



TIME OUT

Days of TV and Fish Fingers

Growing up in the rough and tumble of Sydney's Glebe in the Fifties, Moya Sayer-Jones' childhood was a topsy-turvy world of old communities and the new consumer icons of the Long Boom.

"Moya" was a pretty unusual name for a child born in 1953. Most little girls were Susan or Elizabeth or Rhonda or Jennifer and I might have been called that too if my two older sisters hadn't beaten me to the punch.

By the time I came along, Mum and Dad were drained of inspiration. Two daughters with two names each meant four good ideas already. The post-war baby boom was partly to blame. It left our family crowded with namesakes of every available relative. One aunt was still to be honoured but she had big, flashy breasts and a de facto and so was never a real consideration. I was ten days old before Mum saw a picture of an Irish tap dancer in the afternoon paper. The girl was very beautiful with long hair, slim legs and small breasts and there was no mention of extra-marital sex. Her name was Moya.

The day Mum and Dad brought me home from the hospital our street had a big party. There were streamers hanging from the electricity poles, fireworks, trestle tables covered in sandwiches and laundry boilers filled with bottled beer. Everyone was really excited. No cars were allowed in after six o'clock but this wasn't too much of a hardship for the residents because no one in the street owned one. Dad carried me in the bassinet from the bus stop. It was a long walk, winding through the trestles and shaking hands with all the people, but Dad didn't care. He said a new queen didn't arrive every day. He wasn't talking about me. It was Queen Elizabeth. She was crowned that day.

Anyway, it was a good coincidence really and cheered Dad up. He was a bit disheartened about having yet another daughter. He'd been *really* depressed four years before when my sister Sue was born. He was convinced she'd be a boy and

organised a big party up at the farm for his fishing mates. Then "George" turned out to be Sue and he was humiliated.

I think he was humiliated about the farm too. He'd bought it so that the family would be self-sufficient when the depression came. He had this theory that depressions follow wars. He'd thought it up in 1941 while he was in the navy, watching for underwater enemy activity.

He'd signed up the day war was declared and spent the next six years sitting on the Harbour Bridge waiting for the Japs to come. He waited and waited, but was on day leave the day they did. He was pretty bitter about it all, especially when it was all over. He'd tried to join the Returned Soldiers' League in 1945 but they wouldn't accept him because he hadn't returned from anywhere. Well, anywhere except the northern pylon.

So then he waited for a depression to come and, of course, it didn't. There was a boom instead. This meant the mountain place was empty most of the time with Dad working on his business. He never was able to use it to save his family from hunger and poverty. Mum said the post-war boom was one of his greatest disappointments.

Not that we were rich. We lived in Glebe in a house rented from the Church of England. The Church owned most of the houses in Richmond Street then. They were tiny semis or tenements filled with massive pieces of furniture. It was like that — the poorer you were, the bigger your wardrobe and dressing table had to be. Rich people from big houses used to give the things away and, if you were poor enough, you had to take them. If you were really poor you had to take lots of odd chairs too, and radiograms that didn't work any more. Sometimes the houses got so full of odd chairs and lowboys that there was hardly enough room for the children at all.

That's why so many people came out into the street after tea and stayed there until it was dark. It was pretty interesting. We lived right near the trotting park and the greyhound track, so we got to watch the old men

exercise the animals up and down every afternoon. The little men wore grey felt hats and held two or three dogs in one hand and a well-sucked Rothmans in the other. They gathered on the corner and talked about Blue Streak or Lord Charger while the dogs stood with their thin tails tucked hard along their sunken bellies and whined through muzzles. The local kids would play cricket on the road and the husbands would smoke fags on the verandah and the mothers would stay inside and try to rearrange the chairs. Everybody knew everybody and watched who came and went and when they did.

Sue and I kept track from the window in the front room. We weren't allowed to run wild after tea. Maybe because we were girls or maybe because Dad was frightened that we'd disappear.

That happened a lot in our street. People disappearing. One day someone was there and the next day they weren't. Nobody talked about them after they'd gone.

I was only three or four when I first noticed it with Susan Parkes' father. The Parkes lived at the end of the street and probably had more odd chairs than anybody else. Susan was the youngest with about five brothers and sisters. You'd never know they were from the same family though because they all looked different. Her oldest sister was even part Aboriginal. One day Mr Parkes went to work and never came back. That's when Mrs Parks put her head in the oven and disappeared as well. Then Susan stopped coming outside and we never saw her again either. The street sucked up lots of families like that, but particularly fathers and sons. Like Johnnie Herrington. He was always vanishing. He was about fifteen and had lots of tattoos. He'd come home with a new car or a wireless or lots of money in his pocket and within a few days some policeman would arrive and Johnnie would be gone again. Just when he was starting to do well, too.

And there were the people who disappeared because they were sick, especially the women. You could always tell who'd be the next one to go. They'd either get very thin or very

fat. The thin ones had TB and sometimes would never come back. The fat ones had babies and usually came back, but not always with the babies. Children got polio and came back with braces on their legs, and old people just lay down and died. There was a lot of coming and going and funerals and visiting the courts. That's where Mum's black net pillbox hat came in handy. All the ladies in the street borrowed it when they needed to dress up.

Mum was like a princess in Richmond Street. Everyone called her Mrs Sayer because she had the hat and Dad had a trade. He was a third-generation master painter. He'd take his ladder and brushes with him on the trams in the mornings and bring them home every afternoon. If there was no work he'd paint our place to keep in practice. From the outside it looked as bad as everyone else's, but inside it was all done up. The house got smaller and smaller with all those layers of Royal Magenta and Arctic Blue, but it was pretty exciting. You never knew what colour the kitchen was going to be next.

We had the phone on and were the first people to buy a television. The Herringtons got one not long after but it was the kind where you

had to put a shilling in the meter every time you wanted to watch something. Ours worked for nothing because we were a bit better off. We didn't have much more money than everybody else, but at least Mum never had to wear the black pillbox herself.

Sue, four years older than me, was the entrepreneur of the family, and a really good swimmer. Mr Hill, the swimming teacher at the pool, said she might be the next Dawn Fraser. Mum and Dad got worried about that because Dawn Fraser's shoulders were so big she looked like a man. They stopped the lessons straight away. Sue was short and blond and took after Dad.

Rhonda was ten years older than me. She was the eldest, dark and slim, and looked a lot like Mum.

"Why have you got all that bloody muck on your face, Rhonda?"

"Because I'm going out, Dad."

"No, you're not."

"Why not?"

"Not with all that bloody muck on your face you're not."

Dad and Rhonda had the same fight all the time.

Rhonda was very particular about her appearance. She loved her nails especially and really looked



Graphic: Reg Lynch

after them. She wouldn't even play Scrabble because she reckoned you chipped your polish when you picked the letters up. Anyway, for some reason her thumb nail started to grow faster than all the others and she was obsessed with it. It made Dad sick to look at it, and he told her she had to cut it. She wouldn't, and it was almost long enough to butter bread with. That's when Dad blew up and Rhonda went mad and *bit* it off. Right there, in front of him. I think she must have frightened Dad by that because the next week he let her out with the boy next door, named Bob.

She had been seeing him secretly for months, anyway. No one knew except Sue. Rhonda would give Sue her old lipsticks so she'd carry the love letters back and forth. She got lolly money on delivery from Bob as well, and was very disappointed when Dad relented and Rhonda got to carry her own letters. Things settled down for Rhonda after that except for the odd flare-up like Mum hiding her bikini or letting out her pedalpushers or confiscating her eyebrow tweezers. Rhonda and Bob got serious pretty quickly and it wasn't long before he was in our place almost every night.

This created a new tension. Not that we didn't like him. We did. It was more to do with the telly. The arrival of television at our place in 1957 generated incredible changes. The lounge room became the TV room overnight and we had to buy a lot of new furniture. There were TV chairs and TV tables and even TV cups and saucers. But despite all these purchases there were never enough seats, and some of us to take the pouf or sit on the floor.

We had a carefully worked-out system of rules. Whoever got a chair first could keep it for the whole night, so long as they said "I bags this" if they needed to go to the toilet or answer the door or something. However, even with a "bagsing", you lost your spot if you stayed away for more than two commercial breaks. The only person who was exempt from these rules was Dad, who could come and go when he liked, but I don't know why. Mum usually took the pouf voluntarily because she

couldn't stand all the fighting.

When Bob started coming it threw the system right out. Good manners demanded that, as a visitor, he could have any chair (except Dad's) without any bagsing at all. On the other hand, he came so much that he wasn't really a visitor. In the end we accepted him into the family and he had to sit by the same rules as the rest of us. He never got used to it, though ... he was always shocked when he'd get up and the girls would throw themselves into the seat screaming about "bags". He was particularly surprised when even Rhonda started doing it.

He never got used to Nana's noises, either. She broke wind constantly in front of the telly, in loud, long bursts, and all the girls knew we weren't allowed to laugh or say anything. We'd all sit there as though nothing was happening, surrounded by pops, blurps and bad smells, and Bob thought we were crazy. But every family has its own rituals, even in Glebe.

We had another one on Friday nights. We always ate fish. Not that we were Catholic, it was just a habit Mum got into during Lent one year.

She gave up sugar in her tea the same way. Fish nights were always stressful because Mum and Dad were paranoid about one of the girls choking to death on a bone. Mum would watch us so carefully that if you so much as cleared your throat, you knew you were in for it.

"Jesus, Sid, she's got a bone in her throat."

Dad'd be up quick as a flash and before you could say "Jack Robertson" you'd be upside down being shaken by the ankles. The dog would be barking and going crazy and Dad would be screaming: "Give us some bread, give us some bloody bread!"

Four or five slices of Tip Top would be shoved in your mouth and you knew you had to swallow the lot before the procedure would stop. It was a big price to pay for a nice piece of fried flathead, and the ritual went on for years. It only changed when we all got too heavy for Dad to lift and Mum started buying fish fingers ...

Moya Sayer-Jones' *Little Sister* is a Susan Haynes book published by Allen & Unwin, Australia. © Moya Sayer-Jones 1988.

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Barbie at the Barricades

The Barbie doll turns 30 in the new year. And in the so-called 'post-feminist' era she's had to change to keep up with the times, reports Jennifer Craik.

Barbie seems to have enjoyed every trend in all areas of culture and aesthetics for the last twenty-eight years. But there are some areas that are forbidden to her. Barbie never had a pet rock. Nor did she have a mohawk or a stud bracelet ... She never had a T-shirt with a political slogan or announcement of any kind of liberation. She never went streaking. She never smoked cigarettes ... (*Barbie: Her Life and Times*, 1987.)

Barbie has undoubtedly been a huge success since her launch in 1959. During the early 1960s, over six million Barbie dolls were produced annually. Even now Mattel, the manufacturers of Barbie, expect to sell two million of each type per year, a million in the US alone.

Not only is her appeal to children; Barbie has become a collector's item, fetishised both for rarity and for documentary statements: There is no other collectible in history that tells the story of a nation, its struggles, its fads, its glories, better than Barbie! Better than a textbook, Barbie shows a three-dimensional view of youth in person as it was.

How can we account for her enduring popularity? How has she been able to maintain her appeal through numerous redesigns and changes in cultural tastes? In what way should we read her as a document of the post-war generation?

Fundamentally, Barbie has addressed the development of a youth culture that embodies fashions



Montage: Karen Vance

and consumerism, not just in clothes but increasingly in lifestyles. Perhaps unexpectedly, this has involved desexualising Barbie, playing down her exaggerated physical features, sophisticated make-up and couture fashions.

It is Barbie's explicit adulthood that is her most distinctive feature. Unlike most other dolls which had unformed bodies, Barbie exhibited an obviously mature figure onto which, argue her supporters, children could project their own personalities and futures. Barbie combines "functional doll play" with her role as "a courier of fashion".

Here was a three-dimensional form of paper doll, an enduring fascination for children, except that these clothes were accurate in every detail, with zippers, buttons and accessories. Barbie's 30 cm height and thin body made her the perfect

size for a little hand to hold while dressing or play-acting (in contrast to traditionally proportioned dolls for children, or Barbie's rival Cabbage Patch, who is usually found where Barbie is but whose human baby size invites different kinds of play, more as a comfort object).

Barbie is the essence of the teenager — half child, half adult; oscillating between the freedoms of one and the responsibilities of the other. Her progenitor was a provocative character called Lilli, who started life as a popular cartoon character in the German newspaper, *Bild-Zeitung*.

Lilli was more cosmopolitan than Barbie, a kind of post-war butt of jokes in a nation rebuilding itself and coming to terms with "modern" circumstances. Her cult status led to her transformation into doll form in 1955, in which the emphasis was on

dressing her up in fashionable clothes. She was not a great success, however, and was eventually bought up by Mattel Toys Inc., an American company looking to expand its prospects.

There has been some dispute as to whether Mattel used the Lilli mould for the prototype Barbie. Certainly the two were remarkably similar. Four Barbies later, the authentic Barbie emerged with "Americanised" blue eyes and curved eyebrows, flesh-tone vinyl skin, and new saran hair.

She retained Lilli's figure, which was to become a source of continuing controversy, although her defenders claim that it merely reflects the ideal of "maturity of figure". According to her biographer "She has the ideal that Western culture has insisted upon since the 1920s: long legs, long arms, small waist, high round bosom, and long neck."

These ideals, however, hardly correspond to reality and Barbie's clothes have had to be carefully cut to accommodate the mono-bosom, the cinched waist and the misproportioned thighs atop the impossibly tapering legs and permanently arched (minute) feet. Nonetheless, the very preposterousness of Barbie's figure seems to have been the source of her longevity.

The emphasis on her body was underlined by the fact that her first two outfits were underwear and lingerie, allowing children to familiarise themselves with this unusual bodily form. From then on, the emphasis was on *haute couture* fashion, for which Mattel representatives viewed each season's Paris collections. Barbie has a more extensive collection of Paris fashions than any woman or museum, a feat celebrated in her extraordinary biography, *Barbie: Her Life and Times*.

Following on from the example of Hollywood movies, Barbie became a wonderful living advertisement for the new collections, a trend that inspired American designers to emulate her. Barbie's Parisian clothes were exchanged for American designs, becoming a boost for, and sign of,

changing styles and conventions of dress, make-up and hair.

But while her body has remained intact (in every sense), her face and hair have changed with the times. The biggest changes came in 1967 with the era of the Bendleg Barbie: Dramatic New Living Doll Barbie was the most posable Barbie doll ever made. She swivelled at the waist, neck, hands and legs. She was bendable in natural ways at the elbows, knees, ankles and wrists. Her head tilted beguilingly ... "As posable as you are", claimed the advertising.



Much of Barbie's attraction lies in that malleability, the flouting of everyday restrictions through the glamour and make-believe of Barbie. Barbie represents positive values of American life, though, interestingly, these have translated readily into other cultures, nowhere more so than in Japan.

While the American doll acquired biographical details — middle name, Millicent; last name, Roberts; a student at Willows High

(in the mid-west); with a best friend called Midge — the Japanese Takara Barbie, now called Jenny Lifestyle, came with physical details: blood type A, 165 cm tall, 83 cm chest, 58 cm waist and 83 cm hips. The Japanese put her birthplace as Los Angeles and made her face more innocently round, with huge round eyes — surely the quintessential signs of occidentalism in Japanese culture.

Nonetheless, Barbie has managed to combine fantasy with reality via suburban settings in which to display her glamorous wardrobe. This has involved the creation of a Barbie family of much more down-to-earth characters; as well as a shift away from *haute-couture*.

The friends of Barbie have, until recently, been marked by their prosaic qualities. The controversy over Barbie's sexualised body was behind the launch of her friend Midge in 1963. Midge's name and different head mould gave her that suburban touch — "a wider face, freckles, green eyes, and a flip hairdo".

The appeal was to the everyday, to more realistic play situations and to making Barbie more human (though still, of course, more special and aloof!). Symptomatically, with Midge came Barbie's dream house, thus reinforcing the middle America icons of suburban life and its priorities.

Shortly after came Barbie's erstwhile beau Ken, whose altogether larger frame, stiffer body and moulded hair reflected his necessary but static presence. Ken's body has been slow to adapt, although his head mould has changed more often and more radically than Barbie's, so that he bears an uncanny resemblance to various male pin-ups including Robert Redford, Warren Beatty and Neil Diamond. Ken's transformability may be some comfort to some — one boy's head is as good as another's! Ken has always had a slightly distanced role in Barbie's life.

In 1964, Barbie gained two more friends, Skipper and Allan, based on the Midge and Ken head moulds respectively. Their presence

increased play and double-dating possibilities.

Barbie's world began to expand. The emphasis on couture fashion began to be replaced by street fashion and lifestyle clothes — including travel fashions (national dress), theatre costumes, and an airline uniforms series. Barbie also ventured into the workforce as nurse, candy-stripped volunteer, stewardess and, of course, fashion model.

But Barbie's world was being shaken up by the rapid changes of the '60s — cultural, political and even physical. Barbie's shape was no longer the "ideal": with the Twiggy phenomenon, she seemed "matronly and dated" and too heavily made-up and coiffed. So Francie Fairchild was introduced in 1966 with a less shapely figure, rooted eyelashes and bendable legs. She could flaunt the Mod fashions. In 1967 she was followed by the first special edition doll, Twiggy, who had the same body but a specially modelled face to mimic Twiggy.

A black version of Francie was also introduced amid controversy, leading one report to herald that "Barbie was a leader in civil rights" by introducing a black playmate for Barbie. Children accepted the black dolls very readily. Although black Francie herself was not very successful, her successor, Christie, with Barbie's body, but a specially moulded face and more glamour has maintained popularity. Mattel has taken considerable pride in its black dolls, regarding them at a minimum as an index of social upheaval and changing mores.

Even Barbie has changed: in 1967, her hair reflected the preference for long straight locks; she acquired a slimmer younger face, less make-up and rooted eyelashes: "Her face was now younger, more wide-eyed, more innocent, and much less sultry".

This is the only change in the head mould for Barbie herself, a change with which Mattel wanted to erase the old version. Consequently, a trade-in campaign was held to swap old Barbie (plus \$1.50) for the new model. Millions of old Barbies were swapped, an

episode which Alvin Toffler read as symptomatic of a throw-away society — of materialism, consumerism and transience.

But Barbie's constant updates were not sufficient to guarantee her success beyond reflecting fashion trends over the period. Even the introduction of wigs and different hair styles and colours for Barbie did not work. By the mid-'70s, Barbie (and Mattel) were in real trouble.

She turned to slotting into real life occasions, such as the 1975 Olympics, back-to-nature movements and so on, thus rekindling the successful 1964 World Fair campaign when Barbie shifted from a miniaturised, self-contained world to the wider human world.

Mattel designed matching outfits for Barbie and Midge to wear to the fair, but also designed miniature Barbies and Midges for the dolls: the dressed minidoll even had a miniature red Barbie case with a portrait of Bendleg Barbie on the cover. As well, they designed matching child-sized outfits: Now a little girl could dress like the Barbie she was carrying, who was also carrying a Barbie!

From then on, Barbie had a place in everyday life. And her sixteenth birthday in 1979 afforded an opportunity for publicity and the Sweet 16 Barbie. But her real saviour came in the form of the disco revolution of the 'seventies which provided a whole new backdrop of leisure and pleasure against which glamorous fashions and glamorous careers could be promoted. Whole new ranges of friends and a new more dynamic boyfriend, Derek, completed this transformation.

Today, Barbie combines the glamour of the rock world with professions like astronaut and doctor, though the emphasis is still on her glamorous clothes and transformation at night into a partying young thing. Other Barbies read the TV news, dance (disco and ballet), exercise and generally lead "active" lives or occupations. For balance, Barbie still has her kitchen, poolside, barbecue, and other domestic sets literally to come home to.

This year Mattel has launched the California Dream Barbie which comes with a record by the Beach Boys called, you guessed it, *Living Doll*. The rationale is that Mom, recalling the Beach Boys of her youth, should be inspired to buy it for her five or six year-old — a target group which, as a spokesperson put it: "The Beach Boys feel this is their new audience".

Barbie has nursed, if not nurtured, a generation into consumerism and lifestyles based on display, transience and imitation. Her mute witness to and index of the post-war generation indicates a certain tenacity. Yet politics and action have been reduced to stylistics and gesture: though this may have achieved more than other dolls and toys. Barbie can uniquely reach diverse classes, ethnicities and nationalities — even lifestyles. Cultural politics at least make an appearance on Barbie's agenda.

Yet, on the question of gender politics, Barbie has been less than a role model. She embodies a cruel parody of the female body, fetishised for its very absurdity. For Barbie, her very body is her prison; possibilities are encased in that materiality. As a poem in a *Barbie Magazine Annual* put it:

The sidewalk is a magic street,
Beneath our Barbie's pretty feet,
In a suit of black, white and red,
She finds fame and fortune straight ahead.

While not a tool of revolution, Barbie has adapted to changing circumstances as profitability vies with unpredictable popularity and an unstable social and political agenda. Whether she can survive into the future will depend on capturing aspects of future changes in lifestyle and consumption. Undoubtedly, she represents pure pleasure and certainty in a world that fuses work with play. In a climate of harsh realities, such escapism may be tolerated or even desirable: *Vive Barbie! Vive la difference!*

JENNIFER CRAIK teaches in Humanities at Griffith University in Brisbane.



Welcome to the New Times

Marxism Today was the one success story of the British left in the Eighties. Now it's changed gear from critique to the analysis of 'New Times'. We interviewed editor Martin Jacques.

In 1979 the circulation of *Marxism Today* was four thousand; now it's over 15,000. Over that period it has become one of the most respected forums in British political life, and arguably the most interesting left magazine in the English-speaking world. It was set up in 1957 as part of a liberalising trend in the Communist Party of Great Britain following its massive loss of prestige during the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956.

It first hit the headlines in 1978 with an article, *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* by historian Eric Hobsbawm, which argued the then-heretical thesis that the left was in retreat rather than on the offensive. Following the election of the Thatcher government in 1979 the magazine became best-known as the coiner of the term "Thatcherism" to describe the qualitatively new form of conservative appeal represented by the New Right. Now it has launched a new explanation of the contemporary times in Britain, "New Times", which focusses on the links between the new post-industrial economic realities and the expanding spheres of consumption and the personal.

Martin Jacques, 42, has edited *Marxism Today* since 1977. A Cambridge history Ph.D. and former lecturer at Bristol University, he is closely associated with *Marxism Today's* emergence as a unique blend of leftwing theoretical journal and news stands glossy. He is also a contributor to the London *Guardian* and the *Sunday Times*. Stephen Long interviewed him in London.

Thatcherism in Britain was the breeding ground for the New Right in the late 'seventies and 'eighties. Surely things have gone so far down the track now that some of the changes here must be irreversible. How difficult will it be to get a radical social agenda up, post-Thatcher?

We've now had over nine years of Thatcherism. It's been an extraordinary period. In fact, in many ways, it's been a very unBritish period, because Thatcherism's been such a strategic political project, and it's done away with the pragmatism which has traditionally characterised much governmental practice in our country. It is true that Thatcherism has changed the nature of politics and of certain areas of socio-economic activity, permanently. The problem we've got at the moment is that Thatcherism has managed, particularly over the last two to four years, to become the champion of modernisation in an era of post-Fordism. She's clocked that this is the new order of things, and is seeking a conservative *denouement* for modernisation. The problem the left, and the Labour Party in particular, faces is that it hasn't really clocked these New Times; it's operating in old times. Unless it does that, I don't really think it can win office again.

But Thatcherism has provoked something of a rethink on the left. The Labour Party's undertaking a Policy Review; the Communist Party is redrafting its pioneering document *The British Road to Socialism*. Do these suggest that maybe the left can move into the new terrain and equip itself to battle in the era of post-Fordism?

Well, I hope so. I think both of those are good things; I think basically the Labour Party's policy review is a very good enterprise. Its results so far have been limited and uneven, and I wouldn't say personally that Labour thinking, either about its policies or, indeed, Labour culture, has moved into a post-Fordist era. But it's beginning to broach the question, which it hadn't previously done. I think that

the Communist Party's document, *Facing Up to the Future*, represents a much more direct confrontation with post-Fordism and those New Times, and the problems of a progressive rather than a conservative modernisation. It's much more strategic, much more coherent than the Labour Party's thinking so far. But we're at the very early stages of this process. There are still large tracts of deeply backward territory when it comes to the left's attitudes towards the new conditions, towards Thatcherism, and so on. Where the left has begun to rethink and try to renew itself, it's often been not only rather limited in terms of the left as a whole, but also concentrated on trying to come to terms with the nature of Thatcherism and the fact that the left's in a mess, and not going to get out of it by the old solutions. What it's only just beginning to do really is to rethink what the world is like in the late 'eighties and 'nineties.

