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No Pay, No Gain

After a five-year freeze, pay TV is coming. By the middle of the decade we will be watching a dozen new channels; technically, the system will be able to provide an extra 36 delivered by satellite. The framework approved by Cabinet and Caucus will see a first operator licensed by the end of the year with rights to four satellite transponders (with up to six channels per transponder). The existing network owners will be excluded from this but will be able to bid for the subsequent, single transponder licences, 12 months later.

According to its supporters, the new regime will give consumers more choice and increase media diversity. But whether we really need the choice of more news, sport and movies is open to question. Nor is it clear either that the licensing of a 35% foreign-owned pay TV operator will add to media diversity, or that the 10% local content rule will be strong enough to support local production.

Two things need to be said about pay TV. One is that if we didn't introduce it ourselves, a 'super-satellite' from outside our borders would do it for us. Secondly, the decision is essentially the right one, even if it has been taken for the wrong reasons. Broadcasting is now expanding beyond national borders. Despite Australia's billion dollar disaster with Aussat, something of a satellite boom is now afoot, particularly in our region. Broadcasting companies like CNN and BBC TV offer near global reach, while Eurosport and Asiasat Star TV (whose satellite reach extends from Japan to Turkey) have emerged as regional powers. Even the ABC has plans to broadcast programs into Southeast Asia.

This 'new world information order' isn't necessarily any more benign than George Bush's new strategic order. Inevitably, as US news feeds are beamed directly into Australian homes and offices at marginal cost, problems of cultural identity and the viability of the local production industry will emerge. For this reason, it is better to develop a pay TV industry on our own terms than to wait for one to be imposed on us.

More positively, pay TV will assist with the development of screen-based information and entertainment services. These are important components of the matrix of high value-added, environmentally clean information industries which will dominate economic growth into the next century. A pay TV industry would provide an incentive for Telecom's successor, AOTC, (or any other investor) to follow Japan's example by expanding its optical fibre network, presently installed only between capitals and in CBDs. A fibre cable system has capacity for two-way (or interactive) services, such as home information and entertainment, home shopping, telecommuting and remote learning. An interactive educational network, for example, could be enormously useful in freeing up teaching resources, and the hardware, software and expertise developed in providing these services would all have export potential.

Sadly, much of this is lost on our bureaucrats and politicians. Cabinet first stumbled on pay TV last October as a means of pushing up the price of Aussat—a monopoly on pay TV delivery was considered to add an extra $40 million to its value. Cabinet voted to support Keating's changes again in June because it was politically bound to do so; Keating had intervened in order to dazzle the electorate after a week of bad head-

lines. The perspective that loomed large in the politicians' minds was that pay TV is predominantly a media issue. Because they only locked out the networks for one year, the first operator's licence is financially risky. The networks, especially Packer's Nine Network and Sky Channel, are well-placed to benefit yet again from a Labor government media policy.

Much has been made of the allocations for the upgrading of ports and railways in the One Nation package. Yet, while these may have been the cutting edge of the economy of the last century, they won't carry us into the next on their own. The latest OECD report on international competitiveness ranks Australia 18th out of 22 on science and technology. But policy-making in this area is fractured and driven by Canberra's mania for structural reform and competition for its own sake.

There are important questions here. The Sydney Communications Law Centre supports the introduction of pay TV "because of the consumer's right to choice and diversity". But is there a point at which we stop being consumers and become citizens? Equally significant are the issues of access and equity. Access to information is clearly going to play an ever greater social and economic role in the lives of Australian citizens. This is not simply a question of pay TV, but of access to computer literacy programs for students without a home PC, universal access for schools and universities to library databases and so on.

The new information and communication industries, of which pay TV is one, offer jobs, economic growth and cultural enrichment. None of these outcomes is determined by technology alone. But in the absence of a coherent policy focus, the debate needs to be led away from mere responses to new technology, in order to revive the politics of access and fairness.

ROBERT CLARK is a Sydney journalist specialising in communications issues.
It was a curious sight: forty conservative professionals cheering Jeannette McHugh at their annual dinner in 1983. One man, puzzled to find himself agreeing with her, bemused at finding he liked her, exclaimed to McHugh, his new local MP: "But you're on the Left!" "Yes," she answered, "but what does that mean? I stand for child care. Is that so controversial?"

"When I was first elected, people said I wouldn't hold the seat because I was a women," says McHugh. "They said I'd never get support in the clubs, the pubs, the sporting clubs." McHugh networked frantically, attending every dinner of every club and association, and gained a reputation as a good local member.

"I stand for child care. Is that so controversial?" She'd opposed Vietnam—how many people today believed that was a just war? She was against uranium mining and nuclear power—was that so subversive? Since the moratorium protests which brought her into the ALP in 1967, Jeannette McHugh, 57, has always been an "issues" politician. It's not that she can't play the factional games that characterise the ALP—when Graham Richardson resigned over the Marshall Islands affair, McHugh withstood pressure from both the Right and her own faction to take the vacant spot in the ministry. She just doesn't relish them the way some do.

Perhaps that has something to do with her popularity. In the seat of Phillip in Sydney's eastern suburbs, abolished at the last redistribution, McHugh has practised a style of politics more often associated with Independents than the Labor Party. Phillip was a "weathervane" seat when McHugh won it in 1983—the first woman from NSW ever elected to the federal parliament. It had always been marginal and whichever party gained Phillip could be sure of governing. She made it safe for Labor, blitzing a challenge in 1990 from the far-right Liberal candidate Charles Copeman. The two-party preferred swing of 1.15% to McHugh contrasted with a national swing against the ALP of 5.6%.

Labor strategists in the branches explain her success by her commitment to grassroots issues, hooking into residential and environment movements and practising the sort of local democracy which the NSW ALP Right seems to have forgotten.

"I spent all day with the kids. I was a very isolated housewife," she says, recalling her early days in a semi-detached house in North Bondi. McHugh had excelled at high school, gone on to Sydney University and became a teacher of French and German. She relinquished her job while her husband Justice Michael McHugh forged a successful career as a barrister. This experience has strengthened McHugh's belief that society should reward women for their unpaid work through better child care, housing, health, education and public transport.

Ask McHugh to nominate the major influences on her world view, however, and she'll probably talk about Vietnam and BHP. When she grew up in the shadow of Newcastle's steel mills—the daughter of two Labor-voting school teachers, the granddaughter of miners—BHP owned the private road at the top of her street. "I am still offended by that," she says, "because a road is something that you can't imagine is more common to everyone. I never walked down it in my life." She's sorely miffed that the Greiner government in NSW has introduced private tollways.

But she maintains that most of the issues she has fought for since the 1960s are now accepted by the mainstream. "Look at women," she says, "or the environment. It's not many years ago that, if you were described as a greenie, you were seen as being on the ratbag fringe. I think it's fair to say that the positions I have endorsed have taken a long time to get accepted in the party and in society generally."

STEVE SHORT is a Sydney freelance writer.
There were two alternative ways in which the old Yugoslavia could have been successfully divided up. The first option was to accept the 1945 borders between the six republics (including the 1974 borders for the two autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo) and enforce them strongly while, at the same time, guaranteeing minority rights within those areas.

The other possibility was to throw out completely the old map of Yugoslavia and start afresh, looking at the populations existing in their territory. Then, in a series of referenda, local populations could have been allowed to make their own decisions on where to draw the borders. This would have been a more complicated option—particularly in Bosnia which, as we’re seeing now, is almost impossible to divide into clear, self-contained ethnic zones. The crucial point is that whichever of these two options was chosen, it had to be applied consistently throughout the entire territory.

A major problem with the world response to the Yugoslav breakup is that the international community has tended to vacillate between those two options. On the one hand it has maintained that it won’t allow any changes of border by force. On the other, it has left open the possibility of changes of border by setting up UN protection zones within Croatia. This gave Serbs in those regions reason to believe that they might at a later stage be allowed to leave Croatia.

The other thing for which the international community has been rightly criticised is its slowness to act. In understanding the tardiness of the international community’s response, it’s important to remember that Yugoslavia was part of that huge amorphous mass of territory until recently called the Eastern bloc. In this context, it’s understandable, although regrettable, that the world community wasn’t prepared to do anything concrete to solve the Yugoslav crisis while the Soviet Union was still in being. Western countries were petrified that any decisions they took in Yugoslavia would be seen as precedents for the breakup of the Soviet Union. Following the coup in Moscow there was a clear change of policy on the part of the world community.

Even taking that into account, however, there have been numerous points at which the world community could have said ‘enough’. It has been clear to people who live here that Yugoslavia has been in the process of disintegration for a long time—essentially since the death of Tito, but particularly since 1986-88, when the Communist Party began to lose its influence within society. It was then, too, that Slobodan Milosevic began his move to seize power in Serbia, and to pull together the Serbian enclaves which previously had been semi-independent.

Milosevic’s first step on this path was to take away Kosovo’s autonomy by force. That ought to have been the first signal that something was amiss. This was followed by a protracted period of shadow-boxing. Croatia and Slovenia were seeking a new Yugoslavia conceived as a loose association of independent states; Serbia and Montenegro insisted on simply modernising the federation; while Bosnia and Macedonia were somewhere in the middle. Again, it was clear that this situation was not tenable in the long-term. That was the second point at which the world community could have moved in and offered to help resolve the problem.

Even once the war had started, the world community could immediately have provided what they provided for the Kurds—that is, an air umbrella over the territory of former Yugoslavia to prevent Yugoslav air attacks. That would have had a tremendous effect on the war because the major advantage of the Serbian forces isn’t in tanks and heavy artillery, but in the air. Without that advantage the war would have been much more even, and probably would have been resolved much more quickly.

The world community also made the fatal mistake right at the beginning of the war of imposing an arms embargo on the territory of former Yugoslavia. This was intended to help the situation. In fact, it simply forced the republics that wanted to leave Yugoslavia to fight with one hand tied behind their backs. They didn’t have sufficient weaponry, and found it very difficult to get any, while the Serbs inherited one of the largest armies in Europe.

Thus far, its actions have been ineffective. However, there has now been a fundamental and encouraging change in the world community’s response to the conflict. As recently as December, when the Serbs were bombing the living daylights out of Dubrovnik, the world community’s response was basically to throw its hands in helplessness. Now, seven months later, they have moved decisively in the UN. Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia have been introduced as full members, while Yugoslavia runs the risk of losing its position in that body.

The Security Council vote in favour of sanctions in June was particularly surprising in its decisiveness. Serbia, for one, was absolutely flabbergasted that the Russians supported the motion. The Russians, because of their historic links with the Serbs, were
always anxious to give them one last chance. However, the morning after the Russian foreign minister, Kozyrev, had negotiated a ceasefire in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Serbs launched their appalling attack on a bread queue in Sarajevo—an event which was relayed by satellite around the world. That made the Russian position look very foolish, and it prompted them finally to dissociate themselves from the Serbs. That, in turn, facilitated the creation of the coalition which the Americans needed in order to impose sanctions.

The Russians and Americans now both support further action by the UN. Many people seem to think that UN intervention has to follow the model of Desert Storm. I would argue that, on the contrary, the appropriate model is rather the first half of Desert Storm—Desert Shield. It’s totally unrealistic, especially in an American election year, to expect the world community to gather a sizeable force of ground troops to restore order in Yugoslavia. Even if they were able to do so, they would very quickly find themselves in a quagmire. However, a great deal can be done without the need for a large number of UN troops.

Among the possible options are a total blockade of Montenegrin ports to block transport up and down the Danube; the closure of oil pipelines into Serbia; a complete ban on all air activity over the territory of Serbia and Montenegro; and, if necessary, selective military bombardment of strategic targets in Serbia itself. In Bosnia it may be necessary to take control of the airport and the area around Sarajevo. None of this would be easy, but the point is that there is a great deal the world community can do to help the people of Sarajevo short of direct military intervention.

Regardless of the precise measures imposed, the dilemma of Yugoslavia will have to end where it began. Milosevic came to power on the streets; ultimately, I believe, he will lose power there, too. If he does, it will be as a result of his inability to keep control in Kosovo, and to stabilise the economy. Here the UN sanctions are important: if they are fully imposed they will have a catastrophic effect on the Serbian economy. There’s no doubt that a great many Serbs never really wanted the war. It’s no accident that tens of thousands of young men who refused to obey mobilisation call-ups are now living outside Serbia. This could rebound on Milosevic.

Unfortunately, Serbian public opinion is very poorly informed because of the ruthless propaganda machine which aims to manipulate Serbian popular opinion. The Croatian media, it should be said, is not much better in this regard, though it does allow a slightly wider range of views than in Serbia. This lack of information helps to explain why the bulk of the Serbian public is confused. For a year and a half they have been told that they are fighting a war against fascism. Then, suddenly, their political leadership and their media commentators have to inform them that by 13 votes to nil, the rest of the world—including Serbia’s great ally Russia—has voted to impose the most draconian UN sanctions on any state since World War Two.

Milosevic’s overwhelming control of the media also makes it difficult to be certain how much of the ethnic hostility evident in Serbia is a genuine legacy of old hatreds, and how much has been manufactured in recent times. There has been horrible savagery in this territory for centuries, and a lot of old scores have never been settled. The Nazi-controlled Croatian Ustasha regime inflicted horrible suffering on Serbs, Gypsies and in World War Two and Serbian Chetniks and Nazi quislings did their fair share of killing as well. And there was another wave of killings in the period immediately after the war when the communists engaged in a fairly thorough cleansing operation against those they defined as Croat fascists.

So there is a considerable body of hatred based in history. But then came 50 years of Titoism. And it is fair to say that over that period, while the hatreds continued under the surface, there was a remarkable change in the relationships between the various ethnic communities. In Bosnia and Croatia there was a high degree of intermarriage, and great efforts were made to break down historical ethnic tensions.

It was perhaps inevitable that both Milosevic and Croatian president Tudjman would use the ghosts of the past to help them obtain and keep power. The more important question is, if these old hatreds were so fierce, how were they kept under the surface for so long? Was it simply the omnipresence of Tito’s secret police and the army, or had some genuine conciliation been made by all of the peoples of former Yugoslavia? While many people like to believe that their own feuds are very special, in reality ethnic rivalry is usually secondary in international relations. The English and the French have hated one another for centuries yet Britain and France coexist peacefully in the EC. The French and the Germans have fought countless wars, yet they have now formed a joint army. Historic hatreds can be put aside. Indeed, I would argue that in the former Yugoslavia, to a large degree they had been put aside.

So there is no inevitability about the continuation of ethnic violence and hatred in the old Yugoslavia. However, I fear that even if some sort of peace is imposed, low-level conflict at least will continue for a long time. Too many people in the old Yugoslavia now have the smell of gunpowder in their nostrils, and too many people have benefited from the war—the black marketeers, the local warlords and the looters on all sides.

PIERRE VICARY is Central and East Europe correspondent for the ABC based in Zagreb. He spoke with ALR’s Mike Ticher in mid-June.
Howard's Way

It's little wonder the only thing John Howard wanted to say about the dispute at Associated Pulp and Paper Mills (APPM) was that politicians should keep out of it. The dispute's result is a headache for the Coalition, which has been arguing that its plans to radically deregulate the labour market will usher in a brave new world of harmonious and productive workplace relations. For what was really at stake in the APPM dispute was not a union wage claim or the employer's keeness to overhaul work practices, but the more fundamental issue of union representation.

The dispute began in February when APPM cancelled a series of over-award industrial agreements it had struck over the years with its unions, arguing that they were preventing line management from improving efficiency. APPM said it was only prepared to recognise and deal with the unions to the extent it was required to do so under industrial awards and other legal instruments. From the outset, the company insisted it was happy to 'talk' directly with its employees over the changes it was seeking in work practices. But it would not 'negotiate' with the unions because the changes it was seeking were a matter of managerial preroga-

tive.

But the problem for APPM, and for the Coalition's emphasis on direct employer-employee industrial relationships, was that its workers insisted on union representation on the work practices issue. A clear majority of the 800 or so blue-collar workers at APPM's big pulp and paper mill in the conservative Tasmanian industrial town of Burnie were prepared to strike to defend the principle of union representation.

Union representation is one of the most potentially explosive issues in any industrial relations system, because it involves a fundamental ideological clash between the competing notions of freedom of contract between individuals and the right of workers to organise collectively. This is why most western nations have taken the issue out of contention altogether by establishing legal proce-
dures to determine union recognition and bargaining rights.

In Australia, after the massive industrial conflicts over union representation in the 1890s, the issue was resolved by the adoption of the system of compulsory arbitration. The arbitration model was the brainchild of an antipodean unity ticket of 19th century liberals like Sir Charles Kingston and Fabian socialists like William Pember Reeves, who believed state intervention could render industrial disputation obsolete. Under the arbitration system unions gained legal rights to represent workers and be recognised by employers as bargaining agents through their registration with state and federal arbitration tribunals.

By contrast in the North American collective bargaining systems the state abstains from regulating industrial relations. But even these more voluntarist systems are generally underpinned by a legislative code establishing union rights and requiring employers to negotiate 'in good faith'.

