JOBSBACK: THE COALITION GOES TO WORK

WHY SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT?

BARRY HUMPHRIES

CHEZ NOUS MEETS BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER!

POOR RELATIONS
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.

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.
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He spent his final year as Opposition leader like a car under a tarpaulin. Victorians knew what was under it, they could see its shape, they remembered its lines, but time had made them a bit blurry. Power necessitated that the tarpaulin be cast aside.

Kennett's run-ins with language, accountability, the public service and the media make a good story. But they are likely to obscure an even better story: the appalling plight of the Labor Party in Victoria after its defeat. The decisions the Labor movement will make during the next 12 months will determine whether the Victorian ALP moves back to a chilling repeat of its worst days during the 60s.

In the weeks following the election there was little to suggest that the party could revive itself, although that is often the case when a government has seen its lower house numbers plummet (in this case from 46 to 26). However, all the ingredients are there for a protracted war of attrition between the four—count them, four—factions in the Victorian ALP Caucus of 40.

There will be no winner in this war, save perhaps for some MPs who—in the style of their 60s predecessors—like the idea of the parliamentarian’s salary without the drudgery and heartbreak of winning and exercising power. The problems of the Victorian ALP at the parliamentary level can be traced back to late 1988, when the Socialist Left—at that time operating en bloc—enjoyed a slim caucus majority.

Having, until then, not been part of the parliamentary leadership group in the then six-year-old Cain government, the Left moved on Deputy Premier Robert Fordham whose political reputation was under a cloud as a result of the losses of the Victorian Economic Development Corporation. Joan Kirner replaced Fordham, and the Socialist Left ascendency had begun.

Mrs Kirner's rise to the premiership in August 1990 aggravated tensions, not only between the centre-right Labor Unity and the Socialist Left, but within those groupings. Labor Unity split informally. There were those, like Labor Minister Neil Pope, who were happy to work with Mrs Kirner. But there were those, like Agriculture Minister Ian Baker and backbencher Bob Sercombe, who were not. On the Left some union officials, such as the Electrical Trades Union’s Gary Main, were becoming unhappy with the policy compromises that Mrs Kirner was making. As well, there were Left MPs, such as MLA Neil Cole, and ALP organiser Don Nardella, who were displeased with the influence being wielded by Kirner’s former adviser, Socialist Left secretary Kim Carr.

By late 1990 leading members of Labor’s Right were holding secret talks with various members of the disgruntled Left-wingers, known as the Pledge group. Their unity ticket (hard Left and non-ideological Labor Right) rolled the mainstream Left in the 1991 preselections.

The result, following the 1992 election, is that the hard Left has eight MPs, only a few less than Labor Unity and the mainstream Left, and is in a supreme bargaining position. Thus, while Mrs Kirner and the leadership group retained their positions in the post-election caucus ballot, it can be only a temporary situation. Baker wants the leadership, something he signalled to the Labor Right nationally some time ago. Federal rightwing Senator Stephen Loosley, for example, has backed Baker in his column for the Murdoch papers. Interestingly, so too has the old patriarch of the hard Left, Bill Hartley, on his Melbourne radio show.

On the eve of that caucus ballot, the hard Left MPs caucused separately, something they had been doing for several months while also attending Left caucus. They decided at that meeting, however, to no longer attend Left caucus, thus formalising their separate-faction status. This was of some significance, because union support for this group coming from some individuals who are not ALP members. Len Cooper, an official of the Communications Workers Union, has enjoyed links to the grouping yet he does not belong to the ALP. Cooper, a former Trades Hall Council president, is involved in general Left politics at what was once regarded as the extreme end of the political spectrum.

It is clear now that the broad Labor Left, for all of its organisational strengths, was neither ideologically nor practically prepared for power in Victoria. It is also clear that the Labor Right, wrongfooted by being responsible for many of the state’s unfortunate economic policies, is no longer cohesive and lacks an integrated view about its role. The deals between Labor Unity and the Pledge group did achieve their goal of humiliating and weakening the mainstream Socialist Left. But it is hard to see what the instability it has embedded in the affairs of the ALP will actually bring, short of more instability.