What are some of the shibboleths that the left's still attached to?

Well, there's quite a few, really. (Laughs) First of all, the left, by and large, is still very attached to the old Keynesian welfare model of the post-war period. So if there's a problem with the National Health Service, or there's a problem in relation to economic policy, it thinks in macroeconomic terms. Its conception of public ownership is still very much geared to those sorts of parameters, rather than thinking about public ownership in an economy which has got some very different kinds of dynamics. Another example, a particular problem in Britain, and one where Thatcherism itself has difficulties, is the nation state. The left still conceives of its policies and strategies very much in terms simply of the nation state. There's nothing wrong with thinking on the terrain of the nation state, but we've got to recognise the profound internationalisation that's taking place and, in our case, Europeanisation specifically. But there's great resistance to that. Just as you get forms of Little Englandism on the right, you also get them on the left. It's a very powerful trend.

In specific terms, then, would we not try to take back British Telecom into public ownership; would we not put such an onus on socialisation? What does this new economic terrain mean?

I don't think it means that the public dimension is less important than it was. But it does mean that you can't simply advocate social ownership as an end in itself for the traditional reasons or in the traditional areas — for example, the commanding heights. For two reasons: firstly, because we now know that social ownership in some cases doesn't work very well. That is the experience. Secondly, because of a recognition that the tradition of the socialisation of the commanding heights is geared to an economy where the commanding heights were something a bit different from what they are now. In the immediate post-war period, the commanding heights were the infrastructure of heavy industry, of coal, of steel and so on. My guess is that now the much more critical areas are areas like information technology, of telecommunications, and so on. British Telecom, in this context, would need to be socialised, but not socialised in the way it was before, neither in the form nor the extent, because there are certain features — and this is a particularly British case — of the socialisation of Telecom which wouldn't need to be re-established. The supply of domestic phones doesn't need to be publicly done, it can easily be privately done — probably more effectively done. But the infrastructure of communications should, I think, be socially owned. The other difference, it seems to me, is that we need to place much greater emphasis than has been the case in our tradition on regulation. Regulation can be a very potent weapon, but it's something we haven't really thought about enough.

So there would be room for a regulated market ... ?

Yes, certainly. What we've got to think about much more is getting away from certain set reflex knee-jerk reactions to what we think the

public forms are. And think much more creatively, firstly about a whole diversity of pluralism of public forms of intervention in the economy, but also to face up to the new conditions so that we're shaping them to real effect rather than on the basis simply of ideology.

On a political level, this suggests some sort of decentralisation. You'd perhaps be looking at giving more emphasis to community groups rather than the state as all-powerful provider ...

Traditionally, state intervention has been very centralised, and has been very statist, and not particularly responsive to the workforce. But what has become increasingly important is that it is not responsive to the consumer either, something the left traditionally has neglected.

Take the question of public ownership. How are we going to create a situation where people genuinely feel they have a stake in firms which are publicly owned, because they haven't in the past? Can we create some form of social share ownership which enables people to feel that they have a stake in these firms in a direct way? And what forms of democracy can we introduce in relationship to them? For example, if you resocialise British Telecom, would it be possible to create regional elected boards? In some ways, the American electoral system has merit here, because there's a whole stratum of public officials and so on who are elected. I'm not suggesting that we actually repeat the American experience, but there's some good features in it.

A lot of the hard left have accused *Marxism Today* of watering down socialism, watering down the socialist commitment, flirting with socialist consumerism, and making an accommodation with the market. How would you respond to that?

That sort of criticism seems to me to come from two sources. The first is the view that your socialist parties are cast in stone, and you don't really need to think about the new conditions that you're faced with. Or, if you suffer a series of defeats from the right, then it means

you just redouble your socialism, and you don't have to do any serious rethinking — you don't have to respond to changes, and so on. Which means that you've got this kind of thought police, or political police, who go around with their measuring rods to work out the latest deviation from the norm. And quite frankly, that's not going to get us anywhere. That's the death of socialism, in every sense, culturally and politically. It's got nothing to offer.