The main exception to this is New Zealand, which began dismantling its compulsory arbitration system under the Labour government in the late 1980s and has now moved to an almost completely voluntarist framework for industrial relations under the National government. Under New Zealand's 1991 Employment Contracts Act, employers and employees are free to choose whomsoever they like to represent them in negotiating either individual or collective employment contracts. Unions' former exclusive rights to represent workers in particular occupations or industries have been abolished. And no new mechanisms to regulate how employees choose their bargaining agent have replaced them. Where an employee authorises a bargaining agent, the employer is required to recognise that authority—but is not required to reach a settlement, to bargain in good faith, or even to enter into negotiations.

In Australia during the 1980s industrial relations was one of the areas of principle most clearly dividing the major parties. But since the government-ACTU drive for a more decentralised wages system under last year's so-called Accord Mark VI agreement the federal Coalition has had difficulty in portraying its industrial relations policies as a genuine alternative.

The existing Coalition industrial relations policy retains the compulsory arbitration system but opens up a new stream of enterprise-level 'voluntary employment agreements' to replace industrial awards where employers and employees both agree to 'opt out' of the arbitration system. This would effectively retain the existing arbitration system as a safety net for cases where employers and employees do not agree on whether to opt out.

But the Coalition is now revising its industrial relations policy, and it is considering embracing the far more radical, New Zealand-style model. This approach would turn 'opting out' on its head. The industrial relations parties would automatically be ejected from the arbitration system into the deregulated stream of voluntary employment agreements unless they both agreed to 'opt in' to the existing award stream. Compulsory third-party arbitration of industrial disputes would be abolished, and union representation would be up for grabs. Closed shops would be outlawed, while new enterprise unions would be formed in workplaces where existing unions already have coverage. Individual employment
contracts would legally override industrial awards.

Dr Hewson has already declared labour market deregulation to be the centrepiece of the Coalition’s *Fightback!* manifesto, and he admits to being attracted to what he terms New Zealand’s ‘big bang’ approach to policy change. But industrial relations spokesperson John Howard—a committed industrial relations volunteerist—appears to be concerned about the political practicality of such a radical policy blueprint. Asked recently what he thought of the ‘big bang’ approach, he described it as ‘a very misleading term’.

In each of the last two federal elections the Coalition has attempted to portray industrial relations as a major issue, yet the electorate has shown far more interest in whether the trains are on strike than on the respective merits of centralised versus decentralised wages systems. Thus the dilemma for the Coalition: how can it sharpen the ‘product differentiation’ between the major parties’ industrial relations policies without exposing itself to the charge that its policy would generate industrial conflict and confrontation?

This is where APPM comes in. By demonstrating the degree of conflict that can be unleashed by disputes over union representation, the dispute at APPM has thrown into focus several questions about how a voluntarist industrial relations system in Australia would work. What happens under Coalition policy when employees exercise their freedom of choice in favour of union representation but the employer steadfastly insists upon dealing with individuals rather than unions? Under the 1988 Coalition ‘opting out’ formula the award and arbitration system would presumably continue to operate. But under a New Zealand-style policy which abolished compulsory arbitration, either side would be able to veto any reference of an industrial dispute to a third party for arbitration.

In the absence of either arbitration or legislative regulation of bargaining procedures, such disputes would very likely degenerate into protracted trials of industrial strength. Employers would stockpile their products in anticipation of long strikes or lockouts (APPM imported more than 6 million tonnes of paper before the dispute began). Unions would amass strike funds to sustain their troops through the hardship of long stoppages (the ACTU set up a $5 million fighting fund during the APPM dispute). But Australia provides less legal protection for workers who engage in industrial action than just about any other western nation (even post-Thatcher Britain and voluntarist New Zealand provide more legal recognition of a limited right to strike than does Australia). Hence the balance of bargaining power under such a regime would be tilted in favour of employers.

If the Coalition decides to plump for the more radical industrial policies it is currently examining, the federal government will no doubt remind the electorate assiduously of the violence on the Burnie picket lines. The challenge for John Howard will be to convince the electorate that the Liberal policy does not condemn 1990s Australia to a replay of the great industrial conflicts over legal representation of the 1890s.

MARK DAVIS is an industrial reporter for the Financial Review.
A Catholic Nation

"It would be an evil if a Catholic nation once again found itself in a situation in which it was governed by a non-Christian parliament. A Catholic's responsibility is to vote for a Catholic, a Christian for a Christian, a Muslim for a Muslim, a Jew for a Jew, a communist for a communist. Let everyone vote according to his conscience."

With these words, Polish Bishop Joseph Michalik addressed the electorate on the eve of his country's first fully free election in October 1991. Six months later, among the debris of the former Solidarity consensus, the polarisation of political forces here is already threatening to turn back the clock on Poland's hard-won democracy. One of the main beneficiaries of the Roman Catholic Church's political resurgence, the Christian National Union (CNU), heads a fragile four-member minority coalition government, at odds within itself and with many Poles over the country's direction.

Paradoxically, the elections that were billed as the epitaph of communism and the inauguration of democracy have seen many of the political and economic reform processes under way grind to a virtual halt. Sixty percent of the electorate stayed at home, and the vote delivered a hopelessly fragmented new parliament of 29 parties, the largest with only 12% of the seats.

The climate of chaos, exacerbated by the country's economic tailspin, has led many observers to draw parallels with the 1920s, when democracy succumbed to military dictatorship. Within the Church hierarchy and among its political leadership, such a return to politics of the past is exactly what they have in mind.

The CNU mixes pseudo-leftist demands for an egalitarian society with calls for Poland's re-evangelisation and the reinstatement of Catholic values. Sensing a shift in the public mood last year, the Catholic conservatives freely admit, their priorities lie elsewhere.

It is their fundamentalist vision of the Catholic nation—the 'rebirth' of Poland—that gives democrats here the greatest cause for concern. In a major 1992 CNU policy document entitled Polish Matters the party's leaders offer Poles the comforts of 'Christianity, Church, Fatherland and Honour' to soothe the pains of material hardship. The responsibility for Poland's dire situation rests at the feet of its ubiquitous 'enemies': the 'pseudo-tolerant' left (which includes liberals, the "intelligentsia that appropriates the title of intellectuals", the "immoral West" and Brussels' technocrats). Polish Matters makes plain that the political and moral re-education of the youth is today's paramount concern. The young generations, it says, must be morally pure and physically strong. "A true Catholic is not a meek little lamb who easily reaches compromise" it warns.

The CNU's economic program promised a rejection of Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz's tough monetarist line, a stop on the influx of foreign capital and western goods and an emphasis on welfare. In classic national populist terms, the hard line anti-communists simply replaced the communitarian concept of the 'working class' with that of 'nation' and religious unity.

Once in power, the party and its conservative allies predictably had little luck escaping the pressures of the International Monetary Fund. The new 1992-1993 budget has proved to be only a cosmetic departure from that of its liberal predecessor. Economists agree that beyond sloganeering, the populists lack even the basics of a viable economic plan. And, indeed, the Catholic conservatives freely admit, their priorities lie elsewhere.

The political adventures of the Church, however, may already have provoked a minor backlash. According to recent surveys, Poles see the Church as having unwarranted influence in state policy. The studies underscore the shaky grounds upon which the minority government bases its claim to embody popular will. The CNU itself holds only 49 of the 460 seats in the Sejm (the four-party coalition boasts only 121 in total). Polls also show that public enthusiasm for the party's latest initiative—yet another draft proposal to introduce a total ban on abortion—is rapidly waning.

Still, the impact of the Church and its allies upon public and private life in Poland is undeniable. Over the airwaves Poles suffer hour after interminable hour of religious
broadcasting. "It's no secret who runs the TV and radio around here," observes Dorota, organiser of a recent 'rock against the clergy' concert in Cracow. In late April, Polish Television cut all contraceptive advertising from the live broadcast of Queen's AIDS awareness gig in London. Typically, no explanation was given.

The Catholic conservatives' plans for Poland fit into an idea of post-cold war Europe all their own. They portray Poland as a country worn out by communism, abused by its neighbours and isolated from the world. Poland's one pool which Greg finds himself in, and isolated from the world. Poland's Catholic conservatives' conviction that their vision also extends to the Polish minorities in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine has strained Warsaw's relations with its newly independent neighbours. The appeals to expansionism abroad and authoritarian solutions at home have raised fears that the discredited national ideals of the past are fast becoming political virtues.

Could the hostility of Polish conservatives to the principles of a united democratic European House jeopardise Poland's long-awaited return to Europe? Not a chance, beseeches the CNU. "A mighty Poland in a de-Christianised Europe has a strong mission to fulfill, justified by the richness of the Polish soul, culture and religious belief."

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The Dead Pool

One of my Melbourne mates, retrenched nine months ago, invested the bulk of his redundancy package in a backyard in-ground swimming pool. The cagey builders had emphatically guaranteed against it but, sure enough, the finishing touches were applied just in time for autumn. With Melbourne's fickle weather an outdoor swimming pool is always a risky investment. Apart from one fleeting foray into the arctic depths of his pool, Greg will have all winter to contemplate the wisdom of his $15,000 aquatic investment. Pardon the pun but it is a classic case of sunk cost. The Melbourne CBD too is littered with other megabuck sunk cost projects: some fully kitted out towers, others resembling muddy swimming holes in the ground.

One pool which Greg finds himself in, albeit involuntarily, is the pool of unemployed labourers. For him, the rate of unemployment is not 10.4% but 100%. Indeed, he is only three months shy of being classified as long-term unemployed. Like many, Greg finds the long hours of enforced idleness hard to tolerate but there appears no end in sight to his long wait. Melbourne has been the epicentre of this seemingly infinite recession. It has been hard hit by the downturn in the construction, motor vehicle and textile and clothing trades. With an unemployment rate of 11.5% Victoria has been first in, and is set to be last out.

Many of the newly classified long-term unemployed must be asking whether they will ever work again. The likelihood of finding employment decreases the longer the period spent without a job. Usually the newly unemployed find work fairly quickly while the remainder are likely to experience long periods of unemployment with a declining probability of ever getting out of the rut. But in this recession those retrenched have become, against all their expectations and labouring experience, the new long-term unemployed. The widespread despair is not garnered by the unemployment statistics. April's figures showed that 30,000 job searchers dropped out of the chase for a job. In economic parlance the labour participation rate fell a fraction. But these disaffected people—the hidden unemployed—are set to crawl out of the woodwork once the employment indicators turn up. We can use the iceberg as a useful metaphor in understanding the significance of the unemployment problem. The visible part does not do justice to what lurks beneath the surface.

The 80s boom showed that when employment growth is strong the labour force participation rate shoots upwards. Typically a 1% growth in jobs saw a corresponding increase in the participation rate of 0.4%. This is the same as saying that for every ten jobs created, four led to a fall in hidden unemployment while six resulted in a fall of the recorded unemployed. Consequently the official unemployment rate fell only sluggishly. At the peak of the boom the Australian unemployment rate nestled at 5.9% leaving a hard core of unemployables untouched by economic recovery. We can expect much the same scenario to unfold as the recovery gathers pace.

Much is already being made of the incipient housing recovery. Employment, always a lagging indicator of economic activity, will surely rise. But as young marrieds begin to deck out their newly-constructed homes with furnishings and fittings, our import bill will resume its upward climb. Household effects, from tiles to towel-holders, furniture to fans, are more
often than not imported. Much of the expansionary effect of such spending will, therefore, flow offshore.

Even much of the infrastructural spending proposed in the One Nation package will flow abroad as we acquire imported road-making and rail-laying equipment. When the economy was chugging along the last time our import spending grew three times as fast as domestic spending. Nothing has changed in the structure of the Australian economy to suggest a lowering of that ratio. Indeed, it may be said that thanks to continuing tariff reform our propensity to import may be all the greater. Witness our disturbing tendency to import processed goods.

All this is seemingly of academic concern to people like Greg. After six months on the dole (sorry, job search allowance) he qualified for job training allowance where he was given special access to a pool of jobs where the government subsidises the employer’s wage-bill to the tune of $160 a week for some three months. But for Greg, alas, no luck; the competition and the numbers eligible for the scheme were far too fierce. Job subsidies, although a drain on the budget, do make good sense. Such are the monstrously high ‘on-line’ costs associated with labour employment these days that some incentive, other than the socially divisive expedient of cutting wages, needs to be offered to business. There is a plethora of such costs, namely, workers’ compensation, holiday loadings, the superannuation levy and now Dawkins’ training levy.

State imposed payroll tax is another impost. The states earn nearly $6 billion from taxing labour as an input into the production process. Is it not ludicrous to tax labour when there are easily over a million people unemployed? It is even sillier when Australia is notorious for its high wage cost structure. There are, moreover, economic forces afoot that will ensure the continuation of this uncompetitive wage structure. Microeconomic reform has taken a grip in the corporate sector. Companies have used the recession as an opportunity to shed marginally unproductive labour. The real danger is that the remaining workers on the companies’ payrolls, under the guise of enterprise bargaining, can seek wage rises based upon their productivity given merely because of labour shedding. The higher real wage level that will then ensue makes it all the more difficult for the unemployed to obtain jobs.

Paul Keating should strike out with his own version of ‘new federalism’ by bribing the states to axe the payroll tax and substitute some better means of revenue raising. This should cheapen the relative cost of labour and, allied with the demand-led kickstart to the economy, would give some hope of rescue from the economic scrapheap for Greg and the legions like him.

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Poor Perception

Two decades of declining economic performance overlaid by the current recession have seen increasing numbers of Australians cast aside. Issues of living standards and inequality have returned to the national psyche and the political agenda. Ahead of the next federal election both major parties have recognised the need to convince electors that past trends will be reversed once they regain (or achieve) office. Their rival blueprints have been subject to expert scrutiny, much of which has served to confuse all but the most quantitatively expert.

This is unfortunate, though unavoidable. It is a complex task to assess the impact of major policy changes on people’s economic circumstances and the inequalities between them. Claims that inequality has increased may make for a good story, but they often rest on methods and assumptions which are themselves challengeable and are generally neither explicit nor subject to scrutiny.

One aspect of the debate which all accept, however, is that it is valid to estimate how different people’s incomes are likely to change in response to new policies and to infer from this how people themselves are affected by the change. This is, of course, normal practice which accepts that ‘a dollar is a dollar’ irrespective of who gets it. Recent research conducted at the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW casts doubt on this simplistic view of the world, in the process shedding new light on old questions about how income is perceived and how income changes translate into public perceptions of living standards and inequality.

The research is based on a national survey of a representative sample of Australians conducted in late 1988. Among other questions, respondents were asked to indicate the lowest incomes their household would need in order for them to be able to ‘make ends meet’. Not surprisingly, responses to this question varied with actual income, richer households indicating that they needed more income than poorer households just to make ends meet. Our analysis also revealed that several indicators of family need—the number of adults and children and whether the person was above or below pension age—affect the
making ends meet’ income responses.
In this sense, the responses conformed with existing measures of need as encapsulated in poverty lines, although the patterns revealed by the research differed substantially from those contained in the poverty line developed by the Poverty Commission in the 70s.
The responses were used to derive a poverty line set at the income level at which people would, on average, indicate that their current income is just enough for them to ‘make ends meet’. This produced a poverty line of around $253 (in 1988) for a single person, $281 for a couple and $310 for a couple with two children. The single person poverty line is well above the comparable Henderson poverty line of just over $151 a week and even further above the adult dole rate in 1988 of around $112 a week. However, the extent to which need increases with family size is less than implied by the Henderson measure; according to our survey, children cost around $15 a week each, compared with the Henderson figure of around $45 a week.
Evidence of deprivation and severe financial hardship is also apparent in responses to the survey. For example, nearly 40% of the sample indicated that they had had difficulty making ends meet at some time over the previous year; 10% said they experienced situations where they didn’t have enough money to buy food; 27% to buy clothing and 16% to pay for health care. Around one in six families indicated that they couldn’t afford to buy basic items for their kids, and 7% said that their children had to go without quite often. These figures are all the more disturbing because they predate the current recession. The picture would look a lot bleaker now. What is clear is that many Australians are living close to the edge and having to go without even the most basic items of food, clothing and health care.
We also found, not surprisingly, that housing costs were important, both private renters and those with a mortgage needing higher incomes than outright owners in order to make ends meet. More provocative are our findings that more highly educated people require higher incomes to make ends meet than those with less education, and that Liberal or National Party voters need more than Labor ALP, but $339 if they vote Liberal or National Party. At income levels of twice average earnings, these figures increase to $388 and $421 respectively. Similar patterns emerge for other family types and, although the precise impact varies with actual income, there is a clear tendency for political affiliation to have a larger impact ($20 to $30 a week) than either having a tertiary education ($15 a week) or having high housing costs ($5 to $15 a week).
It is important to be clear about what these results do and do not imply. What they do not provide is a case for paying higher social benefits to (or imposing lower taxes on) the more highly educated or Liberal/National voters—though some might interpret Fightback! as doing precisely this. What people say they need to make ends meet may be important in understanding how well-off they feel, but one cannot give people more, just because they say they need it. We require objective evidence of unmet need before giving assistance if the system is to be fair, legitimate and sustainable.
Overall, our results show the importance of lifestyle factors and individual values and aspirations in determining how people actually perceive their money incomes. In other words, we have for the first time clear evidence that to reduce questions of living standards, inequality and redistribution to a purely monetary dimension will fail to capture the more subtle yet nonetheless important aspects which affect how real people actually lead their lives.

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Summit For NOTHING?

