HEWSON'S DEATHBED CONVERSION

PORN FREE: THE CENSORSHIP DEBATE

HUMOURLESS FEMINISTS?

JOBS, JOBS, JOBS! SEE INSIDE

SOMALIA: US IN!

WHICH DOCTOR?
AUSTRALIA'S UNCERTAINTY:
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... “The Citizen’s Charter in the United Kingdom”
Diana Goldsworthy
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A • The changing relationship of the community and Parliaments to public bureaucracies and businesses
B • Future directions in Public Sector management
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E • Applying the market to the Public Sector
F • Sectoral industry policy: The political debate
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I • Parliament and public policy

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A more fundamental issue is the significance of Fightback II to the Opposition’s broad ideological position. Does it signify that the federal Opposition has, belatedly, joined the move away from the small-government ideology of the 80s?

Obviously, as a federal minister committed to the re-election of the present government, I can’t claim to speak on any of these issues as a disinterested party. So this is an admittedly partisan critique of the Opposition’s latest effort and its significance.

The heart of both Fightback I and II has been the introduction of a broadly-based goods and services tax. In response to criticism from a wide range of community organisations, the Opposition decided to remove basic foodstuffs from the ambit of the tax. While politically advantageous, this does not overcome the fundamental objections to the GST. Excluding food reduces the annual revenue from the GST from $27 billion to the still huge sum of $22 billion. In terms of macroeconomic impact, there is not much change from the original package. There is a consensus among economists that, at least for the next few years, the introduction of a GST of this magnitude would depress economic activity and employment, and lead to higher inflation and interest rates.

The basic problem is that, in the absence of an effective incomes policy like the Accord, a Coalition government would have no option but to run a very tight monetary policy to avoid the price-hike induced by the GST generating an inflationary spiral. This has been the overwhelming experience from countries that have introduced such taxes. New Zealand, for example, had to endure five years of near-zero growth after introducing such a tax.

The revised package contains a commitment to spend several billion dollars on major infrastructure. In this respect, the Coalition could be seen to be following the government’s broad direction in the One Nation statement, which included a multi-billion dollar public infrastructure program. There is no doubt that neglecting public infrastructure is a false economy. There is strong evidence from studies of the US in the 1980s that the starving of public infrastructure investment by the Reagan and Bush administrations exacted a heavy price in terms of poor productivity growth.

The problem is that this increased infrastructure investment is supposed to be funded by a massive program of privatisation, particularly the sale of Telecom. Most economists, conventional or otherwise, acknowledge that to use the proceeds of privatisation to fund increased spending in other areas involves a sleight of hand, since the macroeconomic effects of placing a given volume of public enterprise equities on the capital market are essentially the same as if the government borrowed to fund these expenditures.

The sheer scale of the proposed public asset selloff is remarkable. The sale of Telecom alone will involve putting $10 billion worth of equities on the capital market for two consecutive years. The total value of the private market for equities in Australia today is around $13 billion per annum. There is no doubt that privatisation on this scale would degenerate into a fire sale of public assets, to the great detriment of the Australian public.

Fightback II retains the massive cuts to public spending announced in the original package. The big losers from this would be those most dependent on various ‘social wage’ expenditures. These include labour market programs, which are designed to provide the unemployed with a variety of training and work experience opportunities to enhance their employment prospects. This is a particularly insidious aspect of Opposition policy, which their spokespersons seek to disguise by caricaturing such programs as ‘painting rocks white’.

In fact, these programs are demonstrably effective, particularly for the long-term unemployed and people suffering various forms of disadvantage. Their effectiveness is attested to by international studies and rigorous evaluations carried out locally by the Department of Employment, Education and Training. That they have a crucial role to play in preventing the entrenchment of long-term unemployment as a permanent feature of society is conceded even by ‘dry’ economic commentators such as The Australian’s PP McGuinness.

The revision of Fightback does not signify any fundamental ideological shift on the part of the Opposition—a point they have been at pains to stress. It does indicate a response to the notable hardening in public perceptions of the impact of dry economic policies. To be seen as a doctrinaire ‘economic rationalist’ is increasingly an electoral kiss of death. The public expects governments to respond to the recession with stimulatory policies, and is supportive of increased public spending on crucial infrastructure and the education and training system. It also expects governments to act to ensure that large numbers of people aren’t left behind as economic recovery gathers pace.

PETER BALDWIN is the federal minister for Higher Education and Employment Services.
Baudelaire's words from Poor Belgium could have been written for Canberra, at least as far as the first lack goes. There are virtually no good cheap restaurants in Canberra, despite local government propaganda to the contrary, which boasts that the ACT has the highest ratio of restaurants per head of population in Australia. All of them are frequented, I suspect, by unfortunate souls being dragged around the Mint and the War Memorial. Apart from the central business district, still called Civic, all shops and restaurants here in the ACT must be confined to small areas marked down for 'shops', lest a cafe descendant Anzac Avenue, or even, God help us, a sushi bar spring up next to the eternal flame as if to mock our war dead by the preparation of cool uncooked fish.

This means that each little shopping centre has one or two restaurants. There are at least five in Dickson which makes my suburb of residence pretty damn urban, let me tell you. There is even a McDonalds in Dickson which explains the saddest bumper sticker I have ever seen: "Time for a McDonalds in Civic". This is the real Canberra, dear reader, as opposed to the exciting one on the news.

I reached the nadir of my culinary experiences recently in a restaurant in a shopping precinct on the south side of this fair town. I ordered antipasto in an Italian restaurant and was served one type of meat with Jatz biscuits. Not very risotto, I thought to myself. I was charged $9. But why try to improve things? The lack of competition allows for such appalling behaviour, and the average Canberra resident only argues about policy, not important things like food.

I have taken Baudelaire's advice, at least as far as the cookbooks go. The Women's Cookbook (Heinemann) contains a useful recipe for Grissini—which, for the benefit of the restaurant discussed above, are cylindrical Jatz biscuits, otherwise known as breadsticks. This book, released last year, commemorates a fundraising dinner held for the Victorian Women's Trust where chefs donated their skills to produce food for 800 guests. Many of the recipes are worth having and the book looks particularly attractive, being interspersed with paintings of women artists from the turn of the century and superb photographs of food by Bobbi Fabian.

The Women's Cookbook is intended as a celebration of women's creativity and is dedicated to the women of Australia. "Through your cooking, may you experience the pleasures and joy of sharing, comfort, nature, celebration, and friendship." And may you also enjoy eating and being served, I would add. The fine line between celebrating women's creativity and celebrating unreconstructed notions of feminine activity is highlighted by this book.

Marion Halligan's foreword touches briefly on the ways that women's work as preparers of food has rarely been acknowledged in the way men's work in the culinary world has. Marieke Brugman, the convenor of the Women's Trust, sees the recipes in the book as a celebration of cooking in the Australian context which, for her, lacks "the constraints of heritage and tradition that bind older societies". A strange comment, given the variety of culinary traditions drawn on in the book. The Women's Cookbook is well worth having because the recipes are lovely. However, I would have liked a little more emphasis in the accompanying essays on the role of The Women's Trust in improving the position of women in society, rather than this constant assertion of 'celebration'. This easy term tends to question the need for an organisation such as The Trust in the first place. Either this or no essays at all, and more photos.

One thing I have to say for Canberra is that avocados are very cheap here. I was horrified when I first arrived to see flies in the fruit shops, hovering over the merchandise, and I was equally shocked to find that suspect groceries from other states were dumped here because there were no 'use-by' date rules until recently. And food is generally dearer here than down South. But avocados are an exception, so I was pleased to pick up a second-hand copy of A Glut of Avocados by Ann Carr (Merehurst Press).

The obsessive cookbook is a genre I love; it takes one item of food and does more things with it than had ever occurred to the innocent mind. Avocados, it seems, are not only good as dips and soup, but in sweet dishes too. I have yet to pluck up the courage to attempt Avocado Custard which even the obsessed Ms Carr warns is for the adventurous, but I may yet, given that outside it is Jatz or McDonalds. And with these cookbooks, and remembering past repasts, I have been almost coping with Kafkaland—which I now think of as Little Belgium, ACT.

Penelope Cottier.
All we really know about him is that he's a reporter. He never mentions a mother or father—he doesn't even have a surname. Nor do romance, domestic trivialities or daily hack work intrude in any way on his jet-setting existence.

One can only guess at how the other, more conventional journalists on the Belgian Catholic newspaper Le XXe Siècle (The 20th Century) felt about this newcomer to their ranks. But then, only the most adventurous of them would have envied him his first assignment—in the stories that were eventually published as Tintin Au Pays des Soviets (Tintin In The Land of the Soviets), the young adventurer was frozen in ice, narrowly escaped drowning in a dungeon and faced a firing squad, all in the name of exposing the villainy of the young Soviet state.

Remi (who signed his drawings Hergé), had of course never been to the USSR. In fact, he took his vision of the Soviet Union wholesale from Joseph Douillet's Moscow Sans Voiles (Moscow Unveiled). In this and the second Tintin adventure, Tintin Au Congo, he took his cues and his views from his employers at Le XXe Siècle. Tintin's Congo adventure is high on slapstick and very low on everything else. Hergé, like most Belgians, had no idea of his country's horrific exploitation of its oversize colony. Tintin moves among the carefree and lazy Congolese as if he were wandering around a toyshop.

Hergé's professed naïveté did not seem to have undergone much of a revision even by the time he coloured and 'updated' this adventure in 1946. Where in the original story Tintin plays schoolteacher to four black boys and draws them a picture of Belgium ("votre patrie"), the current version sees him asking them to add two and two, to which he receives only the most stupefied blank stares. It's hardly surprising that these first two Tintin adventures have yet to be given the mass-market treatment of other works.

Hergé began hitting his stride—and making a belated attempt to redress the political balance—with his third Tintin adventure, Tintin En Amerique (Tintin in America). Readers were surprised to find depictions of white cruelty towards native Americans; and had Al Capone had a knowledge of French he might have been surprised to find himself captured at gunpoint by the young reporter.

Tintin had by now become a national hero in Belgium, largely because his was the first locally-produced comic strip. Les Cigares du Pharaon (Cigars of the Pharaoh) and Le Lotus Bleu (The Blue Lotus) followed. Hergé abandoned the slapdash style of the first Tintin adventures and began to give hundreds of hours to researching and developing his stories. If Tintin's readers were shocked at seeing American Indians—'bad guys'—portrayed as victims in Tintin in America, they must have been amazed to see the Mukden railway incident—which sparked off the Sino-Japanese War—told from China's point of view in Le Lotus Bleu. Hergé had found a valuable source—a Chinese student studying in Brussels. Chang Chon-Chen not only set him straight about Chinese customs and culture but also furnished Hergé with anti-Japanese slogans in Chinese characters for the backgrounds to Tintin's adventures.

Sadly, while Hergé developed and expanded his outlook, Tintin stayed resolutely the same. If anything, he became less of a personality and more of a straight man to the cast of eccentric characters with which Hergé began filling his stories. First came Dupont and Dupond, the detectives, (translated into English as Thompson and Thomson). Identically idiotic, the two were always eager to arrest Tintin—or, alternately, to embrace him as an old friend. The drunken and gruff Captain Haddock, the deaf and alternately brilliant/hopeless scientist Professor Calculus (Toumesol in the original) and the aggressive and condescending Madame Castafiore were all to be added to the Hergé gallery in ensuing years. But while Tintin is always cunning and brave, he remains a hero in the true Mickey Mouse tradition: too popular, righteous and sensible to have a real personality.

In the 1938 Le Sceptre d'Ottokar (King Ottokar's Sceptre) Hergé brought his political satire closer to home, as Tintin travelled to the rural Balkanesque monarchy of Syldavia, under threat from the evil dictator Müsttler. It is ironic, then, that less than three years later Hergé and Tintin would be working—in a manner of speaking—for Hitler.

Once again, Hergé claimed political naïveté and innocent neutrality: he had fled Belgium as the Nazis moved in, then returned to tough it out as a loyal subject of Leopold III. Tintin, meanwhile, embarked on a trip to find a bizarre meteorite that almost destroyed the world. Here he was competing with a group of unscrupulous American explorers funded by a businessman named Bohlwinkel (Hergé claimed to be unaware this was a distinctively Jewish surname). In later versions of L'Etoile
Mysterieuse (The Shooting Star), the explorers became citizens of the mythical state of Sao Rico, but the damage—to both Hergé and Tintin—had been done. When Belgium was liberated in 1944, they were out in the cold for years.

However, it wouldn’t have been possible to keep a journalist as popular or as gung-ho as young Tintin blacklisted forever, no matter what his collaborationist crimes may have been. In 1950 he embarked on his moon adventure, which was depicted with astonishing attention to technical detail (the only scientifically inaccurate fact of the voyage is the inclusion of a patently unfit, temperamental alcoholic such as Haddock among the spaceship’s crew).

Cold War intrigue was the theme of the 1956 L’Affaire Tournesol (The Calculus Affair). Having experimented with a number of dotty professors, Hergé finally found one who suited him to a tee. Calculus is just as comfortable inventing machines to destroy whole cities as he is propagating a new rose in honour of the opera singer Castafiore. The high regard in which Tintin and Haddock hold the professor seems not at all tempered by the fact that he is resolutely unable to understand anything they say to him.

Tintin’s adventures continued throughout the 60s, ultimately grinding to a halt with the ill-conceived Tintin et Les Picaros (Tintin and the Picaros) in 1975. Remarkably, Tintin abandoned his regulation plus-fours for a pair of jeans, and even acquired a peace sign on his motorbike helmet—all to no avail. But if Tintin failed to come to terms with the 70s, Hergé’s clear line drawing style and technical excellence have assured him a life far beyond the bookshelves of children and intelligent adults.

The French, who give comics the respect they deserve and then some, have cultivated Tintinism above and beyond the call of duty. Briton Harry Thompson has finally done the decent thing for English-speaking Tintin fans and produced a small volume called Tintin: Hergé and his Creation (Sceptre, $14.95) which has all the facts and a little too much flippancy, perhaps to counterbalance the academic earnestness with which the French-speaking world treats the subject. Somewhere along the line, it seems, Thompson fell foul of Hergé’s estate. He was unable to reproduce any image of Tintin except for one which used on a Belgian stamp. Benoit Peeters’ Tintin and the World of Hergé (Methuen, $39.95), however, was prepared with the assistance of the Hergé Foundation. It contains many fascinating illustrations, as well as a lot of garbled English, but glosses over various sensitive points which Hergé’s successors couldn’t stomach in Thompson’s book.

What of Hergé himself? It seems that while Tintin was having all the fun, adventure and camaraderie, this talented and meticulous lapsed Catholic suffered all his life for his creation. Tintin caused him nervous breakdowns and depression. During his most successful period after the war (which itself brought on a plague of boils), Hergé developed appalling eczema on his hands whenever he began work on a new story. No wonder that towards the end of his life he often professed to hate Tintin passionately—except in lighter moments, when he was simply horribly bored by him.

Perhaps it’s only right, then, that Hergé died without finishing his last story, Tintin et L’Alph’Art, leaving Tintin in yet another tight corner—about to be cast in plastic by a gang of ruthless art forgers. Georges Rémi’s widow and estate elected to leave him there, and the book was never completed. For someone who never perceptibly aged a day in sixty-five years, it seems fitting.

DAVID NICHOLS writes for teen magazines.
Operation Restore Hope, the American-led mission aimed at relieving starvation in Somalia, is just the latest example of what has come to be known as humanitarian intervention.

Other recent examples are the allied action to protect the Kurds in Iraq at the end of the Gulf War and the relief missions presently being mounted in the old Yugoslavia. They are significant in that they are multilateral in character; though only a relatively small number of countries have been involved, the operations have had the backing and endorsement of the United Nations. Other recent cases of intervention where a concern for human rights has been a significant, if not exclusive motivation, have been unilateral. These have included: India's invasion of East Pakistan in 1971—an action which stopped the killing of Bengalis; Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978; Tanzania's invasion of Uganda in 1979 which resulted in the removal of Idi Amin; and the French action in the Central African Empire in 1979 which ousted Emperor Bokassa.

The concept of humanitarian intervention is by no means new. A provision for intervention on behalf of those suffering under tyranny was recognised by the founders of the modern sovereign state system. It received further attention in the 19th century, though the notion of humanitarian intervention was then often used to rationalise the imperial designs of the European powers.

But in the latter part of the 20th century, the idea has come of age, for two reasons: improved global communications have made people more aware of human rights abuses in various parts of the world, and the promotion of human rights has become an increasingly important item on the agenda of international relations. The latter development has been reinforced by a relative decline in the importance of security issues in the post-Cold War era; by the almost missionary zeal with which the developed democracies, in the wake of the
collapse of communism, have sought to promote human rights; and by the increasingly active role of the United Nations.

The principles of sovereignty and non-intervention are central to the modern state system and the United Nations is pledged to uphold them. But the UN is also pledged to uphold the peace, and this has led to the view that the UN has a right to intervene militarily in situations where the abuse of human rights in a particular country threatens international peace—most commonly by causing a flow of refugees across international borders. This was the argument used by the UN to justify its intervention in Iraq to protect the Kurds. The argument would seem to apply even more so in the case of the former Yugoslavia. Any further intervention there will have a lot to do with concern that a continuation of ethnic cleansing and other atrocities in the Balkans might send a flood of refugees into western and southern Europe with obvious consequences for the peace and stability of the region.

The operation in Somalia was justified not on the grounds that the situation there constituted a potential threat to international security, but rather on the grounds of relieving the appalling suffering of the Somali people in circumstances where all semblances of national government had broken down. The action represents a watershed in the UN’s attitude to intervention—it is the first time the world body has regarded the relief of suffering as a primary justification for overriding the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention.

These developments have raised a number of important political and military issues. First, there is the question of the composition and command of the forces engaged in humanitarian intervention. The operation in Somalia has the endorsement of the UN and the forces involved come from a number of nations, including Australia. However, the force is overwhelmingly American and is commanded by an American—though he is required to liaise more closely with the Security Council than did his counterpart during the Gulf War. Elements on the Left have long been sceptical, often to the point of paranoia, about US intentions, and the predominantly American character of the operation in Somalia fuels suspicion that it is little more than an extension of US foreign policy.

