And on the seventh day God rested, & Mrs McGilly came & did the cleaning.

Yoo hoo! It's only me!

Peace on earth & goodwill to all men!

Why not really lash out this year & wish goodwill to women too.

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Life on the Edge, a collection of Judy Horacek's cartoons introduced by Dale Spender and published by Spinifex Press will be available in November.
Why Support Bill?

Bill Clinton is the Bob Hawke of American politics. Like Hawke, as president he will create opportunities for others to radically overhaul America’s economy and society.

Gough Whitlam has recently pointed to the dangers of supporting politicians for the sake of winning elections. But for all the matters of principle for which men like Whitlam and Evatt fought, to the lasting benefit of all Australians, we should never forget the consequences of staying out of government. It is better to fight and win as a member of a broad-based winning coalition than to fight and lose as part of an ideologically pure elite.

After 12 years of Reagan and Bush much of the American Left is isolated from federal politics. The question of working in a coalition with Democrats like Clinton is hardly comprehensible. There is a great deal of idealistic talk about a new American Labor party, but despite the organising efforts of people like Tony Mazziochi of the Oil and Chemical Workers, it is generally a forlorn effort. The most impressive work being done by the American Left, from which we have much to learn, is confined to local and municipal levels. But for most local American lefties a federal victory is seen as pie in the sky, or irrelevant, or too much to hope for, or all of the above.

On top of this, Bill Clinton is frequently derided by the American Left on matters of principle, character and ethics. The most substantial criticisms concern Clinton’s advocacy of the death sentence, his failure to support unionism and to prosecute delinquent employers in Arkansas. Despite these genuine shortcomings, however, the Clinton cause is appealing because something must be done to combat the utter depravity of American society.

In some ways Clinton is a more impressive character than Hawke because he is a mover and shaker and not just a consensus builder-cum-negotiator. Clinton has achieved minor miracles over ten years under extreme, adverse conditions in Arkansas, the second poorest US state. And the Democratic centre group that surrounds Clinton is a more impressive intellectual force than Australian Labor’s right and centre.

An impressive, intellectually open, centrist political leader is worth supporting in a period of economic turmoil. In 1991 I travelled through 42 cities in the United States, talking about the Accord and the Australian health care system. Almost everywhere I went Americans were waking up from a nightmare. They were even prepared to examine and compare the experiences of foreigners with their own. The Australian Accord, for example, was hailed as a triumph. Even Lane Kirkland’s assistant secretary at the peak union body, the AFL-CIO, Ken Young, sanguinely recalled that there had been an opportunity to forge a similar agreement with Jimmy Carter just before he left office. 100 million Americans have inadequate access to health care, so our national health care system was not just envied, it was seen as the crowning glory of civilisation down under.

Most Australians could hardly conceive of the scale and scope of the deindustrialisation of America. The quality of life in many of America’s deindustrialised cities is worse than that in many Third World economies. In Australia in the 1980s a tripartite agreement saved the major industrial bases of Wollongong and Newcastle; in America, whole cities like Pittsburgh, Detroit, Buffalo and a myriad of others were utterly destroyed.

Despite our continued, ludicrous commitment to tariff reductions in the middle of a recession, we have had relatively rational debates within the labour movement about our ability to sustain manufacturing industries such as textile, clothing and footwear (TCF). In America the winds of the market blew and now in New York City in the TCF industry there is a return to Dickensian child labour.

While we did, however inadequately, retrain workers, create jobs and encourage industry to modernise, in the United States millions were thrown into oblivion. It was left to the Taylorist cretins in executive boardrooms as to whether or not they should modernise their technology and upgrade their workers’ skills.

While our federal government moved to rationalise the responsibilities of state and federal governments in order to provide for secure, more responsible and accountable public services and infrastructure, the US federal government irresponsibly borrowed for non-productive spending and buckpassed their responsibilities, resulting in a fiscal crisis for over 20 states and countless municipal authorities.

I would be the last to deny the mistakes and problems of Labor in government in Australia under Hawke and Keating. But to have a Labor government in power in the 1980s made a difference—in an international sea of conservatism—just as Bill Clinton will now make a difference in the United States.

PETER BOTSMAN is the executive director of the Evatt Foundation.
At a Sydney theatre opening night in September, a manager of a computer software company was mobbed by the audience and hassled for photos and autographs. He wasn't even in the play, yet he was confined to the theatre for almost an hour after the performance by the adoring hordes. He wore a quite unhip jacket and went by the unassuming name of Chris Knight. But Chris Knight has a dim, dark secret. He was Peter Brady.

In 1969 the lovely lady with three lovely girls and the man who was busy with three boys of his own decided that they had much more than a hunch, and decided to join clans. The Brady Bunch spent the next five years settling up pressing family problems (Jan feels neglected as middle child; Greg wants to move into a room of his own) which could all be solved within 30 minutes, including commercials. The show was canned in 1974 and went on to syndication re-run heaven. The cast seemed destined for the 'Where Are They Now?' file, only kept alive in the memories of fanatics who knew the name of Cindy's doll, what Alice's sister was called, and Marcia's bra size. That all changed this year.

Barry Williams (who played Greg) kicked things off with his book, Growing Up Brady, which regaled us with tales of mischief—like the time he was stoned on marijuana on the set; a scene in which he was supposed to be pumping up a tyre on his bike became an intense experience where he attempted to form a relationship with each spoke on the wheel. He revealed what all Brady fans suspected—he was infatuated with Maureen McCormick (who played Marcia), Peter and Jan had a romantic liaison, and Cindy and Bobby actually used to make out in Tiger's doghouse! In the book's most talked-about section he recounts details of a date with his screen mother, Florence Henderson. Unfortunately, this Oedipal turn of events never emerged in a Brady script. Then Robert Reed (who played dad, Mike Brady) died of an AIDS-related illness and the tabloids and glossies went into overdrive. By this stage a theatre troupe had been having success in the States with The Real Live Brady Bunch, which involved actors re-enacting episodes word-for-word on stage, with extra innuendo and exaggerated character tics.

One reason for this Bradymania is surely our current fascination with all things 70s. It started with the music. The robotic beats, repetitive melodies and strobe lights of House music at warehouse parties and in nightclubs sparked a disco revival. Hand-in-hand with that came an assimilation of 70s fashion. The gaudy jewellery, flared pants, patterned vests and chunky platform shoes were snapped up from city op-shops and adapted to new designs. 'Dag nights' and 70s theme parties were suddenly en vogue.

The Bradys were so 70s it hurt. They started sedately enough with jeans and sneakers, but quickly took on the accoutrements of the decade which put the flair into flares. The girls had long straight hair parted down the middle, and favoured bell-bottoms and ponchos. The boys wore shirts with patterns so wild and bright that you could only look at them directly with the aid of sunglasses. And the collars were so wide that the actors could have jumped off cliffs and glided safely to the bottom.

But perhaps most importantly, the message that was rammed home week after week was that the family, as long as it stuck together, could surmount any problem. With a little understanding and a whole lot of brotherly/sisterly love, no one had to feel left out or persecuted. In the 90s, when children from broken homes are par for the course, this funny little TV world of domestic harmony with occasional minor, non-threatening upheavals looks like a comforting fairytale.

You could always tell when things got incredibly serious on The Brady Bunch; Mike would call a family meeting. He would lay down the law of the land, explain things reasonably, and Carol would nod sympathetically like a good wife. This seemed to be her major role on the show, as she didn't have a job and Alice the housekeeper handled most of the chores.

Australia didn't get the series until 1974, but it was repeated in its entirety five times up until 1987. As a result everyone from teenagers to thirtysomethings has grown up with the Bradys. At the premiere of The Real Live Brady Bunch they all lined up to get Chris Knight's autograph, and every one of them knew his character's most famous line from the show. For those who are unaware of those enigmatic words which mean 'pork chops and apple sauce'.

BARRY DIVOLA writes for Who magazine, and has a worrying obsession with American television.
That policy was foolish then; it was persisted in, despite all the growing insane in September 1992. It was permitted to the Deutsche marks (DM) to the pound. at the unsustainable rate of 2.95 in 1990 took Britain into the European Monetary System (EMS) which was essentially right. Given the chance, they would have continued to sacrifice the real economy to the god of 2.95. They are exactly like the Bundesbank of perfidy in not intervening to save the pound. But why should the Bundesbank throw good money after bad? The Germans had in effect offered the UK a devaluation as part of an orderly realignment of currencies within the EMS, along with the Italian Lira. The British government refused to consider the idea. Revaluation within the EMS at the beginning of September would certainly have been a U-turn, but it would have maintained Britain's position within the EMS. As it is, the government has been forced into a precipitate withdrawal, and it has probably wrecked the system beyond repair.

Major and Lamont have tried to save themselves by accusing the German Bundesbank of perfidy in not intervening to save the pound. But why should the Bundesbank throw good money after bad? The Germans had in effect offered the UK a devaluation as part of an orderly realignment of currencies within the EMS, along with the Italian Lira. The British government refused to consider the idea. Revaluation within the EMS at the beginning of September would certainly have been a U-turn, but it would have maintained Britain's position within the EMS. As it is, the government has been forced into a precipitate withdrawal, and it has probably wrecked the system beyond repair.

Lamont and Major see themselves as victims of circumstances beyond their control, and their policies as essentially right. Given the chance, they would have continued to sacrifice the real economy to the god of 2.95. They are exactly like the mindless and rigid believers in 'sound money' who sacrificed Britain's poor to the Gold Standard in the 1920s. They still insist that the goal of negligible inflation remains intact and that they will keep interest rates at a level necessary to achieve it. There will be some immediate relief for the economy from the beneficial effects of the devaluation. But high interest rates and a macho round of spending cuts in the northern autumn will ensure there is no substantial recovery.

And yet: what if Labour had won office back in April? Sadly, it would have done just as Major has done. The Labour leadership were all committed to the EMS and refused to accept that DM 2.95 was unsustainable. Current Labour leader John Smith as Chancellor would have doggedly held on to an overvalued currency. Labour had and has no more clue how to handle the exchange rate or domestic inflation than the Tories. And Labour would have had even less credibility with the markets.

The only real policy alternative available to Labour was twofold: first, to admit that the pound was considerably overvalued against the mark and that Britain would seek realignment within the EMS; and, second, to insist that domestic inflation be dealt with by an incomes policy (like the Accord) and not by interest rate hikes and public expenditure cuts. Yet those who advocated such policies before the April elections were informed by Labour 'pragmatists' that they would lose Labour the election.

Labour lost the election. It has been an ineffectual opposition ever since, because it has had nothing of substance to say about the EMS that differed from the Tories. It has refused to think through the hard issues on policy and has accepted feeble compromises and positions that make it indistinguishable from the Tories. Had it honestly faced Britain's problems before April, Labour could now take an unassailable political lead on the basis of having been proven right. Britain needs an Opposition as never before, and it doesn't have one.

Paul Hirst is professor of social theory at Birkbeck College, University of London.
It was a warm summer's night and the breeze played over her nipples like a jazz band in the Harlem of her soul. The lady sighed, and arched her back. Her breasts felt heavy on her chest, and a thin finger of wind reached under the plumpest part of her and tickled gently, teasingly.

Her sigh modified itself downwards, and the ping ping of her clitoris was like the tip tip tap of a tiny hammer on a xylophone. A cat called in the distance, and the lady saw a momentary image of Michelle Pfeiffer's lips under the mask in Batman 2.

She practised an Antipodean purr. But her relevant lips were a lot more puckered and in search of something harder and longer than even Michelle's legs.

The breeze was picking up to the near cyclonic. Fury was in Darwin on business. Her pick-up truck soul was a Brunswick Street phenomenon. Would even her eye be able to identify a single man sans beer-gut and sans walksocks? She had hoped for an Aboriginal man, but for some reason there were no Aborigines in this bar. "Quelle surprise," she thought, colonially. "Must be home with their families."

And then she saw him. A little older than her usual preference, playing pool by the pool. There was a studied non-bourgeoisness to his movements, an "I went to the finishing school of proletarian graces" about the way he sauntered. She sized him up, her eyes travelling down past the pool cue. She thought, in an instant's casing, "Ex-private school boy working for Aborigines. Have conscience will travel. Not as tall as he'd like to be. Works out to maintain his bottom. Probably married (i.e. living with someone meaningfully with a baby) and will therefore not consider a local. He suits the requirements."

She cued herself into action—and she ain't no Equity member, comrades; her mind was on tonight's performance, not the morning reviews. She sauntered up, her hips Bacalling, and felt the near invisible caress of his eyes as he practised a well-executed look-without-offending. He played with a piece of chalk on the tip of the cue, using a little more white than was strictly necessary. Some fell on her fishnets, and she saw a tiny smile tinkling at the corner of his lips. His voice was like the silken sail of a yacht before it disappears into the Bermuda triangle.

"Melbourne or Canberra?" he enquired. 

"Do I look like a public servant?" she speed gently.

"No, but you look like you have a job," he countered, "so I thought probably Canberra, and you don't have a tan, so not Sydney. And the shoes are Italian."

"He has a brain as well as a conscience," she thought. "Try something political to check."

"What type of loser dear? Doctor saving the blind or lawyer who believes in justice?"

He laughed. "I'm afraid I'm only an anthropologist."

"With or without TV show on SBS?"

"I haven't signed the contract yet," he said, looking her straight in the face. And then his flickering cadenced glance over her breasts was like a bright butterfly landing on a rainforest flower. She felt herself grow organically moist.

"Be a concerned greenie to my ecosystem," she hazarded, "and I'll look over the contract for free. It'd be like you were getting $1000 per hour. You could pretend you had a Lotus, and still hold your head up high on the morrow, fair prince. That's if your neck still works."

His jaw literally dropped for an instant and she inserted the tip of her lipstick, gently, oh so gently. He was, after all, asking for it. She moved in for the kill. "And I'll let you use my cellular phone if you have to ring in sick tomorrow, in case I give you cystitis. I understand the needs of the weaker sex, and I have condoms in my briefcase."

That did it. He actually blushed and—honour of honours in Darwin's terms—he left the rest of his beer. They walked out together.

Santa never came into Darwin that Christmas, but the chimney of Fury's compact Victorian terrace was more than replete that night as they discussed the rejection of the insulting doctrine of terra nullius in the nicest possible way. Knock knock, there is someone home.

"Penelope Cottier."
The arrival of news helicopters on the university's football field is an event usually confined to periods when the Wallabies are training there; and we are unaccustomed to the release of an 'academic' report resulting in a large colour photograph of one of the authors on the front page of the region's main newspaper, as well as extensive coverage elsewhere. It was all a bit of a worry.

No author, of course, actively dislikes his or her work getting some recognition. The real worry was that none of us thought that the report contained much that was particularly newsworthy in the sense that it might have come as a surprise to any moderately well-informed resident of this country. It certainly should have surprised nobody in the region.

The main findings of the report were straightforward enough. We found that the industrial restructuring of the 1980s had led to a massive contraction in the demand for labour in the steel, associated manufacturing and coal industries and that this contraction of demand resulted from sectoral forces, most of them related to labour-replacing technological change; that labour displaced from the manufacturing sector had not been absorbed into the expanding service sector; that expansion of the service sector in the Illawarra had been slower than in the nation as a whole and slower than in NSW as a whole; and that jobs in the service sector had a strong likelihood of being both part-time and low-paid. Moreover, the 'multiplier effect' of job creation in this sector was very low and confined to the service sector itself (at least regionally).

Our main concern in all of this was the migrant workers (mainly of southern European origin) who had formed the backbone of the steel industry's workforce ever since the 50s. These were workers who had never acquired any transportable skills in their years at BHP and who had generally not learned to speak English with any degree of fluency either. They had been the ideal labour force for the sort of operation that BHP had run to the end of the 70s, one in which a labour-intensive and largely obsolescent technology was used to process abundant cheap raw materials in order to provide steel for a heavily-protected home market.

By the end of the 70s this form of production was no longer viable. Not only was there overproduction of steel on a world scale but the old production methods could no longer even maintain BHP's position in the home market since they were not susceptible to the degree of quality control that consumers were demanding and not suitable for turning out specialist steel products—an area of expanding demand. Something had to go, and by the end of the 70s, one in which a labour-intensive and largely obsolescent technology was used to process abundant cheap raw materials in order to provide steel for a heavily-protected home market.

Over the next decade, BHP reduced its workforce from over 20,000 to less than 10,000. The number of wage employees was reduced from 15,510 to 6,326. There were also employment contractions in other industries, including the loss of over 3,000 jobs in coal mining alone. Over 20% of the jobs available in the region in 1980 probably disappeared, on a permanent basis, over the subsequent seven years. It is scarcely surprising, then, that the persistence of the then Lord Mayor in referring to the region as the Leisure Coast produced a great deal of bitter laughter locally.

In this process of labour 'shedding', workers of all birthplaces suffered but migrant workers were hit the hardest by far because of their employment concentration in the fastest-contracting areas and their inability to find alternative employment in the expanding (service) sector.

The largest non-anglophone ethnic minority in the region is people born in what used to be Yugoslavia. Such workers lost roughly the same number of jobs in the steelworks as British-born workers, yet this represented over 40% of all jobs held in the region by the Yugoslav-born. By contrast, British-born job losses represented only 14% of the jobs they held in the region and for the Australian-born (who lost three times as many jobs as either of the other two groups, in absolute terms) the equivalent figure was only 5.4%. Our survey of ex-steelworkers showed that only a third of them had found employment subsequent to leaving the steelworks and among the non-anglophone migrants surveyed only one had found employment outside the manufacturing sector.

