

accomplished better had Horne been content to do this and no more. Unfortunately, the conjunctural force of Horne's intervention is somewhat weakened because he encumbers his "ideas for a nation" with the weight of a set of more general arguments, mostly derived from his earlier works concerning such matters as the role of ideas in social life, the public culture, the changing fates and fortunes of class theory and so on. As a result, the edge is taken off those of his ideas which he is most concerned we should think about precisely because they get tangled up with more doubtful and, often, more poorly-stated theoretical positions and contentions.

Some of the difficulties I have in mind are occasioned by his use of the concept of 'the public culture' - a potentially useful term which, however, here and elsewhere Horne simply overloads in trying to make it do too many things. Similar difficulties attend his enthusiasm for the view that reality is a social construct and the stress he accordingly places on chang-

ing ideas as a necessary prelude to changing society. A program for change, in Horne's view, depends on seeing things differently.

It's not that this is wrong. Nor does Horne view ideas as *sui generis* or as all having equal access to agents capable of implementing them. Perhaps more insistently than in his earlier writings he stresses the manifold inequalities of power which make the notion of a free market in ideas ludicrous. What is missing, however, is any sense of the respects in which ideas, if they are to become effective, must be capable of being translated into systems of administration and machineries of government as well as programs of action.

And behind this is a more worrying individualism which manifests itself in his advocacy of the creativity of intellectuals - whether artists, writers, scientists or engineers - as the best means of Australia's economic advancement. Some of this is attributable to Horne's familiar advocacy of the economic benefits of the arts in his

capacity as Chairperson of the Australia Council. Yet it's also clear that he views it as the task of people with ideas - intellectuals and critics - to make up for the lack, as he sees it, of an autonomous Australian bourgeoisie capable of being economically innovative in the national interest.

While I find this unconvincing, I doubt Horne would regard the matters I have raised as contrary to his purpose in publishing *Ideas for a Nation*. Shortly after the book's publication the Australia Council announced that it would hold a National Ideas Summit (held last month).

How the process which Horne has sought to initiate will turn out will depend on the input of others. If these can echo Horne's enthusiasm, if not perhaps all his enthusiasms, and be offered in the same open, democratic and pragmatic spirit, his cheerful optimism may prove to have been justified.

TONY BENNETT teaches in Humanities (Institute for Cultural Policy Studies) at Griffith University.



LETTERS

Superficial

Michael Stutchbury's column on wages policy in (ALR 114) is sloppy and superficial, doing little credit to a left magazine.

He contends that low real wages under the Accords of the Hawke government and the ACTU in fact stimulated job creation and investment, entirely reversing the main assumption in the original Accord that wage cuts led to economic decline.

The evidence of the 'eighties is that huge overseas borrowings since financial deregulation have fueled expansion, and that only 40 cents in every dollar of profit was invested in productive assets. Stutchbury seems to believe that the Accord aim of reducing inflation has been achieved - a rate of 7.8% is hardly a success.

The profits have been largely wasted in speculation and conspicuous consumption. On the political description I think he's right. Most ACTU officers believe in conservative economics, that one person's pay rise is another's job, that the wage increases gained in 1981 caused a recession in 1982. And most ACTU officers have worked closely with Keating to allow the big transfer of wealth from wages to profits.

But the obvious economic disaster created by the deregulated speculative splurge of the '80s ought to suggest that the theory used by Keating and his admirers is wrong. A Left review should say more than the obvious - that a wage/tax deal will be used by Labor in the elections and

point towards a wages, tax and economic policy that can work for the majority of Australians.

Even less should it blandly suggest that we all agree with old-fashioned economic theory which so blatantly serves the interest of capital, and which rules that organised workers or community organisations have no role to play in the allocation of resources and the distribution of the benefits of economic activity. Had we got a Liberal government it would have been a clear test of the theory that wage cuts encourage bosses to hire more workers, to produce more wealth for all!

As it is workers will have to fight harder to ensure productive, ecologically-sound investment and a boost in social resources to ensure long-term economic viability.

Peter Murphy
Surry Hills, NSW.

ALR welcomes letters. Please send them to: ALR, Box A247, Sydney South 2000.