What does the ALP in Victoria stand for? The fracturing of the party in the lead-up to, and aftermath of, the 1992 state election suggests that it does stand for something. But it is not something Victorians would ever vote into office.

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O
casionally in my not-so-busy social life—which includes riding motorbikes, running a vanity-centred weight loss program for myself and corresponding with all sorts of people across this wattle-infested land—I like to take time out to appreciate the smaller things of life. Needlepoint, kittens, jam-making and nuts, for example. Macadamia nuts are my current fascination. These are also called bush-nuts by the type of person who likes to imagine he or she is a hunter-gatherer while strolling down the aisles of Woolies.

When I spoke with Stephanie Alexander (ALR 135) she bemoaned white Australia’s lack of appreciation of this delightful nut. The crafty Americans grow—or, since a recent cyclone, grew—these nuts en masse in Hawaii. Well, following the lead of Australia’s original inhabitants by a mere 40,000 or so years, it seems that at least one Australian company has discovered the piquant beauty of the macadamia. The company I wish to focus on here is Macadamia Plantations of Australia, which has developed the AussieMate range of products. The AussieMate range encompasses roasted salted macadamias, honey roasted macadamias, chocolate covered macadamias, raw macadamias, crushed macadamias and macadamia oil.

It was this last-listed product, nesting among the imported olive lubricants, that first caught my eye. A little koala wearing a shirt with the slogan “I’m a Native” decorated a bottle of macadamia oil. Like most warm fluffy women, I love soft toys, so my paw moved the macadamia oil into my trolley.

From trolley to register to kitchen. I split an avocado oil, is full yet delicate, massaging the tongue without cloying, penetrating the palate with ecstasy. And the bliss is quite indigenous. I was so enthusiastic about the product that I wrote to the company to share my joy. And they wrote back, enclosing more macadamias—in nut form this time. My kitchen was soon replete, absolutely abundant with the smells of fecundity. I was as loaded with nuts as a horse’s head is full of eels in that German film, and I used the recipes sent by the company to make macadamia pesto, and a macadamia fruit cake.

I read the company’s brochures about the history of the nut which informed me that “these nuts, although well-known to the local Aboriginals, were first discovered by Europeans in Australia’s east coast rainforests in the 1820s. They were named after the notable Australian Dr John Macadam...” I was pawing an eponymous, native, colonised nut, and it tasted simply wonderful, and even richer as I understood aspects of its history.

The company exports nuts to all corners of the world, packaged in all sorts of boxes, bearing the images of women, the Opera House, Uluru and, of course, the fluffy marsupial that made me enter Nut Paradise in the first place. Some of the nuts wear chocolate coats as they venture around the world. These value-added nuts reach out everywhere (where consumers exist) and say hello, taste me, I’m yours, I’m attractive, I’ll teach you about Down Under. And like a marsupial, I’m unique. Even when coated in Native American chocolate, I still taste distinctly Australian.

My husband receives an American Express-promoted advertisement for a brand of American Christmas cake using pecans, and we defiantly say “We won’t eat pecans like a toucan parrot. We’re for the macadamia here. It’s more than a koala could bear.” Freedom of choice is a wonderful thing, as is the ability to make such credit card-led decisions, and bad jokes.

Companies that select unusual products like the macadamia and run with them are doing more than helping the Australian economy and themselves. They are protecting diversity and the cultural/culinary heritage of us all. This is the lovely side of the market, and I defy any of the readers of this column to say that a world without the macadamia nut could be as rich as one with it. This is one rainforest gene which won’t be lost, because it is nice to eat. Chocolate-covered macadamia nuts should be tasted by everyone at least once, and I have adopted them as a symbol of hope. An open mind and an open mouth can be things of beauty. So are certain aspects of the market, something that is occasionally forgotten in a cruel and hungry world.

By the way, mix macadamia oil, vinegar, garlic and parsley (or basil). Shake. Dress your salad like a lady in a floral skirt. And taste the good side of capitalism. I know I have. I do now as I listen to Frank Sinatra sing “Ol’ Man River” on CD.

Penelope Cottier.

(Thanