
Ten years ago a book debating Australian industry policy would have focused on the questions of tariffs and industry protection. Today the debate has shifted. The free traders have won the tariff debate and there is a general acceptance of the inevitability of lower tariffs. The issue now is: how should the public sector respond to a post-tariff environment?

Australian Industry: What Policy? is a series of essays by policymakers, trade unionists and captains of industry. Overall, the book is a welcome contribution to an important debate. The issues are current, and the contributors cut across the political spectrum. Highlights include Paul Chapman's critique of free market orthodoxy, and Bruce Hartnett's piece on the role of government by Tony Cole, who oversaw much of the specific mining operations he promoted or oversaw. Much of the specific mining degradation promoted by his environmental concern.

How ironic and sad that Essington Lewis, acting as a good citizen to "green" Australia was the inadvertent carrier of this environmental disaster into the heart of a landscape he loved. How much better it would have been if he had concentrated his efforts on the direct environmental damage caused by BHP's mining and mineral processing or, if he had neglected the environment completely. By displacing his environmental concern from mining to the dry and dusty landscape he played his part in more extensive and serious damage than the mining operations he promoted or oversaw. Much of the specific mining damage can be repaired even now, but it is going to take great quantities of research and effort to overcome the degradation promoted by his environmental concern.

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The contributions by the economic dries and interventionists is provided by the debate on the role of the car industry. Costa, for the dries, argues that the Australian car industry is sub-standard and expensive: it is seen as a cost to society. If the industry cannot lower costs, the argument runs, then Australians should be allowed to import cars and the local industry should pack up. For Evans and Chapman, on the interventionist side, the car industry is important to the sustainability of manufacturing in Australia. Car companies demand skills and components. They have introduced new production technologies and techniques which have spread through other areas of manufacturing. Without the car industry, they argue, the future of Australian manufacturing is threatened. It is thus important in Australia (as in other car manufactur-
ing countries) that the state ensures the survival of this industry.

Ralph Evans, management consultant and current manager of Austrade, argues that competitiveness demands stronger firms which, in turn, demand changes in economic relationships and more sophisticated government intervention. Other writers follow up on various public policies and industry strategies to assist the dissemination of ‘best practice’, export marketing and strengthening linkage between manufacturing firms, research institutions and service industries.

A reading of Australian Industry: What Policy? suggests that the gulf between the economic dries and ‘unionists’, employers and management consultants is widening. The dries may have won the tariff debate, but they are locked into a rigid paradigm which is becoming irrelevant in tackling the issues raised by the increasing internationalisation of the Australian economy.

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Labour’s Utopias: bolshevism, fabianism, social democracy, by Peter Beilharz (Routledge, 1992). Reviewed by Geoff Dow.

I have often wondered about the tendency among academics to take at face value the claims of politicians, political movements and party propagandists to be marxist, socialist, social democrat or whatever. Don’t we need some more analytically secure basis for appraisal and, if necessary, criticism of the claims, programs, strategies and achievements of political activists, even if the evaluations are to remain contested, provisional discursive?

Labour’s Utopias, impressively researched in London, Amsterdam and Oxford, is concerned with the “different conceptions of socialism” to have emerged from the philosophical, sociological and political traditions of the West. It is a history, biographical and political, rather than an evaluation. Beilharz’s judgments will come through most clearly, I think, to those who are already familiar with them (through, for example, Thesis Eleven or his prodigious writings in ALR and elsewhere). They appear via comments on the issues presented by, and in terms dictated by the protagonists themselves; but the subsequent discussions seem to me to be unsatisfactory, almost as if recourse to abstract analysis of politics were now illegitimate.

The first chapter gives an indication of the questions the contemporary reader ought to be concerned about: citizenship, corporatism, productivity, the role of the state, the ontological role of labour, the scope of politics and, writ large, democracy. Chapter 2 is a survey of the conception of socialism preoccupying and constituting bolshevism. Here the variety of utopian hopes is well demonstrated—from Lenin’s elitist politics to Trotsky’s apparently over-enthusiastic pursuit of “Department One marxism”, to dispute in the 1920s around Bukharin and Preobrazhensky. Once again, Beilharz is insistent that we should share his concern for specific questions: the lack of attention to differentiation, excessive faith in Western rationality, cavalier attitudes to coercion, the absence of a clear definition of socialist accumulation and the ill-preparedness of many of the bolsheviks to think beyond the parameters of Marx’s writing. “Too late does Lenin discover that humans do no live by bread alone.” But what was Lenin, celebrated until last year as a nation-builder, able to learn from Marx?

When the question is posed (Was a peaceful transition to industrialism possible?), it is left infuriatingly unexamined. Those who have walked around Moscow recently, observing the buildings and boulevards of the Stalin era surpass in quality those to have appeared in the last 30 years or remembering that the state shops had food a decade ago or noticing that stalls that once sold literary classics now offer ready access to Rambo posters (at considerable cost) might feel entitled to explanations for the disintegration in terms that have a more contemporary resonance. Why, even with all the suffering, have the heirs of bolshevism not delivered; are there no accomplishments at all? To me, the chapter wants its readers to conclude that analysis had failed, the specification of socialism being less important.

Chapter 3 presents the Fabians through the writings of Beatrice Potter (Webb), Sidney Webb, G D H Cole, Bernard Shaw and H G Wells. Once more, the archival research is splendid, but enthusiasm for the Fabians’ attempts to forge social democracy is difficult for this reader at least to sustain. Their doctrines could be offensive (eugenics), misguided (admiration for the Soviet system), misleading (“labour representation of itself would change nothing”—Cole), amateurish or even anti-democratic (Shaw). I found this chapter the least informative, partly because there is something of the playful shavian in Beilharz himself: “It becomes even more than usually difficult to determine the relationship between the views of author and characters”. Sometimes Beilharz’s summaries are pithy and useful: “Darwinism ignores the Mind, in Shaw’s eyes; Creative Evolution offers a better view of humanity...So called natural selection explained the easy part; it says nothing of morality, purpose, intelligence, accident”. Nonetheless, however active they were, there is little indication that any of the writers discussed (and they are more researched than dis-