Such concerns might be allayed if the UN was seen to be more obviously in control. Operations like the one in Somalia could be placed under the control of the Military Staff Committee of the Security Council, as provided for in the UN Charter. Another possibility, which has been pushed recently by Secretary General Boutros-Ghali, is that the UN create a special standing army, made up of contingents from as many member states as possible, which could be used to enforce directives of the Security Council. But these proposals are not likely to gain easy acceptance. For the foreseeable future, operations like the one in Somalia, if they are to go ahead at all, are likely to have a significant American component.

Second, the Somalia operation raises questions about the legitimacy of the UN itself. Many Third World states are dissatisfied with a situation where so much power is vested in a small number of predominantly European countries—the victors of a war fought more than 50 years ago. They would like to see reforms in the structure of the UN such as an expansion of the permanent membership of the Security Council and the General Assembly. These concerns will have to be addressed if there is to be sufficient support for any long-term expansion of the UN’s role in humanitarian intervention.

Third, reference to this sort of intervention as ‘humanitarian’ should not be allowed to disguise its military character. Opposition to the American presence in Somalia has been minimal, but this case could prove to be the exception rather than the rule. A more likely scenario is one in which starvation and human rights abuses are a product of widespread and organised civil strife. In such situations, intervention would almost inevitably involve taking sides in the conflict and perhaps determining the outcome. At the very least this could entail a longer than expected involvement for the intervening force.

Even in Somalia, this remains a possibility. The US originally had expected to be able to quit the country by the time of the Clinton Inauguration. The intention had been to replace the Americans with a UN force of some sort, but this is proving hard to organise. Washington may eventually be faced with the choice of either withdrawing from Somalia before the objectives of the intervention have been achieved or hanging on indefinitely. In any case, those who have argued that military intervention is an inappropriate and counterproductive means of dealing with human rights abuses will feel vindicated.

Recourse to the use of force in support of humanitarian intervention is likely to prove a major sticking point on the Left. At the time of the Gulf War many on the Left, especially in the federal parliamentary Labor Party, were persuaded to abandon their opposition to the use of force because the allied operation had the endorsement of the UN. But dissenters remained, and these same people could be expected to oppose the use of force in support of humanitarian intervention.

When confronted with pitiful images like those beamed out of Somalia, only the most insensitive among us could deny having wished that some international means were at hand to relieve the situation. This is not to deny that problems exist with the concept of humanitarian intervention. But the easy option—one which some on the Left seem to support—is to deny that there are any circumstances in which intervention, even with humanitarian objectives, is justified. Such a stand would sit uneasily with traditional Left thinking about international relations. The Left has a long and proud record of support for just causes in many parts of the world and this has often included support for armed struggle. The Left should support the intervention in Somalia.

BOB HOWARD is the editor of the Current Affairs Bulletin, and teaches in government at Sydney University.
BLUE VELVET

The 1989 Velvet Revolution and its personal symbol, the playwright Vaclav Havel, embodied all that was democratic and liberal in the Czech character.

Among its former eastern bloc neighbours, the Czech lands seemed best situated to make a successful jump to a society and economy close to the western European model. The post-communist Czecho-Slovak Federal Republic (CSFR) was unique among countries in the region in being able to call upon the legacy of a democratic interwar republic which survived as a working parliamentary democracy until German troops snuffed it out in 1938.

On the streets of Prague and Bratislava in 1989, the Czechs and Slovaks seemed in unanimous consent with the dissidents' starry vision of Czechoslovakia's future. It was not long after those euphoric days, however, that another side of the Czech character also showed its face. Though the average Czech detested the communist system, it was only a tiny minority of dissident intellectuals who, under the dictatorship, had defiantly defended the ideals of civil society. The past three years have presented a much more diverse picture of Czech and Slovak society. The party of the former Charter 77 dissidents failed even to reach the 5% hurdle necessary for parliamentary representation in last year's elections. Their loss illustrated all too vividly the schisms between the dissident and the average person, the emigre and the local, the intellectual and the worker, the 1968 Prague Spring generation and those who had never hoped for anything more than a telephone, a flat and a car.

The first signs that all was not well surfaced in April and May 1990 when a wave of rightwing violence against Gypsies and Vietnamese workers captured headlines in northern Bohemia. In northern industrial cities, racist Czech skinheads and a confused hybrid of Nazi-Punks set upon unarmed Gypsies with chains and iron bars. Simultaneously, skinheads vigorously intensified their campaign against Czechoslovakia's foreign workers, the majority of whom are Vietnamese. On 1 May 1990, 200 skinheads raised havoc in central Prague, turning on a Canadian tourist group after beating up the Gypsies and Vietnamese on the main square. Havel responded immediately to the violence, echoing widespread rumours at the time that disillusioned elements of the old apparatus, particularly the security forces, stood behind it. Racial tensions and ethnic animosity, however, existed in the Czech lands long before the dictatorship's frontmen lost their jobs. It was while Havel pondered the human condition from behind bars in the mid-1980s that an underground world of neonazi and skinhead hate culture found an audience in Prague. By 1987 or 1988 any tourist could see skinheads at cafes in the Prague Old Town. At beer halls they openly fraternised with German and Austrian skinheads. Underground heavy metal bands, such as the notorious group Orlik, stirred hatred against punks, Gypsies, foreign workers, Third World students, Slovaks and tourists.

In the revolution's aftermath, legal Orlik concerts drew as many as 600 skinheads. Their stage sets displayed full-size colour posters of Miroslav Sladek, the leader of the newly-formed ultrarightwing Republican Party. By 1992, experts estimated that there were about 1,000 active skins in Prague, 500 in Pilzen and roughly 2,000 more scattered throughout northern Bohemia. On 24 November 1991, as many as 1,000 assorted rightwing hooligans marched through Prague's Wenceslas Square to cries of "Gypsies Out!", "Czech for the Czechs" and "Gypsies to the gas chambers!". Police intervened only to stop scuffles between the rightwingers and a 400-strong counter-demonstration of Gypsies and anarchists.

The march wove its way in and out of several Gypsy neighbourhoods until police disbanded it four hours later. "If this crowd had been any larger," said Prague's Deputy Chief of Police at the time, "we would have needed water cannons and tear gas." But since December 1989, he noted, such means were no longer at his disposal.

The fact that Czechoslovakia's guest workers were among the first targets of skinhead terror came as little surprise to the victims themselves. In the late 1970s the Vietnamese government offered the services of its workers to help pay off debts it had accrued during the war years. From the moment that they landed at the Prague airport, the Vietnamese workers had no illusions as to their purpose; they were the form of value in a primitive process of barter. The guest workers received only the barest language...
training and a thin introduction to Czech society. Their families and children were forbidden to join them. The state put the Vietnamese to work at the most menial of jobs and promptly forgot about them.

According to Uyen Phem Huu, a 30-year-old Vietnamese computer engineer who has lived in Prague since 1980, discrimination under communist rule took more subtle forms than it does today. "At that time, people couldn't afford to hit someone in the streets. Often you just wouldn't be served in a restaurant or something like that. But that was one thing. Now there's democracy and that means they can hit whoever they want and get away with it."

A problem more deeply embedded in Czech culture, however, is that of the Gypsies. As in other central and eastern European countries, the 500,000 to 600,000 Gypsies in the Czech lands and Slovakia are the poorest, least educated and most discriminated against part of the population. In one opinion poll, 91% of Czechs and Slovaks expressed negative feelings toward Gypsies. Since Nazi measures during the war claimed the lives of almost all of the Bohemian and Moravian Gypsies, most of those in the Czech lands today are Slovak Gypsies, sent there after the postwar expulsion of the Sudeten Germans.

Communist policies, though making dents in chronic problems such as substandard housing and illiteracy, perpetuated and institutionalised the racial prejudices that flourished prior to World War Two. The regime treated the minority as a genetically inferior, second class people, with a worthless culture. It tried to extirpate the unique Gypsy identity by forcibly sterilising women, suppressing Gypsy language and traditions, liquidating rural settlements and outlawing nomadic wandering.

Unlike its eastern European relations, Czech "beer hall nationalism" centres not around issues of territorial expansion, religious identification, national independence or ethnic kin outside its borders. More along the lines of western Europe's new Right culture, it plays primarily upon the racial prejudices and economic anxieties of the lower and middle classes.

As economic conditions worsened and criminality sky-rocketed, the Gypsies in the polluted, industrial wastelands of northern Bohemia found themselves the most convenient scapegoats for popular frustration. Journalists from northern Bohemian cities tell of "running race wars" between Czechs and Gypsies.

By mid-1991 that hostility had come back to its source—the average burgher. According to Charles University sociologist Vaclav Trojan, "the first violence was a barometer of deeper social tensions within society". The former dissident argues that these feelings "had been building up for years, and then finally got the signal to explode". Police forces have come under heavy pressure to crack down on Gypsies, or at least to allow the skinheads to do the dirty work for them. "Local communities have shown clear popular support for the pogroms, for the skins and for the police," says Trojan.

The political manifestation of that hatred is the Republican Party which soared from obscurity onto the Czechoslovak political stage last summer. Their spectacular election gain was one of the most painful of the many kicks that Czech democrats took in 1992. The Republicans marched into the legislature with over 5% of the total Czech vote.

Until the June 1992 elections, the crude Czech nationalism of the Republican Party had found an ear only on the streets. From early on, party president Sladek tirelessly traversed the Czechoslovak political stage last summer. Their spectacular election gain was one of the most painful of the many kicks that Czech democrats took in 1992. The Republicans marched into the legislature with over 5% of the total Czech vote.

As the revolution began to lose its glitter, Sladek tirelessly traversed the country, painting an opaque picture of society in which conspiracy and impenetrable networks stacked the deck against ordinary citizens. While Civic Forum's leadership made policy from on high in Prague Castle, he peddled his message to the people. At aggressive, highly charged demonstrations, he railed against the "communist agents" in Civic Forum, against the secret police "staged" revolution and against "Gypsy criminality". Among the Republicans' foremost demands is a full purge and ban on all former members of the communist party from official positions.

As Sladek's star seemed to be rising in 1990, he tried to distance himself from his jack-booted shock troops. But the issues with which he had first won the skins' hearts remained central to the Republicans' agenda. In its program, the party vaguely mentions its intention "to solve the problem of the Gypsies by resettling them". In standard central European phraseology, "resetting" tends to be a diplomatic term for expulsion, in this case sending the Slovak Gypsy populations in Bohemia and Moravia back to Slovakia.

According to Klara Samkova of the Gypsy Civic Initiative (GCI), a Prague-based political party, the Republicans' proposals "violate just about every international statute on human rights that exists". That fact, however, doesn't bother the Republicans. To the contrary, "Sladek is in parliament today because of his hateful rhetoric against Gypsies," says Samkova.

The Republicans, not surprisingly, scored their biggest victories in northern Bohemia—also the site of even stronger showings from the reform communist party. The ultra-right and the Left Bloc took big constituencies from the democratic parties by arguing against full-speed ahead privatisation and the dismantling of social services. Sladek's populism found an audience in the lower and middle classes, disproportionately among working class men in their 20s.
The simple presence of the Republicans in the Czech legislature contributes to the drastically overhauled face of Czech politics in the aftermath of the 1992 elections. Along with the former Charter 77 dissidents, any talk of civil society and expanded forms of democracy has vanished from political discourse. The monetarists of Vaclav Klaus' Civic Democratic Party (CDP) dominate parliament. Following the recent dissolution of Czechoslovakia human rights activists in the Czech Republic fear that the government's conservative tint will aggravate tensions between minorities and the majority. "Our two years of grace are over," says Gypsy spokesperson Samkova, who slipped into parliament as a GCI deputy in 1990 under the Civic Forum umbrella.

Samkova's efforts to put her organisation under the Klaus party's wing during the 1992 election campaign were rebutted. "They said that they were sorry but that they simply didn't want to risk the white vote," she explains. "The CDP doesn't see how human rights and minority issues are useful to it. If something doesn't bring them immediate economic profit, it's expendable." ■


THE JOYS OF SPRING

In Ireland, history has a habit of getting stuck—and usually in the most uncomfortable places, like the 17th century. One German member of the European Parliament recognised that fact during last year's crisis over the right of a 14 year-old alleged rape victim to travel to Britain for an abortion. "I propose," he said, "that only states which have experienced the Age of Enlightenment can be members [of the EC]."

But if such dangerously new-fangled concepts such as the separation of church and state have still to be fully accepted in the Republic, the political party system has at least advanced unequivocally into the 20th century—all the way to 1923, to be exact. That was the year in which the brief but savage civil war ended. The war was fought over the treaty signed with Britain in 1921, which granted the 26 counties which now constitute the Republic of Ireland de facto independence, but left the six north-eastern counties with large protestant populations under British rule. The pro-treaty forces defeated the hardline republicans who refused to accept partition. Yet the cleavage between the two was to remain the essential dividing line in Irish politics for the next 70 years, as the opposing civil war factions evolved into constitutional political parties, Fianna Fail (anti-treaty) and Fine Gael (pro-treaty).

It remained so until last November's elections, when the Labour Party achieved what seems to be a historic breakthrough, more than doubling its representation to 33 seats in the 165-seat parliament. This achievement, modest enough as it appears on paper, has been greeted as a watershed in Irish political history, the 'end of civil war politics'. The two main parties between them secured only 63% of the primary vote, Fianna Fail registering their worst performance since 1927, Fine Gael their worst since 1948.

After two months of horse trading, Labour rather surprisingly decided to enter a coalition with Fianna Fail, securing six cabinet positions, and the posts of deputy prime minister and foreign minister for their popular leader, Dick Spring. The long-term significance of the result lies less in the particular nature of the government formed in its aftermath than in the vastly increased influence wielded by Labour, the prospect of further erosion of the two main parties' votes in the future, and the development of a more conventional political system characterised by Left-Right distinctions rather than atavistic mysticism.

Ironically, it is the party representing the losers in the civil war, Fianna Fail ('Warriors of Destiny'), which has dominated Irish political history ever since they swallowed their pride and entered parliament in 1927. Fianna Fail have governed alone or (briefly) in coalition for no less than 44 years since then. Since 1932, Fine Gael ('The Tribe of the Gaels') has always been the second largest party.
The differences between the two have always been ones of style, culture and tradition, rather than substance. Fianna Fail have traditionally tended towards populism and opportunism, cementing their rural power base through protectionism, identification with 'Catholic values' and windy rhetoric on the Republic's claim to sovereignty over Northern Ireland. The party never fails to exude a strong whiff of corruption and cronyism, a factor which contributed strongly to successive failures to win an outright parliamentary majority in the 1980s, the dramatic defeat of their candidate in the 1990 presidential election, and the downfall of leader, Charles Haughey, in January of last year.

Fine Gael, by contrast, aspire these days to be a modern conservative party, unhampered by Fianna Fail's need to pay lip-service to their origins. But while Fine Gael's lack of historical baggage has enabled them to make more imaginative initiatives on the Northern Ireland problem, it has also left them at the mercy of the prevailing ideological winds. In abandoning the relatively liberal social policies of former leader Garrett Fitzgerald in favour of free-market orthodoxy they have lost the allegiance of liberal, middle-class Dublin to Labour. In a country where the urban middle class is in many respects the most radical section of the electorate, it's hard to see where a party committed to economic liberalism and with no alternative core constituency can go for support.

But the substantive policy differences between the two parties are impermanent and often almost imperceptible. Fianna Fail's populist tradition didn't prevent it implementing severe public spending cuts in the name of fiscal rectitude in the late 1980s. Fine Gael have swung from Fitzgerald's principled and genuine liberalism to pseudo-Thatcherism in the space of five years. The ideological malleability of Irish politics can be clearly seen from the fact that following the election almost any combination of parties seemed possible as a coalition government. Faced with the unenviable choice between the morally bankrupt Fianna Fail and the economically incompatible Fine Gael, as coalition partners, Labour opted for the former. They have come in for a good deal of criticism for doing so, having previously been the most vocal critics of Fianna Fail chicanery while in office. But at least it doesn't immediately compromise their economic policies as another alliance with Fine Gael would have.

The glue that has held the two-party system together for so long has been the vague underlying perception of the parties as respectively 'more republican' or 'less republican'. But the persistence of the war in Northern Ireland is almost the only area left for displaying such stances—and even here the scope for action, as opposed to rhetoric for domestic consumption, is small.

As the violence in the North shows no sign of ending, the irrelevance of the policy stances of the major parties in the Republic become more and more apparent to the electorate. Northern Ireland is simply not an issue in the Republic's elections. Paradoxically, this shift away from a politics based at least in theory on varying shades of nationalism could be a step forward for North-South relations. If Labour continues to gain in strength, it can surely only be a matter of time before they attempt to remove (by referendum) the Republic's constitutional claim to the territory of Northern Ireland.

That would at least go a small part of the way towards lifting the siege mentality of the Northern Protestants, whose refusal to countermand any political arrangements perceived as diluting the union with Britain helps to make 'normal' politics in the North impossible. The more the Republic moves towards a modern, secular state, the less easy it will be for the Protestants to raise the bogey of a Catholic-dominated 32-county state as a fundamental threat to their way of life, and a barrier to any change.

Of more immediate concern to the southern electorate are the economy and the great social questions of abortion and divorce. It's in the latter area that Labour's increased influence is likely to have the most immediate effect. Indeed, the new government's very first move was to announce the decriminalisation of homosexuality and a new referendum on the constitutional ban on divorce. But the economic and social spheres are closely linked. Ireland's hugely important agricultural sector has benefited to a massive extent from EC subsidies, as have its underdeveloped western areas. The idea of Europe is popular among many young urban people (as is in Scotland), since it offers a new and more positive frame of reference than the old antagonism-cum-inferiority-complex towards England. The Irish delight in being good Europeans while the English so conspicuously are not.

But this enthusiasm for Europe inevitably implies a trade-off. If Ireland wants to continue enjoying the economic benefits of association with its larger and richer neighbours, it also has to become something more akin to a modern European nation itself. That means that archaic social legislation will eventually have to go. There was a hint that such changes might come sooner rather than later in the 1990 election of the candidate of the Left, Mary Robinson, as President. Robinson, who made her name championing causes such as the right to information about abortion, and who has taken a conscious and courageous stance against misty-eyed republicanism, embodies the new mood in Irish politics.

