

The DISSENT Of Men

*Lynne Segal's new book turns the spotlight back on men.
Adam Farrar spoke to her on her recent Australian visit.*

At first sight, Lynne Segal's new book, *Slow Motion - changing masculinities, changing men*¹, may seem to be part of a well-established current of feminist writing. It tries to grapple with the question of what we mean by masculinity and, for about a decade now, a great deal of feminist theory has been about men.

This reflects a change from a politics which fought to challenge women's exclusion from the male world and the construction of women as the 'other' sex - which fought for equality by showing that men and women were the same in most relevant ways. But since then the ground has shifted. For some years now a lot of work has gone into establishing the differences between men and women. The point of at least some very influential writers who have taken up this theme has been to show that, across a very wide canvas, masculinity is the problem and, often, that the solution is female.

Of course early feminist writers also talked about differences. But they tended to talk about the different gender 'roles' imposed on men and women, and proposed a future where both women and men had escaped these constraints. Since then many

women (and men) have argued that being male goes deeper than any particular 'role' and often they have talked as though there is some essence which marks off the male world from the female world.

Support for this position has come from two related observations. The first is that, for all the hullabaloo about 'the new man', very little really seems to have changed. Despite apparently changed expectations, studies of housework, child care and the like show minute changes in the distribution of this work. The second is a sense of political pointlessness. Despite all the formal legal and political changes, a decade and a half of conservative reaction has left women more constrained, impoverished and dispirited than before.

So, in the face of this, Lynne Segal's new book makes some bold claims that men are changing, that there is no essential maleness and that a socialist feminist struggle to change both economic and political and male structures is still the only answer. As she says in the book "there is a reason to believe that even in this blighted political environment...a new moral agenda could be proposed. It would be one that connects with people's deepest fears, anxieties and ambivalences, while also tackling questions of personal diversity, choice, freedom and desire."

Lynne Segal's writing has always been controversial. Since 1979 when, in *Beyond the Fragments*, she, Sheila Rowbotham and Hilary Wainwright challenged the Left to adopt a new vision which, using the experiences of the women's liberation movement, would make possible "a united socialist organisation out of those involved in all the fragmented movements, campaigns and political groups which socialists are involved in", she has argued against entrenched and defensive positions. Now that the women's movement is itself fragmented, she has argued strongly against the new feminist essentialism in her 1987 book, *Is the Future Female? Troubled thoughts on contemporary feminism*.

This latest book on masculinity is controversial, not only in its substantive claims (which I will come back to), but also in the sources of politics it draws upon and defends. In this embattled and defensive period few on the Left are comfortable about defending, let alone drawing upon, the hopes of the 'sixties and 'seventies. Even fewer feel at all comfortable about the self-conscious attempts to change the men's groups of that period. And it is now orthodox to condemn the 'sexual liberation' of the 'sixties as nothing but a male con job.

Because this heterodox attachment to more optimistic days underpins



both the theoretical and polemical project of the book, it was one of the issues I wanted to explore with Lynne when she was in Sydney to promote it. Whatever the personal attachment to the activism of that period (and there is a very strong personal stake there), her account raises a far more general political question. That is, if we focus on the practical political obstacles which derailed the projects of the 'sixties, we are led fairly quickly to the conclusion that feminist and socialist objectives must make common cause against the economic and political dominance of conservatism.

I spoke to Lynne Segal about these questions. She responded that: "What happened throughout the 1970s was that some of the optimism and confidence that women could gain control of their lives, and control of their sexuality, was going to enable them to become new women together who could reshape the world closer to their own desires was overtaken for many women by the difficulties of that process.

"The difficulties were both at a personal and at a social level, and that's what's hard to separate out. Of course, we've always had difficulties at a per-

sonal level. Often our innermost desires might be constructed in ways that simply don't fit in with our egalitarian, confident, optimistic hopes for being able to create loving, caring, equal relationships.

"On the other hand, part of the feminism of the early 'seventies was an optimism that we could begin immediately to create the social environment that we wanted to live in. This was a time of squatting, of setting up creches, of setting up play groups, community nurseries, local papers. That sense of trying to grab hold of the world and change it.