This process of getting rid of workers mainly took place under the provisions of the Steel Industry Plan, negotiated between BHP and the newly-elected Hawke government—a document superseded in 1988 by the Steel Industry Development Agreement. Both are complex documents but the guts of them was that, in return for massive government handouts, BHP agreed to terminate involuntary redundancies, reduce its labour force by natural attrition and negotiate 'voluntary' redundancy agreements. The company also agreed to maintain, and invest heavily in, its steelmaking facilities and to develop a number of innovative (for BHP) industrial relations practices such as employee participation and general worker education and training.

Because of these agreements BHP had
only limited latitude to pick which workers it kept and which it 'shed': as a result, some rather strange things have happened to the composition of the workforce at the Port Kembla plant. The most notable is that the characteristics of the workers who left the plant do not seem to have been markedly different from those who are still there. In other words, the smaller workforce of the 90s is probably just as badly educated, just as lacking in English language skills, and just as disadvantaged as the labour force of the 70s when it comes to benefiting from now modish projects such as 'worker lifetime education'. Thus, the proportion of southern European-born workers employed in the Port Kembla plant in 1990 was actually higher than it was in 1980 and, for all the talk of a 'new workplace culture', it is the factory fodder of the old workplace culture (as well as management socialised in the 'old' culture) who will have to produce it. Meanwhile, back in the Lakeside suburbs where migrant workers are concentrated, there are crippling rates of long-term unemployment which no realistically predictable rate of economic growth is going to cure. Workers in their 40s who do not speak any more than rudimentary English, whose educational background is poor and whose skills, acquired on the job, have been rendered valueless on the labour market because of technological change have few job prospects. And not just in these suburbs, of course. Although it is true that the Illawarra has some fairly distinctive regional characteristics, it is by no means a unique case. What is happening in this region is happening all over Australia's rust belt, in Newcastle, in Geelong, in Adelaide and, with a vengeance, in Melbourne. An industrial workforce recruited (to a large extent from overseas) to service a particular sort of industrial system is finding itself stranded by the changes which are being forced upon that system. The section of this workforce which has managed to stay in manufacturing industry is faced with demands which it is ill-equipped to handle and the section which has been 'shed' is largely, as things stand, without hope of getting work.

It need hardly be said that the task of producing this study was not a happy one. The sheer scale of devastation in the lives of working people which has taken place over the last 15 years is the material of the study: and the apparent inability, or, more correctly, refusal, of the political class even to acknowledge what is happening forms its backdrop. But maybe there is a dim ray of hope to be discerned in the story of our study. I started by expressing the surprise we felt that our report was, in the context of such things, such a big story as far as the media were concerned. It could have been just a slow news day, of course, but I would argue something else. Whatever its other shortcomings, the media has to sell, and that involves at least partially holding up a mirror to the deep concerns of the people who buy. Our study, in a small way, mirrored the crisis of the Australian economy. It focused what people can see happening all around them: things which they look at and which make them wonder what the hell is going on.

When they look to the politicians for an answer to this question they get replies which they do not understand and certainly don't believe. Perhaps the interest in our study was a tiny expression of this increasing gap between people's lived reality and the way in which politicians try to interpret it for them. Or maybe it was just a slow news day.

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Policing Patriarchy

Earlier this year the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research released a report, Domestic Violence in NSW: A Regional Analysis. It concluded that there is considerable regional variation in domestic homicide; that this variation is associated with socio-economic status, low status areas having higher rates of domestic homicide; and that there is a link between domestic homicide rates and rates of reported domestic violence. The report decided that "there is a relationship between domestic violence and class".

A key policy implication drawn from this finding was that "while all victims of domestic violence need protection and support, the areas of greatest need are in the Western and South Western suburbs of Sydney and the Western and North Western areas of country NSW". The findings elicited a hostile response from some spokeswomen for women's organisations. Eva Cox was quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald as commenting that "What Dr Weatherburn's figures are saying is that poor men beat their wives while rich men do not, which is absolute nonsense". And "His definition of domestic violence is too narrow because it does not take into account the psychological violence and the threats, which we find in cases involving middle class women".

The head of the NSW Women's Advisory Council, Jane Stackpool, was a little more guarded. She was quoted as saying that "the council...had worked hard over the past decade to convince the community that domestic violence was not confined to certain geographical or socio-economic areas...We have been trying to get the message across that domestic violence is a serious crime which can happen to any woman, and that there are never any excuses for it. What this report does is create excuses".

The vehemence of this response may have been motivated by a tactical concern not to undermine the 'Domestic Violence is Everywhere/Domestic Violence is a Crime' public awareness campaign. Nevertheless, the implication is that domestic violence is equally distributed across class, ethnic, cultural and other divisions. In other words, domestic violence is a paradigm expression of a generalised patriarchy. On this view, to acknowledge different levels of domestic violence across such divisions would disrupt the campaign by providing an 'excuse' for domestic violence.

There is a paradoxical 'silencing' aspect to such arguments coming from women speaking on behalf of women's organisations. Paradoxical in that feminist campaigns around domestic violence, sexual assault and incest have often been conducted under a banner of 'breaking the silence'. It seems that, in the interests of 'breaking the silence', it is better that certain things are left unsaid, even if they are true.

The assumption that underlies the 'male violence is evenly distributed' view is that all men are essentially and potentially violent towards their female partners and others. Leading researchers argue that women fear attack by virtue of being women in a male-dominated society. It is argued that the greater fear of violence experienced by women in general reflects the level of hidden violence against women, the pervasive sexual harassment and intimidation of women by men in all spheres of their lives and the 'climate of unsafety' that this produces by constantly reminding women of their vulnerability.

Some researchers have developed the notion of a 'continuum of sexual violence' to encompass what they see to be the full range of forms of violence, harassment and economic, psychological and social mechanisms of control experienced by women. This leads to the conclusion that since all women experience sexual violence, the division of women into those who are victims and those who are not is exposed as 'false'. Logically we end up with a definition of violence which makes victims of all women and offenders of all men, which sees, in Anne Edwards' words, violence as "an essential component of relations between men and women".

The argument concerning the hidden nature of violence against women frequently turns on a more fundamental point concerning the social organisation of women's oppression in modern societies: the public/private dichotomy. While this distinction is subject to many competing interpretations (in itself a warning as to the dangers of generalising its use), its most common use is to mark the divide between the public life of the market, state and politics on the one hand, and the private realm of the home and domesticity on the other. This dualism provides the fundamental organising matrix of women's experience, or (in Katherine O'Donovan's words) "the social differentiation between men and women in the gender order has its counterpart in the general social distinction between private and public".

Furthermore, it is argued, the former is a legally regulated domain while the latter remains largely unregulated. Hence, violence against women becomes a hidden, privatised phenomenon rather than a matter for public, legal control. Moreover, many feminists see this privatisation of women's existence as itself a form of violence, 'the coercion of privacy' which reflects as it maintains the institutionalisation of male domination.

A major problem with this argument is that it rests on an idealised conception of the way the criminal justice system, in particular the police, operate in the so-called 'public' sphere. The argument that police
should simply enforce the law in the case of domestic assaults (and other forms of violence against women) by arresting and charging offenders, as they would for any other assault, ignores the particularism and selectivity that characterise policing outside, as well as within, the domestic sphere. It therefore oversimplifies the problems entailed in getting the police to behave differently, by reducing them to the problem of police sexism. However, many men as well as women are vulnerable to both violence and the tendency for such violence to be officially and popularly denied and disregarded. An example can be found in the most public of these male domains, the pub.

An observational study of violence in selected licensed premises in Sydney found that, in most cases, although there was genuine victimisation by an aggressor against an undeserving and unwilling victim, there was a reluctance to call the police. Moreover, when the police were called, they rarely took any action beyond advising the victims to pursue civil remedies, unless the incident could be construed as an offence against public order. From observation and interviews with police, it was concluded that police (and managements and staff of pubs and clubs) commonly regarded violence in such establishments as an in-house matter, worthy of police involvement only if and when a breach of the peace occurs or is threatened.

Police deferred to the 'authority' of managements and staff to handle violent incidents in their own way, even though violence on the part of staff ('bouncers') frequently constituted a major part of the problem. And police also appeared to regard most victims of such violence as at fault, for simply being in a rough place or because they were drunk. Interestingly, establishments that the researchers classified as particularly and consistently violent, were often regarded by the police as 'no trouble', since their conception of trouble was constituted largely by reference to the maintenance of what they saw as public order rather than what occurred within these places.

It seems clear that police decisions about whether or not to act on complaints of violence can't be reduced to universal and pre-constituted categories—and this includes the definitions of 'public' and 'private'. Nor are they reducible to some pre-given set of gender-based dualisms. They are more complex and heterogeneous than is allowed for in such theories of victimisation.

In her study of the different uses of psychiatric measures when processing female and male offenders, *Justice Unbalanced*, Hilary Allen offers a powerful criticism of the essentialist nature of many feminist arguments concerning law and criminal justice:

The assumption that all social relations are predetermined by a general oppression of all women by all men converts any specific discussion of this or any other sexual discrepancy into an otiose restatement of what is presumed in advance. In the process, it dismisses as insignificant the more specific and problematic questions that one might otherwise wish to ask, such as why only some of these (uniformly oppressed and homogeneously constructed) female subjects are exposed to this differential psychiatrisation...

This form of analysis also robs political questioning of any practical significance. If all structures of authority, such as medicine and the law, are assumed to be fundamentally predetermirned by the forces of patriarchy, then there is no point in attempting to weigh up the various advantages or disadvantages of different social practices, let alone to intervene in them. Short of a total revolution, all political action becomes pointless. Such an approach is simply not useful, and the only way to avoid its cul-de-sac is to refuse its assumptions from the outset. The world is full of sexism, but this sexism does not operate uniformly or inexorably, nor by any super-human machinery.

Extending Allen's critique to debates about violence against women, it is clear that in the types of feminist analysis she is criticising, the empirical differences and discrepancies in patterns of violence—its differential impact on women, the incidence of male victimisation—are reduced to irrelevance. There is indeed no difference, even that between victims and non-victims, which is permitted to disturb the seamless web of women's oppression.

Victimisation as well as fear of victimisation is not confined to women; nor are victimisation and fear uniformly experienced by women. If any sense of difference in the experience of women (or the conduct of men) has to be subordinated to essentialist claims concerning the universality and uniformity of masculine violence and female victimisation, there will be little point in seeking to change particular practices, relationships and conditions which some victims confront. And given the assumptions of such feminist analysis, there is no informed basis for doing so. Where no pertinent differences exist for women this side of a total revolutionary transformation of a male-dominated society, how could a difference be made by any action which, recognising their common oppression, fell far short of at once changing the position of all women?

Masculinity is absolutely central to the question of violence. But some forms of masculinity are dangerous and oppressive to men, and to the young of both sexes, as well as to women. There is a difference between victims and non-victims. Addressing the problems of violence necessitates addressing the conditions of marginality of its most frequent and vulnerable victims. The differences in patterns of violence as they affect women from different backgrounds are of critical importance in analysing and responding to violence. They are not inconveniences to be wished away or silenced in the interests of protecting the dubious all-encompassing explanatory power of the notion of patriarchy.

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The August Budget was criticised from all sides: for doing too little and too much. Roy Green thinks the critics miss the point. The main constraint on a rapid recovery is still the balance of payments, even though the government would prefer not to talk about it.

Predictably, the August federal Budget has been criticised from both sides: both because it tried to do too much for the jobless and because it did not do enough. However, these criticisms miss the point; the major shortcoming of the Budget was in fact the failure of the government to address Australia’s fundamental economic problem—the balance of payments constraint on the growth of output and employment.

This problem forced its way back onto centre stage last month with the announcement of a July current account deficit of $1.4 billion, resulting from a record import surge. For most commentators, the size of the deficit came as a shock. Yet while the July figure may well turn out to be a statistical aberration, the trend has been apparent for some months.

Indeed, the balance of payments was truly the ‘dog that did not bark’ in this year’s Budget. While the demand stimulus, including a well-targeted short-term job creation program, was welcome, its scope and effect were limited by the absence of any coherent industry policy measures to tackle longer term supply-side weaknesses reflected in the widening deficit. All that the combined pressure of the ACTU, the manufacturing sector and Labor’s own backbench could deliver in the deepest recession since the war was a $75 million plan to help exporters. And even this modest initiative would have been regarded as poison by some of the government’s free market economic advisers, who see no difference between export assistance and tariff protection.

Yet there remains a powerful case for industry policy in Australia, which becomes increasingly urgent as recovery comes into view. As I shall argue here, it is not a case for state planning but for a new tripartite framework in which ordinary trade unionists themselves can contribute to strategies for their companies and, more widely, for sectors of industry. The main elements of this case are, first and foremost, the constraint placed on growth and employment by Australia’s balance of payments; second, the need for manufacturing industry to compete successfully in
world markets; and third, the impetus provided by workplace productivity bargaining. I shall look at these elements in turn.

(i) Balance of payments constraint. Australia's current account deficit for 1991/2, announced in August just before the Budget was $11.8 billion. This may sound a lot, but it was substantially less than the figure for the previous year. Even so, the point is that as recovery gets under way we can expect the deficit to deteriorate again. The biggest component of the deficit by far was the $15.7 billion interest bill on foreign debt, largely incurred by the private sector during the speculative binge of the 1980s. Unfortunately, this has now become lead in our saddle, restraining any 'dash for growth' within relatively tight fiscal boundaries. In fact, without this interest bill our external account would have appeared much more robust. We earned a surplus on our merchandise trade of $3.9 billion; manufactured exports contributed more than $10 billion towards this, continuing an upward trend which began as tariffs came down. That's the good news, but it would be foolish to ignore the bad news.

The problem is that imports, which have temporarily been held back by recession, are now showing signs of resuming their upward trend as well, outpacing export growth. For example, in the July current account figures, while exports rose by 1%, imports grew much faster at 6%—further increasing the already high ratio of imports to sales. Yet it has become fashionable to argue that the current account does not matter so long as the rest of the world is prepared to finance it through capital inflows. There are at least two objections to this view, which have recently been set out by Professor Tony Thirlwall in the National Westminster Bank Quarterly Review.

The first objection is that the "interest rates will be higher than otherwise would be the case in order to finance the deficit, or to stop the currency from depreciating". Clearly, this has been the case in Australia and, as might be expected, it has had a ruinous effect on investment, which is an essential precondition for growth and competitiveness. Second, "no country in the long run can grow at a rate faster than that rate consistent with balance of payments equilibrium on current account unless it can finance an ever growing deficit—which in general it cannot". In other words, the balance of payments becomes the ultimate constraint on growth, raising the spectre of a damaging stop-go cycle which again we have been experiencing here in the recent past. In Australia, recent calculations by the Employment Studies Centre at the University of Newcastle (by Bill Mitchell, Martin Watts and myself) show that just to stabilise net foreign debt at 36% of GDP will require a surplus on trade in goods and services of 1% of GDP. Without that, external stability—manageable current account balance—can be achieved only at the cost of low growth and high unemployment (see Table 1).

(ii) Manufacturing industry. We now know that it will not be possible to generate trade surpluses of the required magnitude through a continued reliance on primary commodity exports. Not only are these a declining proportion of world trade but their relative prices have also been falling steadily over the post-war period. Moreover, recent Reserve Bank figures suggest that a reversal of this trend is unlikely, with a further 6% drop in commodity prices since March, particularly affecting the rural sector. The theory of comparative advantage—which claims that the interests of all countries are best pursued by each specialising in a narrow range of products it can produce most cheaply—has, in effect, locked Australia into a downward spiral of competitive disadvantage.

The source of net export growth in the future lies in manufacturing, especially elaborately transformed manufactured products (ETMs), which comprise the largest and fastest growing segment of world trade (see Diagram 1). Yet the legacy of tariff protection in Australia is a 'sheltered workshop' manufacturing sector. That is why the government was essentially right to pursue a program of tariff reductions. The problem, however, was that, without an industry policy to support it, the development of export competitive manufacturing was made to depend entirely upon the market, or what boils down in the economists' models to spontaneous entrepreneurial combustion'.

While the Prime Minister has understandably made much of the growth in manufacturing over the period of the Labor government, it should be placed in perspective. This growth started from a very low base, and still leaves simp-
ly and elaborately transformed manufactured exports taken together at a relatively small 21% of Australia’s total exports (see Diagram 2). Similarly, the trebling of ETM exports since 1983 to over $10 billion needs to be set against the fact that they constitute less than 20% of merchandise exports but more than 65% of merchandise imports. In other words, despite an overall manufacturing surplus, we are stuck with a $22 billion deficit in ETMs.

What can be done? So far, the government’s approach to manufacturing has encompassed ad hoc industry plans, offsets policies and depreciation allowances. It has also involved setting up bodies such as Austrade, the National Industry Extension Service and Australian Centre for Best Practice to advise firms on new production techniques, work practices and market opportunities.

Yet, whatever their individual merits, these measures do not add up to a coherent industry policy, particularly when put in the context of the high interest rate and exchange rate regime of the late 1980s. In the end the weight that should have been carried by industry policy, especially to promote investment, productivity and competitiveness, fell upon wages policy instead.