The Rio Earth Summit: blighted by a recalcitrant US?
Peter Colley disagrees. He thinks the Summit outcome was better than the mass media’s instincts suggested.

So many world leaders and so little action. Thus the jaundiced response of many environmentalists to the outcomes of the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in Brazil in June. The US in particular has been condemned for diluting the Climate Change Convention and refusing to sign the Biodiversity Convention.

It would be convenient to believe that the environment and environmentalists have lost out at Rio because of the intransigence of the US. Unfortunately, blaming the Americans fails to recognise the role that the US has played on behalf of other countries at the Summit. It also fails to examine the deep confusion amongst environmentalists and governments on how environmental problems should be addressed. Are the ‘polluter-pays principle’ and market forces the solution, or is there a requirement for new concepts of community and government responsibility?

In addition to the 35,000 and equal numbers of soldiers protecting them from the ravenging hordes of Rio’s sprawling slums, there were no less than 8,000 journalists covering events. Never have so many been sent to cover so much and had so little to say. Unable to comprehend the two years of tortuous negotiations that have produced some admittedly impenetrible documents, and unable to summarise the immense variety of interests present in the 150 national delegations (not to mention the thousands of non-governmental organisations) the media have neatly condensed the Summit into a ’US versus the Rest’ scenario.

Australia’s presence at the Summit was muted. Three ministers were sent, but not the prime minister. It would seem that the environment is not what it once was in terms of the survival of governments; Mr Keating decided that it
wasn’t going to be much of a vote winner to take a week out to give a six-minute speech in Rio. This is indicative of the overall handling of environmental issues by the Keating government; the work is continuing, but it is no longer the high priority that it was under Hawke. Further evidence of this new low-key approach can be seen in the government’s pedestrian progress in developing its Ecologically Sustainable Development Strategy and National Greenhouse Response Strategy.

Attending the Summit in place of Paul Keating, Environment Minister Ros Kelly was under firm Cabinet instructions to tread a tightly defined line. On the issue of climate change, every public utterance of the minister has mentioned both Australia’s commitment to reducing emissions and the caveat that the precondition for any expensive moves in that direction will be international consensus.

Nevertheless, Australia has commanded a fair degree of respect at the Summit, as well as in the processes leading up to it, as an ‘honest broker’. Australia is recognised as a developed country in outlook and in living standards, but also as an economy heavily reliant on trade in natural resources in the same way that many Third World countries are. In funding research on greenhouse, on the economic impacts of greenhouse solutions and in pioneering strategies to protect endangered species, Australia is perceived as more genuine about the environment than most.

Australia and Canada were the only two nations in the world to include non-governmental organisations in their official delegation: representatives of the Business Council, environmental groups, foreign aid organisations and the ACTU all attended. The ACTU had a fairly lonely experience at Rio; very few trade unions attended, and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions pulled out due to perceived marginalisation of unions by the Summit process.

The US has been singled out as the villain of Rio for its failure to sign the biodiversity convention—yet this simplistic account conveniently hides a multitude of sins on the part of other nations. The USA has some of the most rigorous environmental regulations in the world. Its Clean Air Act is ahead of similar efforts by the European Community (and the rest of the world). EC grandstanding on carbon dioxide emissions from energy use should be weighed against their opposition to action to reduce other greenhouse gases. Their position at Rio had a lot to do with maximising their current trade advantage in energy efficient products and protecting their heavily subsidised agriculture (which produces a lot of greenhouse gases).

The EC position remains unchanged, despite the mountain of evidence that the dumping of subsidised agricultural products on world markets by the EC has done more to contribute to deforestation, desertification, soil degradation and subsequent species loss, than any global warming thus far. Even more bizarre is the spectacle of Japan emerging as an environmental saviour; it is rumoured to have allocated up to $US7 billion per year to the $US125 billion
price tag attached to Agenda 21, the Summit's aid package for the Third World environment. The nation that resists the phasing out of whaling, uses drift-netting extensively, is a major market for the products of endangered species and has an aggressive program of nuclear power development could only appear as an environmental benefactor within the consciousness-altering confines of a large international conference. Japan's position on foreign aid is linked more to its aspirations on the global political stage than to saving the world.

Similarly, most developing nations (with the notable exception of the Association of Small Island States, who are scared of drowning under rising sea levels) have been loath to make any commitment to reducing emissions growth or to conserving their natural resources. With some moral, but no ecological, justification they have argued for their right to develop, and have chosen to concentrate on concrete issues of water supply and industry creation, rather than the relatively abstract notion of potential global warming.

In this context, everybody has been happy for the US to carry the can for inaction on the environment. America's willingness to play this role could actually be seen as confirming its emerging hegemonic role in the post-USSR New World Order, rather than signalling its marginalisation.

Perhaps these strange twists can only occur because of the dominance of money and development rather than the environment at the Summit. Although the Summit will produce four major documents (see box), for the most part the debate has replicated the traditional fight over funding between the industrialised North and the developing South that occurs in most United Nations forums.

The hope that the North might double its foreign aid programs to $US125 billion in a time of global recession is desirable, possible necessary, but definitely not politically feasible. For Australia, doubling foreign aid would require finding a further $A1 billion within a federal budget of about $A110 billion. (The much vaunted One Nation statement involved a total additional expenditure to the budget of just $2.3 billion. The Liberal Party's Fightback! package promises to cut foreign aid further but it is hard to see any government providing such funds. The people of the South don't vote in Australian elections.

The fight over aid funds has hidden the more fundamental debate over property rights and alternative paths to environmentally sustainable development. This is the background to the US refusal to sign the Biodiversity Convention. The US wasn't prepared to endorse a vague commitment which could be read as infringing intellectual property rights in biotechnology. Third World countries wanted at least partial ownership rights to products that were developed using biological resources found in their country (e.g. medicines produced from plants); the US wanted ownership of the products of biological research and development to remain with the corporations which carry out the research.

There is a practical concern here about where royalty payments to Third World nations for the use of their biological resources would actually go (to the indigenous owners of such resources, or to funding the lifestyles of the Third World ruling elite?). There is also a more fundamental conflict over how environmental problems should be solved. One point of view is that environmental problems are a result of a lack of specific ownership for many natural resources; we pollute air and water and to sell or assign property rights and rely on the profit-maximising behaviour of the owner to ensure that their asset is not sold cheaply. This approach, strongly promoted by international business organisations and conservative groups, seeks solutions primarily through the fuller use of private property rights and market forces.

'Never have so many covered so much with so little to say.'

The alternative is for national governments to take responsibility for the stewardship of natural resources under their control and to supervise or regulate their conservation and use on a sustainable basis. While allowing for the possibility of more public control over how we use the environment, it also opens up problems of centralised, unresponsive bureaucracy.

Therein lies the dilemma of Rio—one which has been addressed neither by the decision-makers or by the media. The world is becoming a smaller and more crowded place. Economic and social development is going to become increasingly circumscribed by physical limits to the assimilative capacity of the planet. This sits uncomfortably with the triumph of capitalism and the free market over the old socialist model of planned development. Measuring and monitoring resource use, and setting standards or parameters for our interaction with the environment on a long term sustainable basis is not easily reconciled with a notion of small government exercising minimal supervision over a supposedly efficient marketplace.

Those who believe that ecological doom is nigh will be deeply disappointed with the outcomes of Rio. Those who are more optimistic about the possible timeframe for change will take comfort from the fact that governments of the world have at least agreed on the need for change and the direction it should take. As the evidence of environmental problems mount we can expect an acceleration in that direction. The environment issue is not being removed from the global and national political agenda. It is being permanently entrenched.

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The Green Old Days

The Left lauded modernity; green politics prefers nostalgia.

McKenzie Wark looks at the new rules of green politics after modernity.

When we look at a ‘nature’ photograph what do we see? Is it a national park? Is it a wilderness? Is it Nature? It’s funny how there is never any trace of the photographer in these images. The picture at right, titled ‘Impregnable’, was taken by Olegas Truchanas, a famous campaigner against the destruction of Tasmania’s Lake Pedder in the 70s. It is a classic of what is now a readymade genre of ‘beautiful nature’ pictures, all lush green foliage, unspoiled and unsullied.

The trick of pictures like these is that they attempt to hide the fact of their own production from us. They hide the fact that they belong to a vast cultural enterprise, stretching back to romanticism, which wants to present a beautiful and bountiful image of nature. They hide the fact that what we see is constructed, an image, not the real thing at all.

They present nature as an alternative world, a utopia, an elsewhere, leaving out all that lies in between you, the viewer, and the ‘natural’ world. These pictures pretend to evade culture, to bring nature directly to your attention, when they are in fact an artefact of culture.

I have a Wilderness Society calendar up on my kitchen wall, full of these lush green images. I look at them sometimes when I’m bored with the TV or a bit frazzled by work and worries. The rainforest is our utopia now, a naturalist realism in the place of the old socialist realism of shiny roads and bridges and buildings. Yet, ironically, this is not as big a cultural revolution as one might imagine. In fact, contrary to all intention, the rhetoric and imagery of greenness ends up being thoroughly postmodern. Let me explain.

Green imagery offers a promise of a reconciliation with nature. Communion with nature is a redemption proffered to enable us to rise above the alienated, fragmented life of industrial society. And, in an odd sort of way, this com-
munion with nature takes the ideological place of the communism of man of the old Left. The fantasy of communism was an overcoming of nature. Through the development of productive forces, communists would collectively build a world more hospitable than nature. They would ‘wrest a realm of freedom from necessity’ in Hegel’s terms.

In this mythology, our redemption lay in the creation of a second nature—a world built out of and on top of nature, but in our image and amenable to our evolving needs and desires. The visionary dreams of the modern architects and the socialist realist artists were representations of this world. It could be imagined as rational and ordered, or as dreamlike and malleable. Either way, the path to redemption was imagined throughout modern history to lie in the cumulative growth of this second nature.

The problem is that in freeing ourselves from the tyranny of nature we created, not a realm of freedom, but a new world of necessity. Second nature grew into a power over and against us. Now it appears that the technical world of second nature runs us, rather than us running it. The alienation and fragmentation of human existence grows, rather than diminishes. As Foucault says, the modern era is the one in which ‘man’ finally makes ‘his’ exit’. Humanism is dead, killed by the crushing weight of the technical world and the demands it makes upon us to keep it going. All this was apparent before green politics and the cult of nature gained widespread ideological currency. The shift to faith in nature is in fact a byproduct of the failure of humanism. Communism’s myth of a second nature is indeed dead. What has taken its place is nostalgia. Yet this nostalgia is not as ancient as it likes to pretend. Both the myth of beautiful nature and the myth of the ancient, tribal society in harmony with itself and nature are recent inventions. Both are representations of a longing which began at the same time as industrial society: the dream of romanticism. Romanticism has found its true vocation in the postmodern media world as a repertoire of redemptive images; ‘mother nature’ and the ‘noble savage’.

Second nature failed to redeem our fallen nature, our alienation from nature, from each other, from the tools and machines that came to overpower us. So enter ‘third nature’. By third nature I mean the now vast and extensive realm of media vectors, the information landscape that now almost exactly covers the same space as second nature. This is not just a matter of the extensive net of satellite TV images and international telephone and data communications. It also encompasses the accumulation of vast archives of images and information. If there is anything of substance in the rhetoric of postmodernism it has to do with tracking down the symptoms of precisely this inordinate growth in volume, velocity and density of information flows and reservoirs.

This is the irony about the green movement: it is only made possible by third nature, the most artificial thing human society ever created. The photograph of an ‘impregnable’ cliff, the TV documentary about penguins, the coffee table book on Aboriginal art, the talk show about rainforests on Radio National—all of this is third nature. The images and rhetorics of nature and community are only possible via third nature.

The nostalgia for an unmediated, direct communion with nature is a fantasy. It is a useful fantasy to the extent that it makes a lot of people realise that second nature is a vast and uncontrollable juggernaut that might just self-destruct. The rhetoric of nature reminds us that oppression, alienation and boredom are not the only ills plaguing second nature. The realisation that second nature has strip-mined nature itself to create this dangerous, ugly world is an even more final phase of disenchantment.

It is a fantasy to suppose that communion with nature is possible at all, and many people realise this, either consciously or unconsciously. In creating language, culture, tools, we turned our backs on nature a long time ago. It is equally fantastical to imagine that there can be a going back to community, to forms of society less alienated and of smaller scale, in harmony with nature. Nature is dead. The skies are a different colour now. The air is a different temperature. The shape of the land and the chemicals in the soil are not what they used to be. We burned all our bridges. This is the result of modernity, for good or ill.

There is nowhere to go but deeper into third nature, into the creation of an information landscape. Marshall McLuhan popularised the idea that community could be recreated on a global scale via the media: the ‘global village’. This idea is popular again now, ‘recycled’ under the marketing labels of virtual reality, cyberspace and hypermedia. Yet after the Gulf War it should be clear to everybody that redemption won’t come from third nature. Here Baudrillard and Bahro, the prophets of melancholy postmodernism and green fundamentalism respectively, come to stand for very complementary projects of disenchantment. Where Bahro debunked the marxist faith in second nature, Baudrillard poured ironic scorn on the McLuhanite myth of third nature.

So we are left with a tragic story; humankind wrests a dimension of freedom from necessity when it creates the second nature of technology, the city, modern life. Yet this turns out to be simply a new realm of alienation and a graveyard for humanist dreams. The desires and dreams deferred from this struggle are invested anew in the realm of third nature, the postmodern world of the information landscape.

So where does that leave us? In an era of great political opportunity. All the old myths have taken a tremendous beating. Old forms of organisation are falling apart. Power is intrinsically bound to flows of information as much as it is to the control of territory. In this sense the struggles in eastern Europe for territorial control are a backward-looking movement. The really significant political struggles today are about who controls the flows, not the territories—flows of people, capital, resources, technology, but above all, information.

The struggle for the Left is to maintain and develop diversity in the form and content of information politics, and to
articulate different demands and desires in appropriate forms to achieve appropriate ends. This is a flexible, pragmatic politics involving a network of interests and organisations. There is no room any more for the endless moralising of the 70s. There is no master-rhetoric. There is no yardstick of ideological soundness. There are only opportunities and goals. This is the postmodern condition.

It is perhaps appropriate, then, that some of the most innovative political forms in the postmodern era have been created by the green movement. The greens lack a basis in second nature. They did not develop historically at the time that the distinctive forms of political organisation of the modern period grew and then ossified. The progressive political parties, the trade unions, the social movements, grew out of second nature and its internal contradictions. The green movement did too, but developed later and went further. It points to the contradiction between second nature and its grounding in nature itself.

So green politics takes a unique form. It is composed of very ‘local’ organisations, it has bases in the ‘community’, but its goals are global and its lifeblood is communication. Hence the tremendous innovation in the use of the media in green politics, from the media stunts of Greenpeace to the diverse computer networks such as Peacenet and Econet which now circle the globe.

There are useful lessons to be learned from these innovative forms of political communication. The form of politics pioneered by the greens will, in one form or another, become important for the rest of us too. The traditional forms of organisation don’t work any more. Throughout the western world, traditional political parties are in decline. This is, at least in part, because the form of organisation they developed was dependent on the control of territory. A political party is a form of territorial organisation. It holds together diverse interests through a branch structure covering the territory, and organises this task through a centralised machine charged with the task of capturing centralised power. Communication in such organisations is tied to the territorial structure of the party (or union) machine.

The communications revolution has made this form of organisation obsolete. There is no need any longer to organise politics on a territorial basis. People don’t actually have to meet to reconcile their interests, choose their representatives and so forth. The decline of the branch structures of the political parties and the failure of new parties ever to really get off the ground demonstrate this. With the broadening of the communication channels open to a wide section of the population, one can bypass the tedious old branch politics and still maintain an open and flexible politics. Public radio, desktop publishing, computer bulletin boards—these are just some of the accessible means for developing networks of interest, based on developing flows of counter-information rather than on developing places of counter-organisation.

The idea that the political Left has a vested interest in better communications and ought to be a communications innovator is not exactly novel. Up until recently it was the norm. The correspondence societies of the early 19th century were an innovative use of the emerging postal system. The German Social Democrats developed news agencies and a diverse and popular press. The popular front leftists between the wars took on radio, cinema and theatre. The 60s radicals discovered the power of staging media spectacles to influence popular opinion.

All of these are struggles to extend the diversity of communications and to make third nature responsive to popular interests and demands. Now is the time to step up this process, not to shrink from it. Building a political force from the ground up is no longer a matter of recruiting representatives and so forth. The decline of the branch structures of the party (or union) machine.

The green movement has added some new ideas to this process, but the whole history of the Left represents an incredible history of such innovations. It matters little whether the ideology and the rhetoric of these innovations stresses a utopia based on a positive image of ‘nature’, ‘mankind’ or whatever. So let’s spend less time worrying what ideological mix or alliance will save us, and spend more time developing the channels through which the many voices of need and desire and hope can flow.

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Big government versus small government was the argument of the 80s. Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham argue that the argument is stale. More interesting is the question of how to govern, and what governing is.

In the last ten years or so, much has been written and spoken in Anglo-Saxon countries about the size and extent of government. Much effort has been spent arguing, or at least gesturing, over how small government needs to be to allow these English-speaking nations to stay ahead of, or just keep up with (depending on how realistic you are) Japanese and continental European economic performance. Most of this effort has been wasted because far too little of it has focused on answering the deceptive question: what is government?

