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Inside-Taft on Trade Unions
Bernie Taft considers recent trade union achievements and also some of the problems facing the trade union movement at present.

Important changes are taking place in Australia’s rural scene. In a major study, Geoff Lawrence examines some of these changes and the effects they are having.

Illustrated with examples from the activities of the Victoria Police, Dave Davies looks at the role, functions and attitudes of the police forces in capitalist society.

Using the recent Ford dispute at Broadmeadows, Victoria, as a model, Brian Murphy draws attention to the problem of workplace democracy and possible tensions between rank-and-file organisation and other trade union structures.

In Economic Notes Bill Mountford writes on some aspects of economic policy including the controversial question of a social contract.

Roger Coates analyses some Labor and working-class ideas on the parliamentary state and the possible implications for an Australian socialist strategy.

In Comment Brian Aarons deals with the military clampdown in Poland and the need for a consideration of the issues it raises.

Philip Herington reviews Paul Ormonde’s recently published biography of Jim Cairns, A Foolish Passionate Man.
The Trade Unions

Where are they today?

by Bernie Taft

Since the onset of the global recession in 1974, and especially since the Fraser government came into office in 1975, the Australian trade union movement has been subjected to considerable pressures. Some of these are old pressures intensified, some are new ones. The trade union movement has been forced to respond to economic pressures of restricted employment opportunities and significant unemployment.

It was subjected to pressures to reduce real wages, especially by means of increased taxation and by a reduction of the "social wage". The Fraser government openly stated its aim to reduce the share of the national income going to wages and salaries and to increase the share going to profits.

Perhaps the most significant of all was the (ongoing) ideological campaign against the trade union movement. It set out to blame the trade union movement for many of the economic difficulties that the country faces. It depicted unions as selfish and lacking concern for the effect of their actions on the community at large. It portrayed unions as immensely powerful and as abusing these powers.

How well has the trade union movement stood up to the new conditions? How adequately has it responded to these pressures? What are some of the main problems facing the Australian trade union movement now, in light of the experience of the last decade?

It has to be said that, on the whole, the trade union movement has reacted rather than acted on its own initiative. It has responded to pressures without any overall strategy of how to meet them. In general it has put up a relatively strong defence against pressures for wage reductions. It has been less successful in preventing the indirect attacks on living standards by the erosion of the social wage component, especially the massive reduction in social services. It has failed to combat effectively the ideological anti-union campaign by the government and the employers. This campaign has been remarkably successful. The public at large, including many unionists, has many false conceptions about the trade unions. Trade union power is seen as vastly greater than it is, whereas corporate power, which is incomparably greater, has a lower profile in the public mind.

The negative and distorted image of the trade unions affects the union members themselves. It reduces the unions' capacity to resist attacks on them and to struggle for trade union demands. It has a considerable corrosive effect. It is the foundation upon which outside interference in the trade unions becomes possible, including the fact that union elections can be heavily influenced by the media.

Positive developments

The last decade has seen many positive developments in the trade union movement, including some long overdue changes to adapt to the new economic and social conditions. These changes are welcome and need to be taken further since the unions remain a long way behind the employers in
their ability to adapt to modern conditions and to pursue their interests effectively.

Among these developments are:
* the growth of the ACTU and a considerable expansion of its activities and apparatus;
* the amalgamation of the white collar unions with the ACTU which marks an important development in Australia's trade union movement;
* the strengthening of the white collar unions and a greater fusion between blue- and white-collar organisations;
* the growth in organisation and militancy among government employees;
* some large-scale union amalgamations.

Some of these developments fulfil a growing need and were late in coming; the establishment of a more effective central trade union apparatus, for example, was long overdue.

**And negative**

But alongside these positive developments, certain negative ones are in evidence, including:
* a growing remoteness of the leading trade union bodies, aggravated by the size of some organisations. In a small union most activists know the officials personally, but this is no longer the case in unions which have many thousands of members;
* a growth of tendencies towards bureaucratisation;
* union structures which remain static or do not adapt to changing attitudes. In many unions the old-style union branch meeting remains the only, or main, centre of direct membership involvement in union affairs. Many job activists do not attend these meetings;
* an under-involvement of women and migrants who remain vastly unrepresented in the trade union movement, despite some progress;
* a slowness to respond to new problems and new issues.

A striking example of the problem is the neglect of health and safety issues by most unions. An enormous amount of factual and scientific knowledge has emerged in the last decade about the great toll on workers' health due to inadequate provision on the job to protect workers from health hazards. Yet the trade union movement was, and remains, slow to fully recognise, let alone act on, the impact of this.

Despite advances, the framework of most unions remains narrow. Most find it difficult to become involved in issues of real and potential concern to their members if these issues go beyond wages, conditions and hours of work.

It is not surprising that the trade union movement as a whole remains inadequately equipped to deal with the more complex problems of modern industrial society. Yet the employers they have to face today are quite different from those of a few decades ago; they include multinational corporations with a vast apparatus available to communicate their "message".

And interestingly, one area where the inadequacy of unions is obvious is precisely in the wages arena. The traditional attitude of the left has been one of suspicion of any form of "incomes policy". There is a good reason for this, of course, (note the British experience) but this traditional attitude has prevented the left from using some opportunities to obtain meaningful concessions from the employers which could have long-term benefit for union members and a positive effect on the working class as a whole. It should be noted in passing that there is always a *de facto* incomes policy, such as a government deciding to deliberately slow down the rate of growth to keep wages down. The past attitudes have simply meant that the trade unions have had little impact on that policy.

Perhaps the most puzzling phenomenon is the apparent inability or unwillingness of the trade union movement to recognise the seriousness and the fundamental nature of the
ideological attacks on the trade union movement. These attacks strike at the very heart of the trade unions' ability to carry out their functions and sap their strength. With few exceptions (which are all the more significant) there has been no really systematic attempt to counteract this anti-union campaign. Clearly, the implications are not understood by most unions. In fact, many union actions almost seem designed to give credence to the anti-union campaign.

Naturally, such actions are given wide publicity and their effects are highlighted and exaggerated. Strike struggles are launched without adequate and timely explanation to the public which will be affected, and the timing of many industrial disputes takes little or no account of the public effect. Some unions don't seem to care about the effect that their struggles have on the general public and don't appreciate how this can be and is used to inflame the public against trade unions. There are cases where the public is hit unnecessarily, where more thought and consultation would have led to forms of struggle which could hurt those employers who oppose legitimate union demands, rather than the general public, many of whom are fellow trade unionists.

A good example

The case of the Australian Railways Union (ARU) in Victoria indicates what a union can do if it acts correctly. The ARU was a union which had a bad public image. Its periodic strike actions which halted a great part of public transport were basically caused by the low-wage policy of the state Liberal government. Nevertheless, these strikes
greatly inconvenienced the travelling public. Naturally, the media made full use of this and focused on the inconveniences to the stranded passengers, rather than on the conditions in the railways which gave rise to the strikes. In 1979 the union launched a “Save the Industry” campaign in which it tried to stop the rundown of the Victorian railways. Railway workers became involved at the rank-and-file level along with local citizens to prevent the destruction of particular lines and the closure of services. Considerable activity was generated and broad unity was developed. The ARU emerged more and more both as the ardent defender of its own members and as the organisation fighting in the interests of the Victorian public to maintain and expand the public transport system. In addition to the direct involvement of railway workers in the campaign, a well-thought-out and effective publicity campaign was developed. It included advertisements, leaflets and booklets setting out a case for saving the industry and exposing the machinations of the Victorian government to cut back public transport.

When industrial action became absolutely necessary, new and imaginative tactics were used, avoiding train stoppages that affected the general public, but setting out to hit the big freight companies. The union’s public image changed.

In the ARU election held in 1981, the militant leadership was elected with a two to one majority. Unhappily, it has to be admitted that the case of the ARU is not yet typical of the trade union movement as a whole.

To explain why, despite some advances, Australia’s trade union movement has remained so slow to respond to changing conditions and so inadequate to meet the ideological assault on it, one has to look deeper.

There is an extraordinary dichotomy which affects the Australian labor movement generally and the trade union movement specifically. There is a widespread conservatism in Australian society which has actually grown in the last decade. There is a great deal of apathy. This is true of trade unionists as it is of the rest of society. At the same time, in the last decade, or more correctly since 1968, there has been a radicalisation of a significant group of activists who are to be found in and around the labor movement. These people are influenced by the growing war danger, the ongoing damage to our environment, the waste of energy and other natural resources, and the dangers of uranium mining. The mass actions against the Viet Nam war, the development of the women’s movement and the ecological movement have helped to widen the horizons and open new vistas for thousands of socially concerned people. But these people — mostly younger activists — operate in an environment that remains deeply conservative, one where most people focus on private solutions to social problems. In Australia, private solutions are still possible for many people, socially undesirable and inadequate as these “solutions” may be.

This dichotomy leads to enormous frustration and impatience; it often causes people to look for quick solutions which usually prove illusory.

Many of the weaknesses of the Australian trade union movement (the inadequate role of migrants, the continued racist trends, the lack of adequate representation of women) find their deeper explanation in the conservatism of the majority of members. The real task for the left is to ensure that the radicalised, more conscious section in the labor movement uses its talents for the purpose of lifting the consciousness of the Australian working class as a whole and of effectively confronting and counteracting the present dominance of bourgeois values. This is not an easy task nor can it be done quickly, but it is the only way in which social and socialist consciousness can be advanced.
The Rural Crisis in Australia

An Overview of Recent Trends

For those who believe in the beneficial nature of the capitalist system of production and distribution, "crisis" is a scare-word which, if used at all, is applied in a cautious and considered manner. Yet in regard to Australian agriculture most industry commentators apply it frequently and with little hesitation. We hear of the "beef crisis", the "wool crisis", the "environmental crisis", or more generally, "the crisis on the land".

Farmers suffer when prices for agricultural commodities fall on international markets and when domestic policy decisions favour the interests of mining and manufacturing corporations over those of the rural industry. They suffer when agribusiness firms manipulate the prices of farm inputs; when speculative capital inflow allows land values to inflate beyond their production abilities; and when revaluation of the dollar reduces the export potential of rural products.

The rural community suffers as the agricultural economy progresses through its characteristic booms and busts. Small towns begin to disappear, rural facilities decline, rural employment opportunities are eroded, and those with jobs remain in a precarious position. Some rural dwellers are able to migrate to the cities but others, with little mobility, may remain trapped in semi-poverty.

The rural environment suffers as farmers looking to increase their returns in an
uncertain market over-graze, over-irrigate, over-fertilise, and over-plough, each year applying more toxic chemicals in an attempt to control insects, weeds and diseases.

In this paper it is argued that existing trends in Australian agriculture are causing severe problems for the farming industry and for rural Australia.

The anarchy of the marketplace

On the surface, Australian agriculture appears to be a productive, efficient and adaptable system. Existing estimates indicate that the Australian farmer can feed an average of 70 people per year compared with 59 for his US, and 19 for his West German, counterparts. Introduction of new technology and management practices has doubled the volume of output in the past 30 years and Australia has been able to export the bulk of the wheat, beef, wool and sugar produced each year.

While orthodox economic analyses point to the great benefits to be derived from exporting the products in which we have a "comparative advantage", they usually fail to acknowledge that it is the structure of the capitalist market which gives rise to the present difficulties experienced by the rural industries.

Australian farmers produce for the domestic and international markets. Demand in the domestic market is usually predictable since the size of the population and the degree of wealth does not change dramatically from year to year. But our internationally traded commodities face different conditions. Farmers producing for the export market are "price-takers" and must be content to accept and accommodate, price fluctuations. The international market is notoriously unstable and is becoming more unstable over time. If there is a worldwide shortage of food and fibre our producers may be in a good position to make short-term gains, but in periods of world over-production, prices, and therefore farmers' incomes, may fall dramatically.

Australian farmers have realised that they can be afforded some degree of protection through the operation of marketing boards and stabilisation schemes, through the granting by governments of subsidies and concessions, and through the development of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements.

Despite these measures, which act at best to ameliorate the problems associated with producing for an unknown market, Australian agriculture has lurched from one crisis to another. As the Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE) noted in its submission to the Industries Assistance Commission:

Farmers will always be faced with an uncertain and unstable environment .... it is concluded that there is only limited scope for introducing measures which will directly and unambiguously reduce fluctuations in incomes at the farm level.

The welfare problem associated with income instability is concentrated among the smaller farmers whose possibilities for belt-tightening are limited. Working in an industry which provides little opportunity for long-term planning, the small farmer is in a vulnerable position, particularly if conditions remain depressed for long periods.

A glance at the state of some of our major industries indicates the difficulties faced by the small farmer and the problems associated with producing for the world market.

International competitiveness

Australia's international competitiveness in wool is being eroded as a result of the upward pressure on the Australian dollar. Wool is now estimated to be 50 percent dearer for European buyers than it was last year resulting in the loss of $150m to Australian farmers. When wool prices fall, farmers make on-farm adjustments and trust that the Australian Wool Corporation can secure higher prices through careful operation of its reserve price scheme; when world prices rise the industry lives in fear that synthetic fibre manufacturers may compete away possible gains and threaten the long term prospects for further sales. Sheep farmers have responded to rising input costs and fluctuating incomes
The Rural Crisis

by increasing the size of their flocks, and wherever possible, the size of their properties. From the early 1950s to the mid-1960s average flock size in the pastoral zone increased by 22 percent, in the wheat/sheep zone by 48 percent and in the high rainfall zone by 56 percent. Despite these adjustments the problems in the wool industry have reached alarming proportions. By the mid-1970s it was revealed that over 30 percent of wheat/sheep properties will have become economically unviable in the eight years to 1985.7

The wheat industry has prospered in recent times as a result of buoyant conditions in the international market and many wool growers have moved into wheat production in response to rising prices. However, a wheat glut is being predicted for the 1981/82 season brought about by favourable growing conditions in the northern hemisphere. In times of over-production some nations, eager to find customers for their products, begin to undercut competitors. The European Economic Community (EEC) is well known for its "dumping" practices and only this year has been reprimanded by the Australian wheat lobby for discounting its wheat prices by up to $60 per tonne to attract buyers.8 The BAE is currently forecasting the end of the three year upturn in conditions in the industry and has indicated the likelihood of a return to the cost/price problems of the mid-1970s. Wheat prices fluctuated sharply during the 1970s and although attempts were made through the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to draw up a new International Wheat Agreement little has been achieved.9

The beef industry entered a period of crisis during the mid-1970s when world overproduction and political decisions in the USA and Japan led to the collapse of world prices and to the bankruptcy of thousands of Australian producers. Australian beef production has become totally dependent upon the political whims of its major importers. The USA has advised Australian farmers to phase beef expansion in such a way as to counter US production cycles, something which appears to be virtually impossible under conditions of non-regulated production and the desire by Australian growers for maximum individual profit. We are bound, therefore, to be involved in another over-production crisis during the late 1980s. The EEC is already issuing a challenge to Australian exporters by discounting beef by up to $1500 per tonne,10 and although it has yet to be determined what effect the kangaroo/horse meat scandal will have on our trade with the USA, demand for Australian beef has already fallen dramatically and it is estimated that losses may be in the order of hundreds of millions of dollars.11

The problems with the beef industry pass well beyond the farm gate. Producers have chosen to rebuild their herds and in the past two years 20 domestic abattoirs have closed and another eight or so have forfeited their export licences. A medium-sized regional abattoir can inject in the vicinity of $100,000 per week into the local community. In one NSW country centre alone the closure of the abattoir resulted in the loss of 380 jobs and the withdrawal of some $200,000 per week from circulation.12 Leaving aside the difficulties faced by the displaced workers and their families, small rural centres, often dependent upon one or two industries, find it difficult to recover from such an enormous decline in economic activity. Abattoirs need to operate at about 60 percent of available capacity to remain viable, but present estimates indicate that slaughter capacity has dropped from 84 percent in 1977 to 51 percent in 1981.13 The cause of the problem is the anarchy of the market. Australian producers respond to US demand by developing an export surplus only to find that US growers have over-produced and their government has legislated for quotas on imports. Our farmers "breed up" their herds leaving regional abattoirs and meatworks to flounder. Once, the abattoirs could have depended upon increases in sheep slaughter to offset beef losses and so maintain viability. However, with live sheep exports increasing at a rate of some 13 percent per annum, there has been an associated decline in the rate of
domestic slaughter. Clearly, there is little opportunity for rational planning and coordination in industries where individual producers, eager to maximise profits, are dictated to by overseas market forces.

Australian dairy farmers have faced hard times ever since Britain joined the EEC. Our exports of cheese and butter fell dramatically and with few new markets available, the industry has remained in a severely depressed state. In the ten year period to 1974 there was what the BAE described as a "massive exit of farm families from the dairy industry" as the number of operators dropped from 62,000 to 29,000.14

The Henderson Poverty Inquiry found that there was a very high incidence of chronic poverty among the dairy farmers who had produced for the export market. The survey revealed they had the lowest income level of any rural producers and remained in severe economic distress.15 Cheese processors have been similarly affected. One of the country's oldest cheese manufacturers which recently terminated production indicated the only way it could reopen would be to process and package foreign cheeses — a rather clear indication of our competitive ability in dairy products.16

Canning industry

The canning industry is yet another example of the vulnerability associated with dependency upon overseas markets. Once an efficient, productive industry, fruit canning suffered directly from Britain's decision to join the EEC. Closures, takeovers of canning facilities and the contraction of orchard size has resulted. Farmers were paid during the 1970s to pull out their trees in an effort to reduce oversupply and force up fruit prices to aid those remaining in the industry. Adjustment is still occurring. The most recent example of the difficulties presently faced by the industry is that of the Riverland Cannery in South Australia. Taxpayers are being asked to provide some $10 million over the next five years to subsidise the cannery's operations, and recommendations have been made for the provision of compensation for those growers who are forced to remove their
trees, and themselves, from the industry.17

A final example of the effects on the domestic agricultural economy of the problems of global oversupply is that of the egg industry. Producers who adopted the modern intensive methods of egg production were able to prosper during the 1960s. However, the same methods used by Australian producers were being adopted in those developed and underdeveloped nations which Australian had begun to supply. The result was that during the 1970s our surpluses "could not even be given away as food aid".18 Sales to Europe alone dropped from 7,800 tonnes in 1960 to 207 tonnes in 1979.19 Industry and government have recognised the desirability of national management of egg supply, yet because of the structure of egg production — pursuit by individual producers of private profit, and the influence of agribusiness — attempts have proved futile. Indeed, the chief of the NSW Egg Board has acknowledged that the only feasible way of controlling egg production and maintaining viability in the industry is by the introduction of a world quota system. He has said "in our society the free market is a myth .... the market (is no longer) an effective economic instrument"20 for determining viable production levels.

While Australian producers remain dependent upon certain overseas markets we will continue to have "crises" in agriculture. Production for exchange value leads to major industrial dislocation if buyers cannot be found. While dumping goods is a short-term means of dealing with oversupply, it is basically irrational and penalises home consumers who must pay inflated prices for food. It reaches its worst form when the excess is pushed on underdeveloped nations for reasons of internal political expediency. The USA is well known for its practice of solving the oversupply problems of its own farmers by volunteering food aid to those countries which desire its arms and aid.

There is little that can be done to control agricultural production when producers are prepared to risk the likelihood of economic ruin for the possibility of windfall gains. And, after all, that is the behaviour which the capitalist system promotes. Australian farmers, and the rural community which depends upon them, will continue to suffer as world agricultural prices continue their rollercoaster ride.

The contradictory nature of state policy

The capitalist state in Australia has assisted those groups which have lobbied successfully for support. Farmers have, at times when agriculture assumed major importance in our international trade, received state assistance through subsidies, taxation concessions, and regulatory and legislative provisions. The primary aim of state involvement in agriculture is to encourage the development of an efficient system of agriculture. It is assumed this will ensure social and economic equity between those within rural areas, and between those in rural areas and the wider community.21 Some agricultural analysts have argued that farmers receive excessive state support which must be paid for by the wage earner,22 while others have justified state expenditure on the basis of agriculture's status as one of our main income-earning industries.23 What is essential to note, however, is that agriculture is declining in importance in the Australian economy, and that the rural lobby, while more vocal then ever, does not have the degree of clout it once had. We have therefore seen a significant and purposive movement of support away from agriculture to other sectors of the economy.

The economic rationale of the present federal government is one based upon the need to reduce inflation. Inflation, it claims, eats away profit and creates an unstable economic climate for investment planning. Yet, because of its mineral policy, the operation of tariffs and the dominating presence in the market of transnational corporations, farm inflation (inflation relating to those input items purchased by farmers) has been running at a level approximately 60 percent higher than the national inflation rate. During 1980 fertiliser prices increased by 35 percent, fuel by 31 percent, chemicals by 22 percent and new machinery and spare parts by 17 percent.24
The federal government’s decision to return to so-called “free” market conditions — a position advocated by organisations representing the larger more viable farmers — has further disadvantaged the smaller rural producer. Under the operations of the Prices Justification Tribunal (PJT) farmers gained some degree of protection from rising input prices. It is estimated that during its years of operation it has saved the farming community well over $80 million and one industry leader commented: “it looks as though the Lynch Gang’s razor, while slicing the throat of the PJT, might accidentally have opened an artery in the neck of agriculture.”

Farmers can no longer expect tariff relief. The tariff issue has always been an emotive one for farmers. They have continually argued tariffs are unfair and that upward movement of the Australian dollar should be matched by tariff cuts (something, incidentally, which was carried out by the Whitlam Labor government in 1974). Today, Australian manufacturing industry is under constant threat. Transnationals threaten plant closures unless “acceptable” and “realistic” profits can be made. Removal of tariffs would lead to a dramatic increase in unemployment, something which may prove to be politically unsavoury. So while a substantial cut in tariffs would assist rural producers it would be at the expense of the manufacturing sector.

However, what both sectors are having to cope with at present are Australia’s mineral development and exchange rate policies. Together they have allowed uncontrolled inflow of capital reserves resulting in upward pressure on the Australian dollar. A dearer Australian dollar means our export industries must ask international customers to pay higher prices for our products. The result is a loss of sales. Yet the federal government in opting for a “mineral-led” recovery has allowed the dollar to appreciate with farmers, manufacturers and wage-earners alike being asked to carry the burden. As a result of government policy the movement in the dollar market during 1980 is estimated to have decreased wool returns by 10 percent and removed $13 per tonne from wheat earnings. The net capital inflow of $5 billion, six times that of the previous year, has removed about $2,300 from the pocket of the average farmer, and up to $5,000 if the farmer produced for the export market. In 1980, some $400 million in agricultural export earnings was forfeited because of the influence of capital inflow on the value of the Australian dollar.

Farmers are also beginning to find it increasingly difficult to borrow funds for farm improvement. Higher interest rates, brought about by federal government monetary policy have, as the National Farmers’ Federation has been quick to note, placed credit “beyond the reach of most farmers, especially those — such as drought affected or newly established farmers — who have significant existing debts.”

The small farmer is also disadvantaged by the inflated value of agricultural land resulting from the high level of capital inflow. Foreign money has sought to take advantage of relatively inexpensive Australian farmlands. The NSW Minister for Agriculture recently warned of the potential growth of a peasant class of farmers as land values soar beyond the ability of Australian farmers to pay. The trend has been apparent overseas. In Europe and the US where farmers are caught in a credit squeeze and land values have inflated beyond their productive ability it has become a common practice for the farmer to sell his farm to a bank or insurance company and then lease it back. Traditional ownership changes hands, and as one writer has indicated “once agriculture becomes the pawn of the real estate or currency speculator then rational land use planning is no longer possible.”

Foreign ownership

In Australia where the foreign speculator need pay no tax on capital gain from the sale of agricultural land, West German, American, Italian, English and Malaysian buyers have purchased land and have fostered lease-back arrangements. Purchasers provide a cash settlement to the Australian farmer and
lease back the properties to them at a reported rate of 4½ percent of cost per annum. At least half of the recent sales of Australian properties to foreigners appear to be of this lease-back type. It is, of course, a form of absentee landlordism. While the Australian manager does have cash on hand to upgrade plant he has forfeited ultimate control of the land and assumes a caretaker/employee status. Importantly, he has a great incentive to work the land for all it is worth in an effort to improve short term profits before the land is sold for capital gain to another investor. Environmental damage is only one of the likely outcomes in a situation where agriculture becomes the refuse tip for capital "dumped" in Australia for the purpose of short-term speculative gain. Another effect is the declining economic viability of rural towns and hamlets. Rural towns have a direct and crucial dependency upon the surrounding agriculture, and when the farming community suffers, flow-on effects can destabilise the entire regional economy.

The state has four main options in mediating the inflow of capital — to allow the Australian dollar to appreciate, to cut tariffs, to allow inflation to rise, or to impose embargoes or restrictions on entry of money by introducing such measures as variable deposit ratios. While farmer groups have consistently argued for tariff decreases, the National Farmers' Federation has recently supported the use of variable deposit ratios, a position enunciated as well by the Australian Labor Party (ALP).

It is apparent that the farm lobby is becoming increasingly cynical about the federal government's favoured treatment of the mining industry. Most of the suggestions for economic relief put forward by the National Farmers' Federation were ignored by the federal government in its most recent budget. If the inflow of capital continues at its present level (and it is already anticipated that the currency will inflate by 10 percent with an expected $8-12 billion inflow of foreign capital in 1981-82), the farming industry, and in particular the small farmer, will be progressively disadvantaged.

The small farmers have also been victimised with respect to other areas of state activity. Unlike their larger and more viable compatriots the small farmers have not been in a position to take advantage of the taxation, development, and machinery concessions offered by the state. And they are finding that research and extension activities are becoming less appropriate to their needs.

State-employed extension officers have, in many cases, become little more than salesmen for agribusiness firms. If farmers cannot afford the latest technologies and methods they are often dismissed as "failures" and are told to adjust out of farming. When they find themselves unable to borrow capital and cannot purchase the most up-to-date agribusiness products, they are seen to be responsible for their own downfall. That their economic demise is construed as being self-induced is a rather interesting example of a state-promoted con-trick: a classic case of blaming the victim. For it is unlikely that farmers who have worked most of their lives in agriculture have fallen victims to a sudden bout of economic ineptitude. Rather, the cause of the problem must be recognised as the deterioration of agricultural profitability brought about by the collapse of markets, overpricing of farm inputs and the policies of the state.

The state and research

State-funded research is another example of the movement of support from the small farmer to the large farmer and corporation. Research into the genetic manipulation of plants and animals, the computerisation of machinery, and the development of sophisticated agri-chemicals favours the larger farmers who will be able to purchase the products of research. The small farmer has traditionally relied upon the state to provide the most productive seeds, to undertake field trials, and to ensure that farmers were aware of the most recent developments. These activities are increasingly being taken over by agribusiness firms. The Plant Variety Rights Bill allowing the large seed/chemical conglomerates sole
proprietary rights over new varieties is viewed by some as potentially destructive of our family farm agriculture. Our agricultural future will be in the hands of private industries seeking maximum private profits. Only those with large capital reserves may be able to survive. At present the costs to the state of maintaining one seed breeder for one year is estimated to be about $100,000. When agribusiness firms have a monopoly over some seed varieties it is considered inevitable that substantial costs (representing research investment) must be passed on to the farmer and to the food consumer.

Concurrent with the upsurge in private enterprise's role in agriculture has been the decline in state-funded research activities. There has been a more than 30 percent decline, in real terms, in federal government funding for rural research since the mid-1970s.

Despite the claims of Liberal (Lib) and National Country Party (NCP) politicians, it is apparent that the activities of the state are both directly and indirectly aimed at the removal of small farmers from agriculture. State support of the larger farmers and corporations heralds the move from "agriculture to agribusiness" where the state withdraws its assistance from the small farm sector and where only those linked in with the large corporations are able to survive and prosper.

The crisis of the state in relation to agriculture is likely to be a mirror of that in the wider economy: how to expand capital accumulation yet succeed in maintaining the legitimacy of this process. But rather than being a crisis arising from the fundamental antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat there is evidence that it will be one based upon the growing tension between the agricultural bourgeoisie (employer farmers and corporations) and the petty bourgeoisie (small, independent farmers). If small farmers come to understand that their economic demise is brought about by the policies of the Lib-NCP coalition there is increased likelihood of factional divisions among the farming fraternity and the possibility of
The concentration and centralisation of capital in Australian agriculture

One important function of the capitalist state has been the promotion of the concentration and centralisation of capital in agriculture and in the wider economy. Concentration refers to the volume of capital controlled by each of the units operating in an industry, while centralisation is a measure of the actual number of operators. There has been an historical trend towards an increase in the volume of capital controlled by individual units and a decrease in the number of operating units. This is reflected in agriculture by the demise of the small farmer and the expansion of the middle-to-large scale farmer; in the growth of large agribusiness corporations supplying the farming industry with inputs; and in the development of food conglomerates. Each will be considered, in turn.

Under conditions where effective demand for farm products has grown slowly and where prices for farm inputs have increased at a faster rate than returns for agricultural products, farmers have faced constant pressure to expand their holdings and to adopt the most productive input mix. In the 20-year period to the mid-1970s the area under sown pasture tripled, the area of crops and pasture fertilised doubled, the volume of superphosphate applied to agricultural lands tripled, and there was a six-fold increase in other fertiliser applications. The gross fixed capital expenditure in primary industry grew from below $300 million in the mid-1950s to well over $500 million by the mid-1970s, reflected in the increased purchase of tractors, shearing machinery, milking machines, storage tanks, combine grain drills, and other agricultural equipment and machinery.

The output gains which resulted from the new practices and inputs helped to offset the cost/price squeeze in farming. However, the ratio of input prices to output prices has shown a distinct downward trend during the last few decades and farmers have complained that their economic position has continued to erode. Figures compiled for the 1981/82 production period have indicated that the agricultural terms of trade (a measure of the effect on agriculture of the cost/price squeeze), will be at one of the lowest levels in 30 years, placing more pressure on farmers to expand holdings, or if no longer viable, to move out of agriculture.

The median size of Australian farms grew by 20 percent in the 30 years to 1971, and continues to grow. The number of viable commercial holdings fell by 14 percent in the 14 years to 1974 allowing expansion of the middle to larger farms. These changes have had a significant influence on the structure of rural Australia. The rural (farm and non-farm) population, which reached a peak of 2.3 million in 1947, dropped to 1.8 million in 1971 (from 31 percent of the total Australian population in 1947 to 14 percent in 1971).

At the time of the 1933 Census, 20 percent of all employed persons were engaged in agricultural production. This proportion declined to 14 percent in 1947, 7 percent in 1971, and is approximately 5 percent today. Farmers are presently leaving the land at a rate of about 2 percent per annum, a rate which the BAE has forecast will increase in future years.

Many service towns have suffered markedly as a result of population movement out of agriculture. For every person who leaves farming there is a potential loss of at least one other from the towns surrounding the farm.

Government policies

It is clear that federal and state government initiatives to aid decentralisation have failed. Clearly, the state is reluctant to impose its will upon the decision-making activities of private enterprise. The drain of population from the countryside to the city has resulted from unbalanced capital location. People follow jobs, and jobs have been located where industries can maximise profits. While the Whitlam government, through policies of the Department of Urban and Regional Development, did provide some measure of
assistance for rural development, the Fraser government policies have led to economic stagnation in many rural towns and regions. The Decentralisation Advisory Board has been abolished, land acquisition and urban renewal schemes were axed in 1977-78, expenditure on environmental protection has been cut in real terms, funds for Albury-Wodonga have been sliced, and spending on urban and regional development has dropped to a level of 0.11 percent of this year's budget allocation (about fourteen times less than the proportional allocation in the Whitlam years).

Just as large corporations have been the impetus behind the growth of cities they have intruded into, and changed the direction of, agriculture. The ratio of self employed to employer farmers which stood at 4:1 in 1947 dropped to 3:1 by 1971 indicating the trend away from the family farm towards that of large farms operating with wage labour. There was also a significant change in ownership patterns in the 20 years up to 1971. The number of farm partnerships doubled during this period and farm companies, while remaining relatively small in actual numbers, more than quadrupled. In the latter case, wealthy owners sought to take advantage of income tax, development, and death duty provisions and concessions.

The small independent operator, pressured by the cost/price squeeze and suffering as a result of governmental policy, is in no position to alter his circumstances. Nor can he be seen to gain by supporting the conservative parties since it is they who are furthering the trends which are promoting the crisis in agriculture. The writing is on the wall for the family farmer. One researcher, looking at the structure of US agriculture, has noted that by the end of this decade some 92 percent of farm production will take place on only 10 percent of holdings. He predicts "the degree of concentration approaching this is also conceivable in Britain and other technologically advanced agricultural nations". These sentiments were more fully explained in an article in the American Journal of Agricultural Economics:

Large farm units can .... afford many services that smaller production units cannot. Large farm units separate management and labour into their logical arrangements. Industry has known for decades that more efficient production results when management and labour are supplied by different people.

Looking to the future I expect large scale farming to become as matter-of-fact as chain retailing is now — the only question is how soon. The economic forces are weighted so heavily in favour of increasing sizes of agricultural production and marketing that any social pressures and traditions to the contrary are not likely to stand.

The second main example of the concentration and centralisation of capital in agriculture is that of the agribusiness supply industries which provide the farmers with tractors, fertilisers, pesticides and insecticides. Many are Australian branches of transnational corporations. Through collusion, price manipulation and other practices these firms are in a position to set prices above those levels which would normally operate. The farm inflation previously described is one outcome. If farmers want the new chemicals and equipment they must pay the prices being asked.

A recent example of price manipulation by a transnational corporation involves the closure of the Duchess Rock Phosphate mine near Mt. Isa. The mine, owned by an international consortium, has the potential to meet Australia's phosphate needs well into future decades, but it was closed because the foreign interests stood to gain from operation of the superphosphate bounty. Now Australia must import phosphate and sulphur, furthering our dependence upon overseas sources. While Food and Agricultural Organisation statistics have indicated a drop in international phosphate prices of some 10 percent in the last year, Australian fertiliser costs have risen by 20 percent in the same period.

Farm fuel supply provides an example of the arrogance shown by the corporations to the farming community. Leaving aside the issues of substantial prices rises, the farming...
industry has found the diesel fuels produced in Australia are of inferior quality to those produced overseas. The oil companies are seeking, as one writer noted, "to squeeze the last drop of profit from a barrel of crude" and are not removing the "wax" in diesoline. The presence of this substance causes the breakdown of fuel injection parts in tractors, increases replacement rates of fuel-line components, and may lead, in some cases, to total engine failure. Despite protests from the farmers, the oil industry has refused to adopt better refining practices, arguing that it would be too costly to alter existing methods.

The economic, environmental and social costs of harmful corporate practices have not been adequately assessed in Australia. But farmers, acting as independent operators in competition with each other and desperate to improve output, are in no position to choose alternatives. The direction of agriculture is very much in the hands of input industries whose prime concern is to maximise returns to capital. The farmers, and community, suffer accordingly.

It is the food industry which provides the most interesting case of the effects of the concentration and centralisation of capital in agriculture. Through horizontal and vertical integration some companies have managed to tie up markets for particular goods, and are in a strong position to dictate to producers. They are able to reap rewards from processing, packaging and selling those goods to consumers.

The degree of concentration in some food lines has reached alarming proportions. More than 70 percent of meat processing in Australia is under the control of 12 companies, 6 of which have transnational links. In the poultry industry, 3 companies control over 90 percent of the chicken-meat output in Australia. Egg producers are linked in with the large feed mill companies which dictate the production practices to the growers they supply. One researcher has said that under these conditions the farmer "is thus reduced from a semi-independent primary producer to .... a de facto wage labourer". Moreover, government policy "actually facilitates increasing monopoly capital control and increasing centralisation" through licencing and quota arrangements.

In relation to cereal manufacture, three large transnationals control 95 percent of Australia's total production. Three companies control 98 percent of our biscuit output. Transfer pricing arrangements have allowed the food corporations to remove large sums of money to overseas headquarters and subsidiaries, and there is little evidence that the Australian government is prepared to halt such practices or to break the industrial stranglehold of the existing conglomerates.

Australian consumers are the losers. They must pay for the costs associated with processing, packaging, and advertising. They have been disadvantaged by chemical manipulation aimed at improving the look of foods or prolonging shelf life. Food quality has deteriorated despite the gloss coating and attractive packaging, sweetening and flavouring. The industry is now developing products which suit the needs of the supermarkets — that is, for easy transport, for little loss and damage in handling, and for controlled ripening. Australia has recently seen the introduction of the "floridale" tomato developed in the USA to withstand the metal teeth of mechanical harvesters. That consumers find it tasteless, of poor colour and thick skinned does not appear to have worried the food processors and supermarkets. It is being grown over increasingly large areas to service the needs of the food industry in Australia.

As food producers expand and tie up market outlets they are in a strong position to tell growers what will be produced, when, and under what conditions. Farmers are left with little choice but to become involved in the process, as evidenced by the growing importance in some industries of contract farming. Farmers lose their autonomy and Australian agriculture is further dominated by large corporations, many foreign owned, which week to achieve maximum profits from the processing, packaging and retailing of farm goods.

Agribusiness supply industries sell a
"package" of seeds, chemicals, machinery and knowledge which, if used in the recommended manner, is expected to provide farmers with increased output. The choice of "package" depends on the farmer's geographical location, on-farm improvements, crop and livestock systems, capital, and overall management strategy. Farmers have been keen to adopt the latest products of agribusiness. However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the fossil-fuel based agriculture developed in western industrial nations is causing major environmental damage.

Fertilisers are soluble salts which are easily leached from the soil. In combination with irrigation systems they have been found in some soils to rise with the water table and, in sufficient concentrations, to poison the roots of trees and crops. In other cases they enter streams and waterways promoting weed growth and eutrophication. One of the worst outcomes in Australia of the mismanagement of irrigation and fertiliser applications is the pollution of the Murray River system. Millions of dollars are being spent by the New South Wales and South Australian governments in an effort to clean the river. However a solution does not appear to be in sight. The problem is that farmers are individually practising the most rational form of capitalist agriculture — applying the new chemicals and practices in an effort to secure the maximum profit. It is only when viewed on a larger scale that we begin to see the irrationality of the system — profits may be being made, but the public must pick up the tab for the desalination and purification of water, for long term declines in soil productivity, for destruction of river-choking weeds, and for the overall environmental degradation. When a proposal was recently put forward for the formation of an Institute of Freshwater Studies and the establishment of a national authority to control and monitor activities affecting the Murray-Darling system, it was panned by the present leader of the NCP. He pointed to interstate rivalry and parochialism as forces which would militate against any long term proposals for adoption of more beneficial practices along the river system. Importantly, he was not prepared to commit the Australian government to any such proposal.

There is increasing public concern about the dangers associated with the use of chemicals in farming. It is well known that our system of monocultural cropping stimulates the proliferation of pests and weeds in plague proportions. The problem that results is that large doses of chemicals must be applied to control the weeds, diseases and insects. In the latter case resistance builds up, and farmers must apply in subsequent seasons, more toxic and potent doses. The effects of these chemicals on human tissue is not fully understood but foetal abnormalities, burns, nausea and dizziness are among the symptoms which have been reported. Not surprisingly, resident action groups have lobbied for tighter control of some substances. In the Namoi Valley of NSW, the use of DDT in cotton crops was banned during 1981, and more rigid monitoring of aerial spraying of pesticides and weedicides has been imposed throughout NSW. The debate about Agent Orange and the suspicions about the possible dangers of 245-T have led to the banning of some chemicals in particular locations. In Mackay, Queensland, canegrowers were "asked" by local residents to stop aerial spraying — or face the retaliatory action of having the crops burnt.

It is becoming obvious that many of the larger farmers care little about environmental preservation or about the consequences of their farming techniques and practices upon local populations. In parts of the cotton growing area of NSW land is being allotted a 20 year productive life-span. Corporations must, in that time, draw as much money from the operation as possible. Chemicals are poured on to improve yields, and, after 20 years of intensive farming when yields begin to drop, the company withdraws its capital and locates in a more productive area. The "poisoned" land is rendered useless for further agricultural production. These sentiments, part of the new "agribusiness" imposed by corporations, were shared by the chairman of
one of the largest irrigation projects in America who stated: "on a discounted cash-flow basis, the earth is simply not worth saving."53

While Australian farmers would like to escape the blame for environmental degradation, current practices are adding to, rather than alleviating, ecological problems. Overstocking and poor agronomic practices have led to serious soil erosion problems in Australia. Some 50 percent of Australian farmlands are affected and the cost of conservation techniques required to redress the problem has been put at $1 billion.54 In Queensland and New South Wales soil loss is often as high as 12.5 tonnes per hectare per annum, but this has regularly reached 60 tonnes per hectare per annum in some regions.

One "solution" being discussed is consistent with the interests of chemical corporations. Rather than attempting to reduce the degree of exploitation of the soil and improve structure, farmers are adopting chemical ploughing or "zero tillage" methods. Herbicides are used to kill weeds and the new season’s seeds are sown directly into the previous year’s stubble. While this does reduce the need for cultivation, harrowing, scarifying and other seedbed preparations it increases the farmer’s dependency upon large corporations and their chemical strategy.

It is not yet fully understood what overall effects chemical manipulation will have on the soil and the soil ecosystem. One problem with fertilisers has recently become known. It seems that improved pastures — the saviour of many marginal farmers during the past 30 years — may eventually lead to the loss of soil fertility. The mixture of subterranean clover and superphosphate has been found to acidify the soil leading to the release of aluminium and manganese ions in toxic amounts. Less tolerant plant species are stunted and the acid soil promotes the growth of fungi, weeds and insect pests, requiring the application of further chemicals to aid in their control. Up to two million hectares in NSW alone are thought to have lost productivity and may now be unable to grow lucerne, barley, rapeseed and other commercial crops. 55

There is also the recently acknowledged problem of eucalyptus "die-back" in farming areas caused, it is thought, through the combined effects of clear-felling, fertilisation of paddocks, and fungi and insect attack. Aerial photographic studies in Western Victoria have indicated a one percent per annum loss of mature eucalypt trees over the past three decades. As one writer has noted:

The frightening reality is that the gradual decline and eventual death of trees has reached alarming proportions right across the country .... Within a generation or two the familiar and unique eucalypt-dotted landscape could have largely disappeared leaving nothing but fence lines to break the monotony.56

Finally, it must be recognised that it is not only capitalist agriculture, but also mining activities, which are responsible for environmental damage in rural Australia.

In the Hunter Valley of NSW, one area to respond to the inflow of foreign capital, mining, smelting and other industrial activities are environmentally suspect. Open cut mining is destructive of the natural environment and causes river pollution. Dust from the mines is a major problem for agriculturalists and urban dwellers alike. Coal burning power stations emit sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide into the atmosphere. Contact with moisture results in the formation of "acid rains" affecting vegetation and animal life. The proposed aluminium smelters, which will emit fluoride compounds are certain to cause major problems in the horticultural, pig, poultry and dairying industries. According to one researcher: "it seems unlikely that any primary industry other than grazing will be able to coexist with the mining industry in the Upper Hunter Valley."57

The quality of the environment will be one of the most important issues of the 1980s. Capitalist farming and mining is aimed at maximum exploitation of existing resources. There is a fundamental contradiction emerging between the desires of individual
farmers for private profit and the needs of the public for clean air, fresh water, and a sound agricultural base. Instead of a socially beneficial agriculture we are seeing the polluting of land, the poisoning of rivers, and the destruction of the environment.

Conclusion

Although the volume of Australian agricultural output has doubled over the past thirty years, productivity increases have been won at the expense of small farmers, the consumers of food, and the environment.

The existing trends in Australian agriculture are for our continued dependence upon overseas markets, for the fostering by the state of a capitalist-oriented less regulated agricultural sector, for the further concentration and centralisation of capital in agriculture and the food industry, and for the continued destruction of the rural environment. These trends appear to be directly linked to the capital accumulation process promoted by the federal Liberal-National Country Party coalition.

Mining developments have attracted greater amounts of foreign capital and Australian farmers have been disadvantaged. Their products have become more expensive to international purchasers, farm inflation has risen at a rate well in excess of the national inflation rate causing a more intense cost/price squeeze in agriculture, farm credit is more expensive and more difficult to obtain, and there is an increasing trend towards foreign ownership of Australian farmlands.

The small independent farmer, rather than the larger farmer and corporation, is the one suffering most. Yet the response of the small farmer to deteriorating economic conditions is itself the cause of another set of problems. In working his land more intensively the small farmer contributes to the oversupply problem in agriculture and to the further destruction of the environment.

The crisis in rural Australia can be blamed, therefore, upon the economic structure of the farming industry. It is a system reliant upon the pursuit of private profits by individual producers in an unplanned and uncoordinated manner. It is a system dependent upon the whims of an unknown market.

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From Dogberry to Cop Shop
by Dave Davies

The police as an arm of the modern state in Australia

Early history

Rudimentary forms of the police, such as the village constable or the town watch, existed for many centuries in England. Their standing in the community is perhaps shown by Shakespeare’s constable Dogberry in his play *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Dogberry: You are to bid any man stand, in the prince’s name.

Watchman: What if he will not stand?

Dogberry: Why then, take no notice of him, but let him go; and presently call the rest of the Watch together, and thank God you are rid of the knave.

A far cry from the tough, efficient but very good police who feature in today’s mass culture, particularly in TV series such as *Softly, Softly* or our very own Australian *Cop Shop*!

Which brings me to my first point: police forces, as corps of professional enforcers of law and order, are a relatively recent arm of the state and are closely associated with the rise of wage-labour and capitalist industrial society.

Capitalist production required workers who were “freed” from the physical and social restraints of feudal village society, workers with the mobility and “freedom” to sell their labour power, a freedom which cloaked a compulsion to put their labour power on the market. This meant a breaking down of the traditional village methods of maintaining order, such as public opinion, tradition, local and family hierarchies.

At the same time, there was a need to regulate these new bourgeois freedoms, to impose new forms of discipline both inside the factory and in society at large. Without idealising village society, one can say that in the industrial town there was less sense of community. New forms of social degradation and poverty grew alongside new forms of accumulation of wealth and goods. There was an enormous growth in street violence, theft and other crimes as well as drinking and gambling.

The anger of the working class and the rural poor often erupted into spontaneous riots and looting. There was the Luddite movement of people who smashed the machines which they blamed for their plight.

Apart from threats to the individual capitalist’s property and person, there was a potential threat to capitalist private property as such. Crowds gathered and marched demanding reforms. Bloody repressions, such as the Manchester massacre of 1819 (Peterloo), took place. The old watchmen, Bow Street Runners and the military either
could not cope or made matters worse. Something had to be done.

New institutions were needed which would be able more effectively to provide the orderly conditions for capital to function, particularly with respect to the supply of wage-labour. Institutions such as the school, charities and prisons helped provide the "right" kind of workers. The army could repress, but could not help mould the sober, frugal and orderly worker needed by capital. A new arm of the state was needed.

The British Home Secretary Sir Robert Peel, fresh from a spell of duty in Ireland, made strenuous efforts in 1822 to set up a police forces in British cities. But a parliamentary Select Committee rejected his attempt in these terms:

It is difficult to reconcile an effective system of police with that perfect freedom of action and exemption from interference which are the great privileges and blessings of society in this country, and your committee think that the forfeiture or curtailment of such advantages would be too great a sacrifice for improvements in police or facilities in detection of crime, however desirable in themselves if abstractly considered.

The advocates of "small government" were strong as far back as 1822! But Peel — and the facts of life — wore them down until the London Metropolitan Police was formed in 1829.

The young Friedrich Engels in his book *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* wrote that ....

.... the law is sacred to the bourgeois, for it is his own composition, enacted with his consent, and for his benefit and protection. He knows that, even if an individual law should injure him, the whole fabric protects his interests; and more than all, the sanctity of the law, the sacredness of order as established by the active will of one part of society, and the passive acceptance of the other, is the strongest support of his social position. Because the English bourgeois finds himself reproduced in his law, as he does in his God, the policeman's truncheon which, in a certain measure is his own club, has for him a wonderfully soothing power.

**Australia**

The Australian Aborigines did not have police forces, and it was the advent of white convict settlement that brought this aspect of civilisation to Australia. The first constables and watches were recruited from the convicts themselves. They were to assist the troops in maintaining order, in particular to prevent the pilfering of stores. Their reliability and efficiency, it seems, left a great deal to be desired.
During the nineteenth century, police forces evolved in the various Australian colonies, at first recruited from convicts and later from other sections of the community. One sad irony was the deliberate recruiting of Aborigines into police forces, often with the cynical aim of helping destroy the Aborigines as a people.

Some features specific to Australia emerged during the last century both within the police forces and in community attitudes. There was the effect of the gold rushes, the unpopular licensing system, the Eureka Stockade rebellion, the era of bushrangers, the big strikes of the 1890s and the growth of modern cities. But generally, the British tradition in policing became dominant.

Functions

Historically, several categories of police functions can be discerned. There is the directly political-industrial, the role of enforcing the law in such a way as to help define or interpret what is normal and acceptable in society, and the function of coping with the dysfunctions of modern capitalist urban society.

In terms of time and resources expended, the direct political-industrial role in Australia is generally minor. But it is nevertheless a vital one, both on a day-to-day basis and potentially, despite the fact that Australian capitalism maintains its rule largely by consensus. (Even in a fascist dictatorship one may well be able to argue that the political role of police forces is relatively "minor" in terms of resources.)

Most, if not all, the forces maintain a "Special" or political branch which keeps a colossal number of files on people involved in leftwing politics, militant trade unionism, democratic movements of all kinds, the anti-war movement, environmental protection movements, etc.

This is the most sensitive and jealously guarded of all police functions. It is enough to recall the vicious campaign against the then Senator Murphy, Attorney-General in the Whitlam government, following his "raid" on ASIO headquarters in 1974. Former South Australian Premier Dunstan was likewise never forgiven for sacking police chief Salisbury after a dispute involving the Special Branch.

Political-industrial roles of the police, despite the relatively small proportion of time and resources applied, are often the most publicised activity. (It is interesting to note that even the best and most sophisticated of the TV police dramas which depict police as having human strengths and weaknesses are hopelessly inaccurate when it comes to depicting leftists, demonstrators, radical students and people with "alternative" lifestyles.

Claims that the police are "neutral" and merely "carrying out the law" are made to justify their intervention in industrial disputes. A discussion of law is beyond our scope here, but it should be noted that in capitalist society the law itself (unless changed or mitigated by mass action) often has an anti-worker bias built in. For instance, a worker who steals from the employer can be convicted of a criminal offence and suffer a fine or jail. The employer who systematically
and deliberately robs the worker by paying less than the (legal) award wage can be the subject of legal proceedings to recover the money, but does not find the police on his doorstep and is not subject to punishment.

Another example may illustrate how the police help establish what is socially acceptable. A person who throws a beer can at the football endangers other people's safety and is promptly arrested. Such offenders may get their names in the paper. But there are laws relating to unsafe industrial machinery and work practices which endanger people's lives and health. These laws are "policed" in a much more leisurely way by a different part of the state apparatus and actions are rarely taken until somebody is hurt.

I recall spending one morning in the Melbourne Magistrates' Court. A number of people were fined for travelling on suburban trains without tickets. Then came two cases where W. Angliss (Aust) Pty. Ltd. was found guilty of operating unsafe mincing machines in butchers' shops. In both instances workers had been maimed with the loss of fingers. The meat company was fined about the same amount as the recalcitrant train travellers. I am sure the management responsible were not bundled off in paddy wagons when the charges were laid. They did not get their names in the papers. There is thus a considerable discretion in the enforcing of the law, a discretion which makes all police functions political.

Many seemingly reasonable and innocuous laws (loitering, obstruction, offensive behaviour) are frequently used to fit pickets, leafletters or demonstrators. And some police show scant respect for the law in bashing or framing people, as shown by cases taken up by councils for civil liberties.

How can police be "neutral" when workers on strike set up a picket line and the employer tries to recruit scabs to cross it? By upholding the employers' "right" to work his factory they automatically deny the strikers' right to protect their jobs, wages and conditions.

Unfortunately, the narrow-mindedness of some trade unions and a lack of unity and cohesion by the trade union movement as a whole has contributed in some instances to a "justification" for police intervention in picketing. There have been examples of particular union leaderships setting up pickets without proper consultation with other unionists and, indeed, in opposition to them.

These examples play into the hands of those who advocate police intervention into industrial disputes, despite the anti-police rhetoric of some of the union leaders involved.

Attitudes by the police to demonstrations vary from time to time and state to state, with Queensland and Western Australia taking the lead in repressive laws and zeal with which many officers enforce them. In Victoria, the situation has improved since the big Viet Nam Moratorium marches of the early seventies. These days, marches which stop the traffic are fairly common (although not to be taken for granted) with the grudging acquiescence of the police with whom some level of cooperation has become possible.

**Dysfunction**

A broad category of police functions — relating to social dysfunction — gives an appearance of being non-political. The scope and nature of these functions can be gauged by the duties of the over 7,000 members of the Victoria Police.

More than one-fifth of police time concerns traffic. This includes control, accidents, breathalyser, petrol and administration. The next largest category (one-fifth of police time) is internal administration (rosters, records, statistics) followed by crime investigation (slightly less than one-fifth) including arresting, charging and escorting. "Civil matters" (about one-sixth) are a significant consumer of police time and resources, including domestic and personal problems, search and rescue, informing relatives of deaths and accidents, summonses, etc. Court work and general patrolling each consume about one-tenth of police time. Attendance at sporting events, public functions and demonstrations consume only a small part of total police time.

These broad headings cover a wide variety...
of matters that police are called upon to handle. In addition to traditional kinds of crime (burglary, armed robbery, homicide, etc.) there is a growing category of "white collar crime" (fraud, embezzlement, more often involving computers). Domestic and neighbourhood violence (especially against women and children), rape, drug rackets are among other problems which our society delegates mainly to the police.

There is a broad category of "offences" often called "social", such as illegal gambling, prostitution and alcohol-related problems. Police and the law, to varying extents, have been and still are involved in matters of abortion and homosexuality.

As well as requiring the police to help enforce concepts of what is normal and correct, modern capitalist society foists onto the police a number of problems that society itself cannot solve. Certainly the police cannot solve the problems faced by vagrants, alcoholics, prostitutes and drug addicts — but the various authorities apparently hope that they can at least be partially suppressed.

A good example is the "youth problem". Vast outer suburbs are built, devoid of any sense of community or culture and based on private ownership of cars. When some young people react with acts of vandalism, car thefts, etc. the only "solution" is to get extra police and make them more mobile and centrally controlled.

Similarly, problems which could be handled more effectively and at lower cost by other means frequently become a police job. For example, the lack of funds and facilities for the protection of children means that police (usually policewomen) have to "process" and institutionalise children at considerable human and financial cost.

Attitudes

Public attitudes towards the police are mixed. There is, of course, hostility, dislike, mistrust. At the same time, there is a widespread, probably overwhelming view that the police carry out socially necessary functions. The vast majority of people demand that traffic flows, that their persons are protected from assault, that violent criminals be caught, that lost hikers be found, that drug pushers be stopped — and the police are seen as "naturally" carrying out these duties.

Changes have taken place in society which reinforce the acceptance of police, perhaps as a necessary evil, but necessary all the same. For example, the majority of workers in Australia today possess personal property which they value and expect to be protected — items such as TV sets, some money, houses, cars.

Dual personality?

From the above, it might be expected that the police would develop a kind of dual personality. On the one hand, their role is to protect capitalist property and law and order and help define that law and order itself. On the other hand, they are increasingly becoming "workers" required to attend to a multitude of frustrating tasks resulting from dysfunction of the system. This dysfunction includes the additional tendencies towards crime engendered by increased unemployment and alienation.

This expectation of a dual personality should be enhanced by the fact that most police men and women are recruited from the working class, and some at least would have a background of association with the labour movement.
Yet in Australia, while this "worker" aspect of the police has increased, it scarcely shows itself at all in terms of police attitudes. The only manifestations occur when the various police associations argue for salary rises, or on the occasions on which an individual police officer may express a progressive opinion. A rare example was that of the campaign in Victoria early in 1980 against a worsening of the Workers' Compensation act, when some expressions of support for the unions' position came from the police.

There are examples of community attitudes being reflected in the police. When public opinion moved decisively against the Viet Nam war, and the Moratorium marches assumed massive proportions, police willingness to attend demonstrations fell away. On the other hand, in Melbourne at least, there was not the same community feeling against the Springbok tour and the police were accordingly more willing in more senses than one.

The explanation for a lack of duality is to be found firstly in society as a whole, where capitalist ideology dominates, and secondly in the police forces themselves where that hegemony is reinforced in specific ways by a combination of ideology and organisation.

As already noted, most recruits to the police come from the working class. They join for a variety of reasons, but the main ones seem to be job security, the prospect of a more interesting and better paid job than is generally open to people with around average educational levels and a vague feeling that the job may give satisfaction by "serving the community". It is hard to gauge, but it would appear that for most recruits the desire for "power" is not the overriding one.

Police training is characterised by strict and often mindless discipline (drill, standard haircuts, uniforms, codes of behaviour and conformity) and, in the main, in isolated institutions remote from the mainstream of education. The recruit is soon integrated into the police "fraternity" — hierarchical, often isolated from and hostile to former peer groups. (In August 1981 the Victoria Police conceded a minor change in haircuts because of complaints that police recruits could easily be "picked" when mixing socially.)

In the circumstances, an anti-democratic and conservative "police mentality" is readily developed. This includes a hostility to all who do not "conform" — from those with unconventional lifestyles and dress to political radicals and protesters — in short, those who are perceived as possible disturbers of established law and order.

Frustrations

Faced with frustrating tasks, the police officer in the main does not blame social conditions for the problems but tends to blame the victims and is subject to pressures to become cynical and even violent. The only "solutions" usually available are jail or a fine, and when these do not work the temptation is to use methods that are not in the manual.

An article in The Age in 1980 described the conditions of blacks living in Moree in northern New South Wales. The article boiled down to this: the blacks are a terrible headache for the police. This is fairly typical — the dispossession, marginalisation, impoverishment and demoralisation of many black people is reduced to a police problem. The police cannot solve it; hence it becomes a source of frustration, racism and brutality.

There is a tendency to see solutions to police problems solely in terms of improved equipment (guns, radios, fast cars, helicopters) and increased police powers (searching, surveillance, holding and questioning suspects). There may be merit in these claims in some instances (e.g. detecting computer crime is hard with note-pads and pencils) but overall they constitute an erosion of democratic rights, a wider gap between police and the rest of society and an extra twist to the spiral of violence in society.

It is not often that social or political solutions are sought. For example, some police appreciate the role of women's refuges in domestic violence situations. But police officialdom — and the Police Associations — were silent on the cutting of funds for refuges. (The police were much more active in dragging women out of Parliament House during a protest against the cuts.)
The “brotherhood syndrome” is a powerful force in the police. It was referred to in the Melbourne press in November 1980 following the retirement of Commander Marchesi, former head of the Bureau of Internal Investigation, the body that handles complaints against the Victoria Police. Marchesi criticised the “brotherhood syndrome” which he said was powerful in the context of internal police investigations where police officers backed each other, right or wrong. He referred to a strong “them and us” feeling. Marchesi was publicly supported by at least one other (retired) officer.

This incident also demonstrated another aspect of the police force — the domination of the Police Association by conservative elements, drawn mainly from the upper echelons. The call for an independent body to investigate complaints was strongly opposed by VPA secretary, Chief Inspector Rippon.

One of the strongest manifestations of police “solidarity” occurred in Melbourne in October 1976 when over 4,000 police met at Festival Hall in response to the Beach Report. The then Chief Secretary, Mr. V. Dickie, had announced in Parliament that some 55 adverse findings had been made against police officers. The meeting demanded Dickie’s resignation and there was some talk of strike.

Once again, Inspector Rippon had something to say about the Beach Inquiry: Lawyers of the New Left were responsible for initiating the inquiry. They consist of those people whose philosophy it is to destroy society by revolution — to have revolution you must first discredit the government and the forces of law and order. (The Age, October 20, 1976.)

There is a connection between the dominance of conservative elements in the police and the kind of government in power. The most obvious example is Queensland, where the reactionary attitudes of the state government give greater scope for the most backward and even violent sections of the police force.

But in all states the police forces have a certain autonomy which they are increasingly exercising as political pressure groups with their own special interests. Demands on pay, staffing, equipment and legislation are made in this context rather than being activities which bring them closer to the organised labour movement.

Thus there is a complex of factors which militate against the development of progressive and democratic trends in police forces in our society. At the same time, any political program which envisages a socialist transformation per medium of expanding democracy cannot overlook the need for such trends to develop.

The elaboration of a detailed future political program relating to the police in Australia is difficult because of the low level of development of democracy and socialism generally. In addition, such a program is connected with many other aspects of society such as law reform, social services and the penal system.

Perhaps a general orientation can be sketched out, followed by some more immediate proposals for reforms which flow from it.

Perspectives

The classics of marxism on the state warn that the working class and its allies cannot merely take hold of the existing state apparatus and wield it for their own purposes. I suggest that the warning is valid for Australia and that police forces as presently constituted could not be envisaged as a part of a developing democratic socialist society.

Do we then envisage as one act of revolution the sudden sacking of the entire police force and its replacement with a completely new corps of men and women who...
are loyal to "the party and the working class"?

Such a perspective contains the ingredients of a new authoritarianism to replace the old, apart from being unreal. History has given us more than one stern warning of that danger. It is a prospect that is most unlikely to win support in our society, partly because history has created justified suspicion of those who ask for power to be put in their hands.

Without necessarily denigrating the objective conditions and the motives which led to the formation of, for example, the Cheka in revolutionary Russia or the "People's Police" in other places, it is fair to say that the prospect of Australian equivalents does not inspire. It lacks viability because it reduces the scope of democratic actions both to curb the police and to pose actual alternatives. It excludes a struggle within the police, alongside and connected with a struggle against its anti-democratic elements and functions.

Both these struggles rely on the development of the contradictions within the modern capitalist state and the growth of a socialist, democratic movement. They rely on a commitment to the withering away of the coercive functions of the state — in this instance, the reduction of police functions and their exercising by democratic institutions and by direct participation in maintenance of law and order by citizens.

Obviously the need for many functions to be performed by professionals will persist for a relatively long historical period. An expanding democracy requires increasing popular control over those functions and those professionals and the reduction of the alienation of people from the law-making processes. (These processes are outside the scope of this article, but it is obvious that mass alienation from law-making constantly reproduces a police system. Similarly, the role of punishment (jail, fines, etc.) is outside our scope here, but it too has a strong influence.)

Thus socialists should have a general attitude of encouraging the development of democratic elements in the police for which the increased roles of police as "workers" affected by the dysfunction of modern capitalist society is a basis.

It means a more discriminating attitude, avoiding the branding of all police as a reactionary, brutal and corrupt mass. It means having an eye to the interests of rank-and-file police when formulating demands on socio-economic issues. It can mean principled negotiations with police when possible on marches, demonstrations, pickets.

Some suggested democratic reforms are:

* More "liberal" training of police recruits where they are not isolated so much in separate police academies. Training in law, sociology, public relations, criminology, etc. should be integrated with studies in universities and other tertiary institutions. The mindless and degrading forms of "discipline" designed to transform the recruit into a machine for obeying orders should be ended.

* A reduction in punishment as a method of dealing with most "crimes" and a closer integration with improved social welfare agencies to provide more humane and lasting solutions to problems such as domestic violence, child protection, alcoholism and other drug abuse etc. In most cases, it can be demonstrated that increased funds for welfare saves money often spent on police and institutions.

* Abolition of "Special Branch" roles of spying on democratic and working class organisations.

* Independent tribunals to investigate and hear complaints by members of the public against the police. There should be a recognised role for civil liberties councils in such processes. This should be only one example of effective public scrutiny not only of individual cases but the day-to-day working of police forces. The political left should take the lead in constant examination and debate of police actions.

It is a tragedy that "law and order" campaigns are frequently used by conservative governments and parties as a stick to beat the left. Socialists cannot react to this by shrinking from legitimate campaigns of action such as anti-Springbok demonstrations, anti-war marches etc. But social change can be presented more positively as a transition to a superior system of law and order in contrast to the present system.
Because of our union's policy to use the system as much as possible, and not to use the workers, the workers feel helpless; they've got no control over their lives.


This is not an expression of anti-unionism, rather it's the opposite. It's a call for an effective union organisation in an industry which has proved to be the most demoralising and alienating yet devised by western capitalism.

Alienation in its sharpest form is a well known feature of assembly line work in the vehicle industry. One effect has been the creation of an extremely volatile workforce of a potentially explosive nature.

The 1973 strike at Ford's Broadmeadows plant did explode. "The picture of the migrant worker, belting the wall of the boss's office with a long-handled shovel, is the picture of the utter frustration felt by the workers."1

The '73 strike began on May 18 from a lunch-hour mass meeting of workers at Broadmeadows. This was during a national campaign by the four main industry unions for improvements in wages and conditions. The shop stewards also wanted some control over the speed and staffing of the assembly line.

The unions, after a series of meetings and negotiations with the company, recommended the acceptance of an offer from the company at a mass meeting on June 11. The offer did not include the shop stewards' claim and was rejected. The "riot" occurred on June 13 at a demonstration outside the plant. Another meeting, this time of assembly line workers only, decided to continue the strike. Union officials present agreed and admitted the previous return recommendation had been a mistake.
Some union officials said that mistake was caused through a communications gap between the officials and the rank and file. A six-week strike at the same plant in 1981 over a wage claim revealed that, while that gap still exists, mainly through language and cultural differences (the Broadmeadows plant has a workforce, approximately 95 percent of whom are migrants), the gap is more than one of communication.

The '81 strike was called an unofficial strike by the Vehicle Builders Employees Federation (VBEF, formerly known as the VBU) officials. Unlike the '73 strike, federal VBEF union officials actively moved to isolate the strikers, particularly the shop stewards who led the strike.

The Ford company sought to take advantage of this isolation. It threatened to take away a previous wage increase, sack workers, and tried to intimidate workers into breaking picket lines.

The Ford company was, in fact, taking advantage of one of the labor movement's great historical weaknesses, that of spontaneity. Both strikes had strong elements of spontaneous reactions against a system which unfortunately includes a tendency for unions to become bureaucratic in their working, i.e. "to use the system as much as possible, and not to use the workers".

"When a blue does occur there is impatience among the workforce not only because of the nature of the work but because not much opportunity is given to the workers to decide for themselves," Felipe Rodriguez told me after the September/October strike at Ford Broadmeadows last year.

When they do occur, divisions between union officials and the members play into the companies' hands, particularly a company like Ford which has a long anti-worker and anti-union history.

Henry Ford's attitude to workers was shown in his concept of labor organisation: "The idea is that the man .... must have every second necessary but not a single unnecessary second."2

In applying that concept to his own plants he actively opposed any interference by unions or shop-floor organisation which would disturb the smooth running of the production line.

**Unions and Ford**

The work was hard and labor turnover high. In 1913 over 50,000 workers quit, between 13,000 and 14,000 workers were required for the plants at any one time.

Ford employed gangsters throughout his plants to prevent union organisation of his workers. After a long struggle, successive Fords were eventually forced into the realisation that the union movement had to be accommodated.

That realisation came in 1941 when Henry Ford was eighty years of age. A spontaneous strike at Ford's River Rouge plant in the USA produced Ford's first signed contract with a union, the Union of Automobile Workers:

(Henry Ford) was too old to change fundamental ideas. He was still shrewd enough to approve of the workers' UAW dues being deducted at source by the Company. He liked the idea of being the 'union's banker', but he couldn't bring himself to completely accept the idea of trade unions in his factory. Edsel (Ford) and young Henry (Henry Ford II) had realized, however, that they were entering the era of the soft-sell, that years of fear and confrontation were no good for business, and that they were bound to lose in the end. After all the UAW wasn't so bad. Why not accept it and use it?

The Ford company, however, has not succeeded in using the union movement for its own ends. Although some officials have proved vulnerable to company overtures, the line between company and union interests remains clearly defined. The so-called "soft-sell" has always been backed by a hard-core anti-unionism.

The company has always followed a policy of only negotiating with national union officials, relying on possible vulnerability to get their aims across. Shop-floor organisation which the company, only in recent years, has
been forced to accommodate is one of the union's strongest means of lessening this vulnerability.

**Shop floor organisation**

A strong shop steward organisation, provided it is united with union officials, lessens the chances of unorganised or spontaneous action breaking out, and also gives union officials a strong bargaining base. Unfortunately, some officials see the developing shop steward movement as challenging their own positions within the union movement.

In 1962, Amalgamated Engineering Union leader William (later Lord) Carron wrote an article for the house journal of the Ford Motor Company, the *Ford Bulletin*, entitled "Where is the enemy". He wrote:

The old need for unbridled militancy rapidly diminished with the reduction of our immediate major social and industrial problems. One still finds pockets of militancy which are inspired by motives that cannot be accepted as being based purely upon trade union principles. These motives spring from attempts to change that system of government we have in the United Kingdom and would attempt to replace this system with one that has been rejected in Parliamentary and Local Government elections by an overwhelmingly majority of opinion. Disruptive tactics with political ambition as a source of inspiration will not contribute to the further well-being of our citizenship or, for that matter, our membership, which depends entirely in these modern years upon the produce of our factories and workplaces.4

Union officials' irritation with shop-floor militancy was also shown by Transport and General Workers Union official, Les Kealey, who said, "unfortunately a number of stewards of certain unions at Dagenham (Ford plant in England) have got into the habit of trying to solve their own problems".5

Not dissimilar sentiments toward shop stewards at Broadmeadows were shown by federal and state Vehicle Builders Employees Federation (VBEF) officials during the strike last year.

One state organiser told the shop stewards during the strike:

The supreme body of the Victorian branch of the union is the executive. Decisions made by the executive meetings are subject to review and approval by branch meetings of the union once a month.

At the branch meetings it is possible for members to pass resolutions urging the federal secretary to commence negotiations with a company on a wage claim, or any other issue.

This would be regarded as proceeding in the proper direction, with a claim, to be considered by all state branches and then be served on the company after being endorsed by all states.

What happened in the Ford dispute?

The stewards in the car assembly plant decided on their own that the time was right, for the car assembly plant only, to commence action to win a wage increase.

What did that decision mean?

No consideration was given to what the position would be with other plants across the Broadmeadows site, or Geelong, Homebush and Eagle Farm. So we then had a number of stewards, from the car assembly plant, attempting to run the union right around Australia, completely ignoring the fact that other plants and states did exist, and in a successful campaign they would have to be involved whether they liked it or not.

That certainly sets out the problems for any campaign against a company that has a spread of plants around the country, where a strike in one section of a plant in one state can affect workers in other plants and states. This means that the company can, and does, use
this fact to isolate the strikers and considerably weaken the campaign.

The steps outlined by the organiser for the proper procedures that should have been followed by the Ford Broadmeadows strikers were designed to avoid that problem. But the theory completely ignores certain facts, not least the volatility and spontaneous nature of the workforce in the car industry; the fact that the nature of the work itself builds up pent-up anger and frustration.

That speech, and public attacks against the shop stewards by federal secretary Len Townsend, served only to inflame the situation and drive the wedge further between the shop stewards/workers, and the union officials. Rather than enhancing organisation as opposed to spontaneity by closing the gap between officials and rank and file, union officials' actions made things worse.

Federal secretary Len Townsend called the shop stewards "dogs" in a radio interview and referred to the strike as unofficial. However, soon after the strike began (September 18), he promised them full support and received a standing ovation. A week later he turned against them.

In fact, it was Townsend who first lodged the claim on the company, about 12 months before the strike began. Felipe Rodriguez said that was done without consulting the shop stewards or workers. "The claim just lay there with no effort to move it along," he said.

We took up the claim and gave the company time to negotiate with our union officials, but we never gained any evidence that our federal officials approached the company in a positive way to start negotiations. Because no attempt was made by state officials to call shop stewards meetings to discuss the claim or to inform the workers what was going on, and in the light of so many industries getting wage increases, frustrations were mounting. It got to the stage where the workers were threatening shop stewards that they would be replaced.

The shop stewards called their own mass meeting at which it was decided to strike. The six weeks that followed revealed weaknesses in the shop-floor organisation which were due mainly to the inexperience of many of the shop stewards. Most had only been stewards for 12 months before the strike. But lessons were learned which could lead to a more vital union organisation among production workers in the vehicle industry.

Among those lessons was the realisation that the stewards have to participate in trade union politics, attend branch meetings, learn to use union rules and procedures, and get information out to rank-and-file workers.

**Strike lessons**

Soon after the strike ended on November 2, the Ford shop steward committee launched its first publication, in seven languages, calling for renewal and full participation in the union and for workshop democracy in the industry.

The publication raised three important questions:

1. The relationship that exists in the factories, e.g. the discrepancy of power between workers and bosses, the need for democracy etc. (e.g. industrial democracy)

2. The relationship between union leadership and rank and file (e.g. questions re: union democracy, representative leadership, efficiency of union structures, etc.

3. The unfair nature of industrial laws and how they are used to the detriment of workers.

The last mentioned refers to the use of the secret ballot ordered by the Arbitration Commission which purportedly ended the strike. The shop stewards said of the secret ballot:

The so-called secret ballot was shown for what it is: a farce and a real "travesty of democracy". Firstly, it is easy to claim a victory when more than half of the Ford workers were starved after 4 weeks on strike and without any financial help from the union.

Secondly, the resources of Ford and the federal VBEF were put together to
intimidate and isolate workers to resume work — it's worth noting that only one-third of the workers turned out to work on the 30th October, the day after the Court order. When the rules are stacked against us and with the resources that one side has against the other, it is farcical to talk about democracy. Real democracy is when the rules are fair and when the opposing forces have an equal amount of resources.

The fact that the shop stewards were able to pull themselves together and begin organising in a more effective way after a bitter and potentially divisive experience, strikes a hopeful note for the future. But it must also be remembered that same hope was expressed after the 1973 strike. Many of the problems that existed in that period still exist. The historically high labor turnover in the industry makes it difficult to sustain an ongoing organisation.

That high turnover rate is not only explained by the harsh, demoralising nature of assembly line work and the low wage-rate (most Broadmeadows workers did not average more than $180 take-home pay before the strike), but is also explained by the high migrant character of the workforce.

Many people when they first arrive in the country find it easier to get work at the car making plants than in other industries. Most see the job as temporary; as a means of getting themselves on their feet until they find better employment. However, it is becoming more difficult to find other jobs in a declining job market, so many are staying on — if they can.

New technology, however, is forcing them out. Ford Broadmeadows has recently introduced ten robots which will take over the function of 800 people. This and other restructuring moves in the industry make it even more imperative for a strong, revitalised union organisation in the industry to protect the workers and advance their demands.

Restructuring, particularly the development of the "world car", is creating new problems for union organisations. The "world car" development extends the problem discussed earlier — i.e. the company playing off strikers in one plant against workers in another plant or state, to workers in other countries.

Ford workers in other countries are organising to meet this problem:

In October 1979, with the support of their unions, Danish workers called an international meeting where Ford workers from Denmark, Holland, Britain, West Germany and France set up an informal commission. Workers from Belgium, Spain and Portugal have since joined the commission.

Whether Ford workers become part of the European organisation, or a similar one in the Asian/Pacific region, may depend on the union's response to the developing shop steward movement at Broadmeadows and other Ford plants.

Senior shop steward, Frank Argondizzo, says the internal affairs of the union will and can only be altered or changed by the members directly:

The present leadership, if it wants to regain the trust of the workers has to do some really serious reflection and start to involve the whole membership in its affairs. A failure to respond to this appeal will be a sad state of affairs both to themselves personally, and as a consequence the renewal process may be retarded a little longer.

Time is on the workers' side; the workers have learned to be patient.

REFERENCES

5. Ibid, p.53.
At the close of 1981 two areas stood clearly at the top of the agenda of economic policy problems. These were wages and the manufacturing industry.

The Metal Trades Agreement, which was ratified the week before Christmas, gave the green light for a whole host of wage increases which had been, or were, in the process of being negotiated at that time. The immediate questions being raised were: would the transport workers seek another increase setting off a new round, or would the Commission and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) succeed in re-establishing a centralised system at the end of this one?

In the longer term there were continuing negotiations between the ACTU and the government over the inquiry into our industrial relations system generally. The changes in the Department of Industrial Relations added further emphasis to the importance attached to this policy area at the moment.

In the area of manufacturing industry policy the stalemate between the government, the manufacturers and the farmers continued. The Industries Assistance Commission (IAC) continued to call for reductions in protection, supported by spurious organisations like the Car Owners Association, while the manufacturers became more and more critical of what they saw as the neglect by the Fraser government of their interests. The decision on the future of protection for the vehicle industry provided a fitting climax to this debate at the end of the year. The result was predictably a continuation of the stalemate.

In noticing that these two policy areas stand at the top of the economic agenda at present, some may justifiably retort: “When weren’t they at the top?” Certainly, since 1974 these issues have never been far from the top and it’s interesting to reflect that little progress has been made. The problems and the options have not changed all that much.

The Fraser government is in some disarray in both areas. Their years of fudging and “ad hocery” in practice, combined with free market ideology at home, and “humanitarian” statesmanship abroad, are catching up with them. They lack direction and decisiveness. That’s not to say that they’re in all that much trouble, certainly not as much as they should be. This is largely because the Labor Party, and the left in particular, are not in much better shape. They haven’t formulated, let alone tried to project, a clear and realistic set of policies in these areas. Only when the left can do this will it be in a position of influence in the labor movement.

Why is it so important you might ask? And what’s the realistic alternative? An historical perspective will help to answer these questions and see them in relationship to each other and the rest of the economy.

The origins of the present policies, and institutions which are central to them, namely the IAC and the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, go back to Federation at the turn of the century. The recession of the 1890s destroyed the rationale of the export-oriented
development which had dominated during the preceding forty years. An alliance between the ALP and the manufacturers legislated the basis of a new course of development in the new federal parliament. This legislation consisted of two related Acts, the Tariff Excise Act of 1904 and the Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1905.

Together they were called "the new protection". Their aim was to promote industrialisation, stable economic growth, and increasing employment. They involved a classic class compromise, in that the Tariff Excise Act protected local manufacturers in return for which the Conciliation and Arbitration act protected the wages and conditions of the workers.

At the outset, the application of the Acts was very limited. However, as they set the framework for the subsequent pattern of economic development, their application and influence gradually expanded. Relatively soon they came to stand for jobs and wages, particularly in the labor movement.

They have periodically come under attack, usually for fostering inefficiency, and assisting inflation, but both have become very deeply embedded in the society and continue to enjoy widespread support.

One good reason for the support has been that, despite the criticisms, the pattern of development seems to have served the country fairly well. Problems began to emerge in the 1930s but nothing was done about these, and the mining boom seemed to obviate the necessity to do anything anyway. In reality, changes in the international and Australian economies began to gradually erode the foundations on which the whole pattern of development, and particularly the framework for it, were built.

It wasn't until 1974 when the international recession hit Australia that the full effects of this process were felt. When they were, the subsequent collapse was that much more dramatic. The area most severely affected has been that of manufacturing industry.

Some sections have called for amputation: in other words, an end to protection and the erection of a new framework for a different pattern of development. Others, including the manufacturers of course, have called for more splints — stronger buttressing against the continuing erosion.

That's largely where the debate lies today which is not particularly useful. Everyone agrees (well, virtually everyone) that our manufacturing industry is inefficient by world standards and uncompetitive. What they don't agree on is the possibility and desirability of them being anything else. One of the arguments involved in this is that protection has been responsible for this state of affairs in the first place: it has fostered an industry which is fragmented, dependent and insular in outlook, inefficient and uncompetitive.

Meanwhile, on the wages front, debate has raged about the effects of wage increases on inflation, and with this the competitiveness and profitability of industries, and ultimately the level of employment. Here, too, there is widespread agreement that our industrial relations system is far from adequate. It is agreed that it is unnecessarily complex and cumbersome and has promoted fragmentation and dislocation. The numerous amendments to the Conciliation and Arbitration Act have only made matters worse. There is also little optimism that any of the current inquiries or agreements will really be able to overcome the basic problems.

Related problems?

What is interesting, even curious, is that, despite the historical nexus, there has been little, if any, serious attempt to see these two areas, and the problems in them, as in any way related.

This has been as true of the marxist political economists as of any others. When this relationship is explored even superficially it becomes clear that the structural weaknesses alleged to have been produced in the manufacturing industry by protection are mirrored in the trade union movement as a result of its protection. Like the manufacturers, the trade union movement is
fragmented, dependent, reactive in outlook, and inefficient. If the problems the unions face are to be effectively met, they will have to change, just as much as the manufacturers.

Only in this context can the full significance of the problems in these two areas, including their relationship to each other and the rest of the economy, be appreciated. And only on this basis can an adequate policy response be formulated.

Firstly, the policies must provide realistic solutions to the major economic problems confronting people. Secondly, they should, at the same time, set the framework for a viable pattern of economic development in the future. Thirdly, they should be based on a clear understanding of the political and industrial balance of forces. Finally, they should seek to overcome the weaknesses in the labor movement and strengthen its position in society generally. Now what does this actually mean in policy terms?

Undoubtedly, the major economic problem facing our society, and the labor movement in particular, is the continued presence of unemployment and inflation. The reason for the coincidence of these two phenomena lies in the changed structure of the economy which has accompanied growth and the changed political and industrial relations climate associated with growth.

As a result, the dominant sectors of the economy no longer operate according to the dictates of a competitive market. Distribution is largely subject to political administration or prices administered by monopolies. The result is that competing demands, particularly over income, tend to be met by increasing prices or spending. In this way the conflicting demands in society tend to be mediated by an inflationary spiral, one that becomes worse as the demands become more irreconcilable.

Traditional economic policies have proved ineffective, and in their place two alternative approaches have been advocated. The corporate sector sees the reduction of inflation as a prerequisite to reducing unemployment, and believe that the major cause of it is the artificial suppression of the market forces. They claim that the culprits are the trade unions and the federal government. Their solution involves easing restraints by restricting government intervention into the economy and undermining the power of the trade unions. The management of the economy would then be limited largely to the regulation of market forces, primarily through the control of the money supply.

The labor movement, on the other hand, has argued that unemployment is the major issue. Unfortunately, this has led some sections of the movement to virtually ignore the presence of inflation, or at least some of its causes. They have argued for an increase in government spending and wages to create more demand. Others have called for moderate increases in government spending to be combined with an extension of government intervention into the economy. The major thrust of this intervention would be in the form of a prices and incomes policy. This is the only way, they argue, that a government can reduce unemployment without fuelling the inflationary spiral.

The market or ....

In other words, in order to decide between competing demands, what the people in developed capitalist societies like our own are being presented with is a clear choice between an extension in the operation of the private market mechanism and the operation of political/administrative mechanisms. Naturally, the Fraser government has chosen the former, hence its cutbacks in government services, deregulation, and attacks on the trade union movement. Bill Hayden, and indeed most of the federal Labor parliamentary spokespersons in the area, have indicated that they favour the latter. However, they have also indicated that in the absence of this they too would be forced to adopt some policies similar to the Fraser government, and certainly wouldn't be able to embark on a substantial job-creation program.

The sensitivity of wage movements to variations in the rate of economic growth has
been demonstrated even in the highly centralised and restrictive wage indexation period. Brief increases in the rate of growth in early 1978 and late 1980 were followed by wage movements breaking out of indexation. In 1978 this was in the form of the beginning of the work-value round of wage increases, and in early 1981 in the form of industry-claims which ultimately led to the abandonment of indexation. Both periods were also characterised by a significant jump in the number of over-award increases won in the metal industry.

This tends to confirm the objective necessity for one or other approach. In the absence of some agreement with the trade unions a Labor government could find that any increase in government spending could end up merely setting off an inflationary boom followed by a collapse of confidence and a slump. Such a course of events would be completely self-defeating in terms of increasing employment and the future of the government itself.

The left, particularly in the trade unions, remains the major stumbling block to the introduction of an incomes policy by a Labor government. The left has always rejected any restraint on workers pursuing wage increases, and believes that such policies are inevitably one-sided in their application. But the left has not been able to come up with any realistic alternative. More recently, sections of the left have realised that some form of incomes policy is not only inevitable, but even desirable.

Public opinion polls continue to confirm that people are not satisfied with the current policies of the government or the trade unions on the economy and unemployment. Even the industry-by-industry wage negotiations are not seen by people as doing anything but keeping their heads above water, and even then only for a limited period. They know that inflation will continue, and may even increase slightly as a result of wage increases. I believe most would welcome a policy which promised security in real income and the possibility of controlling, or even reducing, inflation. If this were combined with a commitment to embark on a significant job-creation program, it would provide an attractive alternative capable of achieving majority support.

Incomes policy

I believe an incomes policy should form part of the framework for a new pattern of development. Such a policy would have a restraining effect on some sectors of the workforce but, over a longer term, it is unlikely to have any significant effect on the real level of wages in the country. If it is to be viable it will have to protect real living standards. If it doesn’t, it will be rejected by workers anyway, as the British social contract was.

Such a policy, if it is backed by working class mobilisation and intervention, could maintain people’s real living standards, particularly those of the lower paid, while assisting to reduce inflation. This could be achieved by adjusting the wage movements for changes in health insurance arrangements, or the introduction of tax indexation, for example. In return for agreeing to this the trade unions could seek assurances on the reactivisation of the Prices Justification Tribunal and the introduction of a wealth tax. Finally, they could demand a commitment to a job-creation program of specific magnitude.

Unemployment, and even excessive inflation, won’t be solved by a job-creation program on the part of the government alone. Nor would it necessarily be accepted even if it could. This brings us to industry policy — another problem area. More rapid economic growth and full employment will require some adjustment in the structure of Australia’s industries, in particular its manufacturing industries.

As I said earlier, we are a long way from coming to grips with this. The debate has been bogged down between those who advocate the dismantling of protection and the freer operation of the market, and those who advocate the maintenance and even strengthening of the current protective measures.

The marxist political economists are not in
any better position. Some are opposed to dismantling protection because it would destroy a significant proportion of Australian industries and leave us at the mercy of the multinationals, while others point out that protection is primarily paid for by workers and doesn’t protect jobs anyway.

None of these positions offers any real alternative. Change is inevitable and the real choices are about what these changes should be and how they are to take place. This doesn’t mean just opening the economy to the dictates of the market with all its consequences nor does it mean ignoring them. What it does mean is setting realistic and consistent objectives for the country and establishing criteria for policies on the basis of these.

**A small economy**

The dominant reality in this regard is the fact that we are a relatively small and open economy. The investment already planned and underway in the resource sector will make us even more open. Our standard of living has been built on this and any change will therefore affect it. Given this, we should also seek to maintain as balanced an economy as possible. This means retaining some harmony between the different sectors of the economy — not allowing one sector to choke off another. At the same time, the range of manufacturing industries we currently have will probably have to be reduced and greater specialisation encouraged. This could be accompanied by policies designed to deepen our manufacturing base, for example, through developing the heavy engineering industries associated with the resource sector.

Another objective of industry policy should be to increase the amount of research and development undertaken here, especially by the corporate sector. There are undoubtedly many more objectives that people can think of. However, the point is to identify a few which are critical to the shape of our economy and can be realistically built into policies. There is not really all that much scope anyway and what there is will take a long time to achieve. What is more important is the process of change. That is, or at least should be, our key concern in both formulating an alternative industry policy and an alternative wages policy. The left is still too preoccupied with the specific content of these policies, although there is some improvement in this regard. The aim of the policies in both areas should be to expand the areas of decision-making in the economy which are open to political/industrial intervention.

In terms of industry policy, for example, a federal Labor government should be responsible for setting the parameters of change. These may and, in my view, should involve a reduction in the general level of tariff assistance and its replacement with types of assistance designed to foster industries with desired characteristics, or these characteristics in existing industries. But what is even more important is that the specific changes should be agreed to and monitored by tripartite bodies at different levels through the economy. Moreover, in return for this assistance, companies should have a statutory obligation to inform their workers of any changes in the production process — such as a new piece of equipment — or the level of employment and staffing, at least twelve months prior to their implementation.

An incomes policy, too, should be negotiated on a tripartite basis — nationally in the first instance. Its content should be as specific as possible — and initially limited. If possible, it should include commitments on the adjustment of social security payments as well as wages and salaries. In return for this restraint, the unions should have improved rights over industrial health and safety.

This may seem defensive but, in fact, it is a viable interventionist alternative. The point of it is that we are at an important turning point in Australia’s development, one which has many similarities with that which existed at the turn of the century. If the left is going to have any influence over the course that will be taken in the future, it needs to formulate and articulate a coherent and realistic framework. This requires a very different and more sophisticated approach to those which we have been used to in the past.
However political life is defined, in a parliamentary political system, parliament and parliamentary institutions occupy a central place. Under parliamentary governments in many countries, but especially those of Western Europe and those that have developed within the former British imperial system, working people have sought to advance their ideals and pursue their needs by passing laws through parliament. Even where workers have established viable trade unions, they have commonly sought to use an existing parliamentary political system to achieve some of their immediate and long-term goals.

This approach has periodically been challenged by a belief in various forms of direct action. Workers' organisations, however, have continued to exert pressure on parliament, and the rest of the state system, side-by-side with taking direct action. Moreover, when non-parliamentary movements based on direct public action have formed, a part — often a considerable part — of their impact has been felt at the parliamentary level. People's movements and parliamentary life have been closely bound together.

**Australian society**

Australian society, after 1788, evolved from a particular set of conditions which was determined, firstly, by a British colonial experience. Alongside the legacy of convictism, the Australian political and state system grew out of the existing British system, and was very largely influenced by liberal, radical and democratic currents from Britain. The evolution of Australian political culture was the result of the continuing struggle between the dominant conservative current and opposing reforming currents. The contending forces fought things out at different levels, socially, ideologically, and above all, ultimately, in parliamentary contest. The parliament often became the final focus of social and political conflict. The resulting laws, and other legal acts,
summarised for a time the state of play, the balance between the contending forces.

In this context, at a certain point, influenced to some degree by socialist notions, the central colonial trade union bodies formed distinct parliamentary labor parties, which eventually coalesced into the Australian Labor Party. The Australian trade unions, as a whole, in this respect were ahead of their British counterparts, and the formation of the Labor Party represented a jump in the political consciousness of the working class, although this consciousness was largely a parliament-oriented consciousness. Political action was regarded essentially as parliamentary action.

The trade unions sought to reform and even revolutionise society by passing laws through parliament. By this means, and by the institution of other means, such as industrial arbitration enforced through specially constituted courts, boards and commissions, it was thought that the state could be captured and put to work in the interests of labour. As the Defence Committee, which acted as the NSW central trade union body during the 1890 Maritime Strike, explained:

A still more important lesson, learnt in the hour of defeat is this. That whilst we must go on ever increasing our capacity for fighting as we have fought before, the time has now come when trade-unionists must use the Parliamentary machinery that in the past has used them. We are still some distance.... from the blind end of our industrial lane. Until we reach that end we shall stand in need of the strike and the boycott. But the trumpet notes .... are eventually political. Once the worker determines .... that the very basis of modern industry is antagonistic to his welfare .... he must set about the work of reform where it seems that reform alone can be obtained — and that is in Parliament .... We must secure a substantial representation in Parliament .... The next general elections must yield us the balance of power; future contests must give us an absolute majority in Parliament .... 'Politics' is a game we must decline to play. For us Parliamentary life will be a real and perhaps a bitter warfare .... We have come out of the conflict United Labor Party ....

This statement expresses much of the thinking of Australian trade unionists about parliament and parliamentary democracy. Political power resides in parliament, it asserted. If a Labor Party secured a substantial representation in parliament, it could affect significantly the power relations in society. With a substantial representation in parliament, and more so with an absolute majority, trade unionists could use the parliamentary machinery to bring about reform 'where it seems that reform can alone be obtained'. There was no suggestion, however, that parliament could deal with all situations; until 'the end' unionists would need the strike and the boycott. But by 1895 a growing body of trade unionists believed that compulsory arbitration could best deal with industrial disputes. And by the early 1900s this view had become the majority, but never universal, opinion.

The remarkable persistence of the views summarised in the last paragraph is an outstanding fact of Australian life, and despite often bitter experience and fierce argument, the political consciousness of the Australian working class has remained doggedly parliamentary. Attempts to win large-scale support for alternatives to parliamentary democracy have failed. In a striking way the almost completely uncritical identification of the Australian Labor Party, from its earliest days, with parliamentary democracy reflects the hold parliamentary ideology has over the bulk of ordinary Australians. L.F. Crisp briefly analysed the nature of this almost natural state of affairs thus:

An institution, the Australian Labour (sic) Party — thoroughly constitutional and parliamentary in its approach to its aims — was built on a particular conception of democracy which reached deep into British history. That conception can be traced back through Chartism at least as far as the thought of more radical groups concerned in the Cromwellian Revolution.

Working class parliamentary political ideology did not originate in the Labor Party; rather the source of the ideology lies deep in
the beginnings of Australian political culture. Thus, the origins and character of the Labor Party can be traced to a parliamentary political ideology, although Labor methods and Labor organisation have significantly affected the development of the parliamentary political system in Australia.5

II

In his later years, Arthur Calwell, shaped by Catholic, nationalist and socialist ideas but basically mainstream Labor6, writing of the great strikes of the 1890s, said:

The use by governments of the police to break strikes seemed to show that the state was not only on the side of the wealthy, but was, in fact, an instrument of oppression against the workers. The lesson was obvious. The workers must form their own party to influence the affairs of state and, if possible, win power in the state.7

However, Calwell believed that the state was generally neutral. Although it might be an instrument of the wealthy, the state could be taken over by the workers. Adopting a view essentially the same as the 1890 Defence Committee, Calwell asserted that the Labor Party was formed as a party of unionists to seek the betterment of workers' conditions through parliamentary action. The goals were the improvement of the workers' lot; greater political and social equality; and provision of social welfare. And the workers' success in sending representatives to parliament, obtaining rapid and substantial reforms and influencing government policy as a whole, led willy-nilly to a concentration on the day-to-day parliamentary struggle and the electoral work needed to form governments.

Concluding what he thought about the Labor Party and the state, Calwell said:

What emerges is a picture of a party consciously and deliberately using the machinery of the state in the interests of those it represented. A frank recognition of the role of the state as a means of social progress is what distinguishes the Labor Party from all others. The great measures.... were based upon this central doctrine: that the state belonged to the people and should be used freely and consciously by the people as the instrument for their own betterment and progress .... It (the Labor Party) was, then, a party committed to the radical reform of the existing system — parliament and the courts.7

Calwell's views were very clearly stated and are fairly representative of the Labor Party's traditional approach to politics and the state. Fundamentally, the Labor Party upholds the value of parliamentary government because it believes that a democratic parliament is the most effective instrument for securing rapid and substantial reforms, and that political democracy is best served by a parliamentary system of government.9

Parliamentary limitations

However, not all Labor Party publicists have had such a complete commitment to parliament. Some, while recognising its value as a democratic forum and basis for government, have been conscious of its limitations and the flaws in its very nature. J.F. Cairns, for instance, argued that if the aims and policies of workers were formed outside parliament by workers themselves and then taken undiluted into parliament by their representatives, the workers could use the political power of parliament against corporate property. Parliamentary activity could thus be added to activities such as industrial action, meetings, demonstrations, publishing and broadcasting etc. — but not made into a substitute for them. However, direct workers' representation could not be attained without overcoming the very real problems that stood in the way of such a goal.10

In his book, The Quiet Revolution, Dr Cairns argued that the workers were faced and broken (in 1890-91) not by the employers but by the police, the army and the courts, acting as agents of the employers and the property system.11 In The Quiet Revolution and elsewhere Cairns examined the basis of social power in its relation to the state.12 He identified the social power base in the control
exercised by capital:

Power is first of all (the) power of the State ... and it is (the) power of the autocratic units of .... the means of production that .... at present determines exercise of power by the State .... But the most extensive and significant power today is not State power, it is the continuing exercise of power .... in the means of production and elsewhere, which not only touches the lives of the people continuously, but in fact always determines the exercise of power in the end by the State.13

Without achieving complete clarity, Dr Cairns emphasised the relationship between the state and class power, and in *The Quiet Revolution* he further developed his analysis of this relationship.14 For Cairns, the state had a wider meaning than the meaning that some other Labor Party publicists have adopted; it included — along with parliament — police forces, the armed forces, law courts and the public service.

**Parliament and soviets**

Another Labor publicist, R.S. Ross, a socialist editor and organiser of the early years of this century, had reservations about the muddles and blunders in the exercise of legislative and administrative power. Nevertheless, in 1920, he argued that the existing industrial and parliamentary machinery was acceptable to most Australians. It was as natural for Australians as soviets might be for Russians. Ross recognised the Soviet system of government as 'one of the world's towering advents', but he thought it would be better to use the existing set-up in Australia as the framework of a socialist state and social system. Parliament could be bent to whatever we wish .... bent to basic, militant and economically reconstructive purposes .... Political democracy is not all-sufficing — but it is, like nationalisation, an integral part of Socialism. ... we may not safely let it go .... We .... cannot tinker and tamper with hard-won freedoms. We are for liberty of thought and for free speech — never for a disenfranchising plan that even in our hands will begin with the exploiter and recoil upon ourselves by giving openings to one faction to strangle another. Instead of less, we want more Democracy, and upon this principle .... we can bend Parliament to our purposes and set up a knitted unionism capable of freeing us .... 15

More recently Peter Wilenski has written critically of the tendency in the Labor Party, that sees a Labor government as the sole centre of power. Such a view, he asserts, fails to take into account the fact that the government is only "one of the sources of power in a capitalist society". In a very perceptive essay on the Whitlam government's successes and failures, he examined particularly the limitations of "parliamentary government acting through the State apparatus". While the Whitlam government innovated in a few areas of administration, according to Wilenski, it did not alter the basic structure or nature of the bureaucracy. "There continued to be a considerable adherence to the view of a public service equally able to serve both political sides".16 Wilenski, drawing on the report of the Coombs Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration, and no doubt his own experience, knowledgeably indicated the inherent conservatism and self-serving nature of much of the bureaucracy. As well as suggesting some steps to reform the public service in order to make it more responsive to Labor initiatives, he stressed the absolute priority of the Labor Party establishing real roots in the community in order to develop public sympathy and support, and to develop strategies to avoid or overcome the resistance of many sections of the people.

**Grassroots struggle**

Another recent writer, R.W. Connell, dealing with an Australian strategy for socialism, and referring to the need to wage a complex and constantly changing struggle at the grassroots, has pointed to the relative ineffectiveness of the Labor Party because of its predominantly parliamentary character: A party organised mainly to fight elections
as the Labor Party is now, will not be very effective .... The preoccupation with electoral politics must change. Not that we can abandon parliamentary action; rather it should be simply the tip of the iceberg. It is down at the point of immediate class conflict — at work ..., in neighbourhoods, ... that the movements energies must focus.17

However, it is notable that even a most up-to-date Labor theorist, such as Connell, fails to deal comprehensively with class power and the wider aspects of the state. In dealing with the transition to socialism, establishing a socialist hegemony is largely restricted to the cultural domain, and concern with the state is mainly confined to the problem of meeting ruling-class responses to an increasing scale of socialist pressure. There is little discussion of the state as such, as a complex of political power, people, processes and institutions; nor, in a parliamentary state, of parliament's position at the centre of this complex; nor of the need for socialists to confront the state and intervene wherever possible, encroaching on and eroding capitalist hegemony in all its centres of power.

Thus, different Labor Party views on the state emerge, the dominant one following the original trade union conception. According to this view the Australian state is equated very largely with the existing parliamentary government, perhaps with the addition of the courts. In this pre-eminent Labor judgment, the state is essentially neutral. In 1890 it was on the side of the wealthy, but through the processes of parliamentary democracy, the state could just as easily be used to promote the people's welfare and social progress. Democratic socialism, to the Labor Party, means the reform of the existing system by the use of weapons provided by that system.

Labor views

The dominant Labor Party approach to the state depends on acceptance of the central role of parliament. It falls short of recognising that the modern parliamentary state is a sophisticated complex. Secondary Labor Party views, such as those of Wilenski and Cairns, qualify the basic approach and extend the discussion of the state more broadly. Wilenski focuses especially on the state apparatus and the problems of a parliamentary government faced with a largely conservative and unreformed public service. But neither the mainstream approach nor the radical position grapple with the complexity of the modern parliamentary state. Although, in a parliamentary state, parliament may be the principal means of marshalling the consent of the governed18, the modern state complex is composed of much more: governmental (executive) power; the armed services; the public service, and other officials and state employees, the court-prison system and police agencies. In addition, the state complex overlaps into such centres of social and class power as the education system, religious institutions, the media and voluntary and professional welfare services.

Although the Labor Party, in pursuing its aims, accepted the central role of parliament, it always linked its broad social objectives with the need for democratic parliamentary reform. The Labor Party sought to build on the limited responsible government achieved by nineteenth-century radicals and sought to develop democratic responsible government. Right from the beginnings of its activity the Labor Party sought to clear away the obstacles to the realisation of this aim. The abolition of undemocratic upper houses and the securing of electoral reforms were planks in the earliest party platforms.19 The Labor Party adopted the philosophy that parliamentary governments should be made or unmade purely on the basis of a majority in the more democratically elected (popular) house of parliament. Members of the government had to be members of parliament, predominantly members of the popular house, where an upper house still existed.

III

Since the 1975 political crisis and the constitutional coup against the Whitlam government, the Labor Party has responded with many new policies that reflect public opinion on the need for constitutional change. Although stopping short of the policy
of such bodies as Citizens for Democracy, which calls for a new and democratic constitution, the ALP has adopted several proposals for change that go a long way in that direction.

Specifically and immediately, the Labor Party proposes that the Australian constitution should be amended to guarantee that a government supported by a majority of the House of Representatives should govern (responsible government); guarantee the right to vote and the principle of one-vote one-value; ensure that the Senate has not power to reject, defer or otherwise block money bills; provide that the Senate may delay, but not reject any other proposed law for up to six months; define and limit the powers of the governor-general so that he or she acts in accordance with the advice of the government enjoying the confidence of the House of Representatives; and enable the Australian parliament to make laws to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms including an Australian Bill of Rights. Finally, the ALP has declared that a Labor government would support and fund a people's popularly elected convention to involve the Australian people to the maximum extent possible in the process of constitutional change.20

As part of a plan to achieve more democratic and more efficient government, the Labor Party has proposed the expansion and development of the Senate Committee system to review government activity, the development of legislation committees in the House of Representatives and the provision of adequate machinery for the initiation and consideration of non-government legislation in both Houses. Other proposed reforms include reform of electoral laws and voting procedures, now to include proportional representation through multi-member electorates, the declaration of financial interests of politicians and political journalists, public funding of elections and the disclosure of the sources of political finance.21

Since the overthrow of the Whitlam government the Labor Party has developed some elaborate machinery-of-government policies that very largely reflect the experience and lessons of the 1972-75 period. While the main thrust of these policies is directed towards the achievement of efficient and effective government, some attention has been paid to making the machinery of government more democratic, more responsive and more accountable. Enhanced parliamentary scrutiny of the implementation of policies and laws is one means proposed to achieve this end. Acknowledging a grave weakness of the Whitlam government-in-office, the Labor Party now states its belief in a thorough public explanation of government policies and the provision of channels to enable Party, trade union and public feedback to reach the government.22

However, when it comes to the public service, the heart of the state machine, the ALP emphasises ways of making a career service more adaptive and more flexible rather than ways of democratising the bureaucracy. Nevertheless, it does propose that a Labor government would guard against an exclusive elite group gaining administrative dominance, first by instituting a more flexible system of appointing department heads, secondly by appointing officials on secondment or contract, and thirdly, by providing an exchange of personnel between the public service and other areas of expertise and experience. In addition, while maintaining the merit principle in selection, it would seek to ensure a rapid increase of representation at senior levels of the public service of such under-represented sections of the workforce as women, migrants and Aboriginal Australians. Accountability would be fostered by decentralising and delegating the capacity to take decisions, thus encouraging individual initiative and responsibility within the public service. But public participation is to be restricted to the existence of representative advisory boards and community access to government information through freedom of information legislation.23

IV

Depending as it does on election, and
Labor and the Parliamentary State

Despite the limitations of representative government, parliament is the most democratic part of the modern state complex; it is the part most susceptible to community pressure. Apart from the influence that is exerted through the ballot box, citizens have a range of democratic procedures open to them: writing letters to politicians and government ministers; interviewing politicians and ministers; presenting petitions; observing in the parliamentary public gallery; forming deputations, including mass deputations; organising marches and demonstrations, etc. Nowadays at the municipal level of government there is a growing practice of public participation in council committees and in full council meetings, with direct dialogue between the public and their elected representatives. It is now becoming less true that people only participate once every three years or so by deciding whom their representatives will be, although public participation has a very long way to go.