(iii) Workplace bargaining. Most commentators now acknowledge that wages policy under the Accord played a key role, at least initially, in promoting non-inflationary growth. It soon became clear, however, that the resources released by wage restraint were being directed not to productive investment but to takeovers and asset speculation. The result was that while Australia enjoyed the fastest jobs growth in the OECD, productivity had stalled in just the areas where improvements in competitiveness were urgently required. Paradoxically, this was further compounded by wage restraint to the extent that relatively cheap labour became a disincentive to investment in labour-saving technology.

More recently, the carefully-managed transition to workplace productivity bargaining within the framework of the arbitration system has shifted the focus from restraint of nominal wages to control over real unit labour costs. In other words, how much workers get paid matters less to firms than their total wage costs per unit of output. Last October’s National Wage Case decision gave effect to this new approach to wages policy in the Enterprise Bargaining Principle (EBP), opening up the prospect in Australia of a high wage, high productivity economy. In a sense, like award restructuring, productivity bargaining is an attempt to achieve the objectives of industry policy by other means.

The emphasis on joint consultation and agreement by the enterprise bargaining principle gives workers and union representatives an opportunity to directly influence investment decisions, and consequently to strike a balance between investment and consumption in the collective bargaining process itself. Indeed, ‘industrial democracy’ is no longer an abstraction, but an integral part of the bargaining agenda. The main drawback of workplace bargain-
Richard Rorty is one of the most challenging contemporary philosophers and thinkers. Here he argues that, with the demise of the old socialist vision, all that's left us is the 'banal' politics of the everyday.

In the wake of the events of 1989 and 1991, it has become clear that western leftist intellectuals stand in need of a new political vocabulary. Visitors from postrevolutionary eastern and central Europe are going to stare at us incredulously if we continue to use the word 'socialism' when we describe our political goals. Indeed, given the suffering they have endured under regimes that called themselves marxist, our eastern European friends are likely to feel that marxist rhetoric is no more respectable than Nazi rhetoric.

Just as we would be justifiably suspicious of anyone who spoke of 'Hitler's excesses', so our colleagues in Czechoslovakia and Hungary will be outraged if we continue to speak, as many western intellectuals still do, of 'Stalin's excesses'. We will have to stop repeating Trotsky's claim that Stalin betrayed a promising revolution and begin to see Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin as Vladimir Nabokov did; as three ruthless gangsters, distinguishable only by their facial hair. We are all accustomed to think of World War Two as a good war, but many of us are not yet prepared to think of the Cold War as a good war. Yet this is just how the Czechs think of it. The Czechs and the Slovaks would be as outraged by the suggestion that the West should have avoided the Cold War by coming to terms with Stalin in 1948 as the French would be at the suggestion that Britain and the United States should, in 1941, have followed through on Chamberlain's betrayal of Benes by betraying de Gaulle.

It is going to take a long period of readjustment for us western leftist intellectuals to comprehend that the word 'socialism' has been drained of force— as have been all the other words that drew their force from the idea that an alternative to capitalism was available. Not only are we going to have to stop using the term 'capitalist economy' as if we knew what a functioning non-capitalist economy...
looked like but we are going to have to stop using the term ‘bourgeois cultures’ as if we knew what a viable non-bourgeois culture in an industrialised society would look like.

I am saying these things not as a triumphant Reaganite but rather as someone who kept hoping that some country would figure out a way to keep socialism after getting rid of the nomenklatura. Even now, I am unwilling to grant that Friedrich von Hayek was right in saying that you cannot have democracy without capitalism. All I will concede is that you need capitalism to ensure a reliable supply of goods and services, and to ensure that there will be enough taxable surplus left over to finance social welfare. The only hope for getting the money necessary to eliminate intolerable inequities is to facilitate the activities of people like Henry Ford and even Donald Trump. Public virtues, as far as we can presently see, will continue to be parasitic upon private vices. Nothing remotely like ‘a new socialist man’ seems likely to emerge.

We will have to work hard to free ourselves of the marxist vocabulary to which many of us in academia still cling. But I hope that we shall go further. I hope we can admit that we have practically nothing in the way of a ‘theoretical basis’ for political action and that we may not need one. As Karl Popper pointed out forty years ago, Plato and Marx share a certain resemblance. Both thought that they understood deep underlying forces, forces whose direction determined the fates of human communities. Plato claimed to know that justice could not reign until kings became philosophers or philosophers kings. He claimed to know this on the basis of a searching inspection of the human soul. Marx claimed to know that justice could not reign until capitalism was overthrown and culture decommodified. He claimed to know this on the basis of a deep understanding of the movement of history. I hope we have reached a time when we can finally get rid of the conviction common to Plato and Marx, the conviction that there just must be large theoretical ways of finding out how to end injustice. I hope we can learn to get along without the
conviction that there is something deep—such as the human soul, or human nature, or the will of God, or the shape of history—which provides a subject matter for grand, politically useful theory. We should accept the fact that from here on in we are going to have to be as crudely experimental as the new governments of Poland and Lithuania are being forced to be.

Now that we can no longer be leninists, intellectuals have to face up to some questions that leninism helped us to evade. What is behind the sense of loss that comes over us now that we are forced to conclude the bourgeois democratic welfare states are the best we can envisage? Is it sadness at the thought that the poor will never get all the way out from under the rich, that the solidarity of a cooperative commonwealth will never be attained? Or is it instead sadness at the thought that we intellectuals turned out to be less relevant to the fate of humanity than we had hoped? Was our thirst for world-historical romance—for deep theories about deep causes of social change—caused by our concern for human suffering? Or was it at least in part a thirst for an important role for ourselves to play?

Whatever the answers to these navel-gazing questions, I think that we western leftists can best acknowledge the revolutions of 1989 and 1991 by resolving to banalise our vocabulary of political deliberation. I suggest that we start talking about greed and selfishness rather than about bourgeois ideology, about starvation wages and layoffs rather than about the commodification of labour, and about differential per-pupil expenditure on schools and differential access to health care rather than about the division of society into classes. I suggest that we stop assuming that the function of the intellectual is radical criticism that attempts to penetrate down to the realities beneath the appearances. I hope that we can stop using notions like ‘mystification’ and ‘ideology’, notions that suggest that we are in a position to see through mere social constructions and discern something that is more than a social construction. It would be better simply to say: perhaps we can construct a better society than we have now—better not in the sense of conforming better to the way things really are but merely in the sense of containing fewer inequities. From this point of view, the only kind of criticism of existing institutions that will count will be reformist rather than radical—the kind that sketches a concrete alternative institution, an alternative that does not presuppose the existence of a new kind of human being.

So far, I have been suggesting that we intellectuals should react to the recognition that we may always have market economies by taking less interest in philosophy and more in reform legislation, less interest in academic politics and more in electoral politics, less interest in the criticism of ideology and more in formulating scenarios for change. But I have to admit that something very important has been lost now that we can no longer see ourselves as fighting against ‘the capitalist system’. For better or worse, ‘socialism’ was...
a word that lifted the hearts of the best people who lived in our century. A lot of very brave men and women died for that word. They died for an idea that turned out not to work, but they nevertheless embodied virtues to which most of us can hardly aspire.

Still, the image of Lenin at the Finland Station, an image that captured the hearts of our grandparents, cannot be retouched and revived. That image is, in today’s St Petersburg, the memory of a nightmare. In the minds of our grandchildren, that image will form a triptych along with that of Hitler at a Nuremburg rally and of Mussolini on the balcony of the Palazzo Venézia. The image of Aleksandr Kerensky is going to blend with that of Tomáš Masaryk, and that of Hans Beimler with that of Horst Wessel.

So what now will fire the imagination of the international Left? What songs will the next generation of hopeful, idealistic students sing now that nobody wants the International Soviet to be the human race? What cry will rally young people who have realised that what their grandparents used to call ‘the bourgeois revolution’ is not going to be succeeded by a proletarian revolution? That what their grandparents called ‘petit-bourgeois reformism’ is, at least in the industrialised democracies, the only political alternative we have left? That revolutions against Third World oligarchies are unlikely to throw up any better institutions than those the industrialised democracies have already developed? What heroes and heroines and which triumphant events, will fill the minds of the leftist university students in 2010?

I have no confident answers to such questions, but I shall offer a tentative one: perhaps the image of Lenin will be replaced by the image of Václav Havel, and the events of October 1917 in St Petersburg, by those of 1989 in Prague. For of all the revolutions of the past three years, the Velvet Revolution best fulfils the intellectual’s hope to act together with the workers, successfully joining forces to overthrow tyrants. Havel’s magnificent honesty has made him the symbol of everything that Lenin was not. It is not hard to hope that Havel’s writings will set the tone for the next worldwide surge of social hope.

What is so surprising and refreshing about Havel’s tone, to my mind, is that he seems prepared to go all the way in replacing theoretical insight with groundless hope and trial and error. As he says in the interviews collected as Disturbing the Peace, “hope is not prognostication”. Throughout those interviews, he emphasises his lack of interest in underlying forces and historical trends. The following passage, describing the events of 1967-69, is typical:

Who would have believed—at a time when the Novotny regime was corroding away because the entire nation was behaving like Schweik—that half a year later that same society would display a genuine civic-mindedness, and that a year later this recently apathetic, sceptical and demoralised society would stand up with such courage and intelligence to a foreign power! And who would have suspected that, after scarcely a year had gone by, this same society would, as swiftly as the wind blows, lapse back into a state of demoralisation far deeper than its original one! After all these experiences, one must be very careful about coming to any conclusions about the way we are, or what can be expected from us.

‘Us’ here means ‘us Czechs and Slovaks’, but what Havel is saying works just as well if we take it to mean ‘us human beings’. We can put Havel’s refusal to prognosticate in an American context by asking, ‘Who would have guessed that the white middle class that acknowledged the justice of Truman’s desegregation of the military, the Supreme Court’s repudiation of the separate-but-equal doctrine, and King’s freedom marches, the same white middle class that turned King into a schoolbook hero, would now decide that it is more important to cut taxes than to immunise ghetto children against measles? Who can know whether, a decade farther down the road, the same middle class may not become disgusted with its own greed and turn against the shameless opportunists who have been panderling to its selfishness?’

Lenin would not have agreed with Havel that we have to be “careful about coming to any conclusions about the way we are, or what can be expected from us”. Scientific socialism, Lenin thought, gave us the tools to formulate, and demonstrate the truth-of, just such prognostications. But the end of leninism will, with luck, rid us of the hope for anything like scientific socialism, and for any similar source of theoretically-based prognostication.

And yet many of us are still, alas, on the look-out for a successor to marxism—for a large theoretical framework that will enable us to put our society in an excitingly new context. We hope that this new context will suggest something to say that will be less banal than “people ought to be kinder, more generous, less selfish”. My own hunch is that there may be nothing less banal to say. There may be no middle ground between that sort of banality and attempts to sketch concrete, workable alternatives to present sociopolitical arrangements. Rather than dreaming of a spiritual renewal, I think we would be better off assuming that whatever improvements occur in the next century will be no more dramatic than those that occurred in ours—that the best we can hope for is more of the same experimental, hit-or-miss, two-steps-forward-and-one-step-back reforms that have been taking place in the industrialised democracies since the French Revolution.

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A more banal POLITICS?

Peter Beilharz responds that, while a more ordinary politics may be a good thing, it still needs to rise to the occasion.

Richard Rorty is one of the most provocative and insightful of contemporary philosophers—which is to say, of course, that by some criteria he is not a philosopher at all. He is a vital critic and public intellectual. In the age where grand narratives collapse noisily like ageing dinosaurs in the jungle, Rorty pursues central social problems in a prose that is at once sprightly and clear. No mean feat. But do we need more banality in politics?

I find it difficult to disagree with Rorty’s claim that we—western radicals—need a new political vocabulary. The question is, what might it be? Rorty correctly observes that the term socialism is completely discredited among citizens of the old Soviet Empire. They have a powerful claim to be heard, and to be taken seriously. But there are others, in the so-called third world and in the deindustrialising parts of the first world, who would still hitch their hopes to that star, or at least view socialism as a countertrend to the market, and they also have a right to be heard, whatever vocabulary they use.

Rorty’s point here is that fellowtravelling has never been a small sin or a passing weakness on the part of leftists. For leftists, like everyone else, are suckers for success; and so the story that starts with the Red October, travels through China, eastern Europe and Cuba is an irresistible path of success for radicals who identify socialism’s success with the achievement of state power.

Into the 1990s, it may be the case that socialism remains a defensible tradition or set of traditions, if only the obsession with state power is rejected. In Foucault’s work, for example—or even in that of the French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, there is a sense that marxism is part of our culture; perhaps an oppositional moment, but nevertheless part of the furniture. Here I stand, I can say no other—Marx for me is usually half right, and therefore half wrong. Half full or empty, the critical philosophy is not yet ready for the junkyard. For marxism speaks a truth about the way the world works, about the extraordinary power of the economic, about the magical world of commodities. Sorel put a similar kind of case at the turn of the previous century, when he argued that socialism only made sense in tension with and against the everyday reality of capitalism—but it was the tension or struggle which mattered. An end to this
tension would be an end to history, an absolute loss. The Sydney philosopher John Anderson argued a similar line in the 30s, with his proposition that labour actually needed capital because it needed a power to constitute itself against. The trouble began, imaginably, when the balance was overturned.

The ghost behind various of these cases is that of Hegel. To some, Hegel was a crazy system-builder, postmodernism's nightmare, part of the problem rather than the solution. But as always there are several Hegels or ways to read Hegel. The young Marx read Hegel as the theorist of the relation between master and slave. Hegel's image made it possible for Marx to think class struggle in a double sense—as containing a moment which reproduced power as well as one which suggested its overthrow. In short, the dialectic of master and slave suggested a theory which could address both culture and power. Little accident then that this particular reading of Hegel became dominant in postwar French philosophy, for it made it hypothetically possible to address both how pernicious assymetrical relations of power could be, and how it was that the subordinate partner could help reproduce these relations.

To say this much is one way of confessing that I do not share Rorty's sense that we can or ought to junk marxism. Perhaps his argument makes more sense in the context of American culture, where marxism had always been viewed as an alien, if not enemy growth and where there are live and rich alternatives such as pragmatism. Rorty proposes that we now have practically nothing in the way of a 'theoretical basis' for political action, and that we may not in any case need one. This is a useful argument, because it puts theory back in its place, but it may also risk jeopardising the idea that criticism is an important practice in itself. Rorty proceeds to argue—again I think correctly—that the 20th century has been a mess partly because intellectuals have been too busy filling an invisible queue as would-be legislators or heroes. But the logic of his argument is that intellectuals should drop not only their bizarre pretensions to power, but even perhaps their claims to criticise or to influence.

The idea that we should, in our time, seek to make politics more ordinary therefore cuts both ways. In one sense politics is already so banal as to be anaesthetising. It's true that in Australia, for example, Dr Hewson has in mind something less than banal, something closer to scorching earth, and we can only hope that Australian electors in this context will go for the banal. But if we can go beyond that, what then of social democratic or liberal prospects? I agree with Rorty that there needs to be more talk of health and education. These were, indeed, original causes for socialists like Owen, Tawney, and the Fabians. Gas and water matters. But I cannot see how we can do this without talking also about ideologies and political visions, not least because Rorty is entirely correct to suggest that the whole process of reform is so incredibly fragile and contingent. The only lesson that history teaches today is that there are no lessons, at least as far as the teleological views of Right and Left are concerned. Here it is better to return, say, to Croce, with his sense that such progress as occurred was always contin-

Richard Rorty's key cue here I take to be the idea that we should indeed entertain an ordinary politics, a politics after the heroic. None of us, arguably, are very good at doing ordinary politics, neither on a national nor transnational, regional or local basis. So this is also a positive exhortation, that we drop our eyes from the sublime, that we speak more of the prose of the world, that we avoid unnecessary abstraction in the way we think or speak. This inflection would indeed see radical language become more conversational and democratic, and this would be a good thing. What makes me twitch is the possible suggestion that there could be a singular answer to the question: what then should intellectuals do? In the Australian setting there is always a risk that intellectuals construct the legitimacy of their work by marginalising that of others. 'Leftist' intellectuals should, to my mind, be both reformists and radicals; some ought even be revolutionaries, surrealists, poets as well as policymakers. In this sense we probably still have something to learn even from the cultural and political milieu of October. If we are living after communism and after the heroic phase of socialism, then the question still remains how to create or revive an ordinary politics which can rise to the occasion.

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According to its ardent supporters superannuation is one of the great political leaps forward. According to its increasingly numerous detractors, though, it's a misbegotten strategy. We assembled a roundtable discussion to explore the issues.

Frances Hamilton is senior co-ordinator of Superannuation Trust of Australia. Brian Daley is assistant federal secretary of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU). Diana Shaw teaches in sociology at the University of NSW. Peter Davidson is a research officer for the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS). The discussion was chaired by Les Fallick, from the speakers office of the ACT Legislative Assembly.

The increasing priority given to retirement savings since the mid-1980s has tended to be traced to the demographic influence of the baby-boomers, and what is called the dependency ratio. Brian, what is meant by the dependency ratio, and why is it perceived to be a problem?

Brian: The dependency ratio is the population of 65 and over as a percentage of those aged between 15 and 64. It was 14.8% in 1980, is expected to be 17.5% in the year 2000 and 32.1% in 2040. In other words, the population is ageing. By about the year 2025, the number of people aged over 65 increases to around 35% of the population. At the same time there is also a decrease in the number of children in the population—a factor that's often overlooked. Because they are not income earners, of course, children are dependent on those who are income earners, in the same way that those over 65 are to some extent dependent on those who are in the taxation system.