Australian governments at state and federal level (of both major parties) seem obsessed with demonstrating (over and over) how lean they've become. The recent British election was won by a Conservative government which convinced enough of the electorate that a commitment to small government—one might even say, a commitment to minimal levels of government—is crucial to Britain's future prosperity. In this case, the small government theme won the day in the face of evidence that the policies associated with it have pushed Britain further and further behind its European and Japanese economic competitors. Clearly, we must acknowledge that the small government idea is resilient. But so what? Silly ideas are often resilient.

Our contention is that more careful thinking about the nature of government can push the 'big versus small' debate off the stage and open the way for more sensible consideration of the effectiveness of government. This is the situation in parts of continental Europe, at least. Debate there concentrates on the effectiveness of government, rather than on its ideal size (with the assumption that its effectiveness somehow magically follows from this); possibly this is one of the reasons for European economic
success. We would contrast this with the situation in Anglo-Saxon countries, where battle-lines are often simply drawn up for and against government.

Let’s go back to basics, then. A dictionary is of limited help; ‘government’ is one of those words with such a wide array of definitions lexicographers cannot pin it down. But at least it’s a place to start. From among dictionary definitions three meanings of government demand attention: (i) the business of directing and controlling the actions, affairs, policies and functions of organisations, localities, cities, regions, nation-states; (ii) the process of exercising restraint over something or somebody; (iii) the process of regulating the flow of energy to a particular mechanism (a meaning which comes directly from 19th century mechanics, which knew a governor as a device to regulate the speed of a machine).

Now we’re talking. Government is deliberate restraint, but not restraint for its own sake. Government is about directed restraint: restraint directed towards certain desired policy outcomes and away from certain perceived dangers, especially the ever-present danger of unrestrained energy. In line with this we can talk about a complex of government in which people govern themselves and are at the same time governed by others: by organisations, localities, cities and so on. Government in modern western countries, including Australia, is concerned with directed restraint, by citizens and over citizens.

All this captures the flavour of some writing on government by the great Italian theorist of government, Niccolo Machiavelli. For Machiavelli, as we read him, government is about managing fortuna and managing the consequences.
The beauty of this formulation lies in its recognition of the perpetual character of government.

Life produces many, many situations which require directed restraint: food production, personal conduct or regional unemployment are just some examples. In addressing these situations by directed restraint, government produces new situations which require directed restraint. And so on ad infinitum. In this way government never totally succeeds and, as such, always produces the conditions for its own necessity.

You do not need to be a great theorist to work this one out; just ask Paul Keating about governing the Richardson fiasco, or Nick Greiner about governing the Metherell affair, or John Major about governing the poll tax issue. They will all tell you government produces problems in producing solutions, which need more solutions, which produce more problems, and so on.

Before we make the picture more complex, consider the sad state of Australian and British manufacturing industry. Any decent factory manager knows that the business of manufacturing produces many, many problems which must be addressed if even a modicum of success is to be achieved. These problems mean the factory must be perpetually governed. Shifts in demand, changes in plant technology, the whims of the trading policies of other nations, the vagaries of suppliers, the necessity of skilled workers, all need solutions—and the solutions inevitably produce new problems. There is no substitute for careful, detailed government. Many Australian and British factory managers and their employees are providing just such government at this level. Yet much of the energy of government at municipal, regional and national levels above them is being directed not to supporting them with careful, detailed industry policies, but to poppycock policies about the angle of playing fields in line with a blinkered commitment to small government.

This example illustrates the need for clear thinking about the nature of government. There is just too much evidence that municipal, regional and national Anglo-Saxon governments have lost sight of what government is about.

Perhaps, you may well say, we are being unfair. Surely these governments are trying to govern, even if they’re not doing it very well? No, we don’t think we’re being unfair. We recognise that governments are trying to govern. Part of our argument is that it is their compulsion to govern which is getting in the way of their clear thinking about how they govern. The last two centuries have seen a massive rise in scope of the will to govern. Of course, governments have displayed a strong will to govern since ancient times. We are arguing that it is the scope of this will which has dramatically increased, and that this dramatic increase is a further obstacle to the clear thinking of governments which are not committed enough to the need for clear thinking in the first place.

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ALR : JULY 1992
The French thinker Michel Foucault refers to this dramatic increase in the scope of the will to govern by the neologism 'governmentality'. By 'governmentality' Foucault is referring not only to the increase in the number of things that governments above the level of municipal management have concerned themselves with since the middle of the 18th century and the accompanying increase in the size and sophistication of public bureaucracies (something many important thinkers, especially Max Weber, have pointed to and tried to describe). Rather, he is mainly referring to a unique configuration of events and inventions behind these increases. It is the uniqueness of this configuration of events and inventions which is important. Any one of them, taken separately, can be traced back well beyond the 18th century, but they only came together as the package Foucault calls governmentality at around this time.

We think five events and inventions are central to Foucault's account. The first is the consolidation of a series of doctrines around 'reason of state'. These doctrines (which began to emerge in the 16th century) understood the operation of the state in terms of principles which were internal to the state itself. These doctrines meant the workings of government could be considered in terms of the internal organisation of the state, rather than, say, in terms of the will of God.

Second, the development of the notion of population as part of the art of government. The reason of state development meant that the art of government had something to tackle; there was a lot more to be artful about. Government came to be a means to an end in regard to population. This notion quickly came to be the focus of concerns about health, wealth, happiness, longevity and so on. What or who is it that should be healthy, wealthy, happy, long-lived, or whatever? A general answer was needed for the general government which was emerging (to avoid it fracturing into very specific governmental units, like families, with no government beyond these units)—and population was that answer. The question to be addressed was how to guarantee the good condition of the population.

Third, the rise of the new science of political economy. The new regularity of population could no longer be understood, as we hinted above, solely through the economy of the family (the traditional model of economic life of the early modern period); the new political economy replaced this old economy. The family was still an important instrument of government, but it was now secondary to the master concept of population. The new political economy sought to promote the flow of government between individuals, family and state. Part and parcel of this development was the development of the science of police—better understood in 20th century English as 'policy' or 'welfare'—which dealt with the flow of government between state and individual, taking the family as its instrument rather than its model.

Fourth, the emergence of the practical political doctrine of liberalism, especially as it allowed the transformation from disciplinary societies to societies where liberty is potential-ly guaranteed through security. In line with this, government was reorganised around new modes of managing risks—sometimes called insurantal technologies (which now of course include the welfare state). Liberalism enabled the conception and formulation of welfare policies. Its aim was to amplify the capacities of the citizen body, to replace the more overtly 'disciplinary' techniques of the earlier era of absolutist rule.

Finally, the birth of the human sciences as formal governmental knowledges. Over the course of a hundred years or so economics, sociology, and psychology began to make their contributions to government, providing accounts of what the increasingly various elements of population look like and how they behave and are likely to behave. Parallel to these sciences, and perhaps more important than them all, the science of statistics expanded rapidly. Sets of facts about the state were reformulated as very specific understandings (increasingly numerically expressed understandings) of populations, allowing more and more precise calculations about birth, mortality, morbidity, longevity, health, illness, suicide and so on, almost ad infinitum.

'An idealistic belief in cutting down government is not good enough.'

Government in the modern world is complex; there is no way round this fact. What we are urging on those directly involved in government at municipal level and above is that the complexities can be unravelled, described and sensibly addressed. Government requires careful, painstaking work. No amount of blustering about small government or large government, private enterprise or socialist government is going to obviate this need. Dogma needs to be replaced by an analysis which starts from the conviction that the art and activity of government are complex: we are arguing that an idealistic belief in the possibility of cutting down on government is just not good enough.

European and Japanese governments are much more aware of this than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, as we noted above. They waste a lot less of their personnel's time and energy on ideological bluster. If we in the English-speaking world want to catch up to their economic performance, we must start thinking about the importance of government in new ways. We cannot luxuriate in the will to govern without thinking through what government means.

GAVIN KENDALL teaches in psychology at Lancaster University, England. GARY WICKHAM teaches in sociology at Murdoch University, WA.
From invisibility to dependency - the 25 years since Aboriginal citizenship have been a blighted story. Pat O'Shane, magistrate and activist, spoke to ALR's David Burchell.

Two incidents recently brought to attention the attitudes of police towards Aboriginal people. First was the ABC documentary 'Cop It Sweet'; and then the private video of police officers mocking the death of David Gundy. Have there been any significant improvements in police attitudes towards Aboriginal people in the last decade?

One of the reasons those two televised incidents had so much impact was that they showed that police prejudices run very deep and that they are still grossly offensive towards Aborigines. There is in fact very little sympathy for Aboriginals on the part of police.

Part of the response was because many people felt betrayed. At one stage in NSW under the Wran Labor government some very good initiatives were pursued by the Ministry for Aboriginal Affairs and the Police Department. Yet all those past initiatives appeared to have had very little, if any, effect. Others were angry because the police were caught out. That was certainly part of the anger of police themselves. And for others again their response was really very simple-minded and shallow. There was the response that there was no difference in the position of Aborigines and police. Yet of course the police are invested with enormous power under our laws, both in common law and statutory law. They are in a very powerful position in relation to Aborigines, and for that matter any other disempowered people in the community.

To answer the question shortly, I'd have to say, no, there hasn't been a great deal of change. How we change police attitudes towards Aborigines and vice versa is a question to which I simply don't have the answer. Like a lot of other people, however, I'm prepared to search for some answers. I do think there are ways in which we can try to improve...
the behaviour of police simply by continuing education programs. In NSW under Commissioner John Avery those programs had a significant role, and a lot of Aboriginal people were invited and participated in police-Aboriginal seminars and gave talks to police groups. I think that was helpful. But one principle that has never been accepted is that senior police officers have to be responsible for their subordinates. I don’t accept that in a hierarchical structure each individual alone is responsible for his or her behaviour. There has to be built into the system a hierarchy of responsibility and accountability. If that were achieved we might see considerable change in the behaviour of the subordinates.

After those two recent incidents a consultative committee was set up in NSW to try to improve police-Aboriginal
relations. You were, as I recall, invited on to that commit­
tee, and accepted. And there was some criticism of that
decision from Aboriginal figures. How do you respond
to that criticism? You obviously think the experiment
was worthwhile.

Yes, I do. You don't change anything by drawing lines and
standing back either side of a no-go zone, and continuing
to hurl abuse at each other. If we're going to do that we're
not going to change anything. If we're talking about rela­
tions between people, that means that we've actually got
to communicate with each other. So I was certainly in
favour of it. But another practical reason I was so much in
favour of it was that it was an initiative from the police
union. I am not aware of any other occasion when there
has been such an initiative from the police union.

But as things turned out the exercise was sabotaged.
People simply did not turn up to the first meeting. I think
that's a matter for enormous regret. And I think it was
sabotaged by people on both sides. I talked with the officer
whose idea it was, and I do believe that he was genuinely
committed to such an exercise. He happens to be a police
officer, but he was very distressed that the whole exercise
had been aborted.

Among Aboriginal activists in Sydney at least, the politi­
cal culture is obviously a very angry one—and under­
standably so. But I imagine it's not a culture which makes
it easy to engage in dialogue.

You're absolutely right. I think anger is a very sustaining
emotion. And I think it's very legitimate. But there are
some instances when it is not legitimate. Of course one had
a response of anger to what was depicted in those
Television programs. But then one has to move beyond that
and look at the situation objectively. One has to put aside
one's anger, and say: let's have a look at this. Let's try to
find ways to intervene in the process whereby these at­
titudes and this behaviour is perpetuated. And there is no
place at all for anger in that assessment.

That sort of anger is in any case a worn-out political tool
on the part of urban male Aboriginal activists. They've
really wrung the last drop out of that particular modus
operandus. It's counter-productive. It's even worse than
that; it helps to perpetuate that whole system that they're
protesting about and getting angry about. And the real test
of whether that is so is that they do not attract very many
in the Aboriginal community to their cause. And the
women in those communities—who come up and talk to
me in a way they wouldn't talk to those men—have had a
bellyful of this kind of standoff tactic. It doesn't work. And
the women bear the burden, so they should know.

The federal government recently released a package in
response to the Black Deaths Royal Commission. You
were quoted as being highly critical of it. Why?

The federal government announced a couple of months
ago that they were putting $17.5 million into various
programs. At the time I said that those programs were
bandaid programs and weren't dealing with the nub of the
issues that had been identified by the Royal Commission,
and I absolutely stand by that statement. Basically, there is
very little good that can be said about it.

I have now read through the government responses to the
recommendations of the Royal Commission. Nearly all of
it consists of motherhood statements, and most of them in
equivocal terms in any event. At the time, the federal
minister Bob Tickner rang me up and said "Look, Pat, I
want you to understand that this is only the beginning of
it. In another couple of months there will be so many more
millions, and they will deal with the really important
issues". From that day to this I have not heard another
word about it. Yet if the government were genuine, they
would have implemented those recommendations long
ago. It is at least 18 months since the commissioners pub­
lished those recommendations. And there was nothing to
stop the government, or indeed governments, of this
country from implementing those recommendations then.
They never have had a commitment to rectifying these
problems, and the so-called package doesn't give me any
more hope in that regard. As far as I can see it really is a
very poor response.

So what would a more adequate response have to do?

The base-line for the recommendations was land rights for
Aborigines. That is an issue which has been raised by
numerous inquiries since 1836. I've read through every
report of every inquiry that has ever been conducted into
Aboriginal affairs in this country, and most of them have
stated that Aborigines have to be given their land rights.
The Royal Commissioner came out with exactly the same
recommendation—and still there has been no response.
That's one issue.

A second issue. The Royal Commissioner addressed a
wide range of social problems: health, employment,
education, housing. All of those things have to be ad­
dressed by the government, yet they just glossed over
them.

Finally, the last level of recommendations related to the
sorts of procedures to be implemented by authorities when
Aboriginal people are taken into custody. It was recom­
mended that they either receive cautions, court attendance
notices or summonses for the majority of offences for
which Aboriginal people get caught up in the criminal
justice system. The overwhelming majority of those are
street offences. And if they are taken into custody for
serious offences, other procedures should be imple­
mented. It doesn't take months for the government to
respond to those kinds of recommendations. All it takes is
an administrative directive to practising police, prison
officers, parole officers, and so on, to ensure that those
kinds of recommendations are implemented. Has there
been any effort in that regard? Not that we are aware of.
So there's very little positive response that one can make
to that package. It really is an insult.
It's become a commonplace in the public debate, such as it is, to say that it's not simply enough to throw money at the problem. That's said by people coming from different directions, and with very different axes to grind. It's said, for instance, by people on talkback radio who'd probably prefer that no more money went to the problems. But it's also said by Aboriginal people in communities themselves that it's not just a matter of adding a few million dollars to the Aboriginal affairs budget. How do you view the latest package in terms of that perception—the perception that it's not the amount of dollars that's crucial, but how they're spent, and how much gets to the communities where it's needed.

Up to a point there's a lot of truth in that. It isn't just a question of spending money. I don't want that statement to be interpreted to mean that money isn't necessary. Quite obviously money is needed. But much more important in my view is the way in which that money is utilised. One of the things that has always been missing from day one in Aboriginal affairs is a commitment to training Aborigines to acquire the necessary skills to rebuild their own communities—to manage community organisations, to become entrepreneurial in some of their activities. In fact, to be leaders. And it isn't good enough for any government to say: Aborigines have had citizenship and the right to vote for twenty-five years; they've had a long time in which to get their act together. That's not true. Twenty-five years is barely one generation. What we are contending with is generations over two hundred years of oppression, dispossession and disempowerment. And that has created a class of people who are dependent to a degree which I think most Australians would find very difficult to comprehend.

I say that on the basis of having been in the position where I had to help drag the community along with us, during the NSW Legislative Assembly committee of inquiry in the 1970s. I raked through thousands of pages of reports drawing out everything positive that people from Aboriginal communities wanted in their communities. And yet when we sought to implement them people often forget that it was they who actually articulated those programs as being the programs that they wanted. Or, even if they did remember them, they had some other reason why it couldn't be done. I was very distressed by that kind of response. I decided to sit down and listen to what people were saying. And when I analysed what they were saying, I realised that they were afraid of taking the next step because they didn't have the necessary skills: psychological skills, management skills, financial skills, simply living skills and social skills to effect the very sorts of programs that they were demanding.

If the millions of dollars which have been poured into Aboriginal affairs are to mean anything, it's essential that people be given the opportunity to develop their skills. And that can only be done through training. A lot of that training will have to be on-the-job training, simply because there are so few Aboriginal people with that kind of training—and because there are so few Aboriginal people. It's not simply an economic matter, it is a complex of psycho-

social, political and legal matters. It's a very complex issue.

The 25th anniversary of the referendum which granted Aboriginal people citizenship rights attracted a lot of attention recently in the media. Looking back 25 years, how significant do you think the changes have been? Has there been a single major achievement?

The fact that you're talking to me here is indicative of the single major achievement that we've made. On one of the radio programs on which I was interviewed that day was a young Aboriginal woman who can't even remember the referendum. She was relating the experiences of her mother and father. They said that suddenly everybody was listening to what Aborigines were saying when, before, they had simply been ignored. I think that's probably been the single greatest achievement, such as it is.