"By the end of the 'seventies, with the recession and the steep rise in unemployment, the confidence that we could, through struggling hard enough, win what we wanted - not only keep hospitals open but organise maternity care in the way we wanted; struggles we'd fought and sometimes won in the 'seventies - was being worn down. By the end of the 'seventies these struggles were being fought but always lost. The space for working together with other people to grab hold of the immediate social world and shake it till it began to get a little nearer to what you wanted seemed to

be becoming ever more difficult. With the advent of a radical right Conservative government, any chance of gaining hold of the physical spaces you wanted - large houses to live in together, or places that could be used as community nurseries - was disappearing."

However, for many women these objective political setbacks, far from leading to a common cause with other Left forces, led in quite the opposite direction. At least part of this arises from what in the book Lynne calls the "crisis of personal life". But here, too, she is concerned to assert the significance of the motives which underpinned something as now commonly rejected as the so-called 'sexual liberation' movement of the 'sixties.

If I read the book correctly, there seems to be a suggestion of a parallel between the radical potential of the greater sexual openness of some subordinate masculinities (particularly gay masculinity) when compared to the sexual discomfort of most dominant western masculinities and the early feminist response to 'sexual liberation'. This is very different from the dominant sexual pessimism of some more recent feminist writing.

By the early 'seventies the exploitative nature of much 'sexual liberation' was quite clear. "However," Lynne argues, "the way in which early feminists of the women's liberation movement engaged with the 'sixties project of greater sexual freedom for everyone was to look for a means of expression of their own sexuality which would be a genuine sexual freedom for women. And of course that went along with ideas of people taking control of their own lives generally because we tended to be more Reichian in those days and see sex as central to life. Women, too, were to gain control of their lives through being confident sexual creatures."

While Lynne is gently ironic about those inflated expectations, she does not share the sense of bitter betrayal which many other feminists report. In the book she points to a retreat into narrower (and inevitably unrealised) expectations of personal fulfilment, away from that earlier extension of sexual freedom into wider social struggles "where relationships beyond the couple would be invested with some of the meaning, commitment and passion never for long fully nourished by the search for love alone".

But she also points out that "it was only by the mid 'seventies that the full horror of the reality of men's violence was taken on board by feminists. The everyday horror for many women of some men's extreme brutality also then feeds into the pessimism of the times. And that was a product of the decline of the hopeful spirit of the 'seventies feeding into the more cynical idea that no change is possible."

Perhaps as a result of all these changes the voice of feminism itself seems to have changed. "I might be criticised for saying this, but I think that some of the voices of feminism by the 'eighties are beginning to be chosen by publishers (dare we say Dale Spender?). Voices which represent feminism today are not really part of that grassroots feminist activism of the early 'seventies." Lynne is quick to acknowledge that it would be very odd if the public face of feminism had not changed. "But because of the grassroots nature of the early feminist struggles, it's very important to

remember them and to hold on to the aspirations of those days - particularly aspirations from women and the anti-sexist men in more confident times, to compare with the ideas of today which I see as springing from far more conservative times."

But what of the aspirations of those anti-sexist men? Again, Lynne acknowledges the limitations of the pace of change over the past 20 years, but without rejecting those aspirations. "While feminists were very clear in the 'seventies that we wanted men to be involved in child care and working with us in the nurseries, this was certainly alright for men who were ex-students or beginning to move into professional jobs, particularly part time, where it was possible to sort out arrangements for working and living that allowed for more sharing between women and men." The problem was that most women and men did not have that economic luxury. In any case, men changing themselves individually was not going to change the world for all women.

Clearly, those ideas did spread, and in *Slow Motion* Lynne pays considerable attention to the changed social expectations - particularly about fathering. And, clearly, despite (or because of) the criticism of people like Bea Campbell, the struggle moved from men's groups into the trade unions and political parties. But even acknowledging the huge political and economic obstacles which have intervened, the pace of change in what men really do has been so slow that it is hardly surprising that many women ask whether masculinity itself is not the problem.

This brings us to the theoretical heart of the book. Lynne: "The main point of my book is to argue that there is no essence of masculinity, as indeed in my earlier book, *Is the Future Female?*, I was saying that there is no essence of femininity that is going to save the world." Much of the most original and exciting work in the book is the detailed description of different, dominant and subordinate masculinities - colonised men and male colonisers, black men, gay men, fascist men, Victorian men. In this she is elaborating the kind of work begun by people like Bob Connell.

But if there is nothing 'in' men - psychology, genes, essence - which explains male dominance, where are we to look? "I argue that masculinity gets its force and power, gets its meaning, from the fact that everywhere men are privileged. It seems to me that since the psychologies of men are culturally diverse and individually diverse, there must be social forces outside of men which are continually recreating themselves to place men as central."