Her election was a sensation at the time, but the results of last November's poll suggest that it was a harbinger of more hopeful things to come rather than an aberration. Ireland's electorate continues to surprise itself: 20 women were elected to parliament (constituting 12% of the total), the highest ever number. Above all, the rejection of two parties with no credible contemporary raison d'être marks the next phase in the modernisation process. Ironically, as Left and Right become more nebulous concepts in most other democratic countries, in Ireland they are finally starting to make sense. History there has sputtered into life again, and not before time.

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This time last year Paul Keating was new to the office to which he had so long aspired. No-one has entered the prime ministership so well prepared for its intellectual challenges since the halcyon days of Gough Whitlam. From December 1991 Keating understood very clearly what he needed to do to recreate a winning combination of issues and voter blocs.

Every objective measurement dictated that the federal Labor government as it entered its tenth year was heading for a massive defeat. But politics is not about such neat objectivity. Keating understood that the Opposition has to position itself in favourable comparison to a faltering government. Keating believes he has witnessed the ALP (and especially federal Labor) blow near certain victory on more than one occasion. Losing elections unnecessarily is part of the mythology of the ALP, a mythology that was one of the most powerful influences on a young party member of the 1960s.

There is no matrix or formula by which a government loses office. Once it was believed that something less than full employment was electorally fatal. The 70s and 80s put paid to that fond notion. Nor, it appears, is there a 'shelf-life' to a government after which re-election becomes progressively more difficult. With a renewal of personnel and policies, plus a sympathetic electoral system, a government can continue indefinitely. John Major in Britain demonstrated that the mood for change is not irreversible. At the end of the 80s, a decade in which Labor had gained its most sustained period of electoral success at both state and federal levels, the principal rules for winning are twofold: first, maintaining control of the political agenda; and, second, avoiding financial or personal mishaps which might lend themselves to the appearance that ministers are tainted personally and/or that the government has lost the plot. Isolated governmental atrocities and episodic unpopularity matter only when their cumulative impact undermines credibility.

Although no previous federal opposition leader has been quite so inept as John Hewson, Keating has not been deluded that Hewson, with all his best efforts, alone could save the government (though there were times in 1992 when even Keating must have wondered whose side Hewson was on). The truth is that the repulsiveness of an opposition alternative has provided no relief when the incumbents have forfeited their credibility as governments; the repulsiveness of Greiner in NSW and Kennett in Victoria did not, in the end, matter a bit. The Keating strategy for re-election has turned on an immediate and overwhelming demonstration of his mastery of the office of prime minister so that no one would seriously question that he was in charge of his Cabinet and that the Cabinet, in turn, was in control of the nation's affairs.

Keating has combined control of the agenda with a brief to reinstate confidence in the broad policy directions of the government. The tight budgetary policies of the 1980s have excluded the old-style electoral remedy of a grab-bag of goodies funded from the public purse. Keating has done as much as anyone to discredit that handy standby in difficult times, while Hewson's central philosophy has disbarred him from that recourse. Instead, government spending will go into infrastructure—big projects preferably, employing large numbers of people and injecting money for further spending.

Essentially confident that the economic package of One Nation was going to come right, Keating has directed his mind and the attention of the media to non-economic questions, revealing that he wants to initiate debates on the fabric of the nation. Even in a recession there are many non-economic preoccupations for the electorate and the interest groups which influence voting behaviour. (And, for all of the piety to the contrary, no government has ever been able to diminish the pre-eminence of interest groups in electoral politics.) Another means of translating the electoral impact of
unemployment of 11% is to deduct that number from 100. The resulting 89% or so who remain employed doubtless have real fears about their own security—and equally doubtless, the real numbers of unemployed are far greater than the official numbers. Nonetheless, people with economic security do have other concerns about public policies—education, health, environment, transport, Aboriginal Australia and law and order, for example—and they worry about the impact of those policies on their families and their own perceptions of the sort of society they want Australia to be. Their economic concerns, beyond jobs, are likely to include the climate for investment, interest rates, inflation and the certainty of policy direction.

Add to those employed the millions of full-time students over 18, the growing numbers of retired persons and those (mainly women) who prefer to work in their homes, and you have a very different portrait of political concern. A clever leader is aware that there are residues of idealism, a desire for stability and a preoccupation with family matters (curiously embracing those who are not part of a family). Addressing all those concerns has been one of Paul Keating's major achievements. The professional commentators entirely missed the point of his early comments about the meaning of the Kokoda Trail to modern Australia. In the best Labor tradition, Keating was not willing to accept the conservative definition of Australia's heritage. Kissing the soil at Kokoda was the beginning of a year of serious, non-histrionic questioning of the imperial heritage.

By the end of 1992, other serious debates were running concurrently on the future of the monarchy, the oath of allegiance and the flag. Keating was advocating a reorientation of trade and economic focus on Asia. The most remarkable aspect of the strategy was that the conservatives have been singularly unable to persuade electors that these mat-
The travails of John Hewson provided minimal distraction; Keating paused to shoot down his opposition number only when the target was irresistible. The Fightback package, all on its own, provoked questions and doubts with which the government had only to connect in order to score points. Simple arithmetic has brought home the impact of a Goods and Services Tax at 15%, and the pay-off via tax cuts was never convincing. The ALP leadership was in the luxurious position of entering sordid matters of politics solely when it suited them and then firing from the high moral ground. The tariff question—an issue in which the federal government had done so much to destroy faith among its traditional supporters—became an unlikely plus for the government when its own extensive reductions (courageous by any historical measure) were able to be portrayed as modest and humane because the opposition was promising to go so much further. Most of 1992 was that sort of year for federal Labor.

Australian party politics in 1992 seemed to be about turning preconceptions on their heads. The Liberal-National Party Coalition, from the still unaccustomed vantage point of opposition, have pursued a policy based on high-minded principle that delivers its benefits (if any) mainly to its core constituency. Contrary to every tenet of Menzies Liberalism, where winning was everything, the federal Coalition has expressly declared itself unconcerned about the electoral consequences of their policies. It was as if, by some cosmic sleight of hand, the electoral politics of the 1950s have been replayed with the party groupings having swapped roles. Menzies had timed his premature elections in the 50s brilliantly; so did Hawke in the 80s. The Coalition has had doctrinal divisions and disputes over leadership which Labor has avoided largely because of the intellectual collapse of socialism and the internal collapse of the ALP Left. The preferential voting system which denied Labor office three times in the 23 years of conservative rule after 1949 has now worked so much in its favour because the minor parties and single-issue groups have directed their ultimate preferences away from the conservatives (Labor in the 80s won elections with a primary vote more than ten percentage points fewer than it used to lose with in the 1950s). When Keating finally moved against Hawke it was as surgical as these things can be and did not straddle a general election.

A huge gulf has opened between the two parties in the technical expertise that their elected and machine leaders bring to their functions. No one in the modern Liberal Party has the chutzpah of a Sir John Carrick. The scheming rogues whose every bent is toward winning reside in the state and federal ALP machines, a goodly number of whom have graduated to federal parliament, especially the Senate. Every decision of federal Calmet 'bents' from the hard-nosed realpolitik of the consideration of the electoral impact of even minor decisions.

In late 1992, when the opinion polls were capturing what the hardheads in both parties had been hearing for some time, there was a big push in Labor ranks for an early dissolution of parliament. Keating resisted. Apart from his own distinct doubts about the wisdom of such a course, he was fortified by the same hardheads. They applied some of the first principles of the electoral geography of Australia: Australia is an agglomeration of states and territories with an increasing tendency to vote according to regional predilection. It was remarkable, really, that anyone could contemplate an early poll given the ALP's standing in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. Just as the implementation of Jeff Kennett's policies in Victoria has lifted the ALP primary vote—very likely with a national spillover—so a state election in Western Australia can only assist federal Labor.

In an eerie reversal of the Whitlam experience, federal Labor has been undermined by the states—not hostile conservative state governments this time around, but rather the accrued disasters of financial management by state Labor governments. Time and a clear separation from localised disasters could only assist federal Labor. The one constant in these calculations was that Hewson was not going to alter Fightback!. Not significantly. Not at all.

The private pressure on Hewson to remove the GST on food before Christmas was immense. Both the integrity of the package and its arithmetic depended on there being no exemptions. The very basis of Hewson's bloodless accession to the leadership turned on his commitment to an express manifesto for the alternative government which would be the lodestar after victory. Never again, it was vowed, would Australia's conservatives have to witness the Lost Opportunity with which they associate the Fraser years. Hewson's election was the final triumph for the ideologues against the fix-it mentality of Menzies Liberalism. Hewson was 1950s Labor reborn.

Those raised inside the Labor Party have approached each general election in the sure and certain knowledge that the conservatives will say anything and do anything in order to be elected. Was a Hewson-led Coalition going to be different? Was it possible that Labor was going to receive its first forfeit since Federation because the conservatives had discovered a principle so important that it
was worth losing an election for? As recently as the 1960s, over Vietnam and defence generally, Labor had paid the same price. But would the conservatives really go all the way? The answer came before the end of 1992.

Hewson, we are told, discovered his Damascus in a fruitshop in Sydney's eastern suburbs—touched by the sad tale of a migrant family who were about to lose their family home in addition to the business which they had founded. Somehow, we are told, he decided the policies of the federal government were directly responsible for this calamity. It was not clear where virtue resided in this story: was it in the private enterprise of the resourceful migrant who had given it a go? What, otherwise, distinguished this victim of the economic downturn from all those other migrants and native-born who had lost their jobs through structural adjustment to the economy or contraction of the public sector? All those others had savings plans based on continuous employment and they too faced the loss of their family homes. Hewson's promises to reduce public spending might raise cheers in Liberal Party conferences, but the effect in the community is immediate and visible when previous levels of company and household incomes cannot sustain expenditure on either capital or consumption (for example, fruit from the local fruitshop).

Keating PM has placed his faith in interventionist and stimulatory policies. Apart from the individual relief those policies might have been providing, the government's adherence to a philosophy that governments were supposed to be helping people and communities in need was exactly the message that voters have wanted to hear. In an address to the National Press Club, Hewson overthrew the fundamentals of the academic orthodoxy which had brought him into politics and so far up the greasy pole. Now, he decided, compassion was king. His government was going to be one of reconstruction through intervention and pumphimming. The John Hewson who came forth that day was straight out of a Frank Capra classic from the 1930s, from a movie like Mr Deeds Comes to Town—that beguiling story about a man beset with sudden riches who resolves his difficulties by giving away all of the bounty.

Early voter reaction to Dr Hewson's betrayal of his own philosophy tends to support the view that the less odious substance of the new Fightback! package is more important to voters than is the loss of credibility that Hewson has suffered personally. The general election is once again wide open, it appears. The polls reveal to anyone who still has not grasped the point that voters do not pause to examine each set of economic statistics and mark the government accordingly. Trade figures or housing loan approvals, as columns in a newspaper, do not determine voting intentions. Hewson has lost to Keating on the score of personal credibility—even though Keating has shed several personas on his way to the top—and he has not been able to dent Keating's control of the national agenda. Now he has gambled all on the voters being willing to try any alternative which has a whiff of caring. Keating knows that Labor must ratchet its primary vote in the states where it is floundering to give its local campaigners any chance of surviving.

Throughout 1992, one read a lot of commentary to the effect that "Hewson was home and hosed but for his GST". This trite observation overlooked that the GST was John Hewson and the post-Fraser Liberal Party. No less true is that the Keating government, bar the recession, would have been heading for a landslide. That an opposition so inept has remained in the race underscores the otherwise terminal economic difficulties for the government. That is politics and politics is not about might-have-beens. The government has still to overcome the perils of an economy at the mercy of international affairs. The opposition has to overcome itself. The coming months will sort out who possesses the credibility to convince a strategic spread of the electorate their party contains the answers. Both sides are now competing for the lofty ground of compassion and fairness. The early reaction to shedding the integrity of the GST was encouraging for the Coalition. The government has decided to come out of the trenches and leave it to Hewson's own ineptitude to sink the Coalition's prospects of recovery. In that atmosphere, the government should be able to prepare for its fifth term by shedding the lunatic aspects of free market economics. The opposition will not readily oppose such a course. Or will it?

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FEBRUARY 1993 ALR 15
Jeff Kennett’s industrial revolution has severely embarrassed his federal colleagues. But as PETER GAHAN reports, John Howard may have to resort to Kennett-style compulsion in order to get his new industrial dystopia under way.

Since the accession of the Kennett government last November Victorians have endured an industrial relations revolution of a kind which probably few had expected. Even the federal Coalition, whose own industrial relations policy is hardly cupidic, have been severely embarrassed by the Victorian Coalition’s ‘reforms’, both by the speed and lack of consultation with which they have been implemented, and by their primitive and compulsory nature.

The federal government has not been slow to seize on this embarrassment, painting Victoria as a dry run of the Coalition’s policies federally. This has put the federal Coalition in an even more difficult position. If they repudiate the Victorian revolution they will be seen as repudiating elements of their own industrial relations platform. But if they support it they will be seen as supporting Jeff Kennett’s punitive and unilateral approach.

Just how similar are the industrial relations policies of the Victorian and federal Coalitions? And how significant are the differences? In short, the answer seems to be that the differences as well as similarities highlight some of the contradictions of the federal Coalition’s industrial relations model.

There are two notable differences between the Victorian and federal Coalition’s policies and their likely effects. First, the fact that industrial relations is a shared power between the state and commonwealth governments implies that the safety net provided by the two policies will have a different impact in each case. And second, the federal coalition’s professed intention to achieve a new workplace culture based on teamwork and co-operation will clearly require a different method of implementation to that used by the Kennett government.

First, the matter of jurisdiction. The federal government has limited powers to legislate in industrial relations. The major source of its industrial relations powers lies in its ability to make laws to prevent and settle interstate industrial disputes. These powers are limited to creating arbitration and conciliation agents to deal with such matters on their behalf, rather than legislating directly.

Historically, this has meant that unions and arbitration courts have a limited ability to carve out a common rule, so that awards cover all workers in a given industry or occupation. Thus the ability of the arbitration system to act as an effective safety net has been limited.

More recently, however, the High Court has interpreted this aspect of the constitution more widely. As a result, the jurisdiction of the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) has increased significantly over the last 20 years or so. And the federal government may derive power from other sections of the constitution to directly regulate industrial matters, although the exercise of these powers remains controversial. These include the external affairs power (which allows the federal government, as a signatory, to enforce international treaties and agreements) and the corporations power (which allows the regulation of corporations formed within Australia).
The federal Coalition intends to make full use of these other powers to allow it to take a more direct role in the regulation of industrial relations. If Jobsback! is implemented, compulsory arbitration will be abolished. Instead, employees and employers will have to negotiate an employment agreement either collectively or individually. These agreements will have the legal status of a contract and, as such, will be subject to common and criminal law proceedings. If strikes occur during the life of, or in breach of, an agreement, employers will be able to sue individual employees for breach of contract and seek to recoup any economic losses.

The legal protection given to trade unions will be abolished. While the formation of enterprise unions is encouraged, the legal status of unions is not clear. Jobsback! intends to remove legal protections for trade unions, yet it is intended that unions will be registered. The most likely result of this ambiguity is that any registration procedure will stand as little more than a legal fiction. This is reinforced by the intention to provide a reconstituted IRC with the ability to take control of union funds and their internal organisation. Here is the rub: unions will effectively be denied any legal status or protections at the federal level. They will be left with fewer and less adequate minima (such as the $3 minimum youth wage) which do not apply to all workers (they do not apply to contractors or non-award workers, for instance), and which have decreasing coverage over time.

Attempts to revert to state jurisdiction—where unions are also denied legal recognition but at least have the 'protection' of minima with common rule status—will also be blocked. The broader coverage of state minima stems from the constitution. While the federal government is by and large limited to indirect means, the state governments have the power to directly legislate to cover all workers. Additionally, where they do exist in state jurisdictions, awards also have common rule status.

The difference may seem slight in the scheme of things, especially given that minimum conditions vary between the Victorian system and the Jobsback! proposal. Nevertheless, for many employees such limited protection may be quite fundamental to how they live their lives in a world where global restructuring has already considerably diminished their labour market opportunities.

This having been said, however, it is clear that the similarities between the two packages far outweigh any differences between them, despite the federal Coalition's attempts to distance Jobsback! from Victorian developments. The federal Coalition spokesperson on industrial relations, John Howard, has repeatedly stated that federal changes would be introduced in a far less confrontationist way—especially since Jobsback! is intended to engender a shared ideology and a 'team approach' to industrial relations.

However, despite the rhetorical differences between the two policies, John Howard may find that political reality will dictate a similar policy outcome to that of the Kennett government—including, ironically, a far more interventionist role for government in industrial relations. And this interventionist role will have, of necessity, to be based on compulsion and punitive sanctions rather than the overriding philosophy of minimal government intervention expressed in Jobsback! or Howard's political rhetoric.

While the focus of Jobsback! was on the GST, embedded within it is a plan for a radical change in the conduct of industrial relations and the structure of labour markets. The hub of that plan is that wages outcomes and the conduct of industrial relations will occur solely at the workplace and at the discretion of that workplace. This, it is stated, will demand an end to the highly interventionist role of the government and arbitration machinery, through such things as National Wage Cases.

This was later detailed with the launch of Jobsback! The philosophical underpinning of this policy—and one which John Howard has been at pains to impress—is freedom of contract. In other words, the federal Coalition's policy is supposed to provide employee and employer with a greater capacity to make decisions about how their employment relationship should be structured. In this view, the role of unions, state institutions and direct intervention of the state through legislation simply serve to 'distort' a relationship that is otherwise natural and can result in greater efficiencies and shared benefits. Thus the parties are 'free' to contract between themselves on such matters as hours of work (when and for how long), redundancy arrangements, penalty rates, holiday loading and other such matters.

The intention of Jobsback! is thus the withdrawal of the state from the sphere of industrial relations and the provision of a minimal institutional framework. The regulation of the employment contract is to be indistinguishable from other commercial contracts. Remedies against breaches will be sought through civil court action. Collectivities such as unions have no special status before the law. The outcome, according to this view, is that workplace 'bargaining' becomes the sovereign sphere of decision making over work issues—and all for the greater good.