Any form of representative democracy, including representative political democracy, has, by its very nature, built-in obstacles to thorough-going participation by the electorate. There is a presumption that once the voters have deposited their marked ballot papers in the box, their part in the actual business of government is more or less complete. In the case of parliamentary government, after the votes are counted and the electoral process is complete, it is assumed that representative bodies — parliament, cabinet, etc. — with the help of public servants — elaborate and formulate policies and make and carry out decisions. How, then to extend responsibility and to provide checks and balances that come directly from the public?

Local government

In some local government councils that have opened up their meetings, such as Leichhardt and Sydney councils in New South Wales, the public may quiz both councillors and council officers on policy and administration. Public discussion is facilitated; the possibility of not only voicing objections but also making proposals with the help of technical assistance is created. Practical proposals have to be costed, and a further logical step is for the public to look at all aspects of finance — to inspect the books and participate in the preparation of budgets. To extend this activity to parliaments and governments may appear more difficult. But already there are certain rights of participation in parliamentary inquiries. The next step is to enlarge the area of public participation in ways comparable to some of the methods now beginning to be used in local government.

Despite provisions of this sort for direct public intervention, the gap between the electorate and the political representatives of the electorate remains very real. Whatever is done it is difficult to see how this gap can be entirely closed in the short term. Until there are far greater social and educational opportunities, and consequently richer all-round individual development, there is little likelihood of everybody being willing or ready to step into the various roles of government. There are many obvious problems. Individuals have to be politically alert and willing to undertake the demands and burdens of political life. Government needs to be economic and efficient as well as democratic. There has to be the opportunity for citizens to become competent in the work and skills of government. On the other hand, the skilled and competent may decline into bureaucratic routine, or worse — into incompetence, privilege and corruption.

Limited tenure

What arrangements can be made to make these difficulties smaller, with the possibility that they may eventually disappear? There are no certainties of success in such a complex field, but in recent times in various movements and organisational structures, there has been some support for the principle of holding office for a limited time in representative and executive positions. Could this principle be applied usefully to parliament and government? And the public service and other administrative services? The idea is not new, of course. The Levellers...
proposed it in England at least as far back as
1647. In the Agreement of the People, a draft
for a new, more democratic constitution, the
leftwing in the revolutionary parliamentary
army wanted parliaments to be elected
annually. Given some form of representative
political system, the Levellers believed that
this would make the people's representatives
as accountable as could be reasonably
expected. To create a further check on a gap
developing between representatives and
electorate, members elected to one parliament
were not to be eligible to sit in the next two
succeeding parliaments.24 The current
program of the Communist Party of
Australia (CPA) proposes that
representatives in governing bodies should
hold office for a limited time, be subject to
recall and receive an average income.

The length of parliament's term of office,
restrictions on the number of terms of office a
member serves, and a time limit on
participation in government, are all matters
that need to be carefully considered. If the
present three-year term of a parliament is
maintained, what sort of limit should be
placed on the number of terms a member may
serve? Should the tenure of the member be
limited to one, two or three terms, or not at
all?25 And how should the problem of
government membership be handled? Should
membership of a government be limited to
one or two terms? Such questions raise a
multitude of problems about representation
in general and parliamentary government in
particular. There are, for example, the human
dynamics of corporate bodies such as
parliament and its political parties: the
unwritten agenda of the recognition of
individual talent and skill, the personal and
political integrity of political figures,
psychological, emotional and intellectual
readiness and the value of experience in the
development of skill and competence. Such
matters can be overrated, and often are.
However, given the present state of human
development and public attitudes to
incompetent or inefficient government, in
considering limited tenure in public or
administrative office, they cannot be brushed
aside.

Much more effort is needed to develop
responsible government and to extend the
areas of government and administration
subject to public accountability. A greater
degree of intervention by citizens in the state
and the state apparatus is feasible and
desirable. Nor is this a new idea.26 An early
Australian example occurred during the
stormy diggers' movement on the Victorian
goldfields, that culminated in the Eureka
rebellion in 1854. The Gold Fields Act of
1855, passed after the Commission of Inquiry
into Eureka had reported, provided for
goldfields' courts with a government-
appointed chairman but court members
elected every six months by those holding the
miner's right. For a time, these substantially
elected courts exercised a great deal of power.
The appointment by the diggers on the
Castlemaine (Mt Alexander) field of "Peoples
Commissioners" as distinct from government
and gold commissioners was another
historically important development of the
goldrush period of Australian history.27

Most public officials including the police,
court and prison officials, and other public
servants, are part of career services. The
peace-time armed forces are also
professional. What to do about greater public
control of the more obviously coercive forces
of the state apparatus seems an awkward
problem. It is not of much practical value to
propose that they be "smashed", but
suggesting useful measures of public
intervention to democratise the repressive
organs of the state is no simple or easy matter.
Devising a practical, widely acceptable
program in this area goes beyond my present
purpose and there is no suggestion here of a
completely worked-out policy.

Armed forces

One traditional approach of socialists and
anarchists has been to establish alternate or
substitute armed forces — a democratic
militia, a people's army or a red guard. The
regiments of the victorious, revolutionary
parliamentary army of 1647 appointed
Agitators, delegates of the army rank and file,
to negotiate the army's pay grievances and
police officers with the High Command's representatives. In 1918 Trotsky, as Soviet Russia's Commissar of War, complemented his policy of using officers of the disintegrating tsarist army in the Red Army with a system of dual power and responsibility. Commissars, drawn from the ranks of communists and revolutionary militants, were appointed to watch the officers, politicise the rank and file, countersign orders and enforce discipline.28

In Australia, there is already some degree of democratisation of the coercive state apparatus. Trade unions of police, court and prison officials exist, and some of the unions are affiliated to the central trade union bodies. While this is a step forward, it is not a guarantee of a sympathetic approach to progressive reform as the recent attitude of the NSW Police and Prison Officers' Associations has shown. Nor would greater rank-and-file control on its own necessarily improve things. Conservative attitudes are sometimes stronger among sections of the police and prison officers' rank and file than they are among the higher echelons. But the possibility of trade union organisation in the armed services is an important issue that should not be neglected. And measures of greater internal democracy in the state forces, including the election of the higher ranks, may have some value.

Public scrutiny

However, much more important is action that would open up the more repressive aspects of the apparatus to public scrutiny. Strengthening of the powers of "watch-dogs" such as ombudsmen and privacy committees would help. Politicisation, in the sense of vigorous internal democratic political activity and organisation, could challenge entrenched conservatism. The tightening of control by elected and responsible representative bodies would increase public participation, even if only indirectly. As well, panels of community representatives could audit all aspects of these services. Above all, it would be desirable to have an intense educational program to foster an appropriate democratic spirit.

Belief in the social necessity of some degree of repression is part of the "common sense" that dominates much social and individual thought and action. As the recent struggle to liberalise the NSW prisons and other corrective institutions has shown quite clearly, prison officers can often draw on this fund of beliefs by taking or threatening to take industrial action. It is ideological domination as much as anything else that stands in the way of progressive change in the more coercive part of the state forces (or the state apparatus as a whole). Until and unless, liberalising and progressive forces can contend effectively at all levels with a "common sense" belief in the need for repression, the achievement of major changes will continue to be fraught with immense difficulties. To confront fully the problem of such "common sense" of course means to face and out-face all the belief- and opinion-forming forces and institutions in society — the government machine, the media, the family, educational bodies, religious institutions, welfare organisations, etc. This is indeed a formidable task that calls for the unbending effort of all channels of progressive and socialist thought.

Today in the advanced capitalist countries such as Australia, socialism may come about through a long-term and conscious process which starts with the development and application of a coherent program of reforms. However, the transition from capitalism to socialism cannot come about through an imperceptible and unplanned process of piecemeal reforms. (Ultimate capitalist power will not be whittled away bit by bit.) What will be gradual is the preparatory phase, setting in motion a process which leads to a trial of strength and will.29

What is crucial in a class confrontation is the degree of public mobilisation achieved. In order to effectively mobilise the majority of the community in a crisis, there must be a steady development of a broad public alliance for democratic social change. In the growth of such an alliance a major task of the socialist
forces will be to mount an effective challenge to the dominance of conservative ideas, beliefs and values. Very largely the strength and resilience of the opinion insisting on social change will depend on the prior dissemination and consolidation of democratic and socialist ideas and values. Only in this way can an effective will be generated, remaining firm in a trial of strength. If temporarily defeated, it will be strong enough and united enough to make a critical appraisal of the situation, advancing to another but more significant confrontation until a basic and fundamental change occurs.

The preparatory phase

Among the most effective ways to disseminate democratic and socialist values, to tip the balance towards a new social ethos, is through oppositional policies of the preparatory phase. But such preparatory oppositional policies cannot aim at anti-capitalist reforms which are incompatible with the survival of the capitalist system, for example, nationalisation of all the important centres of economic power; such policies would already assume a public opinion sufficiently politically mature to ensure an immediate socialist victory. However, we should not conclude that a democratic and socialist strategy of reforms can or must be limited to isolated or partial democratic reforms without socialist content or perspective.

What distinguishes a socialist strategy of reforms from an unplanned process of piecemeal reforms is less the character of a given reform or programmatic objective than the presence or absence of organic connections between a series or program of reforms. Other distinguishing features would be a built-in rhythm and pattern to the reforms, and the presence or absence of the will to profit from the displacement of the social and political equilibrium. In other words, central to a socialist program is a sense of vision, an end-in-view. Essential to this vision is the dedication and conviction to follow a clearly-defined route and not to be readily pushed off course.

A strong conception of the end-in-view is necessary to make headway in the face of the problems and pressures that beset those engaged in the socialist project. A vigorous anti-capitalist belief is required in order to develop a socialist program and strategy with the requisite cohesion and rhythm, offering a good chance of passing beyond the preparatory phase to a test of strength. Perhaps the most pressing requirement is a sense of urgency about the need to develop concretely the socialist project, the articulation of democratic and socialist consciousness in concrete programs and policies.

Socialism and democracy

Socialism consists of democratising all spheres of life. In Australia political-democratic consciousness is at a relatively high level. The public believes that political and legal rights exist. There is a limited acceptance of majority rule. What does not exist is a general acceptance of public intervention in all spheres of society, for instance, the workplace and the economy, the machinery of state, social institutions (educational, health, welfare, religious, etc.), the family and sexuality. The preparatory phase consists in the step-by-step spelling out of what greater democracy means.

From such a process what is lacking is a significant section of the public seriously committed to a coherent socialist strategy and program. The central difficulty of moving from matters of political democracy and the rule of law to acceptance of democratic rules in the workplace, and in the overall economic and social system, lies in concretely connecting the independent but scattered forces of socialism with that part of the community whose main political representative is the Labor Party, and broadly developing neo-socialist consciousness in the direction of a unified movement of labor and socialism.

A major obstacle in developing neo-socialist consciousness is the Labor Party's conception of socialism which is based on the ideology of a mixed economy with public and
private sectors. The ALP favors democratic socialisation of the economy but only to the extent necessary to prevent exploitation. As Peter Wilenski has pointed out, this is an ambivalent formula. Although he doesn't adopt a marxist position himself, Wilenski stresses that marxism postulates that all forms of wage labour are inherently exploitative. And as far as public ownership is concerned, it is not enough to advocate the redistribution of wealth and income to achieve equality. While Wilenski concedes that common ownership of the means of production is not a sufficient condition for the attainment of liberty, democracy, equality and social co-operation, might it not be a necessary condition? He goes on to argue most ably that there are clear limits on the degree of equality and democracy attainable in a mixed economy.

Labor Party socialism

The development of Labor Party socialism, Professor Wilenski argues, needs both a deeper analysis and a bolder party style. The analysis does not lie in abandoning the long-term aim of bringing major portions of the economy — the commanding heights — under some form of common ownership and democratic control but in clarifying Labor's aims, both to the party membership and the electorate. A bolder Labor Party style would recognise that a program of reforms often raises issues that run counter to the dominant societal beliefs and values, and threatens structural changes that affect the balance of political power in society.

In order to meet these challenges, the Labor Party must, Wilenski says, undertake the difficult and painstaking job of attempting to slowly change the predominant cultural and political values in the community; it must devote much time, energy and resources to shifting to the left the points around which the "middle ground" forms. But to achieve this aim, the party must be far better organised and must redirect a major part of its activities; it must become a party that practises politics all the year round; and to succeed in this goal it would need a large, committed and politically educated membership. A top priority would be effective political education, not just within the party structure but in such public areas as the women's movement and the trade union movement.

Australian society in 1975 reached a significant turning point — a major political crisis and the overthrow of an elected government by constitutional coup. But because of the forces arrayed against each other, it was hardly a trial of strength. There was no serious challenge to prevailing values and capitalist domination. Not surprisingly Labor had no plan to meet the crisis. The mainstream of the party, gripped by constitutional and parliamentary values that militated against the building of an effective public awareness of the possibility and need for fundamental social change, had never seriously contemplated such a situation. It believed in a steady but gradual advance and had no concept of radically changing society. As a party, the ALP had little idea of the complexity and magnitude of the tasks facing a serious socialist movement.

Labor rethinking

Over the last five or six years some Labor Party theorists have begun to examine at least some of the problems presented by the conservative forces in implementing Labor's program. This rethinking has led to a major rewriting of significant sections of the ALP's platform, and there has even been some public discussion of Labor's strategy and tactics, and the party's more general possibilities. Neal Blewett's paper "A Constitutional Strategy for Labor in 1981" read at the first National Conference of Labor Lawyers held in Adelaide in June-July 1979 is perhaps one of the more notable attempts to deal seriously with some aspects of Labor's problems.

Formerly a professor of politics and currently a South Australian Member of the House of Representatives, Dr Blewett was trying to get the Labor Party to consider a ground-plan to deal with a possible rerun of 1975 if the ALP won the 1980 election. In the upshot, Labor just failed in 1980; however, a one- or two-percentage-point swing in 1983
could lead to a test of strength next time. 1984 is only two years away.

In his paper, Dr Blewett proposed a plan to deal with possible/probable Senate obstruction/mutilation of Labor’s legislative program, the use of senatorial veto to block supply and ultimately to threaten the existence of any Labor government. The plan consisted of a package of measures designed to hit the conservatives for six right at the outset of Labor’s term of office. The early introduction of legislation on some of the more popular but controversial items in the Labor government’s social program, for example, the reintroduction of Medibank, would be part of the plan. An Appropriations Bill (supply) providing for the basic costs of government for three years (with an adjustments clause for inflation), a wide range of electoral reforms and three key constitutional amendments (simultaneous elections of the Senate and the House of Representatives; the abolition of the Senate’s veto over supply; and a change in the conditions for constitutional amendment to a simple majority of the electorate plus, perhaps, a majority of votes in not less than half the states) would be other parts of the package.

Double dissolution

All this was to be done in the context of actively preparing for a double dissolution of both houses of parliament if Senate obstruction occurred and the requirements for a dissolution were met. (Surprisingly, Blewett does not contemplate the active intervention of the governor-general; he does not include reform of the governor-general’s powers in his package.) Finally, Dr Blewett called for the will “to resist the premature desruction of a Hayden government” and the imperative need to canvass and prepare a strategy to express this will.

There are four outstanding features of Dr Blewett’s theorising: it is a major step forward for a prominent Labor Party MP to articulate publicly his or her advance thoughts on such a topic; secondly, Dr Blewett’s approach is fairly narrowly parliamentary and constitutional — there is no consideration of the roles of united public action behind such a policy; thirdly, Dr Blewett shows no realisation of the manifold opportunities for a conservative backlash and the problems of dealing with it; and, fourthly, there has been a deafening silence following the publication of his plan — no canvassing or public preparation for such a strategy — partly, no doubt, because the largely pragmatic centre of the party is fearful of the consequences of public discussion.

As this essay has argued, Labor’s constitutionalism arises from the relative moderation of Australian political culture. Nevertheless, at the very heart of Labor politics lie the values of the parliamentary state, and there is something like a symbiotic relationship between the ALP and the Australian public in this area. But recently Labor Party theorists have been re-examining this constitutionalism and the need for reform of some aspects of the functioning of the parliamentary state. They see partially at least the connection and interaction between social reform and constitutional reform. Nonetheless, there are grave weaknesses in their approach and, unless there are corrections, these weaknesses will ultimately undermine Labor’s position. Any trial of strength between Labor and anti-Labor will be so much less effective when restricted by Labor’s traditional constitutionalism.

New and broader constitutionalism

What is needed is a new and broader constitutionalism which begins with but goes beyond the orthodox constitutionalism of the parliamentary state. Such a broader constitutionalism would subsume constitutional orthodoxy, but many factors would be in play: the oppositional policies of the preparatory phase, social reform and broadly conducted dissemination of democratic and socialist ideas and values, everything tied together, a rhythm and pattern to it all.

In Part IV above I attempted to sketch an outline of this new and broader constitutionalism. It involves more than the
sort of public intervention envisaged by Labor’s 1979 commitment to the calling of a publicly financed popularly elected people’s convention to initiate constitutional change, important as this pledge is. Grassroots, long-term public intervention would be needed to back up this beginning. In this work socialists outside the Labor Party would have an important part to play. Outside socialists are sometimes able to develop the theory of democracy and socialism in ways that escape Labor Party theorists. They are often determined and self-sacrificing in their dedication to democratic practice and socialist aims. They think about an oppositional strategy and do a lot to develop oppositional movements.

In carrying forward what Antonio Gramsci called a “war of position” from the preparatory phase to the test of strength, a de facto unity of the forces of labor and socialism is of great importance. A two-pronged alliance would enable the development of an oppositional policy on a wide front. Within this alliance the forging of links between independent socialist ideas and Labor policy and initiatives would play a key role. While seeking to develop the socialist project independently but not disruptively, the merging of the separate actions of the parts into broadly based action would be a vital step towards the consolidation of an oppositional strategy for social change and socialism.

References and Notes


9. It is assumed throughout this essay that a popular assembly of more or less freely elected representatives of the electorate mediates the distribution of political power to various institutions, and that these institutions ultimately derive their authority from a majority of the elected representatives in the assembly. For recent accounts of parliamentary government in Australia, see Hugh V. Emy, The Politics of Australian Democracy, 2nd edn (Melbourne, 1978) especially Chapters 6, 7 and 8, and Patrick Weller and Dean Jaensch (eds) Responsible Government in Australia (Melbourne, 1980), passim.


15. R.S. Ross, Revolution in Russia and Australia (Melbourne, 1920), pp.6, 10, 49, 56-7.


18. I realise this may be a contentious view.


25. The Sydney District of the CPA policy for Local Government and Community Politics proposes
that the maximum time in office of elected councillors should be three three-year terms (i.e. nine years.)


27. G. Serle, *The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria 1851-1861* (Melbourne, 1963), pp.106, 177-8, 221-2. For the payment of a pound a year, the digger had legal rights in his claim and, as a leaseholder of crown land, the right to vote. This arrangement preceded the adult male suffrage of 1857.


32. Dr. Blewett's analysis, in some respects, has been by-passed by events. His argument was predicated on preparing for the worst — a Liberal-NCP coalition senate majority — but this now seems pretty unlikely. However, there were many factors at work in 1975, and some or all of them could recur in the future.

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Comment: Poland

by Brian Aarons

The Polish "spring" which, for sixteen eventful months, offered new hopes of democratic renewal in an Eastern European country, has ended in yet another undemocratic imposition of the prevailing bureaucratic model of socialism.

Soviet troops did not intervene as they did in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and a new "twist" was added with the imposition of military rule in a proclaimed socialist country. But, in essence, the politics of the two situations are very similar; the Soviet leaders who set the pace in Eastern Europe still will not allow any "deviation" from their model of "real socialism". By one means or another, they intend to keep the basic model the way it is, and has been, throughout Eastern Europe.

Space is not available here to properly discuss any of the issues raised by the Polish events which, hopefully, will be discussed more extensively in future issues. I will just briefly discuss what seems to me to be three of the major questions.

1. Why did 16 months of unprecedented social upheaval end with General Jaruzelski's declaration of martial law? Explanations vary widely, ranging from those who support military rule as the only way to save socialism and as "the first step to Poland's recovery", to those Western propagandists who proclaim that it's all the inevitable outcome of the communist or socialist system.

Were there other options, given all the formidable internal problems and external pressures? In my view, yes, but only if a significant section of the Party had been prepared to set out boldly on a course of reforming and renewing Polish socialism.

A real and lasting renewal of Polish socialism depended on an alliance developing between the reform-minded wing of the party and at least some of the leadership of Solidarity. That alliance would have had to involve a program of democratic reform in the workplace and in society at large. It also had to include a realistic program of economic recovery over which the masses could feel they had some real control — a program which could visibly promise at least the hope of a real recovery, not yet another round of bureaucratic bungling and corruption.

Such an alliance provided the only possibility of resolving the many conflicts and contradictions between the various social forces. In turn, such an alliance was only a real possibility if a genuine reforming wing had emerged in the party and won a majority for a decisive program of reform and renewal.

Unfortunately, the party seemed hamstrung by the divisions within it. Those favoring substantial reforms never won a clearcut majority. The result of the inner-party struggle between reformers and hardliners (the latter encouraged, supported and promoted by the Soviet leadership) was the emergence of a "centrist" leadership around Kania. This leadership wanted some reforms but did not have a clearcut program for the substantial reforms that were required (and wanted by the masses). Nor did it seem to have any clear strategy for getting out of the difficult and complex situation.

This lack of a credible reform program and of a strategy for implementing it, undermined the possibility of the party winning back the mass support it had lost through earlier blunders. It was also an obstacle to the party being able to get agreement with Solidarity, or even with those Solidarity leaders who genuinely wanted a compromise within the limits of "realpolitik".

Of course, the PUWP leaders were under enormous and conflicting pressures, with Solidarity pushing for major reforms, large sections of the people growing desperate and frustrated at food shortages and the
government's failure to solve basic problems, party hardliners pushing for "tough" solutions, and the Soviet Union and other "socialist allies" labelling Solidarity's demands as attempted counter-revolution.

There were also extremist responses within Solidarity. But these were, in part, a response to mass anger at food shortages and other things. Moreover, most of Solidarity's leaders held to a "moderate" course. It was only when the government wanted to push an anti-strike law through parliament that the "moderate" majority swung around to a harder line.

Had the party and the government declared a major program of social and economic reform, hardliners and extremists of all kinds would have been isolated and there would have been every chance of regaining some of the party's lost credibility.

2. The Polish events sharply reraise the longstanding need for marxists to understand and analyse the Soviet model of socialism.

In particular, the collapse of the Polish economy forcefully drives home the lesson that a socialist economy can only work efficiently when it is controlled in real ways by the mass of the workers themselves. Such control can guard against bureaucratic corruption and mismanagement of the type which proved so disastrous in Poland. (Managers subject to election and recall based on their expertise and performance, not on blind loyalty to superiors and "the line", are more likely to produce results.)

Democratic debate on overall national economic goals can also help to avoid the massive policy mistakes which led the Gierak leadership into the misguided strategy of developing Poland's economy via massive loans from the West. (Of course, democratic debate is no absolute guarantee against mistakes.)

But, most importantly of all, democratic involvement and real control by the working people themselves provides the only solid foundation for a successful, efficient and dynamic socialist economy. Centralised state planning can be very successful in developing a backward economy and in distributing wealth with some equity. But it has become clear that an over-centralised and bureaucratic socialist economy runs into difficulty once a certain level of development is reached. In a developed, complex economy, only the creative initiative of the workers and a degree of freedom for individual enterprises can counteract the tendency to bureaucratic stagnation.

Private profit is the "motive force" of capitalism — a motive force which has proved more dynamic and long-lasting than socialists once thought, despite all the inefficiencies and crises it produces. Against this, socialism can only tap the "motive force" of popular initiative and creativity which, in turn, can only come from people's real sense of controlling social affairs.

3. The declaration of martial law in Poland has also prompted further debates in the international communist movement. Several communist parties, including the mass parties in Italy, Japan and Spain, have sharply criticised the declaration of martial law. Some of them have issued long statements which not only condemn military rule but also extensively analyse the underlying causes of the Polish crisis. The Italian communists have even spoken of a crisis in the whole Soviet system because of its apparent incapacity to renew itself.

Such statements clearly stem from more than a passing criticism of a single mistake. As could be expected, the Soviet Communist Party has responded with sharp and bitter criticisms of the PCI leaders. With the PCI talking about a "third way" between capitalism and Soviet-style socialism, further vigorous debate seems set to take place in the communist movement about models of socialism and roads to socialism.

The title of Paul Ormonde's biography of Jim Cairns — *A Foolish Passionate Man* — may describe the actions of the subject at certain times, but hardly does justice to a complex and towering figure of Australian post-war politics.

James Ford Cairns, former Deputy Prime Minister, leader of the parliamentary left, central figure in the great anti-Viet Nam war demonstrations of the early 1970s and now devoting his energies to "the alternative Confest movement", needs little introduction to the vast majority of ALR readers.

Yet the tendency to remember only the traumas of those last few months of the Whitlam government and a certain elitism in the left towards the Confest movement has resulted in many of Cairns' former admirers becoming all-knowing critics.

Each of us has our own experiences, memories and prejudices of Cairns. I remember him standing in a sea of people in Bourke Street, Melbourne in May 1970 and saying: "Nobody thought this could be done, but it has been done .... Nobody need feel worried about the will of the people. The will of the people is being expressed here today as it has never been expressed before."

On the left there are very different views of Cairns. Views which have divided the left, led old friends to draw apart and younger forces to misunderstand the influence that this man had on Australian political life.

These are estimates which are strongly coloured in hindsight by the events of Terrigal, the Morosi affair and, more recently, his rejection of organised politics and his embrace of an "alternative movement".

Paul Ormonde's book has many defects but its strength is that it outlines clearly, and in popular form, the record of Cairns' enormous achievements. These went well beyond the traditional achievements of academia, bureaucracy and government; they made him one of the most important forces for peace, social equity, civil rights, democracy and social change that Australia has seen. Cairns is a man who fought subservience to the United States, for a new role for Australia, for a new relationship with Asia, an end to nuclear war, a social system based on social equity and dignity and, in general, for a new set of humanist values.

Cairns in government

For orthodox capitalist economists and some leftwing observers as well, Cairns' sin as Minister for Trade and later as Treasurer between 1972 and 1975 was that he refused to trade jobs for lower tariffs, or a lower rate of inflation. In an interview in 1974, he said:

If reducing tariffs is going to put somebody out of work, I'll put quotas on to get them back to work again — even if it means that fewer goods are sold here from developing countries. My first responsibility is for the people I am able to prevent getting hurt. And they're here in Australia. I think this is realistic.

As the economic problems confronted by the Whitlam government grew, Cairns became increasingly concerned by unemployment and by the tendency for the well organised to achieve substantial wage rises, as he saw it, at the expense of the under-organised. In 1974 he wanted the Whitlam government to introduce a "people's budget". He said:

I don't want anyone to be out of work. It's not the government that will be putting people out of work, it's the system and our responsibility is to pick up what the system does and we will pick it up.
just as quickly and just as effectively as possible.

The attempt to do this led Cairns increasingly towards the decision of the 31st Federal ALP Conference at Terrigal in February 1975 which so outraged the left at the time. Cairns, as principal architect of a basic change in Labor’s policy commitment to socialisation, explained:

I am a socialist in that I believe in co-operation and equality and I deplore avarice and aggressiveness. I know that the capitalist system is exploitative and leaves many genuine desires of many people unfulfilled. I also know that ours is a capitalist economy. I know that the jobs of most of our people depend on private industry — most of it part of the multinational system. It’s time for the ALP to say quite clearly and categorically that our socialist objective does not prevent recognition that the basic needs of the Australian people are dependent at this stage of our development on a profitable private sector.

He went on to say “We cannot have a socialist party until we have a society of socialists. We have few socialists in Australia.”

At the time, Cairns’ pragmatism was seen by most forces on the left as a shocking retreat. While many of his critics were justified, it could also be said that the left did little during the period of the Labor government to generate the sort of mass movement necessary for a more radical departure from capitalist economics. Cairns came to believe that only through his approach could more radical change occur in the future.

Ormonde’s book traces the development of Cairns’ thought about economics and social change from his early days as a policeman and economics lecturer, through to the present. But because Ormonde opts almost exclusively for a psychological view of Cairns, he provides us with the bare bones of Cairns’ life without putting them into the context of the body politic. As a consequence, much of the meat and even the marrow is missing.

The discussion of the Terrigal conference, for example, takes no account of the very real expectation within the labor movement (following the election of the Labor government in 1972) for a redistribution of wealth. Nor does Ormonde comment on the reaction of the left to Cairns’ position at Terrigal, the variations in that response, the strains it put on Cairns, let alone the importance of that debate in the more recent discussion of the possibilities for social change with a Labor government in office or, more generally, the prospects for socialism in Australia.

These weaknesses occur throughout the book. The discussion of federal intervention in the Victorian branch of the ALP, of the Moratorium, of Cairns’ involvement in various peace and civil liberty campaigns, all reflect either a lack of understanding of the dynamics of the labor movement, or a lack of concern to find the man by putting him in context.

The book’s strength is also its greatest weakness — it has the accessibility and the shallowness of a page-four leader in the Melbourne Herald.

But based on a wide range of personal interviews rather than a more rigorous examination of historical record — and, to be fair, Cairns has no personal papers or diaries — the book suffers from impressionism concerning Cairns’ personality/psychology and a certain subjectivity of interpretation of fact.

The Leader?

To give a few examples. While much is made of Cairns’ relationship with the Communist Party in an early period — he briefly considered joining in 1946 — the role of the Communist Party in the anti-Viet Nam struggle is almost buried. The fact that Bernie Taft and Jean McLean were vice-chairpersons to Cairns in the Victorian Moratorium is forgotten. While not always agreeing with the CPA about tactics in the Moratorium, Cairns has never run away from acknowledging the important contribution of Australian communists to that campaign, not just on May 8, 1970, but over a long period of activity in the years preceding it. It appears, however, that some of Ormonde’s interviewees would like to play down the CPA’s role. Different interpretations could also be placed on other events — the march of the Dead demonstration in 1969, the breaking through of the barricades in the second Moratorium, the civil liberties struggle with the Melbourne City Council.

One feature of the book is the projection of Cairns into an unreal role as the pivot of events. For example, Ormonde describes (p.72) Cairns’ role in the fight against the terrorist Croatian organisation called the Ustasha. The facts are correct, yet Ormonde leaves the impression that Cairns began this campaign, thus ignoring the critical importance of Marian Jurevic and the publication of considerable material in the communist newspapers, Guardian and Tribune.

While this may not be Ormonde’s intention, his
repeated projection of Cairns as the crucial figure in this and many other campaigns does a disservice to Cairns who has never claimed such a role, and does a disservice to the many people who made those campaigns happen. Cairns became a unifying and very beneficial figurehead for many organisations. He was a most articulate spokesperson, able to project ideas and information well beyond the narrow confines of the left of the labor movement. But, by focusing on the individual, in isolation, Ormonde seeks to build an idol — an idol that he then seeks to show as having feet of clay.

Few Australian politicians have more than one biography written of their lives. This volume will remain for a long time as a popular and useful record of an important man and a vital time in Australian politics. For the average reader its weaknesses will go unheeded. But they disappoint those who were participants in a series of historical events which will affect Australian social and political life for many years to come and which, in many respects, remain unanalysed.

In Cairns, one has a highly ideological figure seeking radical social change by a variety of means: in social movements, in the streets, in the mass working class party, in government, and now in the "alternative movement". His life is integral to the political history of Australia, and a biography which placed him fully in that context would allow for a radical examination of the Australian labor movement and the left without some of the constraints placed on most political histories. Ormonde has written the book he sought to write — a popular biography of one man — and has achieved some success. But one hopes that Ormonde's book will encourage others to take up the challenge where he has left it.

ALR price increases

Rising costs of all kinds, including postage and the new sales tax, have forced us to increase the price of Australian Left Review to $2 as from this issue, March 1982. The size of this issue is increased to 56 pages. However, we hope to increase the size of ALR to 64 pages as from the next issue.

The price of ALR has stood at $1 for four years now (since March 1978) so we believe that the new price will still be good value for money.

Although we are currently printing ALR only four times a year, a subscription is still for six issues. Subscriptions are $12, including postage, $8 for students, apprentices, unemployed and pensioners. Renewals will be at the new rate. Surface or airmail postage will be added to overseas subscriptions.

Cover design and graphics by Gregor Cullen.
Here is a unique social document where Polish men and women speak for themselves about the great issues being faced in their country today. The voices are sometimes strident, sometimes cautious, and mostly optimistic. They offer different versions of events which have been in the headlines over the last year. Taken together, they express history in the making.

Denis Freney, who visited Poland in August 1981, interviewed this cross-section of Polish society.

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Next year in March 1983, *Australian Left Review* proposes to organise a number of events to mark the 100th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx. These events could include symposia, seminars, conferences and other discussions.

We believe that this proposal for 1983 could be a valuable project where the influence of marxism can be considered and through which the problems and possibilities of the socialist movement in Australia can be assessed. We would hope that such a project, attracting the support of a variety of socialists, will also contribute to the unity of the Australian socialist movement.

We invite interested persons to contact either of the existing editorial groups in Sydney and Melbourne and to join with *ALR* in establishing a Marx Centenary Committee.

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