Frances: It's also to do with the fact that people are living a lot longer, so that in fact the period of retirement is much greater than it was even 20 years ago.

Peter: I'd argue, however, that the impact on government spending of this trend has been overstated, and that we need to take into account the probability that in future
people will be working at least part-time for a longer period. And because the age pension system is targeted towards people with little other income, the cost of continuing with the present age pension system has also been overstated. The Economic Planning Advisory Council estimated a few years ago that the total increase in age pension and other related health and social welfare costs would be in the vicinity of 2-3% of GNP over the next 40 years. That’s worth worrying about, but it’s not catastrophic for government revenues, provided there are adequate revenue sources.

When I say to people overseas that the Australian trade union movement has pursued a big superannuation increase in the 1980s, they don’t really know what I’m talking about. How would the problem of ageing normally be tackled in the European social democracies?

Frances: There’s been a mixed response overseas. In Europe much of retirement income is funded through the taxation system. There is a levy on the people in employment and the people who need it receive it not on the basis of work performed, but simply by virtue of being citizens of the country. So women, for instance, who have not been in paid full-time work all their life, wouldn’t receive less than people who did have paid work.
Why haven’t we gone for a comprehensive social insurance system based on taxation?

Frances: Unfortunately I don’t think it was politically or socially feasible back in the 1980s to organise it that way, because it would have implied increasing taxes. What was chosen was the only way it could be done at the time.

Brian: At that time we were massively deregulating all sorts of institutions and to move to a funded pension arrangement which would have involved the government as a regulator in a substantial way was against the general direction and attitude of government.

Diana: There was also a strong push from the state to increase domestic savings because balance of payments problems were developing. There was a feeling that increasing occupational superannuation could create a new pool of domestic savings.

To a degree the super push also arose out of the wages system. How did that come about?

Brian: In the early 1980s, as part of a wages claim, the building unions had sought an allowance payment, which had been refused by the National Wage Case bench. They hit upon the idea of getting employers to pay the equivalent of that wage increase into a superannuation scheme. What sprang from that, however, was the realisation that superannuation was something which the union movement should seek to involve itself in, for a broad range of social reasons. There was, as Diana says, a national savings pool to be controlled and to be developed, and there are significant infrastructure and development issues the working-class movement could have a say in.

Have other countries successfully taken this route? Will it lead to a comprehensive retirement income solution?

Diana: The system we’ve developed here is unique, so it’s very difficult to say. In Sweden, the government established wage-earner funds where employers contributed into a collective fund, and the investment was then going to benefit workers collectively. But those funds didn’t really tie into benefits for individual workers in the way the Australian system has been set up to do.

Brian: Australia also has a much more mobile workforce than most other countries. We don’t have the concept of lifetime employment that the Japanese and a number of European countries have, which have tended to facilitate single-employer superannuation schemes, and therefore perhaps make the funding of other social security schemes easier.

Peter: One of the unfortunate things about the development of superannuation policy in the 1980s is that it has been cobbled together as we’ve gone along, and the goals set later on to justify the policy. Although I think we’ve gone too far down the track of occupational super to go back, there are a number of different ways of structuring that system which haven’t really been explored or even publicly debated. It’s just assumed that the age pension will potter along at around 25% of average earnings—which is a very low rate compared with other OECD nations—and that employers will contribute up to 9% of wages in super. There’s been no exploration of the possibilities of raising the age pension a little, or of devoting some of those retirement savings to other purposes which are needed by people on low incomes throughout their lives. They’re much more likely to become unemployed, to need retraining and to suffer poverty if they become ill.

Brian: Given the drift of demography that we’ve already acknowledged, I don’t believe that we’ll see any government take the decision to create a comprehensive tax-based social insurance scheme in the next decade or beyond.

Diana: But the vast majority of the population are not going to accumulate a significant amount in their superannuation funds, and so there is still going to be a large proportion of the population which will be totally dependent on the age pension, or at least a top-up of the age pension. So there are going to be people who will be demanding that political parties look at the age pension.

Brian: I don’t think that’s going to happen. Part of the theory behind the current model is to increase the real value of the pension in the long-run. The aim is to provide a sufficient retirement income to effectively take many people out of need for the pension system. But you can only do that once you’ve got the demographics working your way. Once you start to decrease the number of people who rely on the pension, both in percentage and in real terms, then you can start to focus on the problem of being able to increase its real value.

Diana: Another area which hasn’t been adequately discussed is the possibility of redistributing income so that the inequalities of people in their working lives could perhaps be changed somewhat in retirement. Because the system is set up on an earnings-related model it means that if you have a poor time of it during your years in the workforce, you’re going to have a pretty awful time of it in retirement too.

Peter: The Australian age pension system, because of its low rates and its income and asset tests, is one of the cheapest in the OECD. I really don’t think there’s a serious cost problem with a moderate increase in the age pension. The cost of the tax concessions for occupational super is already almost half the annual cost of the age pension, and will increase over the years. If we’re concerned about the efficiency of government spending, whether it’s going to those who need it and whether it’s actually boosting national savings, then the tax concessions for occupational super fall down on both counts. A large proportion of those concessions are going to people who don’t need them to subsidise their retirement incomes and they’re going to people who are going to save in other forms anyway. According to the Treasury figures a person on three times average weekly earnings now gets a retirement income subsidy worth roughly three times that which a person on half of the average weekly earnings gets, and that includes the age pension. That’s outrageous.
Frances: I was surprised at the extent to which both the Government and the Opposition had taken notice of ACOS's views on tax concessions. They've both cut out concessions for employees, although they're there for self-employed people, and they are both trying to slot in a tighter system of tax concessions on employer contributions. So my impression is that they are actually trying to be fairer on this.

Brian: It's important to realise the numbers involved in expanding the pension system. A two per cent increase in the share of GDP going to the pension system would add about another $7 billion to the government deficit before you've even touched the size of the pension. By increasing the pension from 25% of average weekly earnings to 35%—a figure that's commonly mentioned—you would probably treble the budget deficit. I can't imagine that there will be a government brave enough to do that for the sake of social security expenditure.

**'Increasing the pension to 35% of average earnings would treble the budget deficit'**

We're changing the superannuation system from a voluntaristic one based on tax concessions to a compulsory one. We've talked about the merits of that. The next logical question seems to be how much money we are accumulating, and who controls it.

Frances: It's growing very rapidly now, especially since the introduction of the Superannuation Guarantee Charge (SGC), which provides that every employee in Australia—not just people covered by awards—are to get at least three per cent put aside for them for super. It's more likely to be around $400 billion by 2000. That money is being invested by the trustees of the various funds—half employer-appointed and half employee-appointed—with the advice of the investment experts, who mainly come from the insurance industry.

Why would an employer be on the fund's trustees if workers are the contributors?

Frances: Because company funds were traditionally employer funds, the employers have always in some sense believed that it's their money, even though once it's in the funds it belongs to the member. The employers still have a very strong sense of their rights to direct where this money goes. And in fact that has always been accepted as fair. It was interesting to see the Law Reform Commission question exactly this point, and they're not exactly regarded as a radical organisation.

We've got some notion of who controls the money. Have we got any notion of what we should be doing with it?

Peter: There's not much point boosting national savings if they're not being invested in the economic development of Australia, both in the interests of the nation, and in the interests of fund members directly—because their returns depend very much on domestic economic growth. There's an ongoing debate as to whether government has a role in directing investment, given their contribution through tax concessions. My feeling is that it's a blunt instrument, and perhaps those arguments put the cart before the horse. If the tax concessions weren't so excessive in the first place, then the government would have the money itself to invest as it wished.

Playing the devil's advocate for a moment, as a potential retiree with money in super, there would seem to be three possible directions for that money: I could give it to the government and hope that there's a good rate of return in infrastructure; I could give the money to a private investing agency like an insurance company or a firm of investors to invest willy-nilly; or I could invest through my trustees in the economic development of Australia. It seems to me that I would be as happy living off the products of rentier capitalism, invested all around the world, as I would be off Australian infrastructure. I would want the highest rate of return whether it's in government infrastructure, Australian investment or Rio Tinto Zinc. Would that not be a valid argument?

Diana: You might not be very concerned about where your money's going, but if your children are not going to work in this country because there are no jobs, then you might think quite differently. One solution would be to find some model whereby low income earners' money is invested in very secure blue-chip securities and maybe as you have a higher income invested in superannuation, some of your money can go to socially responsible investment. The important thing is to have some investment to create employment-generating opportunities in Australia.

Brian: In the early stages of industry super we had to make an assessment about what to do with the money. We had to deliver a competitive interest rate, otherwise the marketplace may well have devoured us, and that's probably taken us down a path of very traditional investment models.

Peter: There's also a direct impact on working people if governments don't have the money to provide services. Retirement living standards depend on a great deal more than income. They will increasingly depend on access to health-care services, so that you can live at home and be more active in the community for longer; and on the ability to re-educate or retrain yourself to make a career change later in life. All of these things are services provided by government. One of my worries is that if too much government money is invested in retirement incomes only, then governments in future are going to ask retirees to pay for these services which are currently provided free or at low cost. So people may be wealthier in income, but they'll have a lot of other expenses.

If we want to increase people's access to their savings, what should they be able to use them for?
Peter: In the battle to increase national savings clear that people earning less than average earnings are the ones not saving at the moment. The fact is that they generally can’t afford to save. So if they’re going to be forced to save, then it has to be for purposes which will really benefit them. It’s hardly in the interests of low-income earners who have just purchased a house, just had children, and rely on one income, to be putting aside money for retirement. They need it now. If someone on a lower wage suddenly finds themselves unemployed, they also need the money now. There is a problem with giving people early access to savings which are tax-assisted. It has to be very carefully structured, so that there are only limited purposes for which people can call upon the money—and I suspect it ought to have been saved for a certain period of time before it attracts a tax-concession. But it’s really not in the interests of low-wage earners to make their contribution to the national savings effort if the system isn’t more flexible and tailored to their needs.

Frances: I agree with Peter on this. When a person retires, that person must have a secure home to live in, and some income. In fact the ACTU has a policy that every member of a fund should be able to take out a sum of money after a certain number of years of membership to use as a deposit on their house. That money isn’t a loan as such, because if and when the house is sold, a certain amount of money comes back to the fund, plus a proportion of any profit. How does any low-paid worker, certainly in the large capital cities, ever get the deposit on a house? This is an ideal way to do it, via the super system.

Peter: A lot of them can’t afford it, and that’s why I think access needs to extend beyond the home loans.

The single greatest contributor to poverty for retirees is not owning their own home, is it not?

Peter: That’s correct. Something like 55% of people on the full pension are non-homeowners. It would be a politically popular decision to make home loans or deposit loans available through super and because of that governments of any persuasion will probably do something along those lines. But I must admit I have a mixed reaction to it. It has the potential, as we’ve seen with a lot of retirees, to make them asset-rich and income-poor, and I’m not sure that that’s necessarily in their interests. It also helps to abrogate the government’s responsibility for public housing. I’m concerned that we’ll see the government move away from socially desirable housing projects and developments, and they’ll use the income from superannuation funds as a means of doing that.

Frances suggested that we would have up to $400 billion in superannuation funds accumulated by the year 2000. From my rough recollection of the amount of shares traded on the Australian stock exchange, that would mean that the superannuation funds could buy all of those shares and have money left over.

Brian: Companies can issue enough equity to absorb ten times over the demand from super funds. The individual superannuation funds won’t regularly own more than around 10-20% of companies.

The superannuation industry has always had a horrible vision of a backroom meeting at the ACTU where industry fund X,Y and Z got together and said, we’ve each got 30% of BHP, that means we own it. Why shouldn’t or wouldn’t that happen?

Diana: If it meant that you got more accountability in some of these publicly-listed companies that could only be a good thing. In Britain, there are quite a number of pension funds which are now making demands that the directors of public companies be more accountable. Funds have recently called the boards of directors to account for giving themselves hefty wage-rises at a time when the rest of the workforce is having to adopt wage restraint. So these active interventions by superannuation funds could only be a good thing, surely.

'It's hardly in the interests of low-income earners to be putting aside money for retirement.'

The notion of corporate citizenship has come onto the agenda after the excesses of the 1980s. If you look at the UK and America, ethics in business is a big movement. Charities, universities, consumer groups, want to see how they can use their investment power to influence their companies. I remember as a student 20 years ago fighting to ensure that the university took its money out of South Africa. But we’re talking about billions of dollars now. Surely now we don’t need to ask them to change their behaviour, we have the power of dictating to them.

Peter: I don’t think such a thing is likely to happen by stealth. There would be a huge political struggle around it, involving the international as well as national markets. If a bit more accountability and democracy are achieved, then that’s good, but I don’t think it’ll get very far without major political change.

Brian: That’s right. One of the focuses of the Coalition’s policy now is to try to downgrade superannuation, and it’s partly because of their concerns about what the future holds.

The trade unions and the community in general have been on a steep learning curve about retirement incomes and superannuation. Entering this field has had a big effect on our culture and our views. But what effect has it had on the traditional providers, the AMP, National Mutual and so on? Has their culture changed?

Frances: It has to some extent, although not enough. A lot of it is token gestures. I suppose we can be arrogant enough
to say that we have influenced them to decide that trade unionists and workers actually have brains, and that they care about many of the same things that insurance companies care about—although not all.

I think we need to pursue this question of ownership and control. Despite their rhetoric about individuals taking back control of their lives, there’s nothing in the Liberals’ policy as democratic as the way in which the developments of the last seven years have opened up superannuation. Before the recent developments, superannuation was something that the employer gave to you as a gift, and it was something you knew nothing about and certainly didn’t have any control over.

Brian: The Coalition’s policy is in fact entirely regressive. The Coalition would put absolute limits on superannuation now, and would do their best to unwind what has been done so far. The Liberals’ policy is really one of stopping the average person improving their lifestyle and their relative income position, which superannuation has the potential to do.

Diana: That’s one of the reasons why we have to be very clear about identifying that employees have a share of the action in industry funds, because the trustees of industry funds are in fact directly representing the employees. If we move towards a system where the superannuation funds are run by the banks, there will be no accountability for the employees in the funds.

Diana: One thing we haven’t talked about is that women continue to be seriously disadvantaged in this system. Because the system is earnings-related and dependent upon how long you’re in the workforce, the fact that women are always in the lower sectors of the workforce and tend to have broken patterns of employment means that women will never accumulate a sufficient amount of money for their retirement. So we’ve got to be demanding that the government look at some way either to give graded tax benefits for the first 10 years of employment, or some other means of addressing the inequity of women in superannuation.

Brian: Don’t you think that some aspects of a family model, and I use the word loosely, are now underlying part of the government philosophy?

Diana: Yes, but that sort of family model is not the model that most Australians live under now.

Brian: I take the point that there are some single women who bear children and leave the workforce, and they are an increasing group, but there is still a large percentage of single people who don’t leave the workforce. And within the family model there is now much more accountability on equality in divorce.

Diana: But the amount of money the woman is going to get on retirement is still going to be precious little.

Brian: I don’t disagree that the model is loaded somewhat towards males, and not just somewhat, but I think we should also acknowledge that we have come a fair way towards redressing some of the imbalance.

Diana: In the past women didn’t get anything.

Frances: I know from my own experience. I was out of the fulltime workforce for seven years and then came back in my 40s, with no super at all. Women previously had nothing, unless they were tied to a man who lived as long as they did or who left them a certain amount of money. Women will work more during their working lives, and will earn more, but they’ll never make it up completely. The only way is to make sure that the age pension is subsidised properly to allow for the fact that women have worked throughout their lives, though not necessarily in paid work, let alone well-paid work. The pension system has to be kept viable and with a structure that builds up the money for the people who actually still need it. And they’ll be women.

There’s an attempt by the industry at the moment to blur the distinction between industry funds and general products that they’re bringing on to the market. These general products, which they are portraying as offering freedom of choice, in fact offer you the ability to sign away whatever ownership and control you’ve got.

Frances: The argument about freedom of choice is ridiculous anyway. The Opposition like to imply that freedom of choice means freedom of choice for the member. When you question them, it turns out that what they really mean is freedom of choice for employers to decide where they will put the money. For instance, the state government of NSW slotted specific legislation on freedom of choice of superannuation fund into their industrial relations act.

That would mean, would it not, that an employer who is making a compulsory contribution can decide which fund to make that contribution to, whereas the model promoted by the ACTU argues that the fund that the employer should contribute to should be specified? That is, it should be an industry fund.

Frances: Yes, and there are very good reasons why this should be so. An employee changes jobs six times in a lifetime on average, and the idea is that an employee will have an account throughout their working life into which the superannuation payments will be made. From the employer’s point of view, they want to write out one cheque every month for superannuation to the industry fund. So the whole idea of freedom of choice from the employer point of view is crazy, because the employer is not going to write 100 or 1,000 superannuation cheques every month.

Brian: Freedom of choice is a really dangerous marketing tool at the moment. At present a number of institutions are coming up with some very slick marketing campaigns which do not disclose fees or the range of costs. People end up buying what is really an inferior product.
Conservatives and RADICALS

Australian conservatives traditionally lauded stability, custom and tradition. The neo-liberals of the federal Coalition are after radical change, and nothing will stand in their way. Stuart Macintyre looks at the remarkable transformation of the contemporary Right.