As with the federal Coalition, the focus of the Victorian reforms has been a concern with the impact of arbitration and unions on the
conducted of workplace industrial relations. Both are seen to inhibit the proper conduct of industrial relations, inhibiting workplace flexibility and productivity in particular. Thus, the primary goal is said to be to provide employees and employers with the ability to freely regulate employment conditions to suit the needs of the enterprise within the market.

However, in initiating these changes the Victorian government has taken a decidedly interventionist role. The effect of the Employment Relations Act 1992 has been to thwart the capacity of workers to continue to undertake collective actions to protect their wages and working conditions, subjecting them to criminal and common law sanctions. Under the Act, employees will have their terms and conditions set by one or more of four legal means. At the base level, the contract of employment will be the chief instrument of common law. Second, individual employees can negotiate an individual employment agreement directly with their employer. Third, as an alternative to individual agreements, employees—with the consent of the employer—can decide to negotiate a collective employment agreement. Finally, if there is consent from both employees and employer, the collective agreement may be ratified by a new Employee Relations Commission (ERC) as an industrial award.

Yet, despite this range of alternatives, the Act makes it difficult for a group of workers to elect for a collective employment agreement or an industrial award as the source of their terms of employment—for two reasons. The most obvious one is that the Act removes the legal impunities for trade unions—impunities which remained largely intact even under the Thatcher government in the UK. Likewise, the ability of unions to gain legal status and protection of bargaining rights have remained features of US labour law also, despite 'union bashing' tactics on the part of employers.

The second reason lies in the changed structure of the legal regulation of industrial relations itself—particularly in the case of the diminished role of the new Victorian ERC. This body has fewer powers to deal with industrial disputes unless both parties consent. This, as historical experience with voluntary arbitration shows, is so unlikely as to render it ineffective. The major exception to this 'imposed voluntarism' is the case of unfair dismissals. However, the procedures which individual employees are required to undertake to respond to unfair dismissal will make this a costly and lengthy process.

Instead of awards and the use of due process through tribunal regulation, employees will be forced over time to 'negotiate' individual or collective employment agreements. Even here, the bias towards individual agreements will make collective ones difficult in many cases. While the compulsion to submit to the jurisdiction of the ERC is removed, it is substituted for the compulsory jurisdiction of the new Industrial Division of the Magistrates Court. The court is armed with considerable punitive remedies to compel unions and employees to agree to the new industrial regulations.

Jobsback! is couched in the political rhetoric of freedom. The impending changes are supposed to free the workplace from the shackles of over-regulation so that those at the workplace will be better able to decide such matters on equal terms themselves. The role of the state, so Jobsback! tells us, is to back off. It is to end the compulsory submission of both workers and employers to over-zealous governments and the specially-created jurisdictions that provide certain interest groups with a status not enjoyed by other individuals and groups in society.

The reality of the intended policy is, however, diametrically opposed to the rhetoric and ideology of a free and happy workplace culture. Like the Victorian changes, Jobsback! is not so much about the withdrawal of the state from the regulation of employment matters and an end to compulsion but, rather, the substitution of one compulsory jurisdiction for another.

Common law regulation requires that the parties submit their disputes over breach of contract at the request of one party only—as is currently the case with arbitration. In other words, it is not possible for the jurisdiction of common (and criminal) law courts to be denied simply because one party does not wish to submit to it.

The replacement of the jurisdiction of the IRC with that of common law courts cannot be reasonably interpreted as empowering the parties to make their own decisions freely in an unconstrained manner, for the good of all concerned. Rather, it amounts to the replacement of one compulsory jurisdiction, historically created to ameliorate the imbalance of power between capital and labour, with another compulsory jurisdiction that has historically been hostile to the interests of working people and the institutions created to protect them in their working lives. The result will not increase freedom but, rather, greater compulsion, as the balance of bargaining power dramatically shifts towards employers with considerable resources and institutional support in their favour. Thus, whatever the intention, in practice the federal Coalition's 'deregulatory' industrial relations policies may have to be implemented with the same degree of coercive government intervention as the Victorian reforms which so embarrass John Howard.

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Debate over the legal regulation of obscenity and pornography tends to be highly principled, in two senses. It is principled in that it appeals to a small number of general concepts which are supposed to form the rational grounds on which legal regulation is or is not legitimate. And it is principled in the sense that those who claim to have access to such general concepts comport themselves as principled persons, speaking in the name of morality or pleasure on behalf of humanity. There is no shortage of such principled argument, on both sides of the debate over whether published erotica should be open to legal regulation. Many liberals have argued that legal restrictions on non-violent erotica are an infringement of individuals' rights to freely pursue their own sexual development or, in the American context, of the principle of freedom of expression. Some feminists, however, have countered by invoking another right: the right of women to be represented in a manner that does justice to their full humanity, rather than in the caricatural forms spun-off to satisfy the male imagination.

Liberals tend to take the high moral ground against the censorship of pornography. Ian Hunter suggests this moral high ground may be a bit shaky. Governing pornography is a more complex business than the partisans in the censorship debate allow.
The ensuing debate has been notable more for the indignation it has fuelled than for the insight it has provided, as is typically the case when contestants imagine themselves to be the principally champions of competing moral absolutes. In the course of researching and writing On Pornography with David Sanders and Dugald Williamson, it became increasingly clear to us that these attempts to provide a principled analysis of obscenity law were both historically inaccurate and ethically inappropriate. Drawing on that book, I want to argue here that such principled argument has long since outlived both its fruitfulness as a way of understanding how obscenity law actually works and its usefulness as a means of educating public opinion. I will argue that the legal regulation of obscenity neither is nor can be based on general concepts. As a result, we must learn to comport ourselves in a far less principled manner, if we wish to participate in a discussion that has any bearing on the way in which the policing of pornography affects our modes of conduct.

Most of the public debate over pornography is organised by three interlocking principles: those of harm, representation and private freedom. These principles play an important role in the feminist case for greater legal regulation of pornography, but as they are more familiar to us in liberal and libertarian arguments for deregulation I will concentrate on this latter use of them.

Liberal moral and political philosophy holds that obscenity law—like other forms of law—can be reformed through an analysis of the rational and moral principles on which it is or should be based, followed by its reconstruction in accordance with the clarified principles. The classic modern example of this approach is the Report of the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship (1979) chaired by the British moral philosopher Bernard Williams, a report which is resolutely representative of liberal philosophical argument on obscenity law.

It begins by enunciating the ‘harm principle’ of legal regulation in its classical form. According to this principle, if freedom is to be preserved—as the necessary condition of individual self-development—then individuals must have the right to conduct themselves as they choose, except for those forms of conduct that infringe the rights of other individuals and thereby harm them. Then this principle is applied to published erotica, and it is here that a second principle—that of representation—is called on. Erotic art and pornography consist of representations or ideas which, while they may be morally offensive to some individuals, cannot harm them. Given this, individuals must be free to produce, disseminate and consume such representations, just in case they contain the true (but socially unpopu-

‘The pornography debate has been more notable for indignation than insight’

lar) form of our sexual self-development.

One exception to this rule is allowed, for a special class of pornographic representations. This is reserved for pictorial depictions of sex whose explicitness is such that they offend or excite in a coercive manner, infringing the subject’s capacity and right to entertain or reject them at will, and thereby threatening to cross the border from ideas to actions. The Williams Report recommends not that such specially offensive representations be banned—even they might contain a glimmer of our sexual truth—but that they be restricted, to mature volunteer audiences consuming them in private. The space of individual private freedom—whose boundaries are marked here by the bedroom door and the adults-only book or video shop—thus represents an absolute or principled limit, beyond which it is rationally and morally illegitimate for the state or the law to encroach.

There are many comments that one might make on this attempt to subordinate legal rationality and regulation to the ‘higher’ principles of philosophical analysis. Given the constraints of space I will content myself with one. Each of the three principles mentioned above—of harm, representation and private freedom—presupposes that human beings are subjects defined by individual possession of the capacity for free rational and moral self-development. It is this capacity that justifies the harm principle. All ‘externally imposed’ doctrine and regulation is relegated in favour of the ‘right’ to the free individual exercise of reason and moral judgement—which includes the right to free expression—as long as this doesn’t infringe the rights possessed by other individuals.

Further, it is the presumed possession of this capacity that justifies liberals in viewing pornography as a matter of (harmless) representations or ideas, given to a moral personality able to entertain or reject them at will, through the exercise of rational judgement. Finally, the figure of the rational subject justifies a degree of legal regulation (of representations whose pornographic explicitness makes them coercive) but also limits this regulation (to the public sphere, where it protects only the immature and the unadventurous). In criticising each of the above three principles it is this figure of the free self-developing subject that I am aiming at.

The liberal attempt to achieve a deregulatory reform of obscenity law on the basis of the principles of ‘harm to others’, representation and private freedom is confronted by a number of problems. The first relates to the attempt to use the harm principle as an instrument for setting general limits to legal regulation. Clearly this principle must be capable of specifying harm at a general level, independently of particular types of harm (such as the harm of obscene publica-

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tion). After all, the harm principle is supposed to provide general criteria for deciding whether such particular 'harm' are indeed harmful. As a number of writers have pointed out, however, this presupposed generality of the harm principle is not particularly plausible.

In the case of affirmative action and equal opportunity legislation, for example, it is implausible to suggest that the harm associated with discriminatory employment practices could be specified independently of particular social policies: namely, those aimed at increasing the proportion of women or other minority groups in the professions. But if this is the case then what is to count as harm will be determined by the norms, practices and objectives of particular policy domains or institutional settings. Such local determinations of harm will not be subject to philosophical adjudication by the general harm principle, which must be seen simply as a misleading puree of specific historical calculations of harm.

This explains why abortion law is so resistant to a 'rights-based' philosophical rectification. Here the law does not and cannot use the harm principle to set an absolute criterion for legal intervention or for legal deregulation, based (respectively) on the fetus' absolute right to life, or on the mother's absolute right to control her reproductive capacities. Instead, it has delegated the determination of what is to count as harm (to the mother's mental and physical well-being) to medical expertise—an expertise informed in this instance by quite mundane calculations regarding the social and personal costs of an illicit abortion industry. Rights don't come into it and, given the threat to social peace posed by competing moral zealotries, this is probably a good thing.

The same logic applies to the so-called 'deprave and corrupt' test, the legal specification of the harm of obscene publication that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This was arrived at in the context of wider governmental policies and campaigns of moral reform. The object of these policies and campaigns was to regulate the circulation of pornography, conceived of as an agent capable of perversely affecting the moral conduct and capacities of vulnerable sectors of the population. It was as a means of pursuing this social objective that the harms of obscene publication were determined, not because pornography was thought to be a threat to free self-developing subjectivity.

Our historians of sexuality have done us no service in ascribing the 19th century medical problematisation of pornography to sexually repressed middle-class men, for whose sins William Acton has been forced to run the gauntlet of humanist indignation and historical wish-fulfilment. Listen instead to the voice of Elizabeth Blackwell, advocate of Christian socialism and women's rights, speaking to us from 1879 through her influential manual, Counsel to Parents: On the Moral Education of their Children in Relation to Sex:

The dangers arising from vicious literature of any kind, cannot be overestimated by parents. Whether sensuality be taught by police reports, or by Greek and Latin literature, by novels, plays, songs, penny papers, or any species of the corrupt literature now sent forth broadcast, and which finds its way into the hands of the young of all classes and both sexes, the danger is equally real... No amount of simple caution, given by parents or instructors, suffices to guard the young mind from the influence of evil literature... The permanent and incalculable injury which is done to the young mind by vicious reading, is proved by all that we know about the structure and methods of the human mind... These important facts have a wide and constant bearing on education, showing the really poisonous character of all licentious literature... and its destructive effect on the quality of the brain.

In fact, despite her reference to 'the young of all classes and both sexes', Blackwell was primarily concerned with the effects of pornography on middle-class boys. The language of moral physiology is really a disguised instrument of ethical pedagogy, designed to pathologise not sex in general, but masculine auto-erotic gratification—something that Blackwell believed was intensified by the 'solitary vice' of pornography and robbed women of sexual pleasure and conjugal intimacy. No doubt there are some to whom Elizabeth Blackwell's campaign to improve heterosexual mutuality will seem an absurd anachronism. Yet she was quite representative of the struggle to improve women's lot in marriage; and the stigmatisation of pornography as an agency of male sexual selfishness remains an important part of the women's movement, albeit not of its more florid and cultic fringes.

Of course, it eventually became possible to laugh at the language of moral physiology, a language that in the mid-nineteenth century described pornography as a social toxin, causing pathological effects in the social and personal body. But to ridicule this language in order to demonstrate the harmlessness of erotica, in the name of a less repressed and more knowledgeable modernity, is to miss the point. The objective of regulating access to pornography as an instrument of moral malformation remains current, even if this harm is now spoken of in languages other than the one that first specified the harm of...
depravity and corruption.

Today, the harm of pornography is more likely to be specified in terms of an optimal pedagogical formation of the young, and in terms of the civic and occupational harms caused to women by their public eroticisation. The fact that liberal political and moral philosophy presumes to sit in judgement on these local calculations of harm—insisting that while pornography may be morally offensive it is not harmful—may be a sign of the limits of its principled analysis. To see why, we need to turn to liberalism’s second general concept, representation.

Liberalism is convinced that pornography is harmless because it assumes that pornography consists of representations or ideas, and that the subject of these ideas possesses the rational and moral capacity to entertain or reject them at will. While some individuals might be offended by pornographic representations they, by definition, cannot be harmed by them, and erotic ideas must enjoy free circulation in liberal societies. But, as we have noted, the principle of representation is not applied with absolute consistency. The Williams Report identifies certain erotic representations which are so offensive and/or arousing—due to their ‘photographic’ explicitness—that they threaten to ‘coerce’ the capacity for judgement and thereby forfeit the free circulation accorded to ideas.

It soon becomes apparent, however, that this notion of a special class of coercive ideas is neither more nor less than a modern philosophical variation on the old notion of morally pathological representations. In both cases what is in fact being alluded to is a particular use of pornography and the moral incompetence of its users. This implicit tying of harms to uses and types of user opens the door to two sets of facts which are incompatible with liberal principles, but which lie at the heart of the legal regulation of obscenity.

First, it allows us to see that pornography is not a representation of sex but a particular practice of sex using representations. The standard histories suggest that erotica and pornography are timebound attempts to represent the truth of sex, perhaps distorted by epochs of sexual fear and repression. Recent scholarship, however, suggests that pornography in the modern sense first emerged in the seventeenth century, as a result of the unexpected overlapping of a particular spiritual discipline and a novel communications technology.

The spiritual discipline was the technique of sexual confession. In the French historian Michel Foucault’s path-breaking account, confession is not a repression of sexuality. Rather, it is an apparatus that uses repression as a technique for creating a particular sense and reality of sexual-
Seen in this light the individual is not the bearer of a unitary moral personality. Rather, the individual is the human platform for a variety of historical ways of conducting the self—formed and maintained through disparate ethical trainings and ethical institutions. Ethical competence is thus not an all-or-nothing affair, but varies with category of person, social setting and cultural level. It is for this reason that obscenity law generally does not seek to ban publications outright on the grounds of intrinsic obscenity. Instead, it attempts to administer a variable access to them, on the basis of categories of vulnerable consumers and problematic consumptions. Thus, historically, a work sold cheaply on the streets near schools might be obscene; whereas the same work sold to an educated public in a scholarly edition might not be.

The standard liberal philosophical view of obscenity law as a repressive policing of unpopular but harmless ideas is thus historically inaccurate and morally inept. Obscenity law is not an attempt to censor or repress pornography but to regulate its consumption. It forms part of a social programme (however successful) aimed at regulating access to pornography as a morally dangerous commodity on the basis of a sliding scale of moral competence. The censorship classification table for films and videos is a particular instance of this scale. Here, degrees of moral competence are aligned with age—though this is not always so. In the case of pedophile pornography it is adult males who may be declared morally incompetent, given certain circumstances of consumption and use.

Like liberalism, the legal regulation of pornography also determines thresholds beyond which the law should not pass. Unlike liberalism it does not attempt to establish an absolute demarcation between the sphere of law and that of morality, based on the principles of harm and representation. Instead it operates a far more sophisticated floating threshold of legal intervention. This threshold treats the capacity for moral self-regulation not as a native endowment of the moral personality but as an ethical ability, unevenly distributed in populations depending on their systems of education, policing and welfare.

For this reason there can be no principled distinction between a public sphere of legal regulation and a private sphere of moral freedom. The right to conduct oneself as one chooses in private is not an absolute one, guaranteed by the freedom of conscience acting within the limits of the harm principle. Rather, it is a right contingent upon specific social and ethical circumstances—or, in fact, on the social distribution of the disposition to choose certain conducts rather than others.

Private freedom in this area of life is in effect a civil status conferred on those possessing the capacity to conduct themselves within the socially defined norms of moral competence. For this reason, there are some forms of conduct—such as rape in marriage or the consumption of pedophile pornography—which are never private, whether they take place behind the bedroom door or not. This is not because such conducts infringe the general principle of 'harm to others'. Rather, it is because they are deemed harmful within the ethical and legal contexts formed by particular moral reform campaigns or governmental social programmes. The campaign to de-eroticise women in the workplace, for example, may provide the moral context in which the display of pin-ups in locker-rooms is deemed harmful, in which locker-rooms lose their privacy, and in which their inhabitants are required to develop new moral competences and conduct.

At such moments it ill becomes intellectuals to stand on principle. There is something unedifying in the repetitious theatrics of the liberal public conscience, where intellectuals purport to show the harmlessness of erotica and to defend the freedom of sexual expression, speaking in the name of philosophical principles that are presumed to stand above the complex mundanity of the legal system. By parity of argument, the same goes for those analyses—equally contemptuous of legal rationality—which purport to show the harmfulness of pornography by treating it as an infringement of women's right to be represented in a 'fully human' manner.

If the preceding account is correct then the production and consumption of erotica is, intrinsically, neither harmless nor harmful. If the harm of pornography is indeed relative to the variable moral competences of its consumers, determined by the norms of particular moral campaigns and social programs, then it is our relation to these campaigns and programs that must determine our attitude to pornography. Under these conditions, for intellectuals to invoke the usual principles, and defend the right to freedom of expression, amounts to a failure to confront the actual circumstances of their own ethical and legal obligations. And, for once, it is true to say that this posture is particularly suspect when it is adopted by men. They are, after all, defending a problematic cultivation of their bodies and minds.