'The federal government package really is an insult.'

Let's make no bones about it: to be regarded as something less than animals in the Australian community had a profoundly depressing effect on one's psyche. I grew up in North Queensland where you were either black or you were white, and if you were black you were no good. I grew up with that attitude about myself. Then, to learn that to all intents and purposes you don't exist even as an object of measurement in the census—whereas animals existed and were counted—was an important measure of your value to society. I can't start to tell you what that does to people. And that is at the bottom of the Aboriginal psyche today.

We've started to change that. That referendum created enormous opportunities both for individuals like myself and for the Aboriginal cause. That's something which a lot of Aboriginal people haven't analysed and articulated but which they nevertheless realise at a gut level. And they have sought to capitalise on it in various ways: for example, establishing Aboriginal medical services, Aboriginal legal services, Aboriginal child care agencies, Aboriginal housing co-operatives and so on. So in that respect the referendum had an enormous impact.

However, when we start to measure the changes of the last 25 years by some sort of yardstick, the picture looks different. Aborigines today are only marginally better off vis-a-vis the rest of the Australian community than they were 25 years ago. Indeed, all of the advances we've made have been through sheer struggle on our part to wrest those concessions from the rest of the community. They haven't simply been given. Every one has been won only after protracted campaigns. Even today Aboriginal community groups have an ongoing battle with bureaucracy and government to attain sufficient funding to keep them viable.
Obviously the decision to grant Aboriginal people citizenship was an important one. Yet it is usually perceived within a particularly narrow, legalistic definition of citizenship. There's a wider conception of citizenship which says you need to be able to take full place in the community, to have social rights and the ability to engage in the community, not just a legal token. To what extent do you think the last 25 years has brought progress in that wider sense of social citizenship?

The referendum was passed in 1967 but my recollection is that it wasn't until 1969 that any government started to put in place mechanisms to effect the legal change in any kind of practical way. It was in 1975, through the hard work and good offices of Lionel Murphy, that Australia first decided to tackle the issue of racism by signing the UN convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination. This then required the government to implement such legislation domestically. There were a lot of people at that time who seemed to think that this was going to lead them into green pastures. I was highly critical of that legislation, because it didn't really deal with questions of racism such as they affect people in an everyday way. At least the wider community is now aware of the issue. But the wider issues of social citizenship have never satisfactorily been addressed. Governments have implemented equal opportunity programs in the public sector workplace. Yet the employment of Aborigines in the private sector remains absolutely abysmal. It's a very difficult thing to measure. There appears on the one hand to be a much heightened consciousness about these issues in the community at large but, on the other hand, there hasn't been a practical realisation of that awareness.

By any conventional measure you're a successful Australian. You're also a successful Aboriginal Australian—and there aren't that many. One consequence of this is that you are often judged as somehow being less authentically Aboriginal because you've been successful. How do you react to that?

It's a perfectly stupid perception, but it's very common. Whites look at me and say: you could pass for white. And blacks say: she's not Aboriginal, she's more white. It could only happen in Australia and it could only happen between Aborigines and non-Aborigines. Nobody thinks that an Italian person who is assessed to be successful—and who has come from a pretty horrendous introduction to Australian society—is any less Italian. Yet because I'm Aboriginal and because Australia has such a dark history and because issues of colour are so emotionally, psychically charged, people can't, quite literally, think straight.

It is open to me to be as successful or as unsuccessful as I am capable of being, in any field whatsoever. I have transcended those practical things which left my mother and my mother's family abjectly poor. Some of my relatives still live in abject poverty and my success hasn't changed that for them. But, at the same time, I think the success of people like me has changed things in a general sense for all Aborigines. I know that because I go around and talk to them. Young women in particular see me as a very important role model. I go to communities that I've never been to before and young kids come out with scrap books on me. My own kids don't have scrap books on me; neither do I, for that matter. These kids don't just say: I can be like her. They say: I now have a range of life chances, and if I choose to go this way and to follow some of the traditions of my people then I can do that with pride. On the other hand, if I choose to go in the same direction as she has, I can also do that with pride in my identity.

The thing many people don't like—black, white or brindle—is that I stand up there and say, yes, I've done this—but as an Aboriginal. I have suffered at the hands of this society, and that is an anger that will burn in my belly until the day I die. It gives me my motivation to change the world, even though I personally have succeeded. I could sit back in comfort in the eastern suburbs of Sydney and never have to fight another fight, but that would be betraying myself. The fact that I have been successful has meant that many more people take much more notice of what I have to say—particularly people in government. It's pretty hard to avoid somebody who is articulate and actually knows the system.

DAVID BURCHELL is ALR's editor.
AFTER Rationalism

Is 'economic rationalism' really about economics?
Tony Aspromourgos is unsure. Is it rational? Probably not. But he cautions that its failings don't let its critics off the economic hook.

As an economist, the rise of 'economic rationalism' in Australia in the 1980s was a source of some bemusement and irritation to me. I do not know precisely what it is. I am not sure that it is economics, but I am certain that it is not rational.

I have the impression that the term—used to embrace a loose collection of policy views with no very obvious unifying core—has had the effect (whatever the intention) of conveying to the general public the conception that in some sense this grab-bag of policies carried the imprimatur of economic science. This is the irritating aspect of 'economic rationalism'. Even if one remains entirely within the confines of orthodox (marginalist) economics, it is not evident that theoretical economics endorses 'economic rationalism'. The academic economists and other economic 'professionals' or 'experts' who are regularly dragged out of their cupboards and draped over a microphone, or broadsheet, to endorse 'economic rationalism' are very little different from the clergy of earlier (and some current) generations who bless the canons of one side or another of various conflicts—in our case, public policy conflicts.

This is not to say that economists do not have the right to participate in public policy debate—they have as much right as anybody else. But they should not be permitted to get away with projecting views which are essentially a product of their wider political and social values, rather than their professional expertise, as if those views had the status of scientific or some other intellectual authority. In fact, their wider social and political values are of no greater interest than those of an unemployed manufacturing worker in Wangaratta or Wollongong.

Much the same could be said of the economic journalists who cultivate an image of residing above the myriad of vested or particular economic interests and offering 'unsoiled' advice, presumably in the service of some 'common good' or 'national interest'. Yet this common interest, if it exists, remains entirely unelaborated in their entirely
derivative writings. In fact, these self-proclaimed crusaders are no more devoid of particular interests and controversial social values than anyone else.

To a large extent, then, 'economic rationalism' is actually a product of social and political values rather than economic science. Thus an explanation for its rise to dominance must be sought elsewhere than in economics alone. I do not mean by this to absolve academic economics of all culpability. Yet to locate the problem in the university training of our bureaucrats or businessmen is too easy. Those who believe that the dominant economic beliefs of the ruling elites—either in government or private business—are largely derived from their university training in economics need to explain how it happens that academic economists (whatever their other defects) on average are considerably less conservative than their former (or current) students. It would be obvious to any academic of even moderate perception that the social values of those who pass through the academy on their way to joining the elites are already solidly formed before they enter the academy. Of those who enter with such conservative beliefs, most leave with them largely intact. In short, it is not good enough merely to point the finger at 'economics'.

For in truth economic science provides little warrant for any economic policies of any kind. To the extent that economics limits itself to explanatory propositions about how economies actually behave, it can say little about desirable policies—only, at most, that if certain policy levers are pulled, then certain outcomes will result. In this purely explanatory realm, orthodox economic analysis is indeed deeply suspect; but that is not the point I wish to pursue here.

Yet despite these various misapprehensions there is a connection between orthodox economics and the bundle of policies associated with the term 'economic rationalism'. On one definition the core of 'economic rationalism' is the notion that competition and 'flexibility' of market processes will produce optimal economic outcomes—or at least, superior outcomes to any other (government-manipulated) regime. Yet again this is far from self-evident. A number of related postulates are required for a proposition like this to be plausible. Explaining them is somewhat technical, but worth following.

Even in the limited domain of price and wage flexibility, prices would have to simultaneously achieve three distinct goals. On the production side, market processes would have to proportion prices to costs. At the same time, on the demand side, prices would have to adjust so as to ensure that supplies balance demands and markets 'clear'. Finally, the resulting prices would have to exhibit certain additional optimal properties; in particular, prices would have to fully incorporate all social costs and benefits of economic activity. It turns out to be remarkably difficult to demonstrate just how market processes are to generate these various results.

Two examples may help to illustrate the difficulties involved. The first is related to the public debate on tariff policy and the best allocation of national economic resources. Here the usual procedure adopted by the econometricians is to assume full employment, and then analyse the possible alternative outcomes from reallocating those fully employed resources to different uses. (All the models contrived by the Industry Commission are of this kind.) The notion that resources (and in particular labour) in previously protected industries might find no alternative use is simply not taken seriously. Yet, to put the point mildly, it may not be so easy to transform a middle-aged male manufacturing worker in Geelong into a waitress in a Japanese restaurant in Cairns. If this is rationality, economic irrationality must be terrifying.

The other example is the parallel public debate over deregulation policy and the economic role of competition in general. Let us suppose for the sake of argument that a completely deregulated and competitive economy will generate superior social outcomes to a regulated and non-competitive system. This does not guarantee that any particular deregulatory reform aimed at providing greater competition will improve social welfare. The economic 'Theory of Second Best' upon which this conclusion rests is highly abstract, but the following illustration helps to suggest its significance.

Suppose that both rail and road freight are subsidised and cost inefficient. Suppose also, following the logic of orthodox economics, that removing subsidies from the costs of both rail and road freight will generate a superior social outcome. It nevertheless may easily be the case that if one removes subsidies from rail freight, but leaves road subsidies unchanged, the result will actually be greater inefficiency and thus a worse social outcome. Why? Because if rail freight becomes relatively more expensive than road freight, the effect will be to encourage more resources into road freight—and this will lead to an inferior, rather than superior, allocation of resources. In other words, removing subsidies from rail freight while subsidising road freight, according to this analysis, is actually worse than the situation of subsidising both.

It would not be all that difficult to provide a comprehensive and devastating critique of orthodox economic notions of the ability of the market mechanism to efficiently and spontaneously direct resources to the best ends—notions which underpin (albeit in vulgarised forms) the rationales for 'economic rationalism' in Australia. But that sort of critique would suffer from the intrinsic limitation of any negative argument: repudiating one set of arguments for a policy position does not remove the possibility that another set of quite valid arguments exists for the same policy. Or, to put
the same point slightly differently, a sufficient rationale may not be, at the same time, a necessary rationale.

This brings us to the real core of economic policy debate in Australia today. We are confronted with a fundamental dilemma. On the one hand we need a growth rate of the economy capable of systematically reducing unemployment towards the ultimate goal of full employment. On the other hand, and at the same time, we need to stabilise foreign debt and our current account deficit at levels which are sustainable. This means, in rough terms, that we need a persistent real GDP growth rate of upwards of 3.5-4% at the same time as generating a trade surplus of around 1.5% of GDP. The crucial question here is whether it is possible to achieve these results by relying wholly on the spontaneous mechanism of market forces. It is because I do not believe that spontaneous market forces are capable of generating these results that I favour interventionist industrial policies.

The dramatic changes in structural economic policy wrought by the Hawke and Keating governments since 1985-86 have essentially—if not entirely consciously—been driven by this fundamental difficulty of reconciling full employment growth and long run external balance. The internationalisation of the economy and aspects of deregulation have been driven by this imperative. That it is of prime importance to generate a persistent trade surplus of the order of magnitude indicated above—if full employment is ever to be revived as a serious policy objective—is at least loosely understood, and accepted, across the political spectrum. Less widely understood, particularly on the Left, is that this also has definite and largely inescapable implications for the balance between public sector expenditure and revenue, and thus for the level of public expenditure itself.

Why is this so? The current account deficit is by definition equal to the private sector deficit plus the public sector deficit. In other words, Australia's deficit with the rest of the world is equal to the excess of our expenditure over our income in the public and private sectors taken together. Hence, if government policy is aimed towards achieving a desired current account balance and a desired level of private investment—as is presently the case—then (given a certain level of private saving) this very largely determines the balance between income and expenditure in the public sector. In other words, if the current account is a primary target of government policy, the level of expenditure in the public sector is directly constrained by that policy objective. And this is true for the public sector as a whole; that is to say, all of the three tiers of government, including government trading enterprises. The consequences of this, though real, are palatable to many on the Left.

This much is clear at the level of principle. In practice, public sector budgetary restraint has become synonymous with expenditure restraint, not least because of the current government/opposition bidding war on tax cuts. But budgetary restraint could equally well be achieved through tax increases. This would mean shifting the burden of economic restraint towards the reduction of private consumption and/or investment. (However, the reduction of private investment is obviously economically unattractive, unless it is somehow or other the result of efficiency gains.)

I cannot conclude without a note of warning. I have argued above that the bundle of economic policies described as 'economic rationalism' lacks any robust general rationale in economic theory. This may be of some comfort for the Left, given that this selfsame range of policies stands at odds with many of its traditional beliefs. However, this does not somehow absolve the Left from the real policy dilemma I outlined above. In particular it should not obscure the fact that any plausible policy stance by the Left must be dominated by the two compelling requirements I outlined above. The first is that we require a trade surplus which allows both employment growth and the stabilisation of foreign debt as a percentage of GDP. The second is a public sector budget in line with the level of private investment and private savings, and with the aforementioned trade surplus (and, by implication, the current account deficit).

'Economic rationalism' is a vague and rubbery term which covers a multitude of intellectual and ethical sins. But this is no excuse for dismissing every policy associated with the term out of hand. It does not remove the necessity for the Left to consider case by case the usefulness of various policies which find a place under this idiotic rubric. The alternative is to make the same mindless error as our adversaries—an irrational a priori commitment to all the policies clustered under 'economic rationalism' confronting an equally irrational a priori rejection of all those same policies. The policies labelled as 'economic rationalism' are not a seamless robe of indivisible doctrine. Many of them may be the result of blind economic faith or prejudice. But equally some may be the result of compelling economic forces.

The Left needs to debate these issues further. In doing so it should not lose sight of two further considerations. First, no political body of opinion can ignore the economic constraints now confronting Australia and hope to remain a relevant intellectual force in public policy debate. There is a widespread diffidence, not to say antipathy, on the Left towards economics as such. For some, 'economic rationalism' seems to be simply a synonym for economic analysis. Second, elaborate critiques of market processes and powerful arguments for their failure are not sufficient to justify vaguely conceived policies of government intervention. There is government failure as well, as the Victorian experience of the 1980s makes transparently clear. It is necessary to provide policy responses which are reasonably likely to generate superior outcomes—and this in turn requires a more thoroughgoing commitment to policy debate and development.

TONY ASPROMOURGOS teaches in economics at Sydney University. This is a longer version of a paper delivered recently to a Left forum in Sydney.
Private prisons are on the agenda, and David Brown is perturbed. An ideological ‘public/private’ tussle over prisons is the last thing the prison debate needs.

Woken by the phone at 6 am. ABC radio: any comment on the NSW government proposals to invite private tenders to build and run a new jail at Junee in NSW? Blearily rehearse the familiar litany of arguments against private prisons. “Penality sole province of the state...dangers of the development of a penal-industrial complex...potential conflicts of interest...less accountable...cost cutting and undermining of union conditions.”

But add that the public penal system in NSW is in such a disastrous state after the punitive and destructive policies of former state minister Michael Yabsley that a private sector operation could hardly be much worse.

The coffee suddenly tastes terrible when the main ABC morning news bulletin oozes a grab of my croaking tones, preceding the news announcement that a NSW penal reform group, the Campaign for Criminal Justice, supports the government’s privatisation plans. Shit. I should stick to the old dichotomies. Either for or against. Anything else is too subtle.

Sure enough the phone starts ringing. What’s going on? Thought there was an established left position against penal privatisation? The old “I was robbed/misquoted/that’s not exactly what I said” always sounds feeble, even when it’s true.

Fortuitously, contacted later by the producer of the John Doyle show on ABC radio and managed to get a spot that day. Roy Slaven’s other (non-rampaging) self conducts an informed interview in which the issues do not need to be forced into crude dichotomies, and a range of arguments can be considered. Savage the current directions of penal policy under NSW Inc and call Michael Yabsley a “menace to the citizens of NSW”. Pressure eases.
Mulling over these events I am struck by the potential of the privatisation debate to provide a window onto a wide range of aspects of the existing penal system and the exercise of the power to punish. And I am disturbed at the effects of an orthodoxy which so readily invokes the 'not on/out of the question' chant rather than seek to open up new political spaces for debate.

For the various issues raised by privatisation are of a fundamentally political nature. They cannot be simply ignored or wished out of existence by either the proponents or opponents of penal privatisation. Nor can they just be redefined as technical issues, to be left to the 'experts'.

They are issues which can only be resolved through a process of open, democratic debate and discussion. The form of the debate is as important in many respects as the content. A prerequisite then is for the debate to be democratic—in the sense that it must be open to a wide range of interested parties and must take place in a variety of forms. It must also be pluralistic and non-dogmatic—by which I mean that the tendency to argue from entrenched positions of, for example, a championing of ‘market forces’ and ‘competition’ as necessarily delivering better services, or a championing of state control on the basis of tradition, must be replaced by a preparedness to look behind the generalised and taken-for-granted slogans of the contending parties.