At the heart of contemporary Australian conservatism lies a profound uncertainty: just what is to be conserved? Conservatives have conventionally resisted radical change and affirmed the importance of custom and tradition. Now, with certain conspicuous exceptions, they want us to break with the past and start anew. Conservatives have traditionally celebrated the national achievement and defended the core institutions of public life. Now, while still championing our absentee monarch, Elizabeth Windsor, they turn their backs on history and damn what has gone before.

The federal Coalition’s Fightback! manifesto sketches an attenuated account of the national predicament that has induced this iconoclasm. Its economic comparisons of then with now seldom go back further than 1983, and a discreet silence is maintained over the period before that when John Howard was advised by John Hewson in the management of the national economy. But there is a brief historical sketch that introduces analysis, in Chapter Two, of The Roots of National Decline. Here we find a statement that purports to explain how it all went wrong.

It begins a hundred years ago when Australia was the richest country in the world. That starting-point is taken as given with no indication of the circumstances or conditions of our good fortune. Then came the Depression of the 1890s “with its bank failures and great strikes”—again, they are simply noted with no suggestion of why they occurred. In response, those who created the new Com-
monwealth of Australia “were determined that the economic and social turmoil of that decade would never again be inflicted on Australians”. Hence the introduction of tariff protection and industrial arbitration. “Tariff protection was meant to ensure that companies could afford to pay a ‘just’ wage while industrial arbitration was meant to guarantee that they did so.” These, with the White Australia Policy and an extension of industrial assistance to rural producers in the form of subsidies, amounted to a system of “protection all round” that reinforced our isolation from the rest of the world. Here it is not the cause but the effect that is unproblematic: “We didn’t know then what is glaringly apparent now: that it was inculcating a low productivity and inward-looking culture and steadily eroding the basis of our prosperity.”

Every generation tends to condescend to its predecessors, but that last statement is simply and unequivocally wrong. The national economic strategy that *Fightback!* summarises as “protection all round” was the subject of searching
criticism and keen debate from the 1920s onwards. The emergent economics profession of this country cut its teeth on the problems of excessive protection. Bankers, politicians, academics, public affairs commentators—all warned repeatedly during the interwar years that Australia had to set its house in order and live within its means. These critics appreciated what the authors of Fightback! show no signs of appreciating—that this strategy was deeply rooted in Australian experiences, that it expressed social as well as economic aspirations, and that any alternative strategy needed to heed the lessons of the past.

Let us go back to that golden age when Australians enjoyed a uniquely high standard of living, before the disasters of the 1890s. It is indeed true that the Australian economy achieved impressive growth and a high per capita national income during the 19th century. It did so on the basis of an international trade in basic commodities, notably wool and minerals. These were produced more efficiently and profitably than rival producers because Australian producers enjoyed some crucial advantages.

First, they had free access to a plentiful supply of a crucial factor of production, land (whose indigenous inhabitants were forcibly expropriated) and the mineral resources under the land’s surface. Second, they were showered with support by the world’s leading economic power, Britain. British capital and labour flowed into the Australian colonies because British manufacturers were prepared to pay high prices for these export commodities; if today we lament our exclusion from the leading trading blocs, we were then part of the dominant one. Third, it was possible on the ‘greenfield site’ of the Australian colonies to practise the most advanced forms of enterprise. While the primary sectors of other economies were hamstrung by restrictive relations of production—rapacious landlords, impoverished tenants practising semi-subsistence patterns of cultivation—here we moved immediately to wage labour and specialised production for the market. Our woolgrowers, and later our wheat farmers, produced at a lower unit price.

If all this warms the hearts of the economic rationalists, then it is all to the good that those organs get some much-needed exercise; but there were further features of the 19th century success story. First of all, this was a high-wage economy. Indeed, the development of the domestic sector, the manufacturing and service industries, relied on the high level of demand made possible by consumer demand. Australians were buying convenience food and ready-made clothing, they were purchasing homes and engaging in commercial leisure industries well ahead of their European counterparts because they enjoyed high real wages. Second, the state played a vital role in this economy. It provided the bulk of the productive and social infrastructure—the transport, the utilities, the schools, the amenities. Half of the capital formation of the 19th century was public sector capital formation. Moreover, the state augmented the labour force with assisted migration schemes and was itself an important employer. Third, this economy relied heavily on foreign borrowing, and increasingly so after 1850 when the conditions of natural resource exploitation became heavily capital intensive while the absence of financial controls allowed rampant speculation.

It all came crashing down when a downturn in export prices triggered a sharp contraction of domestic activity. The bank failures and the great strikes of the 1890s were two sides of the same coin: Australia’s openness to the world economy meant that it had no defence against the withdrawal of investment, while the export producers pinned all their hopes on a reduction of costs at the expense of labour. The misery and the violence of that decade appalled Australians, not least because they threatened the aspirations to national self-sufficiency and national unity that the newly federated Commonwealth of Australia was meant to secure. Hence the introduction of the protective measures—the tariff, the system of industrial arbitration and wage determination, the immigration controls.

Fightback! sees these devices as isolating Australia from the rest of the world, lowering productivity and encouraging an inward-looking culture because they reduced competitiveness. Let us be clear about the limits of this system of protection. It regulated the inflows of labour and manufactured goods. It placed a floor under labour costs. It gave some encouragement to export diversification by assisting with the production and marketing of new farm products. This was hardly a system of “protection all round”, nor could it be. Over two crucial determinants of Australian economic performance, export income and investment, there was very little control. The first depended on the level of demand and prices paid for commodity exports, and these variables became increasingly fickle as other national economies developed their own primary industries. As for the second, governments had very little control over private investment or financial institutions until World War Two, while their capacity to borrow in order to assemble the public infrastructure depended on the willingness of lenders to make those funds available.

Australia, in short, remained an open trading economy highly vulnerable to external shocks. The purpose of protecting local industries was to give some security of employment; the function of arbitration and wage determination was to allow the necessary adjustment to sudden falls in national income without ruinous class conflict. The system could not insulate the national economy but it was meant to provide it with shock absorbers. And during the first three-quarters of this century the record is far from disastrous. Australia did achieve growth; the principal commodity producers remained highly efficient; there was increase in the per capita national income; wage levels rose; inequality was less marked and employment held up better than in most advanced economies; and when the great world depression of the 1930s struck, Australia escaped the worst of the social and political convulsions that destroyed democracy elsewhere. In short, this was—and still is—a good country in which to live.

No one would claim it could not be better, or that there were no missed opportunities. The very formation of the economics profession in the 1920s signalled a growing dissatisfaction with the national economic performance, and introduced a new way of analysing institutions and
debating public policy. Again, the readiness of *Fightback!* to dismiss the past blinds it to the complexities of these issues. The economists who investigated the effects of the tariff at the end of the 1920s could see that it had failed to foster efficient, competitive manufacturing industries in Australia. The failure of the manufacturers to achieve export sales was evidence of that, and their restriction to a small domestic market trapped them in a cycle of inefficient practices and increased tariff levels. They noted also that the collusion of the unions with the employers in this use of tariff protection allowed wage increases without increases in productivity, and thus imposed a higher cost structure on the rest of the economy.

This, in brief, was the economists' understanding of the possibilities back then. If, by some timewarp, the *Fightback!* package had been implemented at that time, the woolgrowers might have increased their returns through cheaper inputs, but most other industries would have withered as a result of export competition and the reduced income levels of domestic consumers. There would have been even less incentive for capital, technology and labour transfers into a distant, backward and polarised country of cheaper inputs, but most other industries would have.

One searches *Fightback!* in vain for an acknowledgment of these complexities. There is no suggestion that the present-day conservatives are heirs to a political tradition from which they might derive an appreciation of their difficulties. Apart from a ritual gesture to Sir Robert Menzies, there is no mention of previous leaders such as Deakin who sought to define the responsibilities of the state in ways that could reconcile economic and social objectives; no awareness of the contribution made by practical intellectuals such as Eggleston to the shaping of the Australian political economy.

The nearest *Fightback!* comes to considering the problem comes in a closing flourish to the third chapter, under the slogan 'Australia Can Do It'. Here we are told that the Coalition's commitment to individual choice and private enterprise is one that derives from our own history.

The story of Australia has been the story of an arid continent becoming one of the world's greatest breadbaskets, feeding millions in other lands. The story of mining in Australia is of dedicated pioneers defying odds and expectations to build a world-beating industry. The best stories of sporting Australia are of shy heroes who haven't let fame go to their heads.

The greatest assets which our country has are the values which have been passed down by generations of Australians who came to this land seeking freedom, opportunities and self-respect for themselves and their families. These are not the values of some historic past. They are values of enduring importance to all Australians, and the task of governments is to make sure that they can be given full play.

This is an interesting appropriation of national history. It begins with the transformation of arid land (whose arid land?) into farmland, and passes over the processes that involved—the dispossession of its original inhabitants, the creation by the state of property rights, the special legislation that assisted farmers to take up farms, the provision
by the state of roads and railways and port facilities, not to mention the schools, hospitals and other social infrastructure of these bush settlements, the tribulations of farm life and the long-term effects on the environment. Similarly, the story of mining is not a story at all—where is the argument over mineral rights, the creation of the legal framework for the mining company, the regulation of mining conditions, the turbulent industrial relations of the industry? In both of these key export industries, a mythical hero is constructed, the dedicated pioneer, and endowed with the qualities of a sporting hero.

From this imaginative reading of the past Fightback! derives the values of freedom, opportunity and self-respect that successive generations supposedly brought to Australia and passed down through their families. Again this is a bizarre version of what was involved in the creation of a settler society. The first settlers had no say in the matter at all, having been sentenced to transportation by British courts. The subsequent waves of immigration were orchestrated by colonial and later Commonwealth officials who repeatedly complained at the poor material they were forced to accept. Their reception was a recurrent cause of conflict. Their family formation was the result of active state intervention. The freedom, opportunities and self-respect they sought were never a matter of consensual agreement. Insofar as they achieved these objectives, they relied on the machinery of Australian social democracy, the public framework that Fightback! dismisses.

Fightback! constructs this mythohistorical national past in order to establish the existence of energies it proposes to release:

Above all else, the program put forward in this document is aimed at giving Australians the chance to show what they can do when the official, the regulator and the taxman get off their backs, and when they are once more guaranteed rewards for their achievements and opportunities for the taking.

It is a program based on trust and regard for the individuals and the families, the farms and the businesses, the teachers and the scientists, who hold the destiny of this great country in their hands.

But against this confident view of the national character is set the document’s gloomy account of the roots of the national decline. In its own words, “Australia’s history for the best part of a century, is a chronicle of missed chances.” Our system of “protection all round” we are told has the best part of a century, is a chronicle of missed chances. It’s an odd admission for an economic liberal. According to their own theory of human behaviour, society is simply an agglomeration of rational, calculating individuals, each seeking to maximise personal advantage. If you remove the regulations and protective devices that hinder the efficient allocation of resources, and scrap the opportunities for free loading and bludging that stifle enterprise, then according to this theory all of us will automatically behave as acquisitive profit-maximisers. Attitudes, according to this utilitarian calculus, are simply habits, responses to stimuli: create the right incentives and the appropriately competitive behaviour will follow.

The admission that policies alone will not work and that changed attitudes are also necessary signals the limits of economic liberalism. The authors of Fightback! sense that it’s not quite as simple as their economic program suggests, that Australians are attached to forms of behaviour that defy this primitive view of human nature. Perhaps they sense also that a nation is more than a business enterprise, that politics involves more than economics, and that there are values embedded in Australian society that resist the logic of the market. Perhaps in time they will appreciate that a culture is not a collection of non-economic residuals that a culture is not a collection of non-economic residuals that a culture is not a collection of non-economic residuals that a culture is not a collection of non-economic residuals that a culture is not a collection of non-economic residuals that a culture is not a collection of non-economic residuals. The admission that policies alone will not work and that changed attitudes are also necessary signals the limits of economic liberalism. The authors of Fightback! sense that it’s not quite as simple as their economic program suggests, that Australians are attached to forms of behaviour that defy this primitive view of human nature. Perhaps they sense also that a nation is more than a business enterprise, that politics involves more than economics, and that there are values embedded in Australian society that resist the logic of the market. Perhaps in time they will appreciate that a culture is not a collection of non-economic residuals that you can change at will. They might even come to understand the deep historical roots of our flawed but far from contemptible social democracy.

STUART MACINTYRE is professor of history at Melbourne University. This was originally published in Markets, Morals and Manifestos: Fightback! and The Politics of Economic Rationalism in the 1990s, published by the Institute for Science and Technology Policy, Murdoch University, 1992. It is reproduced here with permission.
We want you to be part of us

Over the latter part of this year, ALR will be undergoing some big changes: a new design, new features and content, and perhaps even a new name. It's all part of our 'Plan For Growth', because we think what ALR is trying to do is too important to be confined to the select band of our current loyal readers and subscribers.

But all of this will require money, and ALR’s current resources are slim indeed. So, as a vital part of our ‘plan for growth’, we will be offering a stake in the magazine to our readers and supporters. We want you to play a real and important role in the magazine’s strategy and direction; in other words, to become part of ALR.

Further details of our ‘plan for growth’, and information on our ‘ALR supporters Association’ are available in a document we’ve put together for interested readers and supporters. If you’d like to obtain a copy, or if you simply want to find out more about our ‘Plan For Growth’, just fill in the form below. You don’t need to attach a stamp or pay for return postage.

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A species of economic liberalism haunted the 80s. Now John Hewson threatens to make a far stronger version the commonsense of the 90s. But just how well do we understand what neo-liberalism is all about? David Burchell quizzed British writer Graham Burchell on the subject.

Graham Burchell is co-editor of The Foucault Effect (London, Harvester, 1991), a book of essays on the late French thinker Michel Foucault's conception of government. He is currently translating Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's What is Philosophy? He was a visiting scholar at Griffith University in August and September.

Your book explores the idea of government and 'governmentality' associated with the latter work of Michel Foucault. One of the themes which arises from that is Foucault's understanding of liberalism. What is distinctive about that conception of liberalism and how does it differ from traditional accounts of liberalism such as those of the marxist Left?

For the Left traditionally liberalism has been conceived in terms of some kind of ideology—whether it be a dishonest mystification or a justification of capitalist practices. What interests me about Foucault's approach is that he identifies liberalism as a way of thinking about governmental activities, how governments govern. Foucault identifies liberalism as preeminently a critical style of thinking about the necessary limits of government. It arose as a criticism of the characteristic form of government of the early modern period—raison d'etat, or the 'police state'. The assumption of raison d'etat was that states are able to 'know' social reality and the economy and able to act to determine them in the interests of the state. The decisive point of liberalism's critique of this view is its scepticism about the state, both about its capacity to know the details of the economy and also its capacity to act to determine it.

The Anglo-Scottish tradition of classical liberalism sees the economy and more broadly society as a quasi-natural domain with its own internal regulations and its own internal dynamic. Intervention by the state in this domain, according to classical liberals, is liable to produce quite
different effects from those which the state desires—and also probably unfortunate effects of some kind or another.

So we’re not just talking about a different conception of liberalism, but also a different conception of the activity of government, and how government relates to the objects of government.

The view of liberalism that Foucault developed, and that we have tried to pursue in our book, is of liberalism as a distinctive ‘art of government’, a way of providing the activities of government with a principle of self-limitation. Foucault’s focus is not so much on the liberal tradition of ‘freedom of the individual’ in terms of rights, but on freedom of the individual as a technical necessity for the ability of the economy to function in terms of its own natural dynamic. By an ‘art of government’ Foucault means a way in which the activities of government can be rationalised—how they can be thought of in terms of some kind of rational principle of what governments can and can’t do. Foucault’s idea of ‘governmentality’, then, is not simply an idea of government in which the state performs functions in an instrumental way. It implies an active relationship between the state and its subjects or citizens, however they’re defined. And this is an important part of the liberal conception of the practice of government in the first place.

One of the features of classical liberalism is to identify the economy and society as a kind of natural historical entity with its own internal dynamic, with its own internal forms of self-government and self-regulation. Liberalism also identifies the individuals to be governed as both the object of government and the partners of government. Classical liberalism—and I would say that is true for modern forms of liberalism as well—sees the individual not just as a body with a set of capacities and internal forces to be shaped by a technical know-how, but as a natural reality that has to be taken into account in order to be able to govern its conduct. And the essential feature of that natural reality is its conduct according to a certain kind of rationality—in the case of early liberalism, a rationality of interest-motivated conduct of economic exchanges, but also conducted by an individual who also has relations on a communitarian basis, spontaneous passionate relationships of enmity and hatred, affiliation, disaffiliation, association and so on.

You asked how Foucault’s conception differs from the classical marxist or Left view. I would say that the Left traditionally has never elaborated a distinctive art of government. It has traditionally concerned itself with who is governing, rather than with how to govern and the principles which inform these techniques of government.

It may come as a surprise to people who look at neo-liberalism today to see the picture you’ve just created of classical liberalism. In a sense classical liberalism is distinctive as the first serious response to the problem of civil society. Yet critics of neo-liberalism today are more inclined to say that it has no conception of society as a distinct entity. What is the relationship between classical liberalism and neo-liberalism in this respect?

For modern forms of neo-liberalism the nature of liberalism is still as a kind of critical thought concerning the limits of governmental action. For the German school of Ordo liberals that developed in the Germany during and after the Second World War, and which was very influential in the building of the Federal German Republic, the problem
is marked particularly by the experience of National Socialism. Their argument was that National Socialism was not some gross aberration, but was the result of anti-liberal policies which were adopted in the face of the perceived consequences of classical liberalism—the growth of the ‘dangerous classes’, and all the social problems associated with the growth of industrial society. The Chicago School mounted a similar critique of state interventionism. The question that is common to both of them—although they give slightly different answers—is how far can the competitive game of the market function as a principle for government itself. So there’s both a continuity and a discontinuity with classical liberalism.

They’re both looking for a principle for rationalising government preeminently in relation to the market. Where the neo-liberals differ, it seems to me, is that they don’t regard that form of economic action in the market as being the product of human nature. It only exists, and can only exist, under certain political, institutional and legal conditions which have to be constructed. And this is another point at which Foucault’s approach seems to me distinctive; when looking at these varieties of liberalism, he identifies the production of a set of problems to be solved rather than just a theory, or a utopian program, or even a set of policies—and least of all an ideology.

But in relation to the question of civil society, neo-liberalism has a paradoxical aspect. On the one hand it argues that society is a product of government intervention and construction; society has been shaped by things like social insurance, workers compensation, welfare, social workers, teachers—the whole social apparatus of government. It argues this has become an obstacle to the economy and leads to the inexorable growth of the state. So in one sense neo-liberalism is anti-civil society, and also anti-government itself.

Yet in another sense one could see neo-liberalism as a kind of autonomisation of society. An example might clarify this. In watching the UK experience it has been interesting the extent to which the Conservative government, while often presented as ‘rolling back the state’, as returning to some kind of Victorian conservatism, has been extraordinarily institutionally inventive in a number of areas.

An example is their education reforms. In one sense they’re based on an economic model—the model of the enterprise. So, for example, each individual school has to operate according to a kind of competitive logic. It has to manage itself, it has to allocate the resources it is still given by the state, it has to carry out the program of the national curriculum set by government, and also carry out tests of pupils which are established by government. But within that framework each individual school is a quasi-enterprise, which has to engage in a kind of competitive relationship with other schools, both in terms of the results it tries to get, and thereby the pupils it attracts to the school, and therefore more money, and therefore a more successful school.

So in one sense there’s a kind of economisation of what traditionally would have been seen as a public service institution, something which would traditionally have been managed in other ways according to a social service philosophy. However, on the other hand, this is still a governmental technology; it is still a way of acting on the conduct of individuals and populations so as to form their conduct and their capacities.

It seems to me, then, that in a number of areas one can see taking place a kind of autonomisation of society, and not necessarily a destruction of society. It’s recasting that space that was created by classical liberalism as preeminently the space for government, civil society, or ‘the social’. A characteristic feature of modern liberalism, which classical liberalism created, is this interface between society and the state, in which society is instrumentalised for the purposes of government. It seems to me that modern forms of liberalism are continuing in that vein.

There seems to be a paradox here. A large part of the rhetoric of neo-liberalism is deregulatory. Yet as Grahame Thompson and others have pointed out, a large part of the practice of, for instance, Thatcherism in Britain has been as regulatory in some ways as it has been deregulatory in others.

And the same was exactly true of classical liberalism. As Colin Gordon puts it in the introduction of our book, liberalism doesn’t mean a ‘bonfire of controls’. On the contrary, it means precisely finding those regulations which would enable other types of natural regulations to work. In the case of modern liberalism it’s a matter of finding those regulations which would enable a competitive game of entrepreneurial conduct to function to its optimum, and to use that as a principle for both limiting and rationalising government itself. Government itself in a certain sense should become a quasi-enterprise.

One of the striking things about the current political debate in Australia which, in some senses, is a debate about neo-liberalism, is that both John Hewson and Paul Keating are conducting the debate about neo-liberalism as if they’re talking about classical liberalism. So Paul Keating when he wants to attack John Hewson talks about Hewson wanting to ‘return’ Australia to the 19th century. But I take you as arguing two things in this context: first that their conception of classical liberalism is to some extent misplaced; and second that in fact neo-liberalism isn’t simply a rerun of classical liberalism in any case.

I don’t want to comment on the Australian situation because I don’t know enough about it, but I think this same attitude imposed limitations on the critical response to the policies of the Conservative government in the UK during the 80s. The situation was quite similar; the Left was accusing the Tories of taking us back to the dark ages of laissez faire and the god of the market. On the other hand, Margaret Thatcher tried to ‘confiscate critique’ from the Left; to say the Conservatives were the radicals, that it was actually Labour which was the dinosaur.
That attitude certainly did weaken our ability to understand what was going on, and to think precisely about the inventiveness of what was happening—that it was actually new. Some American critics have been much more perceptive in that regard, pointing out that modern forms of economic liberalism have very little in common with the people they invoke. They have little in common with Adam Smith, and operate an incredibly selective reading of Adam Smith, ignoring vast swathes of his work—as well as other Anglo-Scottish classical liberals.

So do I understand rightly from what you're saying then that part of the problem on the Left is that it fails to understand the novelty and sophistication of the liberal tradition, and fails to understand that neo-liberalism's strength is as an art of government at a time—the last 20 years or so—when there has been a crisis of confidence in the role of government in advanced capitalist societies.

Clearly, there were a number of works produced in the 80s which were very perceptive about particular aspects of what was going on. People like Stuart Hall working in cultural studies, for instance, did develop some fairly far-reaching critiques of exactly what was the nature of that culture growing up under the name of enterprise culture. But generally speaking I think what you say is right. Much Left criticism just misrecognised what was happening, and saw it as another avatar of capitalist self-interest, a step back to the 19th century.

The relationship between government and the economy is another aspect of the Left's response. Liberals have pegged their conception of government to some form of economic rationality, the rationality of the market—whether it be the 'natural' market of classical liberalism or the constructed market of the neo-liberals. Thus they have always had to peg this conception to some sense of the performance of that economy. It would be rather odd to claim the superiority of liberalism as a rationality of government pegged to economic action if the economy fails to perform—although I don't think it's ever been clear, either for classical liberalism or modern neo-liberalism, what actually is unequivocally going to count as success.

In Britain, under the guise of monetarism, the government started off with one indicator, the money supply. That became two, then it became three, then other things had to be taken into account, then, of course, there were all these circumstances which were external. So that sense of liberal rationality becomes incredibly blurred. What hasn't become blurred, however, is economic action itself as a principle for governmental action. Whether the economy performs well or not, nonetheless the enterprise form can be adopted and have a certain degree of success, even if its principal reference point fails to deliver the goods.

That's the sense in which it seems to me liberalism is preeminently a reflection on the art of government. The way in which liberalism takes hold is in providing a way of thinking about government activity and a way of constructing techniques for governing, rather than by its success measured in economic indicators. I think, broadly speaking, Left critiques of neo-liberalism have not taken that on board. And they haven't taken it on board precisely because the Left has never developed an art of government of its own. Socialism has never developed a systematic reflection on how to govern, and on inventive techniques for governing.

There's a further paradox. In some senses the Left operates a double-sided critique. On the one hand it calls upon the state to protect us, to provide security for us, to secure our jobs and maintain our standard of living. On the other hand it critiques the state for constantly growing, interfering in our lives, directing our conduct, and so on. So, it has a schizophrenic relationship to the state. And I think that's partly because its relationship to the state is conceived in terms of political sovereignty. At the popular level, much Left discourse is pegged to some idea of popular sovereignty, and of democratisation as a kind of generalised solution for everything, without thinking at all about the fact that however democratic any institution is, it's still going to have to have methods for managing its affairs. There are still going to be forms of power exercised over individuals, and there have to be people exercising that power over individuals. There are going to be problems of government, both in terms of performance and in terms of practicability and acceptability of those forms of government. Traditionally the Left has been seriously weak in developing that side of its thought.

As I said earlier, it is an open question whether there can be such a thing as a socialist art of government. That isn't to say one might not think of other ways of governing, or providing a critical reflection on how we govern ourselves and each other, or a critical inventiveness around techniques of doing that are in some sense still attached to critical values like increased equity, decreased domination and so on. But it is an open question whether one would want to call that form of critical reflection socialist. Having said that, I would still want to retain one of the traditional questions of socialism—one which still poses a serious question for an art of government. That is the question of how do we live together in such a way that we maximise the capacities of each while minimising the restraints on how those capacities can be exercised.

Up to this point we've been discussing the failure of the radical Left, of the socialist tradition, to create an art of government which might provide an alternative to that of liberalism. But maybe there's also a broader problem here. As the context of the rise of neo-liberalism, particularly in the anglo-saxon countries, we've seen the breakdown of the postwar political 'historic compromise' upon which in certain respects postwar social democracy was based. And also, economically speaking, of the tools...
and techniques which were loosely labelled Keynesian. All of this was associated with social democracy, whether or not it was carried out by governments which called themselves social democratic. And so neo-liberalism has been able to hold the field. It’s been able to say: we alone have a conception of the proper limits of government vis-a-vis society. We alone have an antidote to the ‘nanny state’.

I’d agree with that. In fact, I’d perhaps qualify something I said earlier, in the sense that I’m not sure it is a question of creating an ‘alternative model’. Any kind of alternative way of thinking about government is obviously not something that is just dreamed up and then proposed; it has to start from what is perceived to be a way of identifying the problems of government in a definite situation. I don’t think it’s a problem of model-building. And in that sense it is a generalised problem which extends to all candidates to government in the West in the postwar period.

I wouldn’t be quite so pessimistic as you, however. In the practice of neo-social democracy in both Germany and France, there has been much more imaginative thought on the part of a governmental Left, if one can put it that way, than there has in the anglo-saxon countries. I’m thinking particularly about France around Jacques Delors’ wing of the Socialist Party.

Might the ground for some neo-social democratic or post-social democratic art of government then be some of the things which neo-liberalism does address but which historically the Left has not been very good at—having more of a sense of the proper limits of government, more of a sense of the importance of the techniques of government, rather than simply the ends of governments?

I’d agree with that. It seems to me the level I’d like to see addressed is to start thinking in terms of practical experiments, in terms of ways of governing—for example, in all the intermediate areas of society; practical ways in which education might be conducted differently, and so on. In that regard I’d make one last point. The interesting thing about some of the neo-liberal innovations is that they are not unambiguously bad; there are things the Left can learn from them as techniques and practices of government. This may be true of some of the education reforms in Britain, for instance. But I also want to see in that some kind of critical valuation of what the costs are, in the sense of the human costs of different techniques. I’m not just saying: let’s all become technocrats. I’m not suggesting it’s just a question of dreaming up a new gadget of government. I’m suggesting there are more desirable ways of conducting government as well.

DAVID BURCHELL (no relation) is ALR’s editor.

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ALR: OCTOBER 1992
Suburbia Verité

Sylvania Waters: Some loved it, some hated it, everyone watched it anyway.

Graeme Turner peers behind the extraordinary response to ABC TV’s ‘real life soap’.

A mark of the quality of Philip Adams’ communication skills is his improbable success in convincing Australia to see him as its all-purpose intellectual. Maybe it is the black skivvy, or the beard, or the unlikely mixture of populism and existentialism, but he is always getting wheeled in by the serious end of the media to offer short grabs on just about everything. So it was not surprising recently to see Philip Adams turn up on Lateline telling Kerry O’Brien how ordinary Australians were reacting to Sylvania Waters. Nor was it surprising to hear the man who brought us Bazza McKenzie sing the praises of this latest representation of the ugley Australian. “Noelene,” he said, “is fabulous: I am thinking of starting up a Noelene fan club.”

The public and critical reception of Sylvania Waters is a lot like that which surrounded The Adventures of Barry McKenzie. Critics, eminent personalities, writers of letters to the editor and the like have made quite a fuss, objecting to the image of Australians created in the program and to the effect it might have on ‘what people overseas’ think of us. These are performances from a pretty well developed genre of Australian cultural criticism by now; it makes its appearance, usually, when a particularly populist and unflattering set of representations appear on the big or small screen. While nobody worried that Picnic at Hanging Rock might have portrayed Australia as a land where girls walked in slow motion, rocks could make you disappear without reason, and a traffic in St Valentine’s Day messages between schoolgirls was the major form of sexual transaction, there was certainly concern that people might think we were all like Mick ‘Crocodile’ Dundee.

It was hard to have much patience with such ideas when Bazza was around; it is even harder to have much patience with it now. For a start, ‘people overseas’ think very little about us at all; even the enormous success of The Adventures of Barry McKenzie in Britain was at least as much due to the numbers of Australians in London as to British interest in Australians on film. In any case, since Australians all know that what we see on film and television is not real, it is a fair bet ‘people overseas’ know that too. The way in which television images are connected with and subject to other forms of representation was graphically demonstrated when A Current Affair miscievously showed a preview of Sylvania Waters to a ‘typical’ English family in Britain. They hated Noelene and found Australian attitudes laughable, but they also said the sunshine made them want to emigrate.

Arguments about the appropriate image of Australia to present overseas are only possible if one feels sure that one’s own version of the ‘appropriate’ or ‘typical’ is the right one. The policing of Australian content that so marked the funding and reception of Australian films of the 70s and early 80s was about specifying an image of Australia, censoriously restricting the mythologies upon which our movies drew. The furore around Sylvania Waters is, among other things, evidence that nothing much has changed.

Of course, it is true that the wealthy lifestyle Noelene and Laurie enjoy is a long way from anyone’s idea of typical. But what is remarkable about the program is that while Noelene and Laurie may not be typical they are certainly recognisable. I haven’t met anyone who wants to start up a fan club for Noelene, but I have met plenty who find her painfully, irresistibly, familiar. The characters who wander through Sylvania Waters offer tremendous potential for licensed, often pleasurable, voyeurism, precisely because they are quotations from our everyday lives.

I wouldn’t want to push this reality effect too far, however. Kerry O’Brien’s interview placed the Sylvania Waters ‘phenomenon’ within the genre of ‘reality television’, the new, ever-cheaper, ever-trashier programming format which brought us Cops, Hard Copy and Murder Squad. (Murder Squad is currently the only British example on our screens, but it is just as intrusively respectful modulated voice-over.) I would reject this connection. First of all, ‘reality television’ is something of a beat-up anyway. The term dignifies a raft of poorly structured current affairs programs which are the way they are because they are cheaper like that, not because they offer us a fresh, unmediated view of the world. ‘Reality television’ is still television; it is no more real and no less constructed than a quiz show. As for the innovativeness and adventurousness disingenuously invoked in descriptions of the format, it is worth noting that the raw material of reality television so far is overwhelmingly drawn from those who are too powerless, too poor, or too distressed to prevent their predicaments being turned into entertainment.

Sylvania Waters, however, can’t even lay claim to the dubious alibi of ‘reality television’. The show is structured like soap opera, given its narrative shape by the youngest son’s voice-over, and edited with a great deal of thematic motivation. Indeed, among the implausibilities of the show’s production history is the pretence that it was ever anything but highly constructed.

When the British producers came out to promote Sylvania Waters, they delivered a load of nonsense to a gullible Australian media about its being
'fly on the wall' television, an attempt to capture and document the everyday. A venerable tradition of earlier quasi-ethnographic documentaries (Family, the Seven-Up series) was invoked as the appropriate genre model. This was deliberately misleading. In visual style, Sylvania Waters owes as much to Dynasty as to Seven-Up, and its intention is obviously to provide a detailed critique of Australian society ordered around a tight narrative structure. Signs of this structure are all over the place. The producers are particularly fond of the meaningful cross-cut, moving repeatedly between two locations in order to indicate some similarity between them. When the family Christmas dinner was being consumed, for instance, we cut between the people eating their food, and the dogs eating theirs. Not subtle, you'd agree—nor was it the viewpoint of some detached but observant 'fly on the wall'.

When Peter Couchman dealt with Sylvania Waters, he considered it as a soap opera—he asked soap stars to come along and talk about it and about their own work. The two 'battlers' from Sylvania Waters, Paul and Dione (they're the ones whom most people actually like, unless they know Philip Adams), were there too. They revealed, deliciously, what we all suspected: that much of the show (up to 25%, they said) was set-up by the producers, that sequences were edited out of chronological order, that certain sequences were repeated (and thus placed into a context that was months away from when the actions first occurred), and topics of conversation were occasionally initiated by the crew, not the families involved. This doesn't, in my view, make it that much less 'real'; it does establish, though, that the show's producers misrepresented its actual objectives and methods.

It is pretty clear that the concept for the show is firmly grounded in British conceptions of Australian life. The Poms are going to love it, since it strokes all their prejudices about Australians' uncouth materialism. To the extent that some of us might also harbour prejudices about classes of Australian life to which we think we no longer belong, we too have found it fascinating. There's more to it than that, though. Watching Sylvania Waters involves witnessing the survival of values and attitudes we thought were either gone or at least sufficiently stigmatised not to be deliberately expressed in public. We respond with outrage and shock—but also with keen amusement, a tolerance that can border on nostalgia. But we can't pretend we don't recognise what we see on the screen.

It is as if Sylvania Waters is helping us to remember earlier versions of the 'Australian character'—versions most of us would rather forget—and
There are, of course, pros and cons to Marvel’s Peter Daicos to Zofrea? The notion. But, to encounter the arts Kenny to Brett Whitely? Thomas? Or the curving runs of Brett positional sense of Mark Ella to Rover flashing elegance of the ‘Macedonian Culture as a political football is a metaphor that we don’t often encounter in white Australia, where football is so much more important than the arts, education and history that it usually appropriates all the best imagery. Will we ever compare the flashing elegance of the ‘Macedonian Marvel’ Peter Daicos to a Zofrea? The positional sense of Mark Ella to Rover Thomas? Or the curving runs of Brett Kenny to Brett Whitely?