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A GREEN TO DISAGREE

Has the recession sunk Australians' newfound commitment to the environment? EM PAPADAKIS thinks not. But he argues that the green movement of the next decade will have a very different, more policy-minded face.

Green interest groups and social movements face a crisis of identity. Over the past two decades in Australia, as in many other countries, these groups and movements have succeeded beyond their wildest dreams in contributing to the rise in awareness of the dangers of environmental destruction. Nowadays, everyone, including business, industry and labour, is 'green'.

For organisations like the Wilderness Society and Greenpeace this has meant a shift in tactics. Whereas in the past they emphasised the fundamental conflict between environmental protection and economic development, they are now either thinking about or actually collaborating with established institutions in trying to develop viable policies for environmental protection and economic development. Last September, Paul Gilding, the new international director of Greenpeace, announced that the organisation would switch its tactics from confrontation to co-operation with government and industry. This is not to say that the Greens have abandoned confrontation. Rather, I would argue that they have become much more involved in the political process and that this reflects major changes in attitudes and some changes in patterns of behaviour among groups that have in the past been mainly concerned about economic growth and development.

An important force driving the Greens to collaborate with 'the enemy' (meaning business, industry, labour and the established political parties) is their acute awareness of the dangers involved in delaying the implementation of new policies, notably over issues like the protection of the ozone layer. Furthermore, by refusing to collaborate they are in danger of being marginalised in debate about policy implementation.

All this is not to suggest that established institutions have uniformly accepted or have a shared understanding of environmentalism. Different (and often conflicting) strategies have been developed to tackle the problem of environmental degradation. Different (and often conflicting) interpretations have been presented of the significance of environmentalism. Individuals and social actors like political parties, bureaucracies and interest groups have expressed concern about the environment for a variety of reasons. Established organisations have been highly selective in plundering the green agenda. Moreover, they have been extremely cautious about embracing aspects of environmentalism that may undermine economic imperatives and electoral considerations. Commitment to environmentalism can also be expressed with different levels of intensity and in a variety of ways. Radical environmentalism, for instance, may include the preoccupation by 'deep ecologists' with a non-anthropocentric perspective as well as militant opposition to established institutions by groups like Greenpeace.

Though environmentalism can mean different things to different people, there are some common preoccupations and patterns of behaviour. The latter are distinctive enough to suggest that environmental issues will feature strongly on the political agenda in the 1990s. This argument may appear less plausible in the current economic situation, where people are concerned about issues like unemployment, the goods and services tax and the prospects for economic growth. However, there is indi-
rect support for my argument from a recent study, commissioned by the Secretariat of the Ecologically Sustainable Development Working Groups. The study, conducted during the worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s, asked people to rank which issues were among the most important now and which would be the most important in ten years' time. In rank order the most important current issues were unemployment, followed by the environment and education. Most people felt that in ten years' time the most important issue would be the environment, followed by unemployment and pensions and care for the aged.

The dangers of trying to predict political change are well-known. However, the evidence suggests that the preoccupation with environmental issues is unlikely to diminish. Furthermore, though the survey noted only modest changes in behaviour by consumers and a lack of emphasis on fundamental issues like reducing the use of domestic appliances and of motor vehicles, key social actors have become aware of the need to modify behaviour through a variety of means, including both state intervention and market mechanisms.

Media reportage has often portrayed the relationship between environmentalism and development as one of fundamental conflict and division. It is easy to contrast the warnings of catastrophists like David Suzuki (who posit a fundamental conflict between the pursuit of profit and power and the destruction of nature) with the prognosis of cornucopians like Hugh Morgan from the Western
'Catastrophists and cornucopians have abandoned much of their ideological baggage.'

Mining Corporation (who regard environmentalism as a means to an end for ambitious, power seeking revolutionaries aiming to undermine private property).

However, these characterisations, though partially accurate, are too inflexible and fail to account for the impact of more consensual studies like the Brundtland Report presented by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development on business and environmental groups. Though fraught with difficulties, initiatives like the ecologically sustainable working groups and the Resource Assessment Commission have led to a dialogue between catastrophists and cornucopians which has led many of them to abandon entrenched positions and much of their ideological baggage. Many business groups have recognised, reluctantly, that some form of statutory intervention is necessary to address many environmental problems and that, whether they like it or not, they have to become more socially responsible (for instance, in rehabilitating landscapes after they have been mined). Even more striking has been the acknowledgment by environmentalists that market mechanisms may have an important role to play in contributing to environmental protection and that there are many ways in which economic activity is independent of the consumption of energy and of resources, for instance, through recycling of products and through 'closed loop' production processes (as in the design of cars and other goods so that all their components can easily recycled). Moreover, although structural imperatives like the need for economic growth in capitalist society and the struggles for electoral power between political parties may make it difficult to introduce radical reforms in environmental policy, these forces can be challenged and subjected to considerable modification.

But is the challenge of environmentalism to established practices novel or more ordinary? The arguments for novelty are based largely on an idealist tradition that emphasises the role of ideas in bringing about social change. According to this view there has been a shift, particularly among certain social groups, from materialist to postmaterialist values, from a way of thinking which is primarily guided by the aim of economic growth through exploitation of resources to one which values the environment for its aesthetic, spiritual and other qualities.

Arguments for the ordinariness of the challenge derive mainly from a realist tradition that emphasises interests and power. Despite their rhetoric, it is obvious that neither environmental groups nor political parties are simply motivated by idealism. They are also preoccupied by their own survival as organisations and are acutely aware of their own interests as well as of the need to appeal to particular groups and to engage in struggles for power and influence. Moreover, the success of a social movement can often best be gauged by the extent to which its ideals have been incorporated by established groups or by its inclusion in regular processes of negotiation and intermediation. There is no necessary conflict between the promotion by a social movement of certain ideals and its maturity as an organisation.

Environmental movements have been highly successful in promoting their ideals. First, they have been able to utilise a rich tradition of ideas about nature and environmental protection. Second, they have drawn on similar social bases and ideas as the protest movements of the 1960s. Though there is no necessary connection between concern about the environment and support for other social movements, the emphasis on economic growth by established parties in western democracies after the second World War provided new movements with a unique chance to mobilise popular support around the issue of environmental protection.

The notions of progress and of harnessing natural resources for economic development gained widespread acceptance in the wake of the first Industrial Revolution. The forces most closely associated with this Great Transformation—labour and business as well as the political parties attempting to represent their interests—have therefore been regarded by many as incapable of dealing with the new emphasis on environmentalism in the late 20th century. Third, environmental movements have been successful in promoting their ideals because they have operated as effective organisations for mobilising people and for raising funds. A further indicator of the influence of environmentalism has been the level of funding allocated by government both to voluntary organisations and to its own environmental agencies even during periods of economic decline.

Paradoxically, the acceptance of their ideas by the mass public and by key groups in society (including many of their opponents in business and industry) has posed a serious difficulty for environmental groups. Their identity as an oppositional force has seriously been compromised. Yet, many environmentalists are realising that it is not simply a question of 'sleeping with the enemy'. Environmentalists and developers have had to adapt to changing political circumstances and to respond to new insights into the relationship between environmental protection and economic development.

The struggle over the coming decade is likely to be less over whether or not environmentalism becomes an integral part of the political and business culture—that is already well advanced—but over the implementation of radical reforms. Environmental groups will still play a role in placing pressure on established organisations to carry out reforms. However, with the focus on implementation, it is more likely than in the past that the main
struggles will take place at two levels. The first will be between established organisations with experience in the political system and a strategic role in implementing public policy. The second will be between nation states or groups of nation states.

On the first level of conflict, established organisations will continue to differ in the emphasis they place on the implementation of environmental policies. Over the past decade we have witnessed numerous environmental initiatives by the Labor government like the protection of rainforests, the high profile of the Environment portfolio and the funding of the landcare program. The public has also acknowledged the clear difference in emphasis by the major parties on the implementation of environmental policies. Yet while there are indications that a change of regime to a Coalition government led by John Hewson would result in a significant change of emphasis, many of the long-term goals would remain the same. Even in countries led by conservative governments for about a decade or more, such as Germany and Britain, there has been a major shift to incorporate environmental concerns both into political institutions and business practices.

This is not to suggest at the relationship between environmentalists and established institutions will always be characterised by co-operation. Conflicts will persist, particularly over the pace of implementation. However, even during recessions the environment will feature prominently on the political agenda, because it is often compatible with development. In addition, it is widely recognised that problems like the depletion of the ozone layer, soil degradation and the emission of greenhouse gases either have or could have a major effect on economic development.

Some of these issues also relate to the second level of conflict—conflict between nation states. A serious problem of the recent United Nations Conference in Rio de Janeiro was to try to reconcile the divergent perspectives of developed and developing countries. The economic implications of environmental protection are particularly acute for the latter. The agenda in this sphere will be dominated by arguments over who should pay for environmental protection and over what developing countries see as hypocrisy of developed nations that consume a disproportionate share of resources and expect developing countries to take drastic measures to save the environment.

There is also a potential tension between environmentalism in the developed world and the needs for survival and improvement of material conditions in developing nations. The goals of environmentalists in the West may also clash with the policies of particular regimes in developing countries. For instance, environmentalists and trade unionists in Australia have attempted to prevent the trade with countries like Malaysia in rainforest timbers.

Another dimension of international conflicts lies in the different positions adopted by major powers or trading blocs on environmental issues, as illustrated by the divergent positions of the United States and the European Community over the signing of international treaties on the emission of carbon dioxide, over aid programs to developing countries and over the regulation species protection ('biodiversity'). Over the coming decade there are likely to be greater efforts at the transnational level to tackle the varying commitment by nation states to environmental protection. There is a growing realisation that national governments are not only having great difficulty in dealing with international economic problems but also with environmental ones.

The initial experiments with change are likely to be conducted at the national level, especially where laws and institutional mechanisms are being established to address environmental problems. As I have suggested above, significant progress has been made in Australia in identifying key issues. Furthermore, over certain issues, the patterns of response by established and environmental organisations have been remarkably similar. Finally, the notion that policy decisions, even economic ones, should be informed by an analysis of impacts on the environment has taken hold both of the popular imagination and of the bureaucratic and political culture.

It is no longer a question of whether or not one sleeps with 'the enemy'. Though they now rub shoulders with the establishment, the Greens have contributed to significant changes within it. They are also well aware of the dangers of becoming marginalised in debates about environmental protection.

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ALR ACRONYMS WINNER

The winner of the ALR Acronyms competition in our December issue was S Cheung of Killara, NSW, for 'A Little Revisionism'. Among the other highly commended entries were 'After Lenin Rotted', 'Australia's Left Rationalists', 'Australian Left's Rigormortis' and 'Apparatchiks' Literary Raft'. Definitely no prizes, however, either for 'A Lovely Read', or 'A Load of Rubbish'. A voucher for $300 worth of Pluto Press books is winging its way to S Cheung.
High unemployment doesn’t cause the anger it once did. Jocelyn Pixley thinks that ‘postindustrialism’ is at least partly to blame. She argues that before we invent a future ‘beyond work’ we need a future with work.

If the government loses power at the forthcoming federal election, mass unemployment will be one of the primary factors in its demise. Labor’s 1983 commitment to ‘Jobs, Jobs, Jobs’ now looks very hollow. Many of the policy changes of the past decade such as workplace restructuring, enhanced freedom of capital movements and wagesqueezing under the Accordsc did, for a time, buy a high level of job-growth—albeit mainly service-oriented and often part-time. But nothing much has withstood the effects of long-term global recession on Australia. In 1993, unemployment levels of over 11% may well be politically unacceptable. But 20 years ago such rates were unthinkable. Since 1945 most people had believed that mass unemployment would never return. What happened to that belief?

The idea that ‘industrial society’ is dead certainly predates chronic unemployment, but it captured a much larger audience as the 1970s recession developed. The postindustrial analysis was not only a plausible description of economic trends—away from manufacturing employment and towards the service sector—but it also offered hope. A new belief emerged, far from the limited ambitions of job creation schemes, a belief in a potentially different era ‘beyond employment’. There was no need to be as alarmed by mass unemployment as in the 1930s, because the ‘cure’ no longer lay in jobs. Barry Jones wanted sleepers to wake up to the future of work; at a 1980 conference in Canberra, the conspicuously employed worried themselves over the topic ‘When Machines Replace People. What Will People Do?’; André Gorz described the Paths to Paradise as the Liberation from Work. Postindustrial terms like the ‘information age’, cybernetic or service society and the critique of ‘productivism’ were drawn upon in the emerging Green politics.

By equating productivism with participation, chronic unemployment could be regarded as beneficial, because the frugal simplicity enjoyed by the jobless indicated the path the whole world must take, away from consumerism and polluting factories. These ideas were widely disseminated by the early Green movement. Rather than leading to depression, unemployment would be the basis of utopia.

According to postindustrialists in the Left, the condition of being employed, so long feted as the norm, should be rejected in favour of revaluing other kinds of work and removing the stigma of dependency. The time (recession) was ripe for the separation of income from work, through the lifetime provision of an income guaranteed by the state and by seeking alternatives to wage labour (self-help). Thus mass unemployment could even be welcomed and ecologically destructive economic growth could possibly be halted as well.

These hopes have contributed to the widespread indifference towards chronic unemployment. Those who would otherwise be more likely to be sympathetic to the unemployed have instead imagined that a positive future of creative work and income security for all will emerge from this gloom. Meaningless jobs will be replaced by co-operative
harmony, informal bartering of skills and produce, and networks of communes and self-help teams. Men will join women in a revaluing of traditional domestic work.

This apparently attractive vision is in my view gravely mistaken. Not only has it left the field to punitive neoliberal views, a problem in itself, but it has also held out the hope that there might be ‘soft options’ available to tackle chronic unemployment. These postindustrial soft options, however, have been rapidly transformed into harsh ones which have left the unemployed even more marginalised than before. Apart from economic liberals who welcome the capacity of unemployment to control workers and drive down wages, there are many who worry about unemployment but cannot see any genuinely new sources of jobs. How many really believe that a GST here or a new railroad there will have any significant effect? Many believe that microchips and robots have irrevocably destroyed industrial jobs; hence the tinkering offered by political parties is completely unconvincing. This cultural malaise about unemployment silences any hint of a Keynesian revival. Mass unemployment today appears quite different to that of previous periods. This time, there is little confidence that jobs will eventually return.

Instead, many find the postindustrial description of long-term trends much more persuasive. The first trend is the permanent decline and relocation of manufacturing jobs—the male ‘Fordist’ life-cycle is over. The second trend is the rise in service employment and a massive growth of female, part-time employment. Two interpretations of such trends suggest themselves—either we could move, like the USA, to a situation of ‘junk jobs’ with a permanent ‘underclass’, or to more ‘woman-friendly’ service and environmental forms of employment.

The description is convincing enough, but the conclusion often drawn—that we should abandon any search for new jobs—is far more questionable. The stress on a ‘post-employment’ society by progressives like Keane, Block, Offe and Jordan rejects any potential path to new forms of employment. This position, however, ends up with responses like those of economic liberals. A kind of convergence has occurred between the postindustrial search for ‘nonemployment’ and the neoliberal view of unemployment, which sees large numbers of jobless primarily as a means of bringing down wages.
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The postindustrial position appears at first sight to offer the exact opposite to a cheap labour force disciplined by a large pool of jobless, because the postindustrial proposals are based on the expectation that 'nonemployment' will radically undermine or subvert the conventional employment system. But this distinction depends on three major assumptions. The first is that a policy that aimed at separating income from work would be properly implemented by governments. That is, successive governments are expected to act benignly (and generously) in implementing a guaranteed income scheme and in supporting alternatives to conventional jobs. The second assumption is that markets generally would decline in importance if large numbers of people were engaged in non-market activities. Third, the allegedly subversive nature of the postindustrial strategy draws on the counter-culture experiments of the 1960s which rejected wage labour. The distinction between the neoliberal view and the postindustrial one depends on whether these three assumptions are well founded and, in my opinion, they are not.

Postindustrialists claim they are defending the unemployed by providing conditions that would challenge the prevailing system and overturn the present stigma and punishment meted out to the unemployed. For post-industrialists it is futile and undesirable to pursue job creation on the grounds that employment is a mere discipline that prevents wider democratic participation for various reasons. Employment for them is unrelated to citizenship, because universal civil, political and social rights should be safeguarded by governments and in the securing of these rights, formal participation in paid work is irrelevant, even counter-productive.

Yet some governments have actually aimed to implement postindustrial schemes, while in no way according with the postindustrial challenge to subvert the economic order. In a situation of rising welfare payments for the unemployed, governments have been more concerned to reduce these budgets. Accordingly, several governments have transformed ideas for guaranteed incomes, communes, worker co-operatives and 'informal work' into means of further marginalising those excluded from the labour market. They have used the schemes to legitimate their own failures to ameliorate the level of unemployment. More seriously, they have used them to render marginal categories even more powerless by withdrawing the possibility for the excluded to make full claims for citizen rights.

A guaranteed income scheme was nearly introduced in the US by President Nixon with the aim of reducing female welfare claimants and to force male black populations into low paid sectors of the labour market. In New Zealand, in the late 1980s, a 'compensation' to offset the previousLabour government's GST operated as a 'guaranteed income' for those on welfare or low wages. It lasted until the 1990 National government cut cash payments and reduced wages further with the Employment Contracts Legislation. This four-year provision was hardly an income guarantee of a lifetime. Similar problems lay behind the feminist movement's rejection of the idea of wages for housework.

In Australia, although the Hawke government insisted that it was committed to full employment, part of this commitment was directed towards a postindustrial pursuit of 'alternatives to paid work' (Hawke's phrase). Young unemployed were to learn how to survive on communes in the bush, and redundant workers were offered the opportunity to use their own savings to purchase their jobs and convert them into worker co-operatives. Rather than promoting a post-industrial vision, such 'alternatives' only served to remove the existing defences of the unemployed, and to trim welfare budgets.

Hence, governments have taken up postindustrial plans for quite different motivations, and yet the differences are almost imperceptible at the policy level. More seriously the actual plans often led to further punishment for those unable to find work.