Lynne argues that, while no one thing explains this reproduction, one crucial element has been the way in which the caring work of society has been organised so that the meanings attached to sexual difference have made this work both female and peripheral.

Just as important, she argues, that what it is to be a man is to be more important than something else - either a woman or some other subordinate type of masculinity. For example "the crucible of modern masculinity was the close of the nineteenth century, the rise of the white colonial empire, and the superiority of white men to black men was central to that Victorian image of masculinity."

The political conclusion from such an analysis is, of course, that political struggle must be directed to those institutions. But, at the same time, political action will not be sufficient unless it offers an alternative moral vision which answers both men's and women's "deepest fears, anxieties and ambivalences"; and perhaps for this reason it is important not to foreclose on the politics of the 'seventies.

Unquestionably there is a tremendous amount in this book that is new. But at the same time an equally valuable contribution is the sense of having passed through a tunnel and of having emerged on the other side still carrying the best of the cargo from that earlier, more hopeful time.

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1. *Slow Motion - Changing masculinities, changing men*, by Lynne Segal. (Virago, 1990.)

THE CUP

Runneth Over

*Soccer's World Cup is the world's biggest television event. But is it an icon of working-class culture or just an excuse for violent nationalism?
Mike Ticher agonises (a bit).*

Serious sport", wrote George Orwell, "has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard for all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words, it is war without the shooting."

The greatest and most eagerly-awaited event in "serious sport", the soccer World Cup, takes place in Italy from June 8 - July 8. More than 16 billion TV viewers around the world will tune in during the month of the finals series. Considering that the entire population of the world is only around 5 billion, it's not surprising to learn that this will be the largest TV audience for anything in the world, ever. Nelson Mandela, the Berlin Wall, forget it.

While virtually every other nation on earth has taken the beautiful game to its heart, Australia still remains nervously warming-up on the sidelines. Nevertheless, thanks to SBS, we will have unrivalled access to the event. It is believed to be the only TV station in the world which is screening every single match in full - not that the vast majority of Australia's sporting public will thank them for the effort.

It's not hard to suggest reasons for football's unparalleled hold on the world's imagination. Simplicity is its strength and the key to its success in

appealing across class and culture, despite its origins in English public (i.e. private) schools.

All you need are a few friends and a bundle of rags or a tin can, resources available even in the backstreets of 19th Century Glasgow or the meanest shantytowns of today's Rio de Janeiro. The rules are uncomplicated, as is the scoring system. As Bertolt Brecht once said, "It's sensible. Anyone can understand it, it's easy." Or was that communism?

Anyway, the important thing is that soccer is essentially an escapist pastime, which is why it was anathema to Orwell and remains so to many on the Left. The quick fix of pleasure which football provides every week is merely a distraction from the revolutionary destiny of the working-class. It's the old capitalist bread-and-circuses ploy.

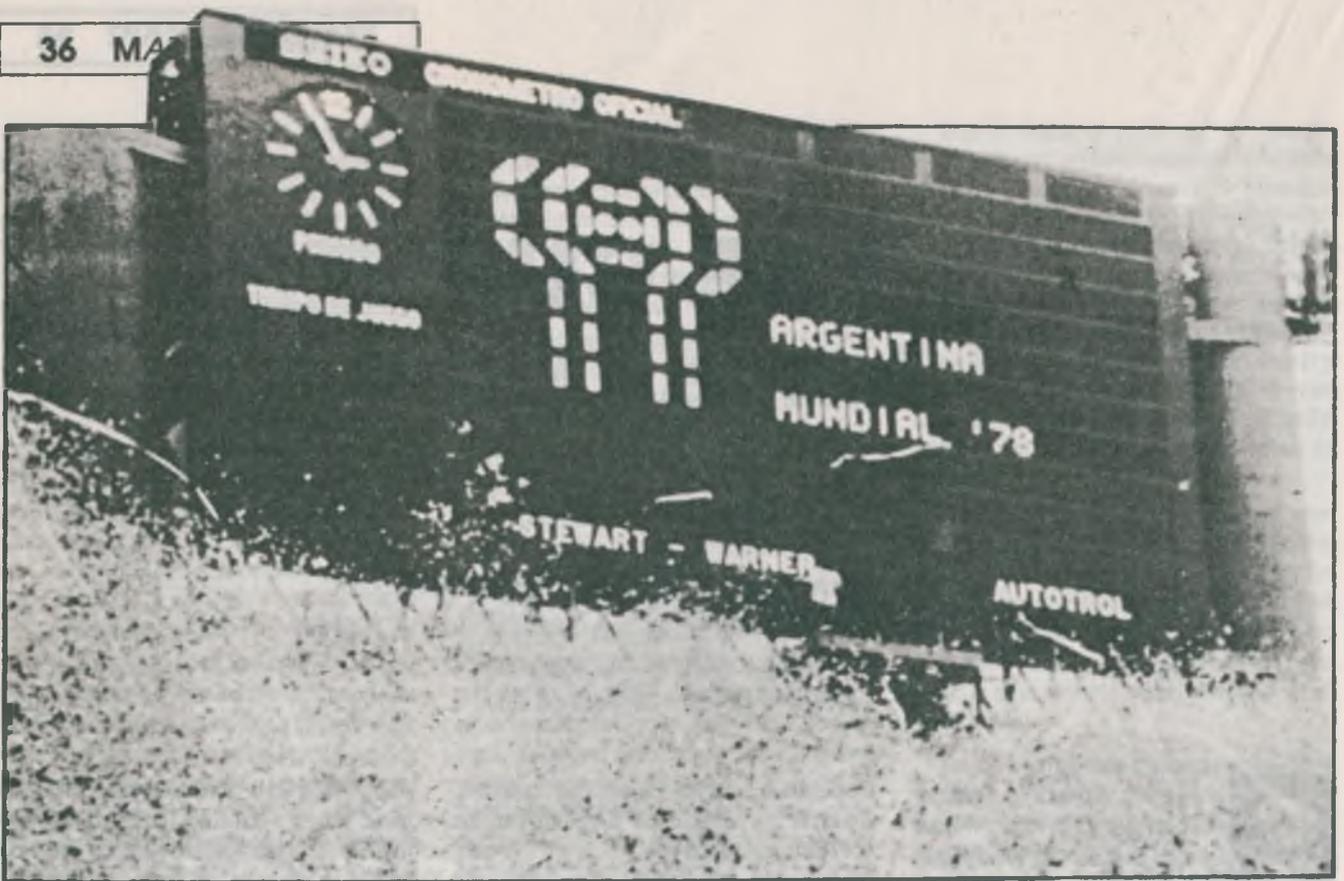
The rather irritating problem with this line of argument, however, is that lots and lots of people seem to get an enormous amount of pleasure out of their "serious sport". Like soap operas, alcohol, lotto and (in days gone by) religion, mass spectator sports fulfil a need. To dismiss them as mere "opiates", whose function is simply to sedate the masses and divert them from political organisation is to take a particularly patronising (but by no means uncommon) view of working-class culture. For all his willingness to share the physical degradations of working-class

people, Orwell himself was a hopeless snob when it came to actually enjoying the things that they enjoyed. He hated football with a vengeance, declaring that "there are enough real causes of trouble already, and we need not add to them by encouraging young men to kick each other on the shins amid the roars of infuriated spectators".

Well, perhaps. But the point is that people actually like such 'circuses'. Whether they are 'encouraged' or not, they will continue to prefer them to having their consciousness raised.

All of which does not mean, of course, that the reverse is true - that anything which is 'working-class' or 'popular' is necessarily a good thing. Football itself is rightly associated in many people's minds with violence, macho posturing and, since the Heysel and Hillsborough disasters, horrific death on a mass scale. Nevertheless, it continues to attract a worldwide following. Perhaps more interesting than the futile argument about whether or not this is a good thing, is to look at the way in which football itself has been used. After all, it is not football which creates aggression or petty nationalism - it is only one arena in which such social problems find expression.

Nor is it necessarily the case that the game has always fostered such undesirable attitudes. Although, in the light of events such as Heysel it now



Argentinian fans celebrate in 1978

seems a grotesque absurdity, it was a widely-held belief not so long ago that international soccer was a useful means of promoting peace and understanding between nations - or at least that war without the shooting was better than war with it.

It was certainly in this spirit that international club competitions were begun in Europe after the war, as well as the World Cup (which was first staged in 1930). Even as late as 1973, when Britain, Ireland and Denmark joined the EEC, it was thought appropriate to mark the event with a football match between sides selected from the six existing members and the three new ones, as a symbol of European co-operation.

There have certainly been moments when football has been able to provide a means of instant communication between diverse cultures. In 1945 a Moscow Dynamo team toured England playing to massive crowds, eager not only to see top-class football again after the war, but also to catch a glimpse of the Soviet 'supermen'. It may have been a propaganda boost for Stalin, but it also succeeded in showing the human face of what was then an almost unthinkable strange

and distant country. Similarly, one of the most famous and moving pieces of film in the World Cup archive is of the 1958 Brazilian team parading a huge Swedish flag around the Stockholm stadium after they had given the Swedes a polite, but emphatic drubbing in the final.

On the other hand, examples of the game being used for more unsavoury ends are just as easy to find. One of the most famous was the 1938 match in Berlin between Germany and England, before which the English players were required to give the Nazi salute (Germany lost the match 4-2 - so much for racial purity). More recently, the surge of national pride during the 1978 World Cup in Argentina, which the host nation won, has often been regarded as a highly successful distraction from the disappearances associated with the 'Dirty War' which was then in full swing.

In Mexico in 1986, the government hoped to profit in similar fashion. However, the presence of the opulent World Cup circus only served to highlight their manifest failure to secure more tangible benefits for the population. High ticket prices and the failure of the Mexican team fuelled

widespread resentment of the competition among the poor. Their slogan, 'Frijoles, Non Goles' ('we want beans, not goals') was one of the few images which managed to penetrate the consciousness of a western media almost wholly indifferent to the social backdrop of the matches.

Much more pernicious than such blatant exploitation of football's popularity, however, is the violence engendered by the game's own followers. Indeed 'hooliganism' is certainly the first thing that most people in Australia associate with soccer. It wasn't all that many years ago that an English person in almost any foreign country could begin their attempts at communication with the words 'Bobby Charlton', in the sure knowledge that football was the most likely common denominator between strangers. These days, proclaiming yourself to be both English and a football supporter is more likely to land you in the local jail or hospital in many European countries.

Hooliganism is a parasite which seems to be beyond anyone's control. Football has failed completely to come to terms with the fact that it provides the perfect arena for young males to

act out their aggressive fantasies. In England at least, the strong racist and nationalistic streak which accompanies hooliganism is spurred on by the tabloid press, with their virulent characterisations of 'Krauts', 'Argies' and 'Dagoes' in 60 point headlines. Such an unhealthy alliance of bigots can make World Cup time in England a thoroughly depressing experience.

The prognosis for this year's competition is particularly frightening, Italy being within easy reach of every hooligan in Europe, and England drawn with the almost equally notorious Dutch in the first round of matches. The prospect of drunken, bare-chested English Nazis spreading a trail of destruction around Italy this summer is almost enough to make you think that maybe Orwell was right after all. Almost. But soccer isn't some kind of belief system which you can accept or reject like Marxism or Christianity. No-one stops liking it because they don't agree with it. So, despite some of the unpleasant side-shows, thousands of perfectly rational

Australians will be adopting the sleep patterns of the wombat for the next month in the expectation of being in on a truly memorable occasion.

What can we expect from the 1990 extravaganza? Seasoned World Cup watchers expect the winner to be either Italy, Argentina (the holders), West Germany, Brazil, Holland or the Soviet Union. The romantics among us will be barracking for some of the less fancied contenders. The 'Indomitable Lions' of Cameroun will carry the burden of representing Africa's much-touted football development, while Ireland have a good chance of gleefully humiliating England once again. No doubt Romania and Czechoslovakia, both in the finals for the first time since 1970, will attract a good deal of sympathy on political grounds. Thanks to the regionally weighted qualifying system, there will also be the usual quota of hapless no-hopers, including Costa Rica, America and the United Arab Emirates (whose supporters in Italy will include Yasser Arafat).

The Italians have had their problems in preparation. More than 28 workers have been killed in the rush to complete the new stadia, and many other World Cup projects will not be finished in time. Nevertheless, they will certainly stage the competition with a style and dignity which will be wholly lacking in 1994 when the World Cup has been awarded to the United States.

This is roughly the equivalent of running the Melbourne Cup in Ulan Bator.

For this reason, despite the worries surrounding the hooligan problem, the attitude of most football supporters around the world will be to settle back and revel in our 'sadistic pleasure' while we can - all 16 Billion of us.

MIKE TICHER is a former editor of the British soccer magazine *When Saturday Comes*.

* Coverage of the World Cup begins on June 9 with the opening game between Argentina and Cameroun (1.00 a.m., SBS)

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Peter Watkins'

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