There are, of course, pros and cons to the notion. But, to encounter the arts of a country that matter so much that which surface in ‘private’ conversations and behaviours are unrepentantly consumerist, racist, xenophobic, homophobic, and sexist. In contrast to the material sophistication of their resort-style way of life, what these people say makes them seem like they just stepped off the set of Married with Children—only this is no sitcom. The result, for many viewers I have talked to, is major embarrassment. Noeline’s expression of pride in her lust for a black stripper, a pride that is actually fuelled rather than undercut by her racism, gets my vote as one of the most embarrassing moments in Australian television.

Australian television has a strong tradition of the exploitation of embarrassment—from Norman Gunston to Perfect Match to Red Faces. But it’s never been quite like this. In the past, the ‘ordinary Australian’ has largely been let off the hook. Even our sitcoms have been relatively tactful in comparison with those of other national TV industries. The Australian television industry has not produced the equivalent of Till Death Us Do Part, or All in the Family—sharply satirical but ultimately tolerant representations of lumpen regressive-ness—until now. (The closest we got was probably Kingswood Country.) The worry is that while All in the Family relied on scripts performed by professional actors before an audience, Sylvania Waters involves members of the middle class performing renditions of their everyday life for the sole benefit of seeing themselves on TV. Where the worry turns to fascination is that the performances not only establish the differences between them and us, they also make it hard to deny the similarities.

Relief from this discomfort is on its way, however. At least one commercial channel is producing its own version of Sylvania Waters to counter the ABC, and to avoid surrendering a whole genre of television to the competition. The sharp edge is clearly going to get duller when we face an evening with ‘suburbia verité’ on all channels, offering us the choice of Sylvania Waters, Killarney Heights, Green Valley and Sanctuary Cove. Thank God, SBS can’t afford to produce its own.

GRAEME TURNER teaches in English at the University of Queensland. He is co-author of Myths of Oz (Allen and Unwin).

**Cultural Football**

The treasures of Angkor Wat are in Canberra: how they got there is a complicated story. Jeremy Eccles explains.

Culture as a political football is a metaphor which surface in ‘private’ conversations and behaviours are unrepentantly consumerist, racist, xenophobic, homophobic, and sexist. In contrast to the material sophistication of their resort-style way of life, what these people say makes them seem like they just stepped off the set of Married with Children—only this is no sitcom. The result, for many viewers I have talked to, is major embarrassment. Noeline’s expression of pride in her lust for a black stripper, a pride that is actually fuelled rather than undercut by her racism, gets my vote as one of the most embarrassing moments in Australian television.

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soons to blow them eastwards, but then had to wait a few months on the other side of the Gulf of Thailand before return was possible. They had plenty of time to pass on ideas and art styles to the distinctly less sophisticated Khmers — who were probably only then, in the fifth and sixth centuries, emerging from tribalism. Hinduism and Buddhism seem to have been bought separately by the tribal leaders and the people, with the future kings particularly taken with the Hindu concept of the deva-rahja, the god-king. To have your authority backed by divine force was much better than the vote.

But you had to be able to prove it. Hence, every king from 800 to 1250—and some lesser mortals—built his own temple city. Angkor Wat, the most famous temple, is but one of these: a moated area 1300 by 1500 metres which housed religious officials in a sub-division of the city named Angkor by subsequent generations. No one knows its original name. The lower, perimeter galleries of the temple housed educational bas reliefs telling stories from The Ramayana and Mahabharata. Priests officiated at higher levels while the King himself held Brahmanistic court with the gods in the uppermost sanctuary—possibly going through nightly fecundity rites. The whole pattern was modelled on Borobudur in Java, recreating Mount Meru, the mountain home of the gods.

What no one knows from the evidence of existing stone tablets — no other writing survives — is who the nonymous artists and craftsmen were who created these many wonders, which certainly didn’t just copy Indian models. It has been assumed that the wealth necessary to afford so much non-productive labour derived from a parallel massive irrigation system. Over 250 years, three huge barays were built to hold 75 million cubic metres of water which, in turn, allowed three rice crops a year. But some historians throw doubts on this efficiency—and no one seems to know whether an assumed Angkor population of 750,000 was held in slavery to achieve all this, or whether they willingly accepted a metempsychotic society in which only the royals were hereditary (and had divine backing) and everyone else earned their place.

How did this whole edifice crumble into the jungles? In 1298, a Chinese traveller described a going civilisation (including the then 300 year old Reclining Vishnu statue in bronze whose gnarled and pitted head and shoulders amazingly sit in Canberra today). Then nothing, until the French ‘rediscovered’ the temples in the 19th century and tried to tell their colonial subjects that they must have been built by a different race of giants.

It seems likely that encroaching Chams (from Vietnam) and the Thais were involved. There have been suggestions of drugs and homosexuality. The last kings’ conversion to the people’s religion of Buddhism may have diminished their power (while also producing the miraculously meditative Head of Jayavarman VII). Maybe all that temple building destroyed the economy, for the wonderful Bayon temple required 54 towers decorated with 216 giant Buddhist heads. Could there even have been a positive decision to relocate to Phnom Penh on that great artery of trade and communication, the Mekong?

Whatever their motives, the French did much to tell the world about the Khmer wonders. They excavated in stifling heat, they hacked back jungle trees and creepers, they rebuilt heaps of stones into temples, and they founded the National Museum. Virtually none of their research, though, was fed back to the Cambodians; the Canberra exhibition catalogue is claimed to be the first in both English and Khmer. This perhaps goes some way to explain why the Khmer Rouge, while attempting to deny the very existence of history with their concept of
Year Zero, simply ignored their artistic birthright. They locked the doors but failed to destroy it—as they set out to destroy anyone who might have an understanding of it, and anyone who might be able to organise its conservation.

This is where the Australian National Gallery came in. Eighteen months ago, Asian curator Michael Brand set out through South East Asia to make institutional links. In Phnom Penh he met Pich Keo, now director of the National Museum—the sole survivor from French days, saved because his archeology-roughened hands were mistaken for those of a peasant. Brand realised that exchanges of art were of far less use to the Cambodians than a swap of their art for Australian skills and training facilities. This became political when Gareth Evans took the deal to Prime Minister Hun Sen and also won the enthusiastic backing of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. Agreement was signed last December. Amazingly, no money has changed hands for an exhibition insured for US$35 million, and few details have been worked out yet for Australia’s contributions in kind.

At this stage cultural politics entered the arena. The Japanese had plans for an exhibition in 1993, but the Cambodians wanted Australia honoured first. Then the French, British and Americans wanted to take the Australian exhibition on to their countries. But the sheer logistics of choosing pieces strong enough to travel (two were left behind at the last moment because of uncertainty), constructing individual packing cases for each piece (which the Cambodians will keep), and involving the RAAF (the only organisation used to Phnom Penh airport with planes big enough and its own lifting equipment) all combined to make onward travel impossible. And, as Michael Brand insists, decisions like that ought to wait until the Cambodians know enough about the conservation of their own art to come to their own conclusions.

With all this political football in the background, at the exhibition’s opening Paul Keating spoke intensely of the “power of culture to unite people and heal differences”. A message from Prince Sihanouk spoke of “once again achieving the greatness of the Angkor Period in Cambodia”. An older Gareth Evans than the one who backed-packed around Cambodia in the 60s looked on benevolently. But perhaps the happiest person there was Sylvie Kea Chin, a young woman who has spent more than 20 years in Australia, but who felt that now she was reuniting herself with her real culture. “My people lost their souls under the Khmer Rouge, but we always had postcards, photos and wall-hangings at home of these artworks, which kept our culture alive. To see something like the Vishnu statue here in Canberra makes me feel so strong, knowing this was made by my people so long ago”. Anyone intending to be anywhere near Canberra before 25 October should go to see what she means.

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**Identity Crisis**


Take the (not entirely hypothetical) example of a women’s health centre. You might expect a congenial and committed working place, but instead you find the place seething with acrimony: each woman is proclaiming that she has been more oppressed than the others by reason of a) her class background, b) her cultural background, c) her sexuality and d) her disabilities. There is, in short, a peculiar competition in play whereby each woman is attempting to be top of the pecking order—is somehow “purer”—by dint of the number of points of oppression she can lay claim to. The scene is reminiscent of Werner Herzog’s terrifying film, _Even Dwarves Started Small_. Forgotten in this power struggle are the two points that connect these workers: the common ground of being women and of working for the health of other women.

If such a scenario is possible in a working environment where you might expect a sense of professionalism, of discipline, to prevail, then how is cooperation, let alone harmony, to be found in voluntary associations, community organisations and ordinary social relations between individuals? You may think this is the stuff of science fiction, but such are the concerns of those who speculate on the politics of identity. Associated with this politics of identity is what Jan Pettman calls the politics of boundary making which, in turn, makes use of Foucault’s nexus between power and knowledge, a notion not so far removed from the older Gramscian notion of hegemony.

According to this view, dominant discourses in effect put boundaries around social groups like women, Aborigines and migrants that serve to oppress such groups and to denote those who are to be included in the subordinate groupings or excluded from the dominant group. Such boundaries are imagined, but are at the same time real. In the case of women, Aborigines and migrants, the boundaries once had to do with supposed
biological characteristics; through mounting criticism and subsequent change in official policy, they have shifted, but certainly not disappeared.

The late Jean Martin, in the Migrant Presence, charted the early connections between changes in "public knowledge" and subsequent changes in official policy towards migrants, and this work has been carried on, in altered forms, by feminist writers like Jan Pettman in her Living in the Margins and the contributors to Intersexions. In these recent works—and particularly in Pettman's—there are suggestions that with the new policies of equal opportunity, affirmative action and multiculturalism, formerly oppressed groups come to have a vested interest in keeping the boundaries firmly in place, since they can make political mileage, gain extra concessions, from their new-found identities.

The difficulty I have with such a politics of identity has to do with the nature of those identities. We are all more than our language, our gender, our sexuality, aren't we? We can all step in and out of roles as the situation demands, can't we? Why do we therefore insist on wearing these gleaming badges of oppression? Why do we want to flaunt these oppressed identities? While the recognition of an oppression is the start of the end of that particular oppression, it is still a long way from liberation. (What a splendidly old-fashioned ring that word has!) People wear their oppression, live their oppression, forgetting that the behaviour is the behaviour of the oppressed, rather than that of a 'free' individual. Thus, women, for instance, assert that behaviour like tears, temper tantrums and emotional blackmail is natural, just part and parcel of an essential femaleness. Nonsense: these are the old ploys, the old responses to oppression. A new behaviour awaits discovery. And the preoccupation with identity does not rest with the self; it extends to the classification of others, usually informed by visual or verbal cues. This, of course, is the old bogey of stereotyping at work again—this time in the hands of its erstwhile victims.

Although feminism and multiculturalism are 'isms' of differing orders, both are capable of generating the politics of identity. Multiculturalism, in its best light, represents a fair go for all; in this light it remains an official policy, but one borne out of humanism and a desire for equality. On another construction it is the means for ameliorating social tensions, or, as some writers insist, for diffusing class struggle. It is a doctrine that has been handed down from on high and eagerly grasped by those whose cultural background is not Anglo-Australian. And it has been used by them to institute power struggles within their own particular cultural setting, to set up hierarchies of cultural truths and to produce 'legitimate' spokespersons. The resultant voices are usually male, as Jan Pettman reminds us.

In its worst light, multiculturalism represents a new, softer racism, one that erects 'cultural' distinctions where biological distinctions once stood. The problem for multiculturalism is that it rests on a static version of traditional culture. But culture is very fluid and is transformed whenever meaningful exchanges with other cultural elements occur. Indeed, as Claude Levi Strauss was fond of observing, a culture doesn't know it is a culture until it bumps into another culture. It is the contact that allows recognition, even self-consciousness. Another problem for multiculturalism is that it rests on tolerance, thus guaranteeing unequal power relations, since (as writers like Ghasan Hage note) the tolerators can always withdraw their tolerance from the tolerated and those tolerated must ensure that they do nothing to offend the tolerators. In all of this the bigger bogey of institutional racism goes untouched, unchallenged.

Feminism, on the other hand, has been created by women for women, and has occasionally informed official policy. Women have articulated its philosophies. Feminist theory at its very best is a powerful tool for transforming women's lives and for challenging patriarchy. Because it is so powerful, so sensible, so usable we tend to think its message is universal. We forget that feminisms have been constructed to reflect certain realities in the lives of western women. We do not like to think of feminism as a weapon that can be used to proselytise women from non-western societies, women who do not share our particular experience or view of the world. The words of Grace Mera Molisa from Vanuatu, quoted in Intersexions, are a forceful reminder:

Women's Liberation...is a European disease to be cured by Europeans. What we are aiming for is not just women's liberation but a total liberation. A social, political and economic liberation...European women thought up Women's Liberation because they didn't have enough to do, and they were bored out of their minds. They were sick of being ornaments in the house. They hate their men for it. That's not our position at all.

Of course, we will challenge the truth of such statements from our own culture and experience, but views like these are important reminders that feminism can be another dominant western ideology which, like Christianity and capitalism, we foist upon non-western societies. And of course, we can say of women like Molisa that they have yet to recognise the ways they are oppressed by their men, and that once they perceive their false consciousness, they can be 'saved' by feminism.

Both multiculturalism and feminism can help institutionalise an atomistic and alienated society—one based on the wounded individuals found in the hypothetical health centre—or they can be used to connect these individuals through their various oppressions. The intricacies of the politics of identity and of boundary making are superbly untangled in Pettman's book, while Intersexions begins to plot some of the ways that the paths of the oppressed might cross. In the end we can all choose to remain victims or to struggle together for a fairer society. If we allow the politics of identity to predominate, then the wish of the Indigo Girls will come true:

How I wish I were a trinity
So if I lost a part of me
I'd still have two of the same...

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Unequal and Different


Gisela Kaplan has undertaken a mammoth and necessary task: to introduce the women's movements of western Europe (to 1988) to the 'English-language circuit'. Her starting premise—that feminist analyses have been dominated by the experiences of English-speaking countries, in particular America and Britain—is doubtless correct. The insights which can come from comparative studies which range beyond these borders is undeniable.

One of the chief constraints on such analyses is the language barrier. Here, Kaplan brings an enviable grasp of seven of the major languages of the countries she surveys. This gave her access to the large volume of feminist writing and government policy documents necessary for such an undertaking.

Kaplan concluded that the experiences of western European feminists fitted most readily into commonly used territorial divisions. Hence, the book has sections on 'Progressivism in Scandinavia', 'Conservatism in the Germanic Countries', 'Creative Traditionalism in France and the Netherlands', and 'Revolution and radicalism in southern Europe'. At the same time, she endeavours to do justice to the varied experiences of each national movement within these groupings.

She offers wonderful potted histories of each country. Not only are we given essential historical and cultural details, but there are also summaries of each government's equality initiatives and the history of feminist organisations and feminist activities in each country. The four thematic sections conclude with explanations of the particular model which provide thoughtful insights into "the patterns of action between protest movements, society at large, and the government of the day". As examples, we are made aware of the importance of the formal commitment of Scandinavian governments to gender equality, the way in which governments in France and the Netherlands take dissent seriously, and the fact that Italian feminists have been able to tap into a lively leftist political culture.

Unfortunately—and it is here that I felt a great disappointment with this book—there is an odd lack of fit between the book's case-studies and its theoretical overviews. Worse still, many readers will be put off by the superficial treatment of complex feminist theory in parts of the book. Often the reader is left floundering both as to the author's position on the issues raised and her intention in raising them.

At the very outset, Kaplan mentions the way in which feminists have challenged some of the fundamental organising concepts of traditional political theory: the 'public', the 'private', the 'social'. But she never tells us why this is relevant to her study and often, to my mind at least, falls into conventional usage herself. She certainly seems intent throughout the text on emphasising the importance of 'political' engagement and is overtly critical of "self-advocacy", getting bogged down in one's own critique, and "forfeiting the public space" which feminists have claimed. This might be acceptable if Kaplan could demonstrate that the two modes of operation are as distinct as her analysis implies, and that 'success' is more closely aligned with one than the other. Unfortunately, she doesn't offer any means of assessing feminist 'victories' other than the acceptance by governments of a range of equality legislation. Though she asserts at the outset that she will inquire into the effects these reforms have on the everyday life of women, she doesn't do so and perhaps could not have done so within the constraints of the project. This leaves many unanswered questions about her understanding of the 'political' and of 'political change'.

When Kaplan takes up the much-debated dichotomy between concerns of equality and difference she leaves readers similarly uncertain about the relevance of these comments to her case-studies. She claims that feminists take one of three approaches to equality. The first she calls "transformative", and one can only wonder why she fixed on this word given her description of its content—"Implicit in this argument is the view that women need not spend much time in questioning 'the system'". This, we are told, is closely aligned with a justice claim. And both of these are clearly marked off from something called "the special value perspective".