The question about policy responses to unemployment, then, is whether there is an alternative to wage labour that does not seriously weaken the citizenship of whole categories of the population. The answer is that it seems highly improbable that there is. The second assumption is that markets in general will decline in importance with reduced labour force participation. A new economic sector will develop as a 'third way' neither state-run nor capitalist) causing the scope of markets to shrink.

In Third World countries, where labour and commodity markets are far less developed, the international markets have inordinate influence. But even the most powerful governments do not necessarily attempt to confront these markets unless they are faced with electoral and other costs. In this, Australia is of course a marginal player, for governmental intervention in the markets has been increasingly limited by long-term global developments.

This contemporary situation is one where the corporate 'citizens' of the world are in a position to pick and choose where the cheapest labour and land may be found, limited only by pockets of nation-state resistance and relatively weak international bodies like human rights and environmental bodies and the International Labour Organisation. For a semi-peripheral nation like Australia to search for alternatives to market participation in such a climate is to ignore these trends of global concentration, which are getting more powerful, not less.
The question of defending a new form of full employment in Australia is more difficult again, and could only make headway if there were international moves in this direction. But there is no foundation to the idea that people or groups can survive 'outside the system' in this situation. Where it was once possible to subsist by avoiding the markets as much as possible, the small-scale units of production and available land required for a return to widespread self-sufficiency no longer exist.

Rather, it is only possible to set up a worker cooperative or move to a commune if capital, skills, tools, materials and land are available. In this respect these alternatives are no different to other small businesses or farms. Furthermore, alternative structures of work do not necessarily render the state more accountable, or put any controls on the markets, even when they are more internally democratic than conventional places of employment. Even though the principle of co-operation is exemplary, those with the least resources are least likely to be attracted to a fledgling alternative, for they have the most to lose. France and Italy have the most developed co-operative sector; by contrast, Australia has a co-operative tradition of recessionary failures.

The other assumption of advocates of an era 'beyond employment' concerns the counter-culture's rejection of wage labour. According to postindustrialists, the counter-culture showed that alternatives to wage labour could have a radicalising potential. When imposed by governments from above, this is obviously a questionable assumption. But even the counter-culture itself became less 'subversive' as time went on. This was pointed out at the time, in Australia, in a debate between Dennis Altman and the New Left.

Although Altman was enthusiastic in the 1960s about the potential for cultural change, he quickly realised that the segment of the counter-culture which chose the self-marginalisation of rural commune life quickly became quiescent. The radical potential remained with the other elements of the counter-culture which turned to the feminist, gay and green movements. Nowadays, the commune movement in Australia is more accurately termed an 'alternative life-style'. It did increase the choice of available different ways of life, particularly for men, but those who chose to live on communes were mostly a social elite who possessed the cultural capital to return to conventional work if they wished. And, of course, communes are not in themselves self-sufficient.

The Australian experience of attempts to impose worker co-operatives and communes from above has been an entirely paternalistic one. Redundant workers did not wish to lose their lay-off pay in trying to manage the democratic structures of bodies which mostly lasted for less than a year. In reality they were passive clients who were to be educated in the skills of co-operation and who had to make constant appeals to the government for more money. Those involved in promoting co-ops were themselves divided about the most suitable structures. The teenagers who were to be moved to communes were not interested in learning about an alternative lifestyle: they wanted conventional jobs. This is not to say that more democratic work structures are unimportant, but rather that they should not be imposed from above, in times of recession, on those with the least material and cultural resources for survival, as an alternative to vigorous and effective employment policies.

In short, while the intellectual climate that fostered a postindustrial era 'beyond employment' explicitly rejected neoliberalism, the assumptions it makes about paid employment have nothing to say which can be set as an alternative to the strictures of economic liberalism on employment policy. The postindustrial search for 'alternatives' has fostered a belief that mass unemployment need not be solved in the conventional way. But there do not seem to be any 'alternative' utopias arising out of our existing unemployment mess. Of course, it can still be argued by postindustrialists that defending dull, powerless, paid work is inimical to the ideal of human emancipation. But the onus is also on the proponents of 'alternatives' to prove that neglecting to press for initiatives to increase conventional employment will not make the situation worse.

Finally, a word about the advantages of full-time employment, something seldom heard these days. In modern life a secure job does provide a source of identity—which is obviously of greater satisfaction when it is not dull. The question of dullness and skill are, however, often political issues about the capacity to define skill, working conditions and social usefulness. Paid employment may seem an onerous imposition, but it also provides a sense of fulfilment and of contributing to the social whole. It also offers protection against client status: to withdraw from work for various reasons of one's own choosing is different from being permanently excluded from employment. (A part-time job, meanwhile, involves a part-time wage—meaning, usually, poverty.) People who have spent at least some of their lives in paid employment are those whose rights are more safeguarded by virtue of the obligations they have been able, ideally, to assume freely in that employment.

In short, gaining access to one of the key modern arenas of social participation, the world of paid work, is more a beginning than an end.

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‘Those who lived in communes' were mostly a social elite with the cultural capital to return to conventional work if they wished’
JUST SAY NEO

As the neoliberal tide of the 80s recedes it becomes clear that its legacy is still a powerful one. NIKOLAS ROSE and GARY WICKHAM trace the ways in which economic liberalism has permanently altered the face of political life.

Neoliberalism, economic liberalism, 'economic rationalism': the terms evoke images of harsh, rightwing dogma and 'scorched earth' politics. To some extent these images are an accurate reflection of an existing and emerging reality. But in crucial respects they are misleading. Like the early AIDS campaign 'grim reaper' images, they frighten the children but don't provide a clear picture of the subject at hand.

Following the excellent lead in recent issues of ALR by Graham Burchell (ALR 144) and Mitchell Dean (ALR 145), we aim here to further elaborate neoliberalism. While we see neoliberalism as an increasingly successful technology of government, we certainly do not argue that ALR readers should embrace it. The policy consequences of neoliberalism are, in the main, anathema to those committed to the civilised democracy/social liberalism for most of this century.

In other words, we treat the neoliberalism seriously as an influential technology of government, but we eschew both the fantasy of the Right, that neoliberalism is messianic, and the fantasy of the Left, that it is an invading force whose rumbling trucks somehow magically attract erstwhile socialists keen to 'sell out'. Here we want to present a picture of neoliberalism in practice in Britain and to briefly suggest the extent to which neoliberalism has and has not influenced government in Australia.

Neoliberalism is less a revolution in government than a reorganisation of political reason that brings it into a kind of alignment with the technologies of government that have been taking shape in liberal polities over the last two centuries. The new political initiatives of neoliberalism certainly often take the form of the attempt to make entities autonomous from the state, or rather, to make the state autonomous from direct controls over, and responsibility for, the actions and calculations of businesses, welfare organisations and so forth. But these reorganisations of government are not intelligible in terms of a simple opposition of the interventionist to a non-interventionist state. Rather, they entail the adoption by the central state of a range of different devices which seek both to create a distance between the formal institutions of the state and other social actors, and to act upon them in a different manner.

Consider the fact that in both Britain and Australia over the past ten years social security mechanisms (and especially those dealing with the unemployed) have introduced more and more measures to separate themselves as formal state institutions from the 'clients' (especially the unemployed). Rules regarding eligibility for benefits have been tightened and 'special treatment' procedures (for example for unemployed professionals) have been scrapped.

The rise and fall of Margaret Thatcher in Britain provides several crucial elements to an understanding of the nature of neoliberalism, especially its differences with liberal social democracy. Some commentators regarded the coming to power of Margaret Thatcher in Britain, and Ronald Reagan in the United States, as a 'counter-revolution' against the politics of post-war liberal democratic society. Perhaps it was. But we need to ascertain what this counter-revolution was if we are to be able to assess it. The new political climate was certainly marked by the rise of a set of political ideals articulated in a neoliberal vocabulary, and a range of programs for transforming the ways in which economic, social and personal life were to be regulated. As is well known, neoliberalism articulates itself in terms of profound hostility to the 'interventionist' state.

While, for some 30 years following the publication of Hayek's The Road to Serfdom in 1944, this hostility seemed eccentric to the main lines of political debate, from the mid 70s onwards, in Britain, the United States and Australia, the rhetoric of neoliberalism began to underpin the appeal of conservative political programs and pronouncements. In Britain, the manifesto produced by the Conservative Party prior to their victory in the general election of 1979 presented some of its key proposals in these terms. And, after her election, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher became the most eloquent spokesperson for a politics against the state:

the first principle of this government...is to revive a sense of individual responsibility. It is to reinvigorate not just the economy and industry but the whole body of voluntary associations, loyalties and activities which gives society its richness and diversity, and hence its real strength...Since Burke's time the activities of the State have penetrated almost every aspect of life...
trouble is that when the State becomes involved in every strike, price or contract affecting a nationalised industry, its authority is not enhanced, it is diminished... In our party we do not ask for a feeble State. On the contrary, we need a strong State to preserve both liberty and order... to maintain in good repair the frame which surrounds society. But the frame should not be so heavy or elaborate as to dominate the whole picture... We should not expect the State to appear in the guise of an extravagant good fairy at every christening, a loquacious and tedious companion at every stage of life's journey, the unknown mourner at every funeral.

Neoliberal political rhetoric thus breaks with the assumptions, explanations and vocabularies of the field of political discourse mapped out by liberal social democracy. Against the assumption that the ills of social and economic life are to be addressed by the activities of government, it deploys theories of government 'overreach' and 'overload'. It counterposes the inefficiencies of planned economies to the strength of the market in picking winners. It claims that Keynesian demand management sets in motion a vicious spiral of inflationary expectations and currency debasement. And it follows the Austrian thinker Joseph Schumpeter in suggesting that big government is not only inefficient but malign.

According to this view, because parties have to compete for votes, they are pushed into making lavish promises to the electorate, fuelling rising expectations which can only be met by public borrowing on a grand scale. Further, because of the reliance of 'the welfare state' on bureaucracy, it is subject to constant pressure from bureaucrats to expand their own empires, again fuelling an expensive and inefficient extension of the governmental machine. Because it cultivates expectations that it is the role of the state to provide for the individual, the welfare state has a morally damaging effect upon citizens, producing expectations that government will do what only individuals actually can, engendering a 'culture of dependency'.

The boundaries of the state are to be rolled back; society is to be made innovative, productive and fulfilled through 'entrepreneurship'. The vocabulary of enterprise certainly has an economic reference, but its scope runs far wider. Neoliberalism argues that an economy structured in the form of relations of exchange between discrete economic units pursuing their undertakings with confidence and energy will produce the most social goods and distribute them in the manner most advantageous to each and to all. But that is not all: the rhetoric of enterprise also provides a rationale for the structuring of the lives of individual citizens and families. Individuals are to become entrepreneurs of themselves, shaping their own lives through the choices they make, striving to fulfil their aims. Families are to pursue their own ambitions, to take decisions as to their priorities and endeavour to maximise their own quality of life.
Neoliberalism is less a revolution than a reorganisation.

Not that the state has no part to play. The state must, first and foremost, be strong to defend the interests of the nation in the international sphere. The state also has a domestic role to play in providing a legal framework for social and economic life, and in ensuring public order. But within this framework autonomous actors—commercial concerns, families, individuals—are to go freely about their business, making their own decisions and controlling their own destinies. Many find in this emphasis on a more than minimal state in the rhetoric and programs of the new right a contradiction with the classical doctrines of neoliberalism. With degrees of stringency varying between Nozick, Hayek and Friedman, neoliberal philosophies agonise over how minimal the role of the state should be, though none argue for its strength.

But neoliberalism as a political 'rationality' is not equivalent to neoliberalism as a political philosophy—a rationality combines philosophical themes with those taken from elsewhere. Here a rhetoric of the nation, the family, the virtues of law and order, and the respect for tradition serves to align neoliberalism with traditional rightwing values, and simultaneously to open up a space for the elaboration of governmental programs.

Most of these elements of neoliberalism, as we hinted above, have applied just as much to Hawke's and Keating's Australia as to Thatcher's and Major's Britain. The rationalities and the philosophies of neoliberalism are definitely becoming part of mainstream political life in this country. However, the situation in Australia is quite different from that in Britain when the style of governing economic life is central to neoliberalism.

For neoliberalism any techniques of economic regulation must be concerned with the 'autonomy' of private enterprise. Neoliberals claim that these techniques are especially efficient because they operate by handling the multiplicity of tiny decisions and choices that constitute economic activity and which exceed the scope of even the most megalomaniac planner. And they question the possibility of the state establishing 'what is really going on' in terms of the division of state and civil society or state and market. However, while the programmatic language within which they first emerged might have devalued planning, these techniques themselves seek to govern economic actors through shaping their autonomous decisions. Crucial to this process is the emergence of managers committed to intellectual and calculative methods by virtue of their training and professional allegiances, capable of acting as relays between national economic objectives and the everyday activities of industry.

This style is much more influential in national government circles in Britain than it is in Australia. While the British government continues to deny the need for a formal prices and incomes policy and to reject direct negotiations with the nation's peak union body, for instance, Australian national government has been built around the Accord, featuring direct negotiations with the ACTU, since 1983. The British example is certainly being followed here, but only so far at the level of state governments such as Victoria. If the federal Coalition wins the forthcoming election, of course the above elaboration of the neoliberal style of governing economic life will almost certainly have to be applied to the national sphere as well as these states, and the Australian situation will much more closely resemble the British one.

None of the above is to say that a neoliberal polity like Britain is without a 'macroeconomic policy', a set of aspirations and programs for acting upon the economic life of the nation in order to promote desired economic ends. One strand of this policy is a range of diverse strategies to create and sustain a 'market', to reshape the forms of economic exchange in the direction of contractual exchange. Another takes the form of attempts at creating autonomy from (or for) 'the centre'. The first programs for this project sought to achieve it by 'hiving off' responsibilities to local authorities, nationalised industries, employers and unions. These were to function within a macroeconomic framework with an emphasis on reducing the public sector borrowing requirement, limiting public expenditure, and shifting from direct to indirect taxation.

The strategy here was to marginalise the problems stemming from macroeconomic policies, as well as to increase the influence of local citizens, consumers and union members over their respective organisations. As macroeconomic problems grew, these economic failures were attributed to the resistance to economic change mounted by powerful interest groups and institutions. So neoliberalism altered its strategy, seeking new ways to bolster the autonomy of the central state by changing the power networks within which these resisting organisations and institutions operated. Hence, while monetarism began life as a technique for taking policy decisions out of politics, making them 'automatic', it ended as a mechanism for re-establishing the role of politicians, enabling them to wield influence over employment levels and the like by decisions controllable by central governments.

The privatisation programs of the new neoliberal politics have formed perhaps its most visible strand, and one most aligned with the political ideals of market versus state. Cutting free utilities such as (in Britain) gas, phone and water, business such as the car and armaments
From the periphery to the centre, as in the reduction of the autonomy of local authorities. But most notably the Greater London Council—intermediate institutions have been abolished—by the state, as do the imperatives to profit. But this reconstruction of the form of economic regulation is less a revolution against the failure of central planning than a recognition of the difficulty of constructing a centrally planned economy, of the illusions of knowledge and power that such rationalities embodied.

In terms of economic regulations at least, a rigid distinction between nationalised and private enterprises is misleading. On the one hand, the degree of political direction over the activities of nationalised companies is variable but small—perhaps the principal form of intervention is or was the provision or refusal of investment capital. On the other hand, private sector enterprise is open to the many strictly speaking non-market mechanisms that have proliferated in advanced liberal democracies, with the rise of managers as an intermediary between expert knowledge, economic policy and business decisions. Of course, 'market forces' intersect in different ways with investment decisions and the like when businesses are no longer formally owned by the state, as do the imperatives to profit. But this reconstruction of the form of economic regulation is less a revolution against the failure of central planning than a recognition of the difficulty of constructing a centrally planned economy, of the illusions of knowledge and power that such rationalities embodied.

Another central programmatic plank of the new neoliberal rationality is hostility to 'intermediate institutions'. These are centres of institutional power distinct from the central state yet not apparently subject to the disciplines of the market. The attack on the power of the trade unions, the attempt to transform local government, hostility to 'quangos'—all these appear, on the surface, to be of a piece. In Britain, some intermediate institutions have been abolished—most notably the Greater London Council—while others have had their powers transferred from the periphery to the centre, as in the reduction of the autonomy of local authorities. But most significant has been the creation of a new intermediate space, neither private nor public, for the operation of regulatory bodies.

In Britain this has taken two forms. The first is the statutory creation of self-regulatory bodies operating within a framework of law. One example of such an arrangement is the establishment of a Securities and Investment Board under the Financial Services Act. The SIB will have substantial powers to authorise or refuse investment activity, thus possibly putting firms out of business. It will further delegate responsibility to five other self-regulating organisations responsible for various sectors of the financial services industry. These will have considerable powers, the Security Association responsible for the London Stock Exchange having an enforcement division of 120 with powers to seize documents and interrogate employees.

A second form of intermediate institution that has thrived within neoliberal government is a version of what has been termed 'private interest government'. This form of government is an arrangement (according to two recent analysts, Street and Skinner) "under which an attempt is made to make associative, self-interested collective action contribute to the achievement of public policy objectives". But in effect, such government by private interest embraces a range of intermediate organisations, from those regulating advertising standards to those regulating the dairy industry. Such entities act to translate between considerations of public policy and pressures for private profit. Formed by central government itself, though independent of its direct control, they nonetheless act to link the calculations and actions of very different organisations and businesses into a governmental network, falling outside the philosophical divisions of state and market.

At the rhetorical and programmatic level, neoliberalism also embodies a profound transformation in the mechanisms for governing social life. In place of collective provision and social solidarity the new rationality of government proposes notions of security provided through the private purchase of insurance schemes, health care purchased by individuals and provided by the health industry and efficiency secured through the discipline of competition within the market. The public provision of welfare and social security no longer appears as a vital part of a program for political stability and social efficiency.

Central to such a transformation has been a series of programs and strategies that have sought to penetrate the professional, political and bureaucratic bastions of welfare. Neoliberal programs to reform welfare draw support from their echo of a range of other challenges to the mechanisms of the welfare state.

