Just on a year in the job as Mayor of North Sydney, in 1981, Ted Mack decided to stand for his local seat in the NSW parliament. The seat where Mack lived was the base of the Liberal leader, Bruce McDonald, a former developer, a representative of everything that Mack had entered public life to oppose.

In order to make an immediate impact against the popular Labor Premier Neville Wran, McDonald had chosen to employ extravagant language with deliberately violent imagery. McDonald’s extremist language was a matter of shame for gentle conservatives, the very sort who inhabited his own constituency and who, for a decade, had been able to live with the liberal populism of councillor Mack.

The question was whether Mack could climb over the ALP, no mean feat as the ALP in 1978 had polled over 45% of the vote. However, the ALP leadership decided to make life difficult for a Liberal who had aroused a rare degree of hatred. The party would continue to contest the seat but the effort to win would be minimal.

The Wran government duly won the 1981 election with a majority that broke its own record. North Shore meanwhile was close to a three-way tie. Mack’s candidature had dragged McDonald well below an absolute majority; his victory hung in the balance because the Labor vote had held over 30%. If Labor came second, enough of Mack’s preferences would flow to McDonald so as to elect him safely. If Mack came second, the Labor preferences would flow solidly to him and Mack would win. By the time that the last primary was counted, Mack was in front of Labor by a few hundred. From there he won.

Since then independents, serious about winning, have sought to employ Mack’s 1981 formula. The first indispensable factor is a safe seat – it does not matter which party. This is such an obvious piece of arithmetic that it has eluded most analysts. Independents waste their time in marginal seats. Every independent who has won has relied upon: (1) the winning party becoming so complacent that it overlooks the rudiments of local campaigning; (2) the losing party so battered and exhausted by the certainty of defeat that it has effectively stopped trying. That is when the arithmetic becomes awfully straightforward: if the independent can finish ahead of the other major party, he or she can ride the preferences to victory.

It is terribly easy right now to compete in the chase for cheers when the major parties are coalitions of (sometimes severe) internal differences and umbrellas for all shades of mainstream opinion. In order to win a federal or state election in Australia, the parties have to draw the big picture, and local candidates have to fit inside that picture – with the odd exception like a Grahame Campbell in Kalgoorlie.

Modern Australia is a part of the world economy, for better or worse. Contemporary statecraft requires a degree of economic literacy. The mainstream ALP Left – the “soft Left” as Stewart West has called them – is as attuned to the rhetoric of economic rationalism as any other player in the parliaments of the land.

Forty-five years after the end of hostilities, the undisputed success of planning for military victory and a better society has faded from memories. The prevailing wisdom is the flight from regulation; it is a hegemony that requires a response beyond slogans. Politics is more complex, its players cannot operate separate to the laws of mathematics, the fundamentals of limited resources, the popular resentment of taxation.

In this policy environment the Democrats at present are seeking to occupy rhetorical territory on the Left, vacated, they profess, by an ALP hungry for the middle ground. Yet independents are seeking to appeal to a regionalism of microscopic proportions, the region of the local borough. The Democrats have not succeeded in a Lower House anywhere. Janine Haines’ defeat reveals that they are not likely to. The independents’ narrower focus has worked handsomely for the more adept among them.

The rhetoric common to Democrats and independents alike is anti-party – the all-purpose swear word being “bureaucracy”. The national interest does not figure. The wicked aspect of this anti-party posturing is the pretence that independents can suspend the iron laws of politics – the need for negotiation, to compromise in order to achieve mutually agreed ends, leadership, an administrative arm to execute the will of the elected representatives in order to ensure fairness and consistency.

Take North Sydney Council itself under Ted Mack. It was completely honest, a model of open government. It was also the instrument of a tightly disciplined majority; it could not have functioned otherwise. That tight discipline was, doubtless, the product of reason and persuasion, not bribes or intimidation. North Sydney under Mack and any Council under a charismatic non-party

(Continued on page 45)
The ‘information revolution’ does, for example, offer the possibility of easy access to unlimited sources of knowledge and information and, in theory, that could mean a far better-informed citizenry. But it’s far more likely that the new technologies will lead to far greater centralisation of knowledge and information, and thus greater control over it.

We all know how the junk mail industry has boomed as a result of the growth of computer lists of names and addresses; the same technology allows everyone from ASIO to market research companies to keep more and more detailed files on more and more of us. For example, by the time the Baader-Meinhof gang’s attacks came to an end, the West German police computers had a list of possible suspects and sympathisers with over ten million names on it. The Baader-Meinhof propaganda that

Independent Day

(continued from page 9)

...figure, is controlled by a discipline identical to the control that exists in a party chamber.

Wherever independents or third parties have held the balance of power in our state parliaments, one of two dynamics prevailed: the instability brings a rapid termination of the parliament (South Australia 1970, Tasmania 1972) or the independents become an extension of the government party on a de facto basis (Tasmania and South Australia now). Indeed, the Greens in Tasmania are observing the model of Australian Labor in the 1890s and the early federal parliaments — support in return for concessions. The Tasmanian Greens are displaying a respect for

West Germany was becoming a police state had been fulfilled.

The impact that computers are having on our lives is already enormous. They have radically altered many areas of employment, abolishing some jobs and transforming others into boring ones.

Understanding the implications of technology is essential if the debate isn’t going to be dominated by those who have a vested interest in seeing computers used ever more widely.

*Computers in the Human Context* has over 500 pages of fairly small print. Few people are going to read all of it, but its organisation into sections on different themes makes it easy to pick out the essays on topics that interest or affect you. It’s a valuable contribution to a debate that the Left needs to get much more involved in. Computers are far too important an area to be left to the enthusiasts.

JIM ENDERSBY is almost a computer enthusiast.

**COMING-UP**

- Enterprise bargaining: the great debate.
- Yoshio Sugimoto on the Japan controversy.
- US battles over IVF.
- Post-Fordism: John Mathews responds.