Kaplan acknowledges that the three commonly labelled feminist strands—liberal, radical and socialist—had adherents in western Europe. She even sounds sympathetic at times to a socialist feminist analysis, highlighting again and again that reforms which leave underlying structures intact will ultimately fail. And yet this perspective is omitted in the theoretical overview. Moreover, despite the occasional passing reference to patriarchy, the role of men as subverters of feminist claims receives very little attention. There is also an odd tension in the book between the insistence that "the suppleness of the economic structure" can "accommodate any changes" and the endorsement of a strategy of concentrating feminist energies on "the public and the political arena".

As to the "special value perspective", it is clear here and elsewhere in the text that Kaplan is deeply concerned by anything that smacks of 'essentialism'—which is to say, the belief that women display a range of virtues such as nurturance because of their essential nature. While I am sympathetic to this concern, she does little justice to the theoretical debates which surround this topic. In fact, she is downright insulting in aligning essentialist feminist analyses with fascism. She claims here that countries
which have experienced fascism, including Italy, will have little truck with this dubious claim, ignoring the well-developed and challenging work of the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective (Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice, Indiana University Press, 1987). Kaplan admits that the 'special values' approach may have been useful in the necessary development of women's new identity, and she rates this development as one of the major successes of the women's movements. But nowhere does she tease out how different feminist approaches may have influenced and assisted one another.

One final irritating aspect of the theoretical overview is Kaplan's suggestion that there is a fundamental ideological conflict within feminism over attitudes towards privacy and politics. She argues that in the abortion campaign feminists were making a 'deregulatory' move, demanding that governments step back from the areas of contraception and childbirth because of their 'intimate' nature. Then, she claims, they contradicted themselves by inviting the state to regulate domestic violence disputes.

The point here is that feminists were challenging those who labelled these areas of life 'private' and 'public' according to their own agendas. The feminist claim that 'the personal is political' was meant to highlight how all such designations are inherently political and to assert women's equal right to engage in the politicking. If, in the process, they used particular discourses such as that of privacy, surely this says more about the limited strategic alternatives available to feminists than about their ideological consistency or otherwise.

These points are disturbing because one of Kaplan's chief contributions is precisely her sensitivity to the way in which feminists have to manoeuvre within the contradictions of the system they are attempting to influence. Unfortunately, this insight is not evident in the theoretical sections of the text.

In offering some starting hypotheses, presumably to guide us through the detailed narratives to follow, Kaplan usefully dismisses simplistic equations about progressiveness on women's issues; for example, correlations between religion, or the wealth and size of a particular country. However, she then goes on to suggest an equally simplistic analysis—the 'seesaw effect'—that when women succeed in one or two spheres there are certain backlashes in the other one or two; for instance, when women have achieved fairly high representation in politics, it is highly unlikely that they will have any equality either in economic terms or in their private lives.

Yet, as Kaplan goes on to show, the Scandinavian countries lead the world both in female political representation and in a range of social benefits such as child care and parental leave. Sweden introduced legalised abortion with little dissent and makes a formal commitment to increasing domestic role-sharing between men and women—all reforms which affect women's 'private' lives. True, there are weak spots in the Scandinavian reform agenda—there has been little success in attempts to alter sex segregation in the workforce, for example, and violence against women has only recently come onto the political agenda—but, surely, it is more useful to disentangle the complex reasons for this uneven progress than to impose a formula which simply doesn't work.

Given Kaplan's decision to paint with a broad brush, some of the painting is slipshod, but this should not deter readers from buying and reading Contemporary Western European Feminism. There is a wealth of material here and some thoughtful insights on particular countries. It is just unfortunate that, instead of signposting such insights in an introduction and drawing them together in a conclusion, Kaplan uses the opening and closing sections to offer theoretical analyses which are distracting and insufficiently developed to be meaningful.

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THE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION presents its fourth National Conference on the 9th, 10th, 11th October 1992 at Women's College, University of Sydney. Conference topics include Sexual Harassment in Education, Teaching About Women, Gender and Difference, Feminism and Postmodernism, Rethinking Lesbian Desire and Women, Shopping and Consumption. Speakers include Liz Grosz, Jan Pettman, Rosemary Pringle, Robin Rowland, Denise Russell and Susan Sheridan. For further information contact the Women's Studies Centre on (02) 692 3638.

ALR's Listings are available at extremely reasonable rates to all groups interested in advertising. Phone (02) 565 1855 for details. First listing free.
Our absence from our familiar locations was obviously noticed. But the church establishment simply looked in the wrong spot.

We did, however, have a gathering of considerable note, just before the service. Women and men packed Pitt Street Uniting Church to hear Wendy Fatin (the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women) launch Changing Women Changing Church, a collection of essays in honour of Patricia Brennan, MOW foundation president. The minister also launched the Australian Feminist Theology Foundation, which will enable us to continue to challenge the high levels of testosterone in all the Christian churches. The book’s contributors (who included Sister Veronica Brady and Bishop John Spong) were international and Australian, academics, clergy and laity, women and men, Catholic and Anglican. This occasion, deliberately planned to precede General Synod and to which all General Synod members were invited, spoke as eloquently as banners and singing have done in the past. It celebrated intellectual strength and pastoral commitment, horizons and bonds far broader, more vigorous and more imaginative than institutional church structures such as the General Synod.

Yet, far from being tired and despondent, many Anglican feminists are full of life despite—or because of—recent experiences. These years have been filled with legal decisions about the ordination as priests the highest vote since the issue has been debated (80% of bishops, 70% each of clergy and laity), but the vote was still too low for the measure to come into effect.

So MOW decided not to have the familiar singing protest outside St Andrew’s Cathedral by which we have greeted the bishops (“not an ovary between them”, as Patricia Brennan observed of the Lambeth Conference of 500 bishops in 1988). Our absence from our familiar locations was obviously noticed. But the church establishment simply looked in the wrong spot.

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And women are increasingly apparent in the decision-making structures of the church.

As in any revolution, change begins as sporadic and scattered; ‘1789’ is not the same as ‘the French Revolution’. Institutional forces for continuity are always greater than forces for change. There is, however, great energy in the feminist organisations of various Christian traditions, of which MOW is only one. FUN (Feminist Uniting Network), New Vision for Woman (Catholic Church), and Women and the Australian Church (Catholic Church), as well as numerous informal groups such as the Geelong Feminist Group are where the energy flourishes. Many such women are involved in their church’s structures, but they sit lightly in them. More importantly, we realise we have more in common with our feminist friends in other denominations than we do with some members of our own. Half the Kingdom, a documentary shown last year on SBS, revealed how close the experiences of exclusion and stereotyping of Jewish women are to those of many Christian women. The first two ecumenical Christian feminist conferences drew hundreds, with prominent speakers such as Justice Elizabeth Evatt, President of the Australian Law Reform Commission.

The links between feminists in the church and the wider women’s movement are not a whim of moments of sorrow or joy. Supporters in the women’s movement have encouraged new energy. Anne Deveson and other prominent women were much in evidence at the non-ordination rallies in Goulburn. Likewise, in Perth in March, Wendy Fatin, Pat Giles (first woman senator from WA) and other pioneering women politicians were present, all full of admiration for Patricia Brennan and MOW generally. And, of course, there was the deluge of support from women in the community in phone calls and letters, as well as that ubiquitous forum of views, chat-show radio.
The Movement for the Ordination of Women is now faced with a dilemma. The agenda we have persistently brought to the church's notice is now part of the mainstream debate in that church. Some of us are involved in the church's structures. The issue for us is the future after ordination—for the women ordained, lay women, men in the church, for the church as a voice of justice in the community. We will continue to be a prophetic voice to the Anglican Church. We will continue our ministry of irritation, of support for women who have been ordained or have not been ordained. We will continue to explore priesthood, language about God, authority. We will continue to expand our ecumenical and international networks. And while bishops' names might appear on the successful motions and historic plaques, we and our families and friends and the community at large will remember the sacrifice and energy that was such a challenge to the institutional church.

Some supporters of the ordination of women regard MOW as counterproductive, negative, and a hindrance to their way of addressing the issue. We have made and will continue to make a strong contribution to the transformation of the church. We speak with clarity and excellent information; we are moderate and reasonable under the most trying circumstances; all we have ever really done is tested the sincerity of the establishment and shown that the establishment message so often lacks substance and life.

One cannot possibly be tired and despondent in such an environment for long. Energy in the Christian feminist movement is abundant, generous-spirited, and undaunted by the institutional churches' ridicule and dismissal. But it is in danger of being lost to those churches.

JANET SCARFE is president of the Movement for the Ordination of Women.

Radical Changes

Pat O'Shane's interview in ALR 141 (July), on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the 1967 referendum, failed to highlight the radical changes and the progress which has been made in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in recent years as a result of policies of the federal Labor government.

The establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) is no mere bureaucratic reform but a radical and fundamental shift in power to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The decision-making control over expenditure and policy formulation of the former Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Aboriginal Development Commission has now been transferred from Canberra to the 60 elected Regional Councils of ATSIC and a national Board of 20 Commissioners, 17 of whom are elected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia.

ATSIC will no doubt evolve in the years ahead to give further effect to the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to self-determination, but the fundamental shift has already occurred and the effect of greater indigenous control over policy and expenditure will have a dramatic impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Governments and politicians need to come to terms with this radical shift in decision-making power and it is important that Australians generally—and particularly those on the Left—keep pace with the nature and extent of the reform.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody began in 1987 and reported in 1991. However, its significance and ongoing impact is still not fully appreciated. The Commission's final report did not accord with the expectation of many in the community that the 99 deaths it investigated were the result of foul play—a conclusion which many found difficult to accept. But the report stands as an indictment of the legal and corrective services system in respect of the most disadvantaged group in Australian society, and of our society itself, in allowing that situation to develop and persist. It found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in custody at a rate 29 times that of the general community. In some states the rate is considerably higher, and even escalated during the time of the Royal Commission. The Report found that those who died did not lose their lives as a result of isolated acts of unlawful violence or brutality. They were found to be victims of entrenched and institutionalised racism and discrimination. Their deaths were found to be the tragic consequence of two centuries of dispossession, dispersal and appalling disadvantage.

The federal government announced its support for 338 of the 339 recommendations. With limited exceptions, state and territory governments came forward with responses which were broadly comparable to the Commonwealth response. An extensive regime of accountability has been established to hold governments to their obligations. ATSIC will give an annual account of the extent to which all Commonwealth agencies are meeting their obligations, and states and territories are expected to make similar arrangements. A consolidated report to parliament on the implementation of Commonwealth undertakings will be made each year.

Pat O'Shane identified features which she saw as essential to a response to the Royal Commission recommendations—land, health, employment, education, housing, training and law and justice procedures. Not surprisingly, the federal government agrees with these priorities, as they are largely similar to the priorities that were identified in extensive consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the development of its response to the recommendations.
Over $400 million of new funds has been committed for programs to address these priorities over the next five years. This funding includes some $60 million for land acquisition and development programs, $450 million for Aboriginal Legal Services, $71 million for drug and alcohol services, and an array of new and expanded employment and economic development programs. Training and skills development programs have been restructured and put under the direction of local Aboriginal communities, through the 60 elected ATSIC regional councils. Funding has been provided to implement the National Aboriginal Health Strategy, and Commonwealth Aboriginal Housing programs have been restructured and put under the control of ATSIC.

Although I had announced proposals for the framework of the process of reconciliation before the Royal Commission reported, the concept of that process was endorsed in the Final Report of the Royal Commission. Commonwealth legislation has established a council of 25 people, the majority of whom are indigenous people, to guide the process of reconciliation at the national level. The council is chaired by Patrick Dodson, and its members include Galarrwuy Yunupingu, Archie Barton, Jennie George and Ray Martin.

The process of reconciliation has three key objectives which seek to keep faith absolutely with Aboriginal aspirations. First, it seeks to initiate activities to educate non-Aboriginal Australians about Aboriginal history, culture, dispossession and continuing disadvantage, with the objective of convincing the wider community of the need for governments to support Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander people to give effect to their aspirations. The second objective of the process of reconciliation is to elevate Aboriginal aspirations and Aboriginal social justice issues as critical issues of the national agenda in the lead up to the centenary of Federation in 2001. Third, it aims to place on the public policy agenda the question of a document or agreement on the rights of indigenous people as one of the outcomes of the reconciliation process.

A treaty, 'makaratta' or agreement between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians has been a long standing objective of indigenous people in this country but a process with the potential to secure such an agreement has never before been put in place. In this process several matters of critical importance need to be re-emphasised.

First, there has been no attempt made by the government to define the terms of any document, instrument, treaty, compact or agreement which may result from the process. Second, there has been no attempt to give any final name to the document or documents. Third, the option has been left open for a separate document related to Aboriginal people or a separate document for Torres Strait Islanders should this be the wish of Australian indigenous peoples. Fourth, no decision has been made on which party or parties should be responsible for negotiating any document. These matters have been deliberately left open and must, first and foremost, be the subject of extensive consultation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

It is time that Australian people got serious about the issue of a document. The most recent public opinion polls have told us that 65% of Australians agree that there should be a treaty with Australian indigenous peoples, and there has been a call by many indigenous people for such a document. In Canada there is a greater level of maturity in political discussion about treaties with Indian and Inuit people. Such modern treaty agreements are supported by conservative politicians in that country as a means of addressing the aspirations of Canada's indigenous people.

As a result of the establishment of ATSIC, the response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the unanimous Commonwealth Parliamentary support for the process of reconciliation, an agenda has been set which commits the nation to self-determination and social justice for indigenous people in this country.

ROBERT TICKNER is the federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

Criticisms of Left positions and discussion on current issues in *ALR* have been interesting and useful. Events overseas and past acceptance of dogmas have combined to create serious problems for socialist ideas and the Left in Australia.

However, it is disappointing that the number of articles in *ALR* which are largely an intellectual wank is increasing. The Howard interview in the August issue was a negative for the Left. Failure of overseas socialist experiments, while creating massive immediate problems for socialist ideas, does not mean the Left should accept capitalism and feature its foremost advocates. It was a bureaucratic model of socialism which failed in Europe. Russian tanks crushed the Czech bid for socialist democracy in 1968.

Currently there is need for promotion of creative alternatives to the increasingly crisis-ridden capitalist system. *ALR* was, after all, brought into being to further human progress, not merely to inflate egos and provide a platform for the extreme Right of politics.

Aided by circumstance, Hawke and Keating used their positions in the Labor Party to help shift Australian politics to the right in the 1980s. The current drift in *ALR*, if not arrested, could be a pressure for a similar slide in the Left itself in the 1990s.

Max Bound, Kingston, Tasmania.
Richard Glover in the *Sydney Morning Herald* which served not only to pour scorn on the family involved, but also to profile one of the runners-up in the lucky family stakes, a multicultural bunch of academics and artists. It wasn’t that this family was more typical, argued Glover. Rather, they should have been chosen because they would have made for better PR in the UK.

Then came the opening and closing ceremonies for the Olympic Games. I watched this with a group of people who all oohhed and ahhed at every slice of pyrotechnics, while simultaneously getting their knickers in a knot about what sort of tacky ceremony Sydney would put on if it wins the 2000 Olympics. The Spanish had Culture and History coursing through their veins instead of blood, they said, whereas Sydney would undoubtedly fall back on a parade of 20-foot tall cuddly koalas or something equally tacky.

Now, I lived in Barcelona for over a year in the mid-80s and can testify that the cultural pursuits of the average male Spaniard (or Catalan, if you prefer) frequently don’t extend much beyond football, the bullfights, Madonna and the latest kick-boxing movie. Even my revealing that the whole Barcelona shebang had been choreographed by an Australian did little to arrest this particular bout of hand-wringing.

The third factor reveals what is essentially the other side of the same coin. As a writer and sub-editor for various rock music magazines I became used to receiving letters from readers imploring us to ignore what went on overseas on the grounds that Australia produced the best, most honest and no-bullshit rock bands on the planet, and that everything else was just a bunch of foreign nancies prancing around diverting the minds of young Australians from this incontrovertible fact. This attitude hit its apogee with a recent series of showcase gigs in Los Angeles by Australian bands. Dubbed ‘The Wizards of Oz’, and funded by taxpayers’ dollars, it saw something like ten Australian groups flown to LA at considerable expense in order to play in front of American record company executives. Invitations were issued to said executives imploring them to come to the gigs—not on the grounds that these were exciting bands that would make them lots of money but, rather, on the fact that they were from Australia. I don’t know about you, but I don’t give a flying fox where music comes from as long as it’s good; Australia does indeed produce many fine artists, but I’m far from convinced that geography is any sort of decisive factor. The Americans, largely baffled by the whole marketing exercise and treating it as something of a joke, apparently agreed and largely stayed at home. I’m all for government supporting the local music industry, but can’t help wondering if some better way couldn’t have been found to spend my money.

What all this reveals is a self-consciousness about nationality and identity that’s proving incredibly durable. To many Australians—and this seems to be an attitude far more prevalent among those born in this country than among recent migrants—art and culture from this country is either intrinsically inferior to anything overseas or it’s above criticism simply because it’s home-grown.

Personally, I think that the idea of a republic and the removal of the Union Jack from the Australian flag are both long overdue, but I have my doubts as to whether they’ll do anything to alleviate the cultural cringe. That will happen only when we accept ourselves simply as we are, a diverse nation with its own cultural institutions that are no better and no worse than any other country’s, only different. In the meantime, our frequently crippling self-consciousness will keep the old beast alive and kicking for a good few years yet.

**STUART HITCHINGS** is a Sydney freelance journalist whose toes steadfastly refuse to curl while watching *Sylvania Waters*.
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