Many radicals and socialists have argued that welfare has more to do with legitimating power than with equity.
Monetaryism has played a key role in breaching the ramparts of the welfare state. For example, when contemporary British hospitals are required to translate their therapeutic activities—from operating theatres to laundry rooms—into cash equivalents, a new form of visibility is conferred upon them, new relations established and new procedures of decision-making made possible. Making people write things down and what things people are made to write down is itself a kind of government of them, an encouragement to think about and note certain aspects of their activities according to certain standards. The figures themselves transform the activity: they enable new standards to be constructed and new comparisons and evaluations made.

The monetarisation of health through the mechanism of budgets and through the various devices of health economists effects a fundamental transformation in the power relations of the health apparatus. It is not an attempt to impose a power where previously none existed, but rather to transform the terms of calculation from medical to financial, and hence to shift the fulcrum of the health network from the consultants to the managers. And far from autonomising the health apparatus, power is relayed back from the operating theatre to the cabinet office, for the resources in which managers calculate are those controlled largely at the centre: money.

The rejigging of the apparatus of welfare put in place in the period since the end of the war entails the attempt to 'privatise' certain activities that were previously provided within the institutional apparatus of the state: in Britain the transfer of housing from local authorities to private landlords and housing associations, the attempt to redirect provision of hostels and the like to the 'voluntary' sector. No doubt much could be said about these programs and their objectives. Here only one point can be made.

Within the institutions of the state, welfare bureaucracies were a swarm of small fiefdoms riven with inter-professional rivalries, each trying to turn policy objectives, programs and re-
Why have film theorists shunned funny movies? Is it simply that theorists are unwilling to exacerbate their killjoy reputations by making a move on cinematic humour? Even more puzzling, given the way jokes have been used to beat women around the head, is the fact that the large and influential contingent of feminists writing on film have said so little on the perennially popular genre of comedy. Rather than wheeling out the old line about feminists’ lack of humour, I’d like to suggest that the tools of trade of film theorists are, in the fashion of a Laurel and Hardy sketch, quite destructively getting in the way of an investigation into the comic in films.

During the mid-70s, feminist accounts of film made a huge leap forward when attention shifted from stereotypes of women to the way in which the act of watching film is gendered. The key to this new approach was a picture of the processes of viewing, based on a metaphor between the darkened cinema and the scene of the child’s incorporation into society and language as described in rereadings of Freud. This metaphor has proved immensely productive. Unfortunately, the tendency to see even a symbolic family hearth as the uncomplicated domain of pink and blue playsuits has beset many feminist writers on film who have produced a diverse and fascinating range of film analyses in which influence of ethnicity (or indeed class, racism and so on) is either entirely ignored, or made to parallel neatly the workings of gender.

Perhaps the neglect of comedy, then, can be attributed to its manifest dependence on the play between particular notions of class, race, religiosity and a multitude of other social distinctions. In Jokes and their Relationships to the Unconscious, Freud suggests that jokes are a symptom of underlying psychic processes. Taking the substance of humour seriously, however, is one interesting way of discovering how popular culture links gender with other kinds of social identity. And what better example could present itself than Baz Luhrmann’s Strictly Ballroom?

One of the central scenes in Strictly Ballroom gives a strong indication that understanding comedy can involve relating ideas about gender to those around ethnicity. Fran’s grandmother, teaching Scott to dance “from the heart”, comments admiringly to her rather embarrassed grandchild about the nice body exposed by his unbuttoned shirt. The older woman’s remark is in Spanish, conveniently subtitled for English-speaking members of the audience. It’s a funny moment, playing on assumptions about women’s (and especially older women’s) supposed disinclination to look at male
bodies. The joke signals a reversal of the romance plot, suddenly giving Fran inside knowledge and the upper hand in a relationship with Scott which had until then been characterised by his mastery and her ignorance. The recourse to subtitled Spanish also pulls the audience into line with the two women's look at a male body, making explicit the undercurrent of display present in the flamboyant dance sequences throughout the movie. Feminist accounts have pointed out that in classical cinema it's overwhelmingly male characters who serve as the proxy for the spectator, more often than not directing the gaze of both camera and audience at the image of a female body. Even within Strictly Ballroom, the removal of Fran's glasses is a time-honoured metaphor for her transformation from observing ugly duckling to an attractive dancer at the centre of attention. Given the importance of this convention, it is of considerable interest that it's the timely intervention of Spanishness which triggers the audience's identification with a female gaze at a male body. Understanding the effects of ethnicity might be crucial, at least in this film, to an understanding of gender and comedy.

Spanishness isn't of course the only ethnicity which features in Strictly Ballroom. Rather, it's a particular variant of Australian identity which gives the movie its distinctive quality—a specifically feminised kind of kitsch. The film traces the struggle of the talented Scott for an individual kind of dance-sport takes place that is one of the most notable features of the film. The stylisation of the costumes, dance steps and even personality (Scott's mother exclaims "I've got my happy face on") evoke a kind of rampant conformism which is personified primarily by the women in Scott's life.

The portrayal of Scott's ambitious and conventional mother and his eccentric and brilliant father elicits groans of recognition from those schooled in film cliche. It's worth noting also that Scott and his initial dancing partner Liz fit the same mould of female convention and male innovation. In fact, the identification of women with unquestioning conformism is a hoary connection, going back at least to responses to modernity in the early part of this century. Critics of the move to mass culture viewed undifferentiated and easily led, but particularly feminised.

Fashion is often depicted as the realm of an irrational female conformism. The preposterous costumes which characterise the ballroom dancers in Strictly Ballroom powerfully and comically evoke this connection. It's significant that although a few hints through the film indicate a contemporary setting, the costumes, sets and sound-track give the film a 'retro' feel. Following the maxim that there's nothing so ridiculous as last decade's fashions, this dated quality makes it all the easier to laugh at the milieu of compulsory ballroom dancing.

Strictly Ballroom's depiction of the conformism of the dance studio also has overtones of the version of Australian suburbia drawn upon in the persona of Edna Everage. It's an Australianness of the cultural cringe; a feminised alternative to the bush battler image. The hit song of the film, John Paul Young's disco tune "Love is in the Air," captures this version of Australianness perfectly. A kitsch classic of a period that came in for a great deal of ridicule in the 80s, the song wallows in romance. The use of JPY's song in the film is perhaps best described as reaffirmative parody, since the final sequence isn't just a take-off of the song on the soundtrack, but borrows its romantic connotations as well. Nonetheless, the song neatly encapsulates the central joke in the film—a joke on a feminised, and particularly Australian, kind of conformism.

Of course, there is at least one woman in Strictly Ballroom who escapes the taint of conformity—and that is Fran, Scott's dancing partner. The 'authentic' culture of her family lends her dancing, as well as her person, distinction. Scott's first recognition of Fran's choreographic ability, for instance, is prompted by a snappy Spanish-flavoured step. The laughter that greets Scott's attempts at the ballroom version of the paso doble in the presence of Fran's family provides an internal reference point for jokes on the stylised qualities of ballroom dancing.

Two kinds of women—Scott's mother and partner on the one hand, and Fran on the other—embody Scott's two alternatives of the romantic novel plot. Along with romance and drama, the tension between these two versions of femininity provides most of the humour of the film. However, without recognising the weight of 'authentic' ethnicity in the plot, or the significance of an Australianised conformism in the depiction of the women in the film, one would be hard-pressed to see how Strictly Ballroom works as a comedy. Attending to these elements within film doesn't mean losing sight of cultural influence of gender. Rather, it means grasping the nuances of gender itself. And, hopefully, in the process, gaining some insight into the gendering of comedy.

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THE RISE OF THE NOAM PETER WINTONICK AND MARK ACHBAR'S MANUFACTURING CONSENT: NOAM CHOMSKY AND THE MEDIA has been very well received, not just by its 'natural constituency' of leftish political and media activists, but by a wider audience both at the cinemas and through its screening on SBS-TV. Considering that the film is about one prominent academic and his views on the world, and consists largely of a series of interviews with, or monologues by, Chomsky, its success might seem, on the face of it, surprising.

The book by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman upon which the film is based represents the most sophisticated and empirically grounded presentation yet of a 'propaganda model' of the operation of the mass media in contemporary democratic societies. For the authors, the mass media in the United States functions as a means of exercising 'thought control' over its intelligentsia and citizenry, in the interests of the dominant political and economic elites. Like other analyses of this type, it sees the concentration of ownership of mass media in the hands of a small number of large, profit-driven corporations, and their dependence upon corporate advertising revenues for commercial survival, as being at the base of explaining their operations and their effects.

Ownership and advertising dependence are two of the 'filters' which, Chomsky argues, skew the process of news-gathering and selection in some directions and not in others. Others include the dependence established by journalists upon a few information sources, of which government, business and 'experts' funded by either or both of these sources are the most important; the use of 'flak' by think-tanks and syndicated columnists as a means of 'disciplining' the media and controlling potential renegades; and the use of 'anti-communism' as an ideological control mechanism.

An interesting aspect of the film Manufacturing Consent is the way it relates Chomsky's analysis of the media and his broader political economy of American power to his earlier work in structural linguistics. For Chomsky there is a human nature which is fundamentally rational and enquiring, or what is now called a 'rational Cartesian subject' (after 17th Century French philosopher René Descartes who sought to establish a mathematical theory of mind). The violence of contemporary democratic societies is the way in which they prevent real human needs, such as the needs for creative work and free enquiry, from being realised.

The significance and shortcomings of this conception of knowledge, power and human nature is intimated at in Manufacturing Consent by a brief excerpt from a Dutch television program from 1971, where Chomsky featured in an interview with French political philosopher Michel Foucault. For Foucault, the interesting political and intellectual question is not whether or not there is a 'human na-
tured', but lies in considering the effects in Western societies of seeking to answer that question, and to that shape institutions around the sorts of answers reached. The consequence in Foucault's research was that they turned from the question of the 'why' to the 'how' of power, and from abstract discussions of human nature to more specific understandings of the formation of social subjects.

This has a bearing on some of the limitations of Manufacturing Consent. At one point Chomsky is asked by a Canadian student newspaper editor to expand upon how the power systems he has outlined actually work. The student gets a fairly blunt answer to the effect that as soon as you challenge corporate power in media work, you will be crushed by those dominant elites, whether you work for a major media institution or for a student newspaper—unless you are simply being ignored. To me this did not answer the question. There is a sense in which the New York Times editor featured in the film is correct to say time pressures and forms of routinisation in journalistic practice are a more powerful force in 'framing' particular issues in a certain way than the direct intervention of proprietors, their agents or powerful vested interests. What needs to be added to his picture, however, is a consideration of the ways in which ideas of 'journalistic professionalism' interact with both such routines and power constraints, as well as with the sorts of power systems outlined by Chomsky, to what comes to us as news.

It is also notable that both the film and Chomsky's overall analysis are very America-centric, and particularly centred around the gap between the ideals and the practice of US foreign policy. It is not clear how applicable such an analysis is to countries such as Australia, where domestic politics are not so much driven by foreign policy issues. Another problem relates to Chomsky's idea of 'manipulation': it is clear from the film that the mass media manipulates and distorts the truth, but is a truly truthful presentation of news, which presents all facts and opinions, possible given constraints of time and format? More significantly, if the news media is manipulative, then so is the film. This is not a criticism of the film as such—all films of this type seek to generate a sympathetic portrayal of their subject—but it does point to an important political point.

Part of the reason why certain viewpoints have predominated in the news media in recent years is that their advocates have employed quite targeted media strategies, relating an assessment of new routines to the deployment of resources to particular ends. This has mostly been the prerogative of 'think-tanks' and corporate-funded bodies, but such strategies have also been employed by groups such as Greenpeace to good effect. In Australia it has often been argued in the 1980s (quite contrary to the situation in the mid-70s) that the Labor Party gets an unreasonably positive presentation from the media. This is usually explained by an argument that journalists are pro-Labor, but I believe the answer lies more in a better media strategy, combined with other forms of social and ideological mobilisation, than the Coalition has thus far been able to develop. The period leading up to the next federal election will certainly provide an interesting 'case study' of such a question.

The sort of 'balance' the news media realises on any issue at any particular time will always reflect in part the distribution of power resources in the overall society. But the relationship is not as straightforward as Chomsky and other advocates of the 'propaganda model' suggest. For those with different political agendas, the lesson of Manufacturing Consent may be to learn how to better 'manage' the media, as well as posing more abstract questions about bias and truth.

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MANUFACTURING CONSPIRACY

One simply has to say the words 'the media' in some circles to immediately identify the force responsible for a multitude of social evils. It's just like saying 'Hinch' or 'Sixty Minutes' or 'John Laws' or 'bloody Gerard Henderson' (or for Age readers 'Michael Barnard'). Thus, Chomsky's views on the media in Manufacturing Consent 'strike a chord' with many people on the Left, appealing because of their similar muddled mixture of valid criticism, ignorance and poorly thought out assumptions.

At one point in Manufacturing Consent Chomsky contends that the media's preoccupation with sport is a diversion to keep people amused and entertained while the real policy makers get on with the job in secret and away from the eyes of the populace. It's not his main point but it's a good place to start.

I never watch sport on TV. Organised team sport has never appealed to me and watching it bores me; I don't understand why some of my friends waste hours watching it. But as far as I know the fact that they watch it does nothing to blunt their critical faculties or to 'manufacture consent' within their skulls. If people watch lots of sport, game shows and sitcoms on TV and little else, the chances are they will be poorly informed about national politics and social issues. They will probably have views on these things, but they will not be informed by much actual information. This may (though certainly not 'will') lead them to have conservative views. But are their conservative views ('consent') formed by their TV watching habits? And is it really possible that TV executives flood the network with oodles of entertainment, sport and sitcoms to keep the masses' minds off the actions of the rich and power-
It's obviously not as simple as that. The social values which underlie many sitcoms and current affairs programs exist 'out there' in the real world as much as 'inside' the production teams that produce them. In my experience, while journalists and media people too often resort to the argument that 'we give them what they want', there is a sense in which they are right. And there is definitely a sense in which TV ratings and circulation mean something.

This is the real problem with Chomsky's railing against sport: it's a kind of criticism which lets journalists and media people off the hook too easily. It's easy for journalists to answer (or usually ignore) such silly criticism and carry on as if all critics are similarly intellectual snobs or totally off-beam.

The really telling criticism of contemporary media behaviour is not the fact that people like to be entertained, but that, increasingly, TV news and current affairs and press coverage is being presented simply as entertainment. Shuffled aside in this process is a body of practices and beliefs about the ideals of journalism that get in the way of such 'infotainment'. A recent edition of Channel Nine News covered three car accidents in the space of its 18 minutes or so of non-sport news. If you asked the news editor or the journalists at Nine why this was so, in all likelihood they would say it was a slow news day. Or maybe they would respond "that's what our viewers want to know" —and point to their smashing ratings success as the final answer.

But, quite independent of ratings, journalism must have its own standards. Journalism must have some concept of professionalism and of public service. One of the most serious criticisms of the media' is that too often it doesn't live up to its self-proclaimed goals of informing people. But often it is as much to do with laziness, cowardice and place-seeking as it is by the conservative values of media people, junior and senior, let alone Chomsky's grand conspiracy.

Manufacturing Consent has a dramatic sequence which compares the tiny coverage in the New York Times given to East Timor between 1975 and 1979 compared to that provided for Cambodia in the same period. In both countries genocide was taking place. In Timor it was by the USA's ally Indonesia while, in Cambodia, it was by America's enemies. Of course, it is not surprising that a US newspaper covers Cambodia more than Timor, given the more overt and long-lasting US entanglement with Indochina. Yet even this rings untrue in Australia where the media covered East Timor extensively and where, in some cases, dramatic news stories and pictures of Indonesian atrocities have galvanised public opinion.

In fact, that strong media coverage and exposure of the horror of Indonesian aggression didn't change Australia's policy on East Timor much. And that's significant. The power to change policy lies in the hands of the bureaucracy and the elite in political parties who are often only indirectly affected by public opinion or 'the media'. Chomsky's right that powerful corporate and political elites prefer to operate in secrecy. And there is far too little commitment by TV, radio and press to investigative work to remedy that situation. But that has more to do with laziness and tight-fisted budgets than it does with a desire by editors or owners to protect the powerful.

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JUST DESERTS?

Boris Frankel: he's not the Messiah, just a very naughty boy, reports PAUL PATTON.


Frankel's book is intended as a scathing critique of the 'prophets' of contemporary Australian political culture. According to Frankel, the New Right, Accordists, Left Technocrats, Feminists, Environmentalists, Aboriginal activists and enthusiasts of popular culture all, whether by design or ruse of history, conspire to produce an intellectual, cultural and political desert. This is not the 'desert' beloved of the Nietzschean philosopher, "where the strong independent spirits withdraw and become lonely", much less the 'desert' produced and inhabited by Deleuzian nomads, but rather the wasteland of a public sphere swept clean of alternative policies by the twin scourges of economic rationalism and cultural postmodernism. On both sides of politics, Frankel informs us, we are faced with only more or less rigorous versions of the same imperative to encourage a productivist culture and to transform this country into an economically viable competitor in the emerging global market economy.

On the ruins of the oppositional Left, he complains, we find only postmodern cynicism, mindless relativism and a general retreat from the heroic ambitions of the revolutionaryies of yesteryear. What Australian political culture lacks, according to Frankel, is a comprehensive vision of an alternative ecologically sustainable and anti-capitalist society: not just the founding principles, but the detailed economic and political proposals which would show how a society "based on such things as a reduced working week, the redistribution of wealth, as well as the reorganisation of paid and unpaid labour in the domestic and public spheres" might be implemented and maintained.

Clearly, Frankel himself is a prophet of sorts, crying out in the wilderness for a return to the old ways of Left critique and analysis: utopian vision and unambiguous moral and aesthetic values, all grounded upon the bedrock of institutional and political-economic analysis. This book we are told, is but the first of a two or three volume series which will eventually present not only an analysis of economic policy and organisational changes in the Australian polity, but also detailed alternative policies and institutional arrangements.

As an historical materialist aware of the far-reaching changes in the capitalist modes of production, exchange, consumption and communication during the latter part of the 20th century, and sensitive to the manner in which these have constrained the rationalising agendas of Australian governments during the 70s and 80s and 90s, Frankel is not optimistic about the prospects for a radical alternative: "It must be said that the choice confronting Australians at the moment is bleak indeed. Essentially, we have a large current account trade deficit and a giant surplus of old ideas and old organisations."