The second impulse that informs this sort of attitude is a kind of fear, a fear of the unknown. One of the problems that we, as socialists, throughout the world are having to face now is this. Once there was a sense of certainty about socialism: we knew where we were going; we knew the left was on the side of history. In Britain now it's not the left that speaks with a sense of confidence about history, it's the right. It's Mrs. Thatcher who says socialism is dead, socialism is about yesterday, we will go on and on and on. Internationally, capitalism is in the ascendant as an economic system at the moment. Whatever one could say about Gorbachev, the Soviet economic system is not in the ascendancy; that's one of the reasons for the rise of Gorbachev and the solutions he's beginning to propose. And this fear of the unknown, fear of uncertainty, has created a kind of ossification, a deep conservatism on the left, a fear of looking outwards. The only way socialism can grow is if it's an expansive culture; if it's an introverted culture it must decline, and that, of course, is one of the things that's been happening.

Turning to the specifics of defeating Thatcherism, we had a third election defeat in June last year. Can Labour come back in time for the next general election?

At the moment, if you asked me what my feeling was about the next election, I would say the Conservatives would win it. The Tories are running well ahead of Labour in the opinion polls, further ahead than they were after either of their two previous general election wins. But, more importantly,

Thatcherism still commands the times. Labour doesn't seem as if it's got a sense of the future. At the moment, notwithstanding the policy review and so on, it's still got a long way to go to feel like that. So I'm not an optimist. It doesn't mean that I would rule out the possibility of a Labour victory but, at the moment, it doesn't look very likely.

Even were Labour to win, could we see a situation similar to that of countries like Australia, where the defeat of the radical right has seen the rise of a very tame social democracy which is undoubtedly better than Thatcherism, but is still not the direction in which we want to go?

If you look at where the left has managed to get somewhere despite the conservative ascendancy of the last decade reviving, such as in France, or Australia, it's been a very pragmatic, very technocratic left. Its project has broadly been a kind of humanised version of modernisation in the shadow of the hegemony of the radical right internationally. I'm talking about Spain, New Zealand, Australia. Now, I'd give my bottom dollar to have that sort of government in Britain as against what we've had over the last decade: that would mark a big advance for us. But, of course, what we would like to see is something much more transformatory. In the context of the Western left at the moment, however, I don't really see a transformatory left on the terrain of post-Fordism beginning to call the tune anywhere. I can see a transformatory leader on the left, but it's not in the West, it's in the East; it's Gorbachev. I don't see that in the West.

So how do we get there?

I don't think there are any simple solutions. The only thing one can stress is the importance now of left forces existing in and coming to terms with the terrain of these New Times, and finding the solutions appropriate to it; and feeling comfortable with it, and not living in the past — whether the past is a long time ago or the 'sixties and 'seventies. It's the 'nineties that are the problem:

it's what's going to happen into the next century. Of course, at the same time, it's important not to let go of those large tracts of society which are not post-Fordist, and where our traditional roots lie. The problem so far is that the left has been basically operating on the ground of the old, not a combination of the new and the old. We need a project which can combine the two. And Thatcherism, of course, did do this. Thatcherism hasn't just operated on the ground of the new; it's also operated on the ground of the old — very successfully. It's transformed conservatism; a combination of modernism and traditionalism.

Is part of it making the left saleable? *Marxism Today* in particular has been associated with what's been derogatively termed "designer socialism", a trend which is concerned with making left thinking appeal to the consumer. Is part of it the same process in political terms?

Yes, I think so. Nothing more clearly reveals the inability of the left to address modern times than its own media. Take the leftist media here — particularly the labour movement press. By and large, it speaks to itself. It's very predictable. It reflects the hierarchy of the organisations that publish it — the message from the general secretary, or whatever. It assumes that the readership might somehow be interested in this. It hasn't confronted getting itself on sale in the marketplace, in the newsagents and so on: which is where you're going to sell to an essentially catholic, diverse, pluralistic public. By and large, the labour movement press sells internally, and therefore just sells to the converted. This is also true in design terms and so on. This varies from country to country: in Italy and elsewhere on the Continent, the situation is a bit different. But everywhere I sense that the left is still lagging behind when it comes to the massive changes in the mode of communication over the last two decades.

STEPHEN LONG is a freelance journalist.