An example of the need to scrutinise taken-for-granted assumptions is provided in the advertising and promotion of a conference on penal privatisation scheduled for Sydney in November last year. The conference was promoted by glossy brochures and full-page advertisements in national daily papers. It was organised by “AIC Conferences”, subtitled “A Euromoney Company” and “sponsored by Carter Goble Associates, USA”. The AIC tag invited confusion with the Australian Institute of Criminology, which runs many conferences on criminological topics. The venue was The Sheraton Wentworth and registration was $1095 for two days, the fee covering “lunch, refreshments and documentation”, but not accommodation. The publicity nominated “WHO SHOULD ATTEND” as “Executives from corrective services, community services, security and technology organisations, unions, construction companies, police forces, criminologists, banks and merchant banks plus those involved in administration of the court”.

Needless to say, few representatives of ‘community services’, particularly from the voluntary sector—or indeed anyone without full institutional backing (which these days excludes most academics, save those actually giving papers)—would have been able to afford to attend. And, indeed, the conference was cancelled, which was probably a good thing, given that the structure financially excluded certain participants, infringing one of the basic requirements of democratic debate.

The title of the conference ‘Reform and Privatisation of the Criminal Justice System’ surreptitiously hitches the process of privatisation to the banner of reform. Now, this may or may not turn out to be the case. Certainly, one of the few concrete examples of penal privatisation we have in Australia, Borallon prison in Queensland, has generally received a very favourable press for what could broadly be described as a reform-oriented profile. But the point here is that it is the challenge for those promoting specific forms of penal privatisation to demonstrate their reform potential over existing state provision. Such a challenge is not met simply by the addition of an ‘and’ between ‘Reform’ and ‘Privatisation’. A demonstrated commitment to reform in the criminal justice system is far more than a PR strategy. It involves, among other things, a preparedness to criticise the punitive penal policies pursued by governments such as that in NSW, as indeed senior management at Borallon have done.

Another requirement of the debate is that the proponents of privatisation tackle head on the criticisms of penal privatisation put forward by the opponents. So far in the debate, there has been a tendency for the opposed parties to talk past each other: this must be overcome. One way to overcome it is for a clear exposition of the arguments against privatisation to be undertaken and then seriously addressed by the proponents. Without this joining of argument any initiatives in privatisation will be built on inadequate foundations, subject to continual challenge and destabilisation. It is in the interests of all parties that such a process occurs.

The key arguments against penal privatisation that have emerged are that penal privatisation should remain primarily the responsibility of the state; that there are dangers in the development of a strong penal-industrial lobby group which may develop significant political power and seek to wield it in the direction of maintaining high imprisonment rates; that there are potential conflicts of interest; that accountability is a worry, as is the possibility of attacks on unions’ wages and conditions; that cost savings are illusory; that there is the real danger of the development of a two-tier system in which privatised prisons would be offered better conditions and reserved for middle class fraud and white collar offenders, while the public system became increasingly impoverished and violent.

Many of these arguments carry considerable force. Some of the problems sketched in these objections can be seen in the US experience, and they may well emerge here if we see an acceleration of penal privatisation in Australia. The point I wish to make is not that these arguments are either right or wrong, but that asserting or denying them as taken-for-granted propositions can close off opportunities for opening up penal issues to new surfaces of debate, new ways of thinking about penalty and new social forces taking part in those debates.

I want to investigate briefly a couple of these arguments in order to illustrate the dangers of treating them as conclusive.

First, the assertion that the power to punish is inherently a state function, has two particular difficulties. One is the very limited historical understanding this view involves. Certainly, in the Australian context where the initial white colonial settlement was in the form of penal colonies, the state was more deeply involved in penalty than in Britain.
or the USA—where a range of private, philanthropic and voluntary agencies played a significant part in the penal system (for example, in initiating systems of probation). Even in the Australian context ticket of leave systems, although sponsored by the state, were highly dependent on private supervision by free settlers. And contemporary Australian social historians are in the process of rediscovering the importance of the networks of philanthropic and voluntary agencies, staffed particularly by women, which operated forms of aftercare programs (arguably precursors to a formal parole system) in the latter half of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century. The point is that state hegemony over the penal system is, clearly in Britain and the USA, and to a lesser extent in Australia, a phenomenon of the 20th century. It simply was not ‘ever thus’, as the claim that imprisonment is “inhertently a state function” tends to suggest.

A second problem relates to the initiatives of ex-prisoner and prisoner action groups in community corrections in the 60s and 70s. The arguments at the time were that self-help and activist groups should have a significant role in the provision of prisoner and ex-prisoner housing and welfare/political services. Having spent considerable time theorising, arguing for and being involved in such forms of radical private initiative, it is a little difficult suddenly to elevate the principle of state monopoly over corrections to taken-for-granted status. Of course, there is a world of difference between a prison built and run by a multinational company and a prisoner movement halfway house. But that is precisely the point. In order to evaluate the appropriateness and abilities of particular agencies to operate, administer or service various penal institutions or programs, we need some more specific criteria than a crude public/private distinction.

The same difficulty arises in relation to the argument that private prisons will be necessarily less accountable. Having spent much time showing how unaccountable the public prison system is, and how the limited forms of accountability have been eroded, for instance, under the current NSW government, it is a little difficult suddenly to trumpet its virtues against an untried challenger. Again, there are many reasons why a private prison is likely to be even less accountable than what we have at present—but they relate to the specific conditions under which a private prison would operate. In particular, claims of commercial confidentiality in contracts of performance between governments and private operators may well prevent the most basic public scrutiny of the terms in which a private prison is to be operated, paid for, receive its prisoners, and so on. In short, the analysis must be pitched at the institutional, technical and discursive conditions under which different penal regimes are likely to operate, rather than assuming that certain effects are necessarily embedded in either public or private operation.

In short, both the standard hostile and defensive reaction to penal privatisation per se, and the uncritical promotion of penal privatisation as self-evidently amounting to ‘reform’ tend to operate as forms of closure on the debate—a debate which might otherwise be used precisely to highlight the inadequacy of current forms of accountability in relation to public prisons. Moreover, such a debate might open up fresh opportunities to raise questions about the many problems in our penal system, not the least being its frequent failure to provide sufficient educational and training programs and initiatives for prisoners.

DAVID BROWN teaches in Law at the University of NSW.
Fear and Loathing in LA

The Rodney King case provoked outrage and bewilderment in almost equal proportions. Ian Hoskins explores some of its roots.

Soon after the all-white jury handed down a 'not guilty' verdict in the Rodney King case, America's most successful black news presenter, Bryant Gumbal, interviewed one of the jurors. It was a rare moment of unscripted poignant emotion. Gumbal's style is usually one of automated fluidity. His most excruciating mode is 'serious'. But in keeping with the need for 'balance' and 'professionalism' Gumbal commands a range of emotional modes. Both Gumbal and the NBC Today show have a seamlessness which, paradoxically, counters attempts by the viewer to relate and connect issues and news items. All is forgotten when the next segment arrives and Gumbal's intensely knitted brow dissolves into a commercial break or Willard Scott's weather report.

But the night of the jury decision was different. Gumbal wanted to know, as so many of us did, how the jury could reach its verdict in the face of seemingly irrefutable evidence: video and audio tape recordings of the beating and subsequent police radio conversations. When questioned, the juror repeated the arguments offered by the defence counsel: Rodney King had provoked the attack and was actually in control of the situation. Gumbal asked the next obvious question: at what stage of his beating did King lose control of the situation? The juror responded: King had remained in control the whole time; he was making the decisions; the police were only responding.

Throughout this short dialogue, NBC ran the video footage of the beating. We watched Rodney King lying on the ground surrounded, beaten and electrically stunned by police officers while the juror continued to argue that King was in control. When the camera cut back to the studio, Bryant Gumbal's face showed a mixture of incredulity and disgust. For a brief but powerful moment auto-emotion had given way to the unrehearsed.

Clearly, the question had not been answered satisfactorily. Perhaps it is necessary to rephrase the question and ask how and when such an episode can be made to seem reasonable. As a TV viewer, I certainly found it somewhat difficult to make the imaginative leap into the world of that juror. But it is important to get beyond this impasse. Conclusions which simply label the jury members 'bigots' are not overly helpful. While the LA riots were clearly multi-focused and multi-ethnic, their catalyst—the image of a black man being beaten repeatedly by white police officers—is historically loaded in American society and culture. A more insightful analysis of the verdict must therefore begin with a historical look at violence against African Americans.

Few social phenomena present the problem of this imaginative impasse more starkly than the bitter legacy of lynching, particularly in the American South. While some lynchings were simply spontaneous responses to accusations or grievances, many were more elaborate, planned and sometimes publicised affairs. They brought together the white community in a public ritual of torture and execution. Everyone was involved either actively through participation in the torture and killing or passively as spectators.

Lynching was largely a Southern practice. Its peak in the 1890s coincided with the maturing of a black population which had no direct memory of slavery. In the wake of slavery, lynching served as a reaffirmation of the solidarity of the white community, the pattern of race relations and the image of the 'dangerous nigger' commonly represented in literature and academic works as an insatiable black man. The ideology of lynching was heavily underscored by the perceived threat of black violence, particularly sexual violence. Miscegenation had become the symbolic threat to white society and the almost ceremonial attacks on the bodies of the victims were symbolic of the social expurgation of African Americans.

So, in the name of social stability and the maintenance of order, God-fearing white men, women and children stabbed, burned, shot, hanged and dismembered at least 3,500 blacks between 1882 and 1968. The photographic and written accounts of these lynchings reveal that they often performed these acts with enthusiasm and good cheer.

The customary extra-legal control of African Americans was given tacit support by the judicial system. No white would be found guilty of murdering a black, at least in the Southern states. But the ideology of lynching was also reinforced more directly by the legal discrimination of disenfranchisement and the Jim Crow segregation laws. The right to vote, granted to black men after the Civil War, was revoked throughout the South. Blacks and whites were not only segregated on street cars, in hotels and schools, they had to swear on different bibles in courts of law. Blacks were confined and regulated spatially and socially within cities and small towns. Contact between the races was increasingly limited to clearly defined work relationships: overseer and labourer on the farm and in the factory, mistress and maid in the home. In this sense, segregation replaced the intimacy which was permitted by the rigid institution of slavery.

But if lynching was essentially a Southern folkway, the coincidence of extra-legal violence, legal repression and spatial separation had its origin in the cities of the North in the preceding...
The jurors who sat in judgment on the Rodney King case came from Simi Valley, a predominantly white community in Ventura County, north-west of Hollywood. Some have described it as a retirement home for police officers. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) itself is nearly 70% white. Its upper echelons are almost exclusively white. Most of the officers live in neighbouring counties such as Ventura, San Bernadino and Riverside. Each working day they travel from their suburban homes to their jobs—policing the black and Hispanic quarters to the south and west. These are areas known only to the police from the inside of a patrol car or from the vantage point of a helicopter fitted with spotlights and infra-red nightscopes. The LAPD is one of the most mechanised and hi-tech police forces in the country. In this segregated city the highly mobile officers employ a tactical logic based on spatial and ethnic ‘profiles’. Any Hispanic or African
century. Slavery had petered out there by the end of the 1820s, but racial antagonism had not. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s the pattern of legal and extra-legal anti-black violence, segregation and disenfranchisement spread through Northern cities in response to the perceived threat to white economic and spatial security. In the wake of slavery in the North, as in the South, blacks had to be ‘shown their place’, both figuratively and literally.

With the social upheavals of two world wars and the huge migration of blacks to the North and West, fresh waves of race riots swept American cities: East St Louis in 1917, Chicago in 1919, Detroit in 1940 and Los Angeles in 1943. Legal segregation remained in force in the South until the 1960s, while Northern cities, particularly Chicago saw de facto segregation. Any transgression of these undrawn boundaries could prompt swift and terrible violence.

Los Angeles today is a huge sprawling metropolis, a city with many centres. Along with Chicago it remains one of the most ethnically segregated cities in the United States. This segregation is spatial, but also economic, social and cultural. Poorer blacks tend to live in the Watts and South Central areas. Hispanics, the fastest growing ethnic group, have traditionally gravitated to East Los Angeles—though they too are moving to South Central. The Vietnamese community is centred in nearby Orange County, Koreatown sits on the edge of South Central and, as the name suggests, is home to the majority of Korean immigrants. Whites have tended to move to the security of suburbs to the north and the outlying counties to the east—vast areas of shopping malls, video outlets and comfortable houses.

Movement between these areas is economically defined. Hispanic men and women service the gardens and houses of middle class whites during the day and most return to their neighbourhoods at night. Koreans run their liquor stores and supermarkets in the black and Hispanic areas of South Central. Many young unemployed black and Hispanics stay in their barrios and ‘hoods’—landscapes overlaid with an invisible matrix of gang territories.

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American homes via news broadcasts, television, police dramas and 'real life' exposés of crime in *America's Most Wanted* and *Cops*. In the segregated city the white audience travels to the other side through these filtered images. They both reflect and generate public perceptions of law and order.

When the amateur video recorder shot the videotape of police officers clubbing Rodney King he brought the filmic representation of policing operations as close to reality as it can perhaps possibly get. The home video camera would seem to be the ultimate democratisation of the medium. Citizens can now videotape their own real life police dramas unedited and unrehearsed. Here the camera was pointed in the other direction and it was the police who were the criminals. But, for this jury, the filmic reality was only one negative image amid a thousand positive ones.

Kevin Ryan, now a Sydney barrister, had a successful Rugby League career with Sydney clubs St George and Canterbury in the 1960s. He was a state Labor MP from 1976-1984. Since taking over the unpaid position of president of the Players' Union two years ago, he has succeeded in having the draft—the system by which the League controlled the transfer of players between clubs—declared illegal. Now, he has his sights set on establishing an industrial award for players.

Under your presidency the Players' Union has taken steps towards becoming more like a 'real' union. How much further would you like to go along that path, and in what directions?

I saw the Players' Union initially as a tame and captive sort of union, a bosses' union. Fortunately, way back in the early 1980s, someone had registered it under the Trade Union Act, and also under the Industrial Arbitration Act. I took that one step further by affiliating it with the NSW Labor Council. The court case where we overturned the players' draft was a big victory and that's helped to entrench the Players' Union as a true union, and also to lift the morale of the players. At the moment, we're pursuing an industrial award in the State Industrial Commission. Hopefully within a few weeks, it will put in place an award structure requiring minimum payments to the players, including allowances for training, proper insurance cover and superannuation.

Having an industrial award will be the basis of true unionisation. It will be the first of its kind in the world—there have been some collective bargaining agreements in American sport, but this will be the only one under a centralised wage-fixing authority. After that we'll be looking at improving conditions for players by, for example, achieving more say in the rule-making department—players at the moment are ignored in this area, and they're precisely the ones who should be consulted.

How has the League reacted towards the increased militancy of the Union?
They don’t like it, just as most bosses don’t like it! But we don’t want to interfere with their managerial prerogative, they can run their organisations badly if they want to, and a lot of clubs are run incompetently. All we want to do is to put a floor under wages and conditions to ensure that our players get a minimum turn out of it.

The NSW Rugby League introduced the retain-and-transfer system in 1960, based on the old system in British soccer, which was finally made illegal there only three years later. How do you think the League’s industrial relations stand now, in comparison both with overseas sport and other sports in Australia?

By way of a benchmark, soccer in England has been industrialised since about 1912. English soccer players have got a strong and militant union, which has, for instance, recently won them a share of television proceeds. The management has had it so good out here precisely because there has never been a real players’ union, or any solidarity among players. When an individual player, Denis Tutty, took on the transfer system in 1969-70, he was on his own. It cost him three years of his life and his football career.

The League are still pretty antiquarian on industrial relations. When changes are made, they tend to follow what happens in America. The draft happened first in America, then in AFL. The League thought that sounded like a good idea, and so they brought it in. But if ever you sat them down and asked them for a constructive, conceptual reason why the draft should exist, all they could do was give you anecdotes about the past. No-one had a vision of what really needed to happen. They didn’t even understand their own draft.

ABC general manager and rugby league club president David Hill has described the League management as “a self-perpetuating oligarchy”. Others have used terms like feudalism to describe the industrial relations system. Why is it that sport has been so slow in coming to terms with modern industrial practices?

In rugby league, it’s simply because there’s no real democracy. It’s a big family really, a mafia form of running a business. I use the word mafia not as a sinister term, necessarily, but in the sense that people are anointed into their positions, there’s no real choice there. It’s been accepted that sport is not run in a way that makes its managers answerable to the people. People are allowed to set themselves up as dictators, and as long as they get away with it, they’ll continue to do so.

In the 1970s the players were found to be under workers compensation cover, so in 1979 the then president of the League, Kevin Humphreys, went to the state government and, with a stroke of the pen, rugby league players were removed from cover under the workers compensation legislation. Substituted in its place was a Mickey Mouse scheme called...
the Sporting Injuries Insurance Scheme, which is totally inadequate. In addition to that there has been some private insurance taken out by the clubs, again totally inadequate. So there's a lot of work to be done there to provide proper cover for injuries.

As far as violence is concerned, I would like to see the players enter into some sort of social contract in relation to their conduct on the field. A code of conduct with the general support of the players would go a long way to eliminating violence in the game.