Undeterred by the historical failure of Old and New Left programs for large-scale social change, he suggests that the fault lies entirely with the Left itself: "What undermined the Left, in countries such as Australia, was its inability to convince its own members, let alone many citizens, that it had the theoretical solutions and practical organisational capacity to deal with major socio-economic problems. It was overrun by default." Supposing that he could overcome this default in the changed circumstances of the 90s and provide us with ideas that would galvanise a population to concerted and coherent action, as well as show us how to redistribute wealth, maintain living standards and convert to an ecologically sustainable economy, without penalty at the hands of international commodity and capital markets, Frankel would be more than just a prophet. He would be the messiah.

Readers could be forgiven for wondering why this undead Author does not simply get on with the positive task instead of devoting 374 pages to denouncing the insufficiencies of others, many of whom would not recognise themselves as his competitors in such a project. It is, after all, a distinctive feature of the book that everybody gets a serve: the Old and the New Left, the ALP, the ACTU and assorted other Left Technocrats; the Old and New Right; Postmodernists and the liberal intelligentsia.

Frankel's ideal of a comprehensive and economically grounded critical alternative ensures that everyone else falls short. Either they have taken the path of economic realism (Accordists and Left Technocrats, along with the economic rationalists of the New Right) and given up the prospect of anti-capitalist values, or they have embraced anti-capitalist
values but given up on the attempt to implement these through social and institutional change (Environmentalists, Radical Feminists, Postmodernists and some Cultural pluralists).

The scope of Frankel's radical critique is such as to ensure that he is never without a put-down. So, for example, a dominant theme of his critique of postmodern theories is the manner in which they have contributed to the reduction of politics to culture (read: abandoned political economy for textual and cultural studies).

But then when he turns to discuss post-marxist cultural policy theorists who do take seriously the need for economically sustainable cultural practices, he finds fault with their abandonment of aesthetic principles. Never mind that it is only the idea of such principles that sustains his criticism, the mere promise that old wine can be made to fill new bottles.

Frankel is not completely oblivious to political movements of the last 30 years or so. However, while he admits that marxism may not be adequate to deal with ecological crises, gender relations and other aspects of sexuality and culture, this does not appear to imply more than superficial changes to his own position. Thus, while he is aware that the critiques of mass culture by members of the Frankfurt School betray an unsustainable elitism, Frankel nevertheless longs for a similar position which would retain the critical connotation of the very concept 'culture industry'. On this view, aesthetic excellence is simply incompatible with market relations, as are moral values or any acceptable forms of social or political life. How can beauty triumph in Australian or other capitalist cities, Frankel asks, 'where design is constantly subordinated to private developers and their real estate speculative investment strategies?' So much for 20th century architecture and design.

So what are the conditions under which beauty can triumph? Presumably not the oppressive social hierarchies of pre-capitalist societies. Frankel's attachment to such simplistic oppositions as that between beauty and private development, or those between capitalist social relations and relative equality between men and women, between market relations and ecologically sustainable economic growth, amounts to a massive strategy of deferral. Political culture is barren, it would seem, so long as it does not contribute to the attainment of the anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal and ecologically sustainable utopia. At one point, Frankel approvingly cites Pierre Bourdieu's description of the lifestyle of the rising petit bourgeoisie as one governed by "deferred pleasure". Structural change may defeat the expectations of hard-working savers and lead to disenchantment and bitterness. Frankel's diagnosis of the failure of the Left, the 'sell-out' by the Accordists and the 'moral nihilism' of Postmodernists is such a litany of resentment that one cannot but suspect a similar structure of deferral underlying his own aspirations.

Ironically, he speaks in tones that resemble those of the prophet whose teaching of weariness, failure and futility Nietzsche's Zarathustra rejects. Not that we should expect someone as ill-disposed as Frankel is to anything remotely resembling postmodern theory to count Nietzsche among those who might have something to contribute to "the difficult task of constructing a "postmodern politics". Others have learnt from Nietzsche, however, what many have experienced within the day-to-day politics of some left, feminist and environmental groups—namely that the structures of transcendence and deferral which have governed much 'revolutionary' thinking sustain their own forms of oppression.

Indeed, remnants of stalinist logic occasionally surface in Frankel's text. For example, after allowing some value to poststructuralist reappraisal of aspects of the myth of Australian identity, he cautions the reader that "while it is a good thing that the political culture embodied in the 'Australian legend' is being subjected to radical critique, it must not be forgotten that the New Right also is committed to dismantling key aspects of the 'Australian character'.

Thus is the 'complicity' of postmodernism and the New Right established: not only does the former attack some of the same targets as the latter (never mind how different their critical strategies), but they ignore economics in favour of such secondary cultural matters as texts and bodies, all the while abstraining from offering alternative policies. The silence of Postmodernists when it comes to opposing economic rationalist policies is proof of complicity. Frankel subscribes to a magical kind of cultural causation according to which Postmodernists simultaneously ignore economic analysis and 'reduce' political economy to cultural analysis. Anti-humanist analyses of cultural policy simultaneously pursue mindless cultural relativism and 'endorse' the attitudes of the New Right. The shadow logic of 'objective counter-revolutionaries' is not far behind.

Such a mode of criticism may be reason to doubt the moral credentials of Frankel's utopia. Indeed, at times he does betray a certain fondness for the communitarian beliefs of the Old Right—even while pointing out the degree to which their commitment to the market logic of capitalism helps to undermine the conditions under which forms of community might be restored.

But even if one were sympathetic to the vague outlines of Frankel's eco-socialist utopia, one could not help but wonder whether this might not be subject to a similar dilemma. On the one hand, a commitment to a realistic understanding of the economic and institutional conditions of social life; on the other, an aspiration to comprehensive rupture with those conditions.

To know whether Frankel's agenda was anything more than wishful thinking one would need not only a more detailed statement of that agenda but also a better understanding of the constraints upon economic and social change in the present. To the extent that this book produces neither, it is a paradigm of really useless polemic.

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Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree, by Tariq Ali. (Chatto and Windus, 1992, $39.95), Reviewed by José Borghino.

Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree is Tariq Ali's second novel. His first, Redemption, (published in 1990) was a cheeky satire about the politico-sexual machinations of the far Left; its petitifoggyy, its inbred self-indulgence and its paranoid sectarianism.

The high water mark of Ali's notoriety came in the late 1960s. His work for Bertrand Russell's Peace Foundation and Michael Heseltine's Torn magazine took him to the world's hotspots—Vietnam, Cambodia, Jordan, Bolivia, Berlin, Moscow—and brought him to the attention of the CIA. Back in Britain, he was targeted by the Special Branch, the Director of Public Prosecutions ordered an enquiry into his activities, and both Tory and Labour MPs clamoured for his deportation while John Lennon wrote a political autobiography of the 700 years of Islamic art, history and culture in Spain. When the Catholic monarchs marched in, and especially when they appointed Cisneros, this long tradition of social and religious tolerance was wiped out.

Ali opens the book with a scene that articulates the problems with the book: it deals with a dead-end culture—not the Moorish culture of post-conquest Granada in general but that of its ruling class. Ali has focused on the family that owns the small town of al-Huydal and its surrounding territory, and who, of course, have the most to lose from being dispossessed.

This helps him create some ethical tension because they would also have the most to gain from converting to Christianity. But, having set them up, as Ali does, as unquestionably honourable and honest folk, it is inconceivable that they should choose anything but an honourable and grisly end. Anything else would be like Luke Skywalker in Star Wars betraying Princess Laya and setting up a McDonald's franchise with Darth Vader on Pluto—no way José!

True, the villagers of al-Huydal, who include Jews and Christians, also choose to fight and die alongside their Muslim overlords, but by then they've been surrounded by cut-throat Christian soldiers anyway. It is also certainly true that Muslim Spain was considerably more tolerant of its subjugated Christian and Jewish populations than the Catholics turned out to be. My quibble is not with history but with this novelisation. It may serve Ali's purpose that the townsfolk are indiscriminately butchered regardless of creed because it underlines the polemic he's pushing about the blind fanaticism of 16th Century Spanish Catholics. As a novelistic device, however, it banishes any hope of the characters rising above the rhetoric and being any more than cardboard cutouts moved around to illustrate a thesis.
In the end, even the heroic resistance of the town against the bloodthirsty Christians reads annoyingly like a boys' own version of Islam's Last Stand. And, anyway, does anyone in the world, except perhaps the head of Opus Dei, believe that the Spanish Inquisition and the State that ran it, were anything but cruel, ignorant and corrupt? What little dramatic tension there is in Shadows of the Pomegranate tree appears not when Ali is dealing with the central members of this noble family (who remain predictable throughout), but whenever Miguel or any other peripheral characters who have converted are on stage. A martyred end is the stuff of epic and propaganda—day-to-day ambivalence, humiliation, and contradiction are much better subjects for a novel.

To give him his due, Ali has resuscitated a small piece of history and given it some human dimension as well as connecting it to the present day. As an idea for a novel about the politics of race, Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree is excellent. As a novel, however, it's mediocre.

JOSÉ BORGHINO is a freelance Spaniard.
fies competing discourses around the self-starver's body using an eclectic theoretical approach, drawing on theory from phenomenology to postmodernism.

Robertson traces the process by which self-starvation moves from the religious realm in Mediaeval Europe to the medical clinic in the 19th century and finally to the psychiatrist's couch in the 20th century (after a brief foray into the endocrinologist's laboratory in the early part of the 20th century). However, she moves beyond the familiar chronology to speculate about future trends in explanatory, diagnostic and therapeutic paradigms. Robertson displays a refreshing intellectual self-awareness in much of the book, and is especially cautious about proposing feminist therapy as the final stage utopia of this historical process. She suggests that, in striving for a piece of the action, feminist therapy may become no more benign than its precursors. It may represent just another discourse striving for ascendancy at the expense of consumers of therapeutic services.

Where Rodin invites women to test their obsession against the 'normal' using quantitative scales (reinforced with writing and movement), Robertson envisages a far more fluid process of therapy. She encourages women to develop a new vocabulary (verbal and nonverbal) within which to 'write, speak and be heard'. Laughter, pleasure, playfulness, games and music are seen as important therapeutic activities, alongside art, journal-keeping, visualisation and memory work. She emphasises the lost choices and options that women relinquish in assuming such labels as 'anorexic', and in the same vein as 'narrative' writers such as Michael White (Literate Means to Therapeutic Ends) encourages women to 'articulate other parts of the self outside of so-called typical anorexic patterns'. In other words, the self is not 'given': it can be constructed and multiply-constituted.

Robertson points to the central role of language in the constitution of the self: "It is through the acquisition of language that the individual develops a sense of self and enters the patriarchal symbolic order." She emphasises the need to step back from the 'anorexic body' and self as a psychiatric category and create a voice outside the patriarchal symbolic order. This contrasts with Rodin's tendency to cast her audience as 'potential patients' to be scrutinised from the viewpoint of the 'normal' and in need of cues (or as she states it—"information") on how to enter the 'normal' order.

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**Discussion**

Why the Left should pause for thought about Victoria; that damned new design.

**Bully for Boofhead**

Jeff Kennett must be given credit for being the most honest politician in the land. He promised Boofhead and he delivered Boofhead. The pay rise for the minister in charge of lowering everybody else’s pay is just about the level of decision-making that the voters had been led to expect. So, too, more or less, is the new silver service for the Parliament House dining room.

Complaints about the new government’s broken promises are risible. By the prevailing standards of political rhetoric his lies were trivial, indeed ritual. In any case, by dishonestly concealing its debts on such a massive scale, the former Labor government has given him an excellent excuse to break any promise he likes. Comparisons of Kennett with Hitler are particularly fatuous, and quite insulting to the victims of the real Hitler. Kennett was elected by a clear majority in a fair election. The Labor government was thrown out because it ran up enormous debts and did a great deal of damage to the state’s economy. The statistics are sufficiently well known to need no detail here. Yet the most prominent opponent of the new regime, John Halfpenny, talks as though state budgetary problems simply do not exist and mindlessly pushes for ongoing industrial action which can only damage the state further.

It is time for the Left to stop moaning and groaning, to admit frankly that we made a mess of things, and do some solid thinking about what went wrong. What do we want to achieve in government, and how will we go about achieving it? The Labor Party can hardly offer itself to the public in future as the party of increasing debt and economic decline. Without serious thought and careful analysis the Left will simply become marginalised in the political process and, indeed, that is what it will deserve.

Among the issues to be resolved will be the following:

* How does a party with a strong power base in public sector unions deal with the need for structural change and efficiency in the public sector? A lot of progress has been achieved in this area elsewhere. In NSW the railways have been modernised gradually without forced redundancies. Sadly, the Victorian situation is now too serious for this to be possible.

* How can education, with a limited budget, improve the chances of children from disadvantaged backgrounds? There is a common perception that Victoria has spent heavily but it may even have had the opposite effect.

* How can health services be made more efficient without loss of equity?

* How can environmentalism be reconciled with social equity? Victoria under Labor had the most zealous Environmental Protection Agency in Australia, and the lowest level of investment. If we are to advocate zero growth we should do so frankly and examine the implications for social equity. The losers otherwise are likely to be those at the bottom of the social pecking order, certainly not those at the top.

An economic crisis of the proportions which we are now experiencing will entail great social change. It entails both opportunities and threats to improvement in social equity. The fatuous post-Kennett election debate ignores the critical issue of the times.

**Rodney Henderson,**
Annandale, NSW.

**Not Your Type**

Why have you done this to me, a reader of ALR from the first issue? ALR’s November issue had a crunched up typeface which made reading hard work instead of a pleasure. Why the change from the previous typeface which was reader-friendly? If the new typeface heralds the new style of ALR that has been forecast I dread what other changes are contemplated.

**Jack Hutson,**
Canterbury, Vic.

We happen to like the new typeface but astute readers will notice that it has been increased in size since the November issue, to be easier on the eye.— Ed.

**Coming Up In ALR**

A Special Issue:

ALR’s Agenda For The Fifth Term, plus women and cities, republicanism, AIDS policy and much more. In your local newsagent by March 4. Don’t miss it.
I don't discriminate either. I'll read about anything. It's just as easy to shell out too much money for a wanky British style glossy as it is to pick up the latest issue of Simpsons Illustrated (especially when they throw in nifty gifts like a free pair of 3-D glasses!).

But as any fellow member of Mags Anonymous will tell you, the time of year when you can really go into a feeding frenzy is the annual round-up. The 20 best records of 1992; the 50 best dressed people of 1992; the 100 most nicely groomed pooches of 1992—it all adds up to fascinating reading. The main reason for the fascination is that when you discuss these articles with fellow mag junkies at parties, you can scoff at the choice of music/the drastic dress sense/the poorly coiffed pooches. In reality you're thinking “Shit, I've never even heard of half the bands in this list!”

There was only one problem with the reams of information that flooded the racks as 1993 lumbered into view. Where was the list of the most ingenious people of the year? I'm not talking about ground-breaking physicists or fearless environmentalists or genre-busting novelists here. I'm talking about people like that guy up in Queensland who happened to drop into conversation that he had scored a cameo role in Beverly Hills 90210. He was lying, of course, but faster than you could say “Luke Perry's sideburns are, like, totally to-die-for,” he was having limousines, bodyguards, free passes to nightclubs and bevies of blonde females pressed upon him. It speaks volumes for the mentality of the Australian public. So much is made of the alleged Tall Poppy Syndrome in this country, but what about the phenomenon of elevating completely ordinary (and in many cases less than ordinary) people to the status of godhead?

Let's call this species MUFFIES (Mostly Untalented Famous Folk) and marvel at their achievements and their public profile, while carefully considering them for nomination for the Australian Of The Year. You may have your own favourites, but here for your edification and future dinner party argument fodder, is my Top 10 MUFFIES OF 1992.

1. Elle Macpherson—Not only for that rivetting one hour special about the making of her Balinese calendar. And not only for her tarttong arguments detailing why she refused to appear nude in Playboy (at the time she was only wearing a bit of dental floss on her private regions). Mainly because of a comment she made last year which will endear her to educators for ever. Why doesn’t Elle have any books in her house? “Because I never read anything I haven’t written.” Role model ahoy!

2. Doug Mulray—I can’t understand why everyone’s so up in arms about the fact that he’s a sexist, racist, crass pig. Hasn’t anyone noticed his biggest crime? He’s not funny. Even if you don’t admire Kerry Packer for anything else, at least he terminated Uncle Doug’s highly entertaining video show at the half-way mark.

3. Noeline Hogan—OK, OK, we’re sorry Paul left you for Linda Whatsemame. Now could you please slip out the back quietly?

4. Noeline Donaher—Did you know that this shy, reclusive woman from a modest home in Sylvania Waters has had her life ruined by the media? She told us on the Midday Show, and on A Current Affair, and in Woman’s Weekly, and in TV Week, and...

5. The entire 1992 Australian cast of Jesus Christ Superstar—Andrew Lloyd Webber may be to music what Jackie Collins is to the art of the novel, but at least you could come away from the original JCS saying “nice sets”. A bunch of overpaid pop stars wandering around a stage while singing pop does not a spectacle make.

6. Athol Guy and Karen Knowles—Wouldn’t you like to be judged seriously on New Faces by the bespectacled bass player from The Seekers and high profile (and hey, what have you been up to for the last 10 years, Kaz?) former juvenile from Young Talent Time?

7. Tony Barber—No, honestly, Jeopardy is a completely new concept that’s never been seen on TV before. And no, rumours that I’m not overly versatile are completely exaggerated.

8. Molly Meldrum—An inspiration to us all. Who said you have to know anything about music to be the rock’n’roll guru of a country?

9. Daryl Somers—The leer of a used car salesman, the personality of a commercial FM radio jock, and a stuffed animal as a sidekick. It all adds up to top ratings and great television.

10. Adriana Xenides—What do you mean “Who”?? She’s the one who spins the letters around on Wheel of Fortune, and...um...well...she spins the letters around on Wheel of Fortune, OK?”

BARRY DIVOLA is a Sydney journalist. Despite the fact that his work appears in Who Weekly, Drum Media, Hot Metal, Juice, HQ and Girlfriend, he is still not famous. He is quite bitter about this.
ALR is radically cutting back its stock of old issues. This is the last chance to catch up on many past issues you may have lost, given away or which preceded your subscription.

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