Do you agree with the generally held conviction that violence is increasing?

It's hard to compare, because there's so much scrutiny of the game these days through television replays. Certainly I don't like to see viciousness in the game, although it should obviously be a tough and hard game. I thought the last NSW-Queensland State of Origin game was a good example of rugby league's toughness and competitiveness, and the ensuing drama that goes with it. Maybe it's cutting out a bit of ball-handling and subjugating the skills a little bit, but I don't think there's any really unnecessary violence in that.

You mentioned TV. How would you like to see the Players' Union involved in decisions about the TV coverage of League?

Certainly to the extent that some percentage of the revenue should go to the players. They should also have a say in the nature and quantity of it, in the same way that they should be involved in consideration of rule changes and the general promotion of the game. I have a lot of faith in the players. At a recent AGM of the union, it was incredible to hear some of the ideas coming off the floor in relation to a whole range of issues. The problem is that the players have never been given the opportunity in the past, and they should be. There are a lot of original thinkers among them.

Do the players appreciate the changes you've made to the Union?

Like anywhere else, there are union people and there are anti-union people among players. I've also had a very hostile media—sporting journalists by and large are keen to be accepted by the governing body. They'd sooner be treated to a free lunch and publish a press release rather than delve a bit further and make themselves unwanted and unwelcome in the process.

To what extent do you think the players and the Union have responsibility to the people who come and watch?

I think most players do instinctively feel that responsibility, and that's really why they go for the honour and glory of achieving representative honours. There's very little money involved there. The international players who toured England last time were on petty wages over there, around $150 per week, then when they came back they got another two or three thousand dollars. This is after they've been away from their job and their family for three months, running the risk of injury and all the rest of it. Perhaps the players could be reminded of their responsibility to the public a bit more often, but I don't think any of them would have trouble with the concept that they're there principally to give entertainment.

Where gains have been won for sportsmen and women, such as freedom of contract, it's tended to result in a greater divergence in salary between the top few players and the rest. Is that an acceptable outcome for the Union?

As far as I can see, the way it's gone in America, and the way it's headed in Australia, is that fewer and fewer players are getting more and more of the pie. The size of the pie here is being restricted by the League through the use of the salary cap [The restriction imposed by the League on the total wages bill for each club]. I don't think that's a good form of management, because even though there are so-called stars, and they are important to a team, you still need 13 people to make a successful side. I don't think there's as great a disparity between the top and the bottom players in a team as suggested by the present remuneration system. But that's a managerial issue and at this stage I'm not buying into that argument. All we say is that at least there should be a minimum structure.

Why do you oppose the salary cap?

I'm against it in principle, philosophically and in terms of economics, because it's an interference with the free market system and an interference with managerial prerogatives. It also, of course, affects the players in terms of their financial return. I'm not so interested in interfering with what the people at the top might be getting. That's a matter for themselves, as long as the bottom guys aren't suffering.

How do you think the game has changed in the past few years, both on the field and in terms of marketing?

There's a lot of hoo-ha written about changes to the game. I think the game has basically been the same since 1967, when the four-tackle rule was introduced. There have been refinements, and improvements, obviously, and players now are bigger, fitter, faster and better ball-handlers than they were 20 or 25 years ago.

Obviously, promotion and presentation has improved dramatically, and that's one thing I've got to give the present administration. At least they've had the commonsense and humility to get other people to do the marketing, and not try to do it themselves. Whether you agree with the philosophy of what the revenue's being spent on is another matter.

What do you see as the main problems of the revenue distribution?

First of all, it doesn't appear to be equitable. The eleven clubs which didn't get into the finals last year got $290,000 each from the League. Yet those clubs have salary costs of $1.3 or $1.5 million, apart from all the other costs of running a club. That's obviously ridiculous. Something's got to give somewhere. I do concede, though, that they don't want to give it to inefficient clubs, obviously that's just wasting it. I suppose the ultimate answer is simply better management of the clubs, but it's hard to legislate for commonsense and efficiency.

MIKE TICHER is ALR's business manager.
Not Far Enough

Put Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman together in an epic Irish-American saga and the result is...a buzzard.
David Nichols reports.

The Gulf War: the skill, the expertise, the progress of it all, was once again occasion for white America to look back in wonderment. America the brave, the most excellent: where did all this magnificence come from?

Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman present million-dollar director Ron Howard’s version of American origins in the new movie Far and Away; in fact, the movie had the working title Irish Story which, typically for Hollywood, actually meant ‘American Story With Irish People’.

Cruise and Kidman’s characters are from different classes, different religions, different world views; America, the great leveller, puts them on an even footing. But wait...was it America, or was it Love? Heck, tell me the difference!

But all of this is not any sort of a subtext. Actually, it’s a given. Underneath is something which is both more personal and more revealing of mainstream America.

Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman met in a movie: no, literally. They came together in Days of Thunder, the motor-racing film Tom conceived of as an epic follow-up to his role as Ron Kovic in Oliver Stone’s rather more severe Born on the Fourth of July. Nicole played his doctor: the movie was rather crass, and the product placement (the little packets of Sweet ‘n’ Low Tom diabolically pushes up Nicole’s leg to illustrate his pursuit of perfection) didn’t help at all. Nevertheless if it didn’t break box office records, it did get the two together—and yet another fairytale Hollywood romance was born.

Who of the American audience of Far and Away would not know about Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman? They have the ‘pairability’, if not the classic quality, of Tracy and Hepburn, Bogart and Bacall. They’re both young and attractive, not to mention talented. The ascension of Tom Cruise from ‘handsome top box-office draw’ to ‘talented too’ would be worth plotting in itself. The fact, then, that Tom and Nicole don’t actually ‘get together’ for any period of time in Far and Away (they actually reveal their love for each other in the closing few seconds of the movie: there, I spoil it for you) doesn’t seem to matter. They are, after all, married off-screen.

The movie plays with our knowledge of the couple. Where the real Nicole is only a novice in Hollywood terms, in the movie she is Shannon, a complacent, petulant, established young lady of the upper classes: daughter of a Protestant land-owning family in Ireland, 1892. Tom Cruise, Hollywood’s leading leading man, is a poor and even slightly simple young lad called Patrick. He tills the soil—back-breaking work because the soil is so bad in Ireland—and he is so unworldly it hurts. By a series of ridiculous and vaguely humorous coincidences Shannon takes Patrick under her wing and the two travel
together to America, where land is free for the taking!

Pause for three-quarters of an hour in Boston for the obligatory Tom Cruise violent sport sequences. Tom seems to believe no one will go to see a Tom Cruise movie if they cannot see him dice with death in a man-against-man sport. Days of Thunder was the need for speed. Far and Away is boxing. In fact, Patrick, after being beaten from an early age by his drunken, ugly elder brothers, has invented a new form of boxing: you wag your head around and dodge your opponent’s blows. No one’s ever thought of this before so, naturally, he’s a hit—until he chooses to challenge a massive Italian. Are the Italians more Catholic than the Irish? God obviously thinks so, and Pat cops it.

Suddenly they are destitute: Pat and Shannon are split up. Pat helps build a railroad, having abandoned his dream of land. Yet he can’t let the bad times get him down in such a world of promise: travelling to the next place of menial work he hears a black co-passenger (the only black person in the film) decrying the craziness of a group of would-be land claim-stakers. Pat can’t help it, he’s crazy too. He leaps off the train and joins the throng: land!

At the town where the race to grab a plot is about to begin, Patrick reunites with Shannon who is there not only with her old beau—a snivelling upper-class cad—but also her parents who, after their house is destroyed by Irish rebels, decide to ‘make a fresh start’. (Shannon’s parents are interesting. Her father confesses to Patrick early in the film that he has no particular wish to live off the peasants’ hard labour and degradation. Unfortunately, he is too bumbling and loveable to explain why. Then he concocts a plan to steal a plot of land which people are already slaughtering each other over: he does not need the land but enjoys the adventure of the plan to defraud others of it. Loveably enough, he succeeds.)

‘Land!’ The land, America, freedom, is there for the taking. One split-second shot, just before the race for the land begins, speaks a billion words: a few Native Americans, in western clothes, look on as the white settlers prepare to kill each other in the pursuit of a small farm. The shot of the Native Americans is too quick to mean anything except: ‘Native Americans, not doing anything about anything’. They might be bemused, they might be antagonistic, but they’re portrayed as not acting on either or on any impulse. Ron Howard appears to be looking around and noticing for a second that ‘Yes, actually, the land wasn’t free for the taking per se—these people had it first. There, I said it—but what can I do about it?’

Do Pat and Shannon get their little plot of land together? Does a horse roll over Patrick and kill him, until his soul—herself above his body—hears Shannon cry out that she has always loved him? Well, you’ll have to see the film and find out. Far and Away is a myth (Tom & Nicole: their romance) within a myth (white guys: they rule) within a myth (America: the bold and brave) within a myth (Ron Howard makes great ‘family’ movies). And when a film makes a complacent mass media enthusiast like the present writer this upset and irritated, you know it has to be pretty darn deep.

DAVID NICHOLS started his journalistic career ten years ago in Vox Musicpaper and has since progressed through Smash Hits, TV Guide and Puncture to Terrorzone.

Low Fidelity

Cuba—last hope of socialism or a prospective banana republic that even runs out of bananas? Ray Moynihan was his own man in Havana.

José is in his late 20s. He comes up to us on the street, the day we arrive in Cuba, before we even find a hotel. The Lido. It’s cheapish, there’s hot water most of the time, and a fifth floor view of crumbling old Havana. You can smell the sea from the balcony.

José sniffns out a couple of sympathetic foreigners. He tells us he is very keen to meet and talk. He breaks through our first night nerves, and we end up sharing a meal at one of Havana’s celebrated eating spots, the Bodeguita del Medio. Lots of photos of Hemingway. We eat rice, black beans, chicken and pork. Often they are out of bananas. The beer’s good, though, and always available. It comes in brown unlabelled bottles.

Anna is 50. We meet in her home in Cerro. It’s comfortable, but small, in the better part of Cerro, a big suburb in central Havana. We have a letter of introduction from an Australian friend of her husband. He is a senior bureaucrat; she is a senior academic. Anna is passionate about the revolution, and makes us a wonderful meal. A few friends drop in and we chat about the new petrol restrictions and the reductions in the working week. We drink warm flat beer and Cuban rum, and overhear Fidel on the neighbour’s TV. It’s a speech about everything, the third this week. It runs for maybe two hours, prime time, no ads.

José is trained in one profession, works in another and is actively involved in the music scene in his spare time. Sooner or later he confesses to us that his sympathies lie with the Cuban dissidents. Perhaps he boasts it. I don’t quite know how to react to a Cuban dissident.
José wants to leave Cuba. But he won't be jumping into the sea; some of his friends have died doing it. In any case, he doesn't want to go to the States. He's thinking about Australia's economic migration program. His English is good, but I'm not sure if he'll pass the points test.

Anna is telling us about her trip to the southern shores of Cuba, to that special place where Fidel and his comrades landed from Mexico in 1957. She tells me how they struggled ashore through the mud and mangroves and walked many miles before reaching the mountains and waging their war. It is religious awe; her visit is a pilgrimage. Anna has wanted to join the party for many years, but can't; it already has its quota of intellectuals.

José and his friends talk bitterly about what they see as the dreadful repression of Cuba. They are young professionals, underemployed in what they say are inefficient state bureaucracies. They want real jobs and opportunities to make money. They want to drive a car to work, not a Chinese push bike. But there are no cars for them, and at the moment there's no petrol either. They rail against restrictions on the media, against Castro's antidiluvian rhetoric and cult of personality. They say they want us to tell them about Australia, about western democracy and all it promises. More than anything they want to tell us about Cuba, passionately.

Anna is lamenting the racial make-up of her university undergraduate class. She's worried that there aren't enough Afro-Cubans. It's a big problem. Every money-changer on the street who has approached us is black. They want to buy my US dollars with their local currency, and they are the most visible manifestation of Cuba's burgeoning black economy. Tourism is one of the grand dreams that Cuba's political elite, and its people, are pinning their hopes on.

José invites us for New Year's Eve. We eat and dance with him and his family, and we throw water on passers-by at midnight. He lives with his mother, brother and sister-in-law in two small rooms in one of the many decaying tenements in Old Havana. The meal is the best of our trip to Cuba: rice, beans, chicken, pork and banana. Much of it was purchased the previous afternoon when José and I rode about 10 kilometres to the 'Diplo-tienda', the store open only to diplomats and other foreigners. José bought the rum the day before; he waited in a queue for six hours.

The night is a celebration infused with sadness. The songs tell a political story of Cuba, now and before. José's mother sings along to some magnificent old Caribbean rhythms from the 30s and 40s. We hear poor-quality cassette copies of banned pop songs from Cuban dissidents recorded in the States in the 70s and 80s. Later, our hosts cynically talk us through some contemporary official rock on the radio. And of course we hear The General, the most popular song in Havana. The sensual rhythms of this Puerto Rican rapper pound from every ghetto blaster in every apartment in every street. The sexual, apolitical lyrics excite a generation of young Cubans as their parents feign outrage.

Like a lot of Cubans we meet, Anna tells us of the great successes of the revolution in health, welfare, education, housing and human rights. This is not empty rhetoric. We didn't see one homeless person in Cuba. We must have seen a dozen in a day in LA.

José is frustrated and angry about the restrictions on political freedoms in Cuba. He is angry about Cuba's isolation, and sick and tired of the same old speeches from the same old man in a military uniform. Anna and José, were they ever to meet, would no doubt both feel that, at least in part, the other's view was a product of "manipulation"—in one instance manipulation by "the party"; in the other, manipulation by "outside influences".

Outside Havana, in a sea-side town, we spend an afternoon with a young teacher and her journalist partner. We laugh and joke about US sitcoms which can be picked up on Cuban TV, and with much hilarity we eat homemade 'Egg-Donalds' for lunch. As dusk comes, we take a bath in the Caribbean, which is warm in mid-winter. While we don't meet any, we're reliably informed that people are still jumping into rubber tyres and making for Miami, just 100 kilometres away.

We leave Cuba soon after the huge New Year's Eve celebrations. Since 1959, New Year has replaced Christmas as the time of festivity, and it coincides with the anniversary of the revolution. A few days later we are in a cab in Mexico City, and we pull up at the lights. On the pavement half a dozen kids sell chocolate and lollies. Some are as young as five. My friend remarks that in Havana, the kids ask the tourists for chewing gum; in Mexico City they sell it to stay alive.

RAY MOYNIHAN is a producer for ABC TV's Four Corners.
Is the Left resurgent in Latin America? If so, why and what kind of Left? The authors of both of these studies agree that it is. (I myself do not share this optimistic view, for reasons I shall explain below.) Petras and Morley argue that the hegemony of the United States is under siege and the social movements are growing in size and effectiveness. Silverstein and Sader point to the rise of the Labor Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores) under the leadership of Luis Inacio Lula da Silva (known simply as Lula) in Brazil.

James Petras and Morris Morley have produced a series of essays which form a challenging and provocative, if not a sustained, critique. They contend that to understand the political economy of Latin America in the 1980s and beyond, it is necessary to recognise three related developments: "the deterioration and breakdown of reformist social-democratic governments; the emergence of mass social movements and rising levels of class struggle; and the revival of the Left and centre-Left (parliamentary and insurrectionary) as consequential political actors". The crisis of social democracy, they claim, the result of the inadequacy of the reforms attempted, economic recession and falling living standards. This, it is argued, has led to the increasing isolation of the social democratic regimes, the rise of social movements and the increasing popularity of what the authors call the "electoralist Left".

Petras and Morley see social movements, rather than political parties, as the future vehicles for change. The social movement is more heterogeneous—it includes sectors of the working class very difficult to mobilise such as unemployed slum dwellers, under-employed, highly mobile people, or lower middle class religious folk. And unlike the party which normally possesses a head-quarter and a bureaucracy, the social movement is far less centralised and hence more flexible. At the same time, however, the social movement, because of its heterogeneity, decentralisation, and flexibility is also very vulnerable to division and co-option by the political class when conditions permit parties to operate openly. And they conclude by claiming that "Objective conditions are maturing for a revival of revolutionary politics".

Without Fear of Being Happy provides a more detailed analysis of the possibilities for fundamental reform—within Brazil. There, the Left "is not only alive and well, but growing" unlike in eastern Europe or in most of Latin America. The evidence is the 31,000,000 votes gained by the Partido dos Trabalhadores (the PT or Workers Party) in the presidential election of 1989.

Brazil is a country without a strong Leftist tradition. The Communist Party reached its zenith in 1947 with 180,000 members, eight daily newspapers and two publishing houses. But the Cold War pushed the party underground. A brief attempt at guerrilla warfare during the 1960s failed. The significance of the PT is that it breaks completely with the old Left. The military government which began in 1964 with a coup and ended only in 1990 oversaw very rapid economic development until the recession of the early 1970s, but did nothing about the distribution of the wealth. That, combined with a slowing rate of growth, created the conditions for a restive middle class and an increasingly frustrated working class.

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Prior to the appearance of the PT, the organised labour movement in Brazil was weak. What influence it enjoyed was restricted to the south-eastern region of Brazil dominated by the city and state of Sao Paulo, the most industrialised part of Brazil. It was in this area that the independent and combative labour movement, which was to find expression in the PT, began in the late 1970s.

An obvious priority was to extend its influence to the interior. Publicly rejecting sectarianism but openly identifying with the working class, the PT leadership found itself working closely with Church activists (up to this time, the only activists in the interior). Slowly the peasants and rural proletariat became aware of the new party.

In the national non-presidential election of 1988, the PT scored 28.8% of the vote in Brazil's 100 largest cities and the largest number of votes among the three major parties. These results set the stage for the presidential election of 1989, the first election in 25 years in which the people were permitted to vote directly for their President. The PT's platform included: the immediate suspension of payments on the debt; the 'democratisation' but not privatisation of the state sector of the economy; a frontal attack on inflation (how is not made clear in the book); an agrarian reform which would break up and redistribute holdings of over 1,500 hectares; and a more independent foreign policy. A surge in Lula's popularity resulted in a filthy campaign run by the rightwing media in favour of the rightwing candidate Collor de Mello. The results: Collor received 35,000,000 votes,; Lula 31,000,000.

The PT had established itself as a major and legitimate independent force in Brazilian politics. It overcame the impediments to organising a party to represent many of the interests struggling within social movements: women, students, Indians, blacks, intellectuals, Church leaders, etc. It created an effective organisation from the bottom up rather than from the top down. It did not, however, elaborate "a strategy for transforming Brazilian capitalism into a democratic socialist society, using the former's own political institutions".

The issues raised by these two books are fundamental to any under-

It seems a strange thing for me to write a review on a political thriller set among the chaotic zones of the Israeli-Palestinian feud. Firstly, I have probably read fewer (official, back-cover verified) thrillers than I am able to count upon one hand; and secondly, my knowledge of Middle Eastern politics is, to say the least, embarrassingly flimsy.

Yet, despite these gaps in knowledge—and perhaps, to an extent, because of them—I found myself enjoying Simon Louvish's new novel The Silencer. It is not a book in which the reader is supposed to feel steady; rather, one flaps and flounders among the manic descriptions of politics and espionage, and the often wild use of language. The confusing plot reminded me of a novel by another Jewish author, Kafka's The Trial—in which the central character, K, is arrested and put on trial for a crime which is never explained, either to K or the reader.

Louvish's prose is more anarchic than Kafka's, but The Silencer's Joe Dekel, a leftwing journalist and one-time
novelist from Israel, finds himself at the centre of a similarly absurd labyrinth. As the story begins, Dekel is sent out to New York by his newspaper to cover an Israeli-Palestinian peace conference. While there he meets Didi Schaffer, a young American Jew, who politely informs Dekel that he is his 'silencer'. Didi represents a rightwing organisation named the Anti-Slander League, whose agenda includes keeping pro-Palestinian literature from being published in the United States. This includes Dekel's only novel, an espionage thriller based around the 1982 war in Lebanon and which supported the Palestinian resistance movement.

Led by Didi Schaffer to a secret rendezvous, Dekel finds only an old Jewish man with a bludgeoned head who, in his last breath, accuses Dekel of being a traitor and 'hater' of his 'people'. To quote Dekel: "...after that, it gets a bit strange". In fact, pure craziness. The novel tracks Dekel's path from New York to Jerusalem, from the West Bank to The Church of the Living Christ in Utah, as he attempts to make sense of a very twisted group of different areas, a country whose fragmentation is even more apparent in the face of a seemingly unified and constant Palestinian resistance against occupation. But towards the end of the book, Dekel cannot refrain from making the rest of the world a target for his loathing:

The people, my people, are just a microcosm of the squabbling heap of humanity...Our arrogance, our terror, our insecurity, our boycotts and excommunications, are not, at the end of the day, an ethnic inheritance. The global state. La Condition Humaine. We are fucked up, therefore we exist. There is nothing inherently Jewish about this. It is a bipedal problem.

Despite such damning monologues—which, one might think, offer humanity very little chance—the narrator of The Silencer somehow remains hopeful. Having witnessed a very disturbing world of spy-scandals, power games, fear and hate, Dekel and his wife still choose to have a child. Life must go on, even in the face of so many problems; even when the world seems on the brink of ending. At the end of the book, Dekel is brave enough to sing: "Come out, come out whoever you are! The more of us malcontents the better."

This book manages the inspired: to remain very funny while, at the same time, cramming in many intelligent, insightful and cynical views of the Israeli-Palestinian feud. I left the novel with a somehow clearer perception of the complexity and enormity of this very current and often debated problem. A shit-stained view perhaps—murky and chaotic—but what else would one expect?

MATTHEW SCHULZ is a Sydney poet and writer. He is currently working on a murder mystery set in colonial Australia.

Language Landscape


It seems a bit misleading to describe Bernard Cohen's first book as a 'novel'; for while it is certainly novel in its form, it isn't exactly a novel. It is divided into 149 sections, each less than a page long. Each bears the name of an Australian town. This at least is reassuring, but on reading the text underneath these headings disorientation sets in.

The section headed 'Darwin', for instance, begins: "If only we received visitors, we too would eat. This is the land of possibility." At Adelaide, it says, "There is a battle for stasis, and we are its objects. Decisions are made here but never enacted. The truth is different. Everything else seems the same. This is because we have not learned to differentiate sound."

These places, then, are more like Calvino's invisible cities than the Australian landscape we know. The seemingly interminable series of 'landscape novels' that pass for Australian literature. Cohen is having his little joke here. The landscape of language can be more interesting than the landscape of rustic rural towns which populates Australian TV drama and travelogues.

This is a very contemporary sort of fiction; one might even call it avant garde. Yet it is engrossing, funny, amusing, saturated with wit and Cohen's unique style. Breaking with the tedium of Australian fiction need not be a leap into the high seriousness of 'experimental' (i.e. unreadable) prose. But then, as Cohen would say, "In Yass, one always overtakes on the inside."

McKENZIE WARK writes for the Australian's Higher Education supplement.
DISCUSSION

Abandoning the Struggle

Unlike the good prime minister, I was aware that ALR was still in existence. However, after reading through your last issue, I'm not sure what the 'Left' in ALR actually means. The articles that particularly confused me are those by Denise Meredyth and by Stegman, Mahony and Burchell.

Meredyth's review of Pusey's Economic Rationalism in Canberra enjoins us to smarten up our critiques and to this end she gives us what turns out to be some fairly ordinary stuff from Weber about the necessity of bureaucracy. She also throws in what is by now some very well-worn poststructuralist mysticism under the heading of 'theoretical shifts'.

These same theoretical shifts have, of course, functioned, particularly within the academy, to depoliticise and disorientate a whole generation of Australian leftists. Crucial to this project has been the abandonment of a notion of a social totality and the concept of class struggle.

Such is the advanced nature of Meredyth's theoretical sophistication that she is unable to conceive of "a clear separation between the principled positions of the Left and the calculations of government". This, when unemployment has averaged around 8% for the entire period of Labor rule. Meredyth does point to reforms and these of course should be acknowledged. But their existence does not point to some extremely clever political breakthrough based on the policy manoeuvrings of a new intelligentsia reared on a diet of Foucault and Co. Before we actually begin to believe in this wonderful new creature of the 90s—Policy Woman/Man—we should remember that reforms are not new. There have been many reforms and even periods of reform under capitalism. However—and this is fundamental—their continued existence depends on the state of the struggle between the classes. To say this is, of course, in Meredyth's eyes to be a "romantic oppositionalist" and (horror of horrors) to deprive one of "access to policy debates". For Meredyth this appears to be her very raison d'être. Reformism has indeed shrunk to a very small measure.

For all the faults of Pusey's work, it is at least informed by a sense of outrage at what has happened to Australian society. This, alas, is too much of a totality for Meredyth; she appears unable to conceive of, never mind address, what has happened under Labor rule. The truth is that capitalism has entered a particularly vicious phase where it once more has become a brutal zero sum game. Neither Foucault nor Donzelot, Lyotard and Co. has anything useful to say about this. By 'useful' here I mean providing the oppressed with the theoretical means to overthrow the existing state of affairs and institute a more just system.

That ALR is a long way from providing the basis for such a project is made equally clear by Stegman, Mahony and Burchell on the economy. Here, the underlying fear of being 'oppositional' has led to an explicit endorsement of another period of austerity. There are several points here. The first is: austerity for whom? The answer is, of course, the working class. But I strongly suspect that the smart new theoretical sophisticates would choke if they tried even to pronounce the world 'class'.

The second point to make is that we have just come through a period of austerity where real wages fell considerably. But what happened through the opportunities that were deliberately created for the rich (old and nouveau)? In the orgy of speculation, borrowing and takeovers have left us with yet another period of austerity ahead of us. Burchell, it would appear, disagrees. He argues that more austerity does not mean we must accept the 'status quo'. He hints darkly that something might have to be done about the universities and telecommunications. It seems that this is where his 'Left of centre' axe would fall. One is tempted to say 'there but for the grace of God goes God'.

We do desperately need some solutions to our present mess. I would venture to suggest that the answer does not lie in a return to a watered-down or even full-blown Keynesianism. After all, it must be acknowledged that Keynesian economics failed and this left the way open for the return of neoclassical economics. We need instead to begin articulating a socialist project which requires full-scale democratic intervention by the state and imposes very severe constraints on the room to manoeuvre of the capitalist class.

At present, calls for austerity are simply disguised calls to make the rich richer, in the hope that they will invest. This, Burchell assures us, is realistic. However, given the present parlous state of both the Australian and world economy, this is the true 'self-deception' that Burchell is anxious to accuse his critics of. Unlike Burchell, I believe that the crisis is so acute that we must deepen the socialist content of our critiques. This may, of course, lead to our exclusion from some policy debates, but the present policy trajectory will inevitably lead to the return of a Liberal/National government, and I presume that then even the 'left of centre' would wish to be excluded from policy debates and committees.

Gary MacLennan, School of Media & Journalism, QUT, Brisbane.
I have been concerned for some time at the articles in ALR which only denigrate the Left or the Left's criticism of rightwing ideology. In the May 1992 issue we have an article attacking Michael Pusey's views as lacking intellectual rigour; another saying how much better off the East Germans are under West German auspices; another, "Love's Labours Lost", sneering at the British Labour Party; and a lengthy article, "Whatever Happened to the Debt?", which takes a painfully correct academic approach in expressing a pretty conservative line.

The Left has often been open to criticism in its ideology, and also its administration. I would hope that a journal such as yours would concentrate on criticising the Right and providing alternative Left perspective in areas such as economic and social policies. Every left-thinking person has been aware of the absence of a coherent Left position for at least the last decade; there is no need for more articles stating what is already widely accepted.

Conservative

The launch of the new format ALR had a cover which proclaimed "Death of Communism"—which was curious, considering the history of the publication. In June 1992 there is a cover which asks "Is the Left Braindead?" Such covers indicate conservative contents, and that unfortunately has proved correct.

Ann Symonds,
Legislative Council,
Macquarie Street.
Sydney.
In Australia's summer, thoughts of city workers turn to a more relaxed lifestyle—discarding the suit and sweaty shoes for cooler, informal garb. At last, the grime of frenetic CBD activity can be swapped for a few sweet weeks of tranquillity. Shaking off the exhaustion of the year's work, we go through a checklist of indispensable adjuncts to life on the beach or in the bush: swimmers, jeans and hat. Footwear is important, too. But, this year at least, good quality sandals were remarkably hard to locate.

Is there something vaguely disreputable about this functional cover for our feet? Sandals do seem to have had a bad press, despite their assistance in protecting us from dog droppings, hot sand, glass and other hazards of urban living.

Orwell, that embodiment of English socialist propriety, condemned Fabians as vegetarian sandal-wearers. And, in the early 60s, Bob Dylan declaimed:

Don't wear sandals
We can't afford the scandals.

In criticising Dr Hewson's GST package, the Financial Review's economic commentator, David Clark, argued that the winners from the Opposition strategy would be "irrational, sandal-wearing, Volvo-driving professors of sociology..." The pejorative connotations of wearing the sandal are obvious: eccentricity, unworldliness. The sandal-clad feet are not regarded as being really on the ground.

Yet what are the alternatives? The dreaded rubber thong rips off skin between thumb and next toe, while providing a pervasive flopping sound on beaches and footpaths. Our offspring demand the ubiquitous Reeboks, multi-coloured and with various 'pumps', at vast expense. Whole stores are set up to dispense these pretentious sandshoes.

Compared to such paragons of fashion virtue, the sandal is regarded as stodgy, and odd, certainly unfit for the voguish.

They are virtually forbidden from the streets of Double Bay or Toorak, or the hot sands of Palm Beach. Around the less respectable pavements of Balmain, Fitzroy and the university campuses, on the other hand, the sandal is de rigeur.

How much more sensible were the ancient Egyptians who, from 2000BC, donned papyrus or leather soles linked to the foot by a series of straps. The Romans would not allow slaves this comfort, but used elaborately designed sandals to clad the rich and powerful. The early Wyclif Bible (1382) recorded a command to be "schoon with sandalies". A later, 16th century, version of the scriptures contained a plea to "gyrde thy silfe and bynde on thy sandalles". And in Hamlet Ophelia sings:

How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon.

For sovereigns and bishops, the half-shoe sandal of red leather and silk became an established part of the regalia.

Sandals remain cool, useful footwear: firm, tightly buckled, the pedal extremities are delightfully exposed to the breeze. That sandals lack fashionability can only be attributed to the sort of irrational 'style' which dictates discomfort in the interests of amorphous fashion. Let's rebel against the fad and defiantly wear our ancient, scandalous sandals in 1992—a robust rebuff to go to extremes and keep the sandals on—yes, with socks!—into winter.

JEFF SHAW is the NSW Opposition spokesperson on industrial relations. Penelope Cottier is on holidays this month. Next month she returns with a new column, Moveable Feast.
PICK THE QUOTE

If you want to make sure you get your ALR every month, on the month, there's only one sure way: subscribe. But we'll also add a further inducement. Below are four quotes from ALR readers (or non-readers), along with four faces. All you have to do is match each of the quotes to a face, and add their names. If you're one of the first five correct entries you'll win a free subscription for yourself or a friend.

A. 'One might imagine why it was that ALR decided to carry Senator Walsh's article. It is basically an issue about the Accord. The communists have never liked the Accord, the Liberals have never liked the Accord, and Walshie has never liked the Accord. So there is this trifecta of the communists, Walshie and the Liberals.'

B. 'ALR is refreshingly free of dogma, choleric abuse and patronising certainties. It also contains that rarest ingredient of the leftist press—humour.'

C. 'It gives you another side to the story; it tells you more about the main players than they would tell their bosom buddies.'

D. 'I thought ALR had gone out of business—no offence to my colleagues on the Left, no offence at all. I thought it had actually faded away quietly, that it had quietly gone out of business.'

Quote A ................Quote B ...................Quote C ...................Quote D . . . .

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Signature ................................................................. Date .............................................

Send to ALR Subs, Freepost 28, PO A247 Sydney South NSW 2000 (no stamp needed if posted in Australia)
White cotton t-shirt (with 'Republic of Australia' text & flag in blue) Item E01 $15.00
White poly/cotton sweatshirt (with 'Republic of Australia' text & flag in blue) Item E02 $25.00
Blue cotton t-shirt (Bonds) Item E03 $15.00
Blue cotton singlet (Bonds) Item E04 $12.50
Eureka Flags available in 4 sizes:
Hand held (on stick) Item E05 $2.75
Small (800 x 580 mm) Item E06 $16.50
Medium (1200 x 900 mm) Item E07 $29.50
Large (1800 x 1100 mm) Item E08 $45.00
Keyring (bonded metal) Item E09 $7.50
Metal brooch Item E10 $5.50
Car sticker (120 x 80 mm) Item E11 $2.00
Mini sticker Item E12 $2.50 (for 2)
Cloth patch (100 x 70 mm) Item E13 $2.75
Linen Tea towel (750 x 500) Item E14 $7.50

All t-shirts are 100% cotton
Available sizes are S, M, L, XL & XXL
Our t-shirts are made in Australia

Black cotton t-shirt (flag design completely covers front of t-shirt) Item A01 $20.00
Black poly/cotton sweatshirt (flag design completely covers front) Item A02 $25.00
White cotton t-shirt (flag design & text 'Land is life' printed on front) Item A03 $15
White poly/cotton sweatshirt (flag design & text 'Land is life') Item A04 $22.50
Aboriginal Flags available in 3 sizes:
Hand held (on stick) Item A05 $2.75
Small (840 x 540 mm) Item A06 $16.50
Medium (1300 x 750 mm) Item A07 $29.50
Earings (for pierced ears) Item A08 $9.50
Keyring (bonded metal) Item A09 $7.50
Metal brooch Item A10 $5.50
Car sticker (120 x 80 mm) Item A11 $2.00
Mini sticker Item A12 $2.50 (for 2)
Cloth patch (55 x 80 mm) Item A13 $1.75
Cloth patch (120 x 90 mm) Item A14 $2.75
Cloth Patch (170 x 120 mm) Item A15 $3.75
Linen Tea towel (750 x 500) Item A16 $7.50

FRIDGE DOOR DESIGNS
PO BOX 449
BROADWAY NSW 2007
TEL/FAX: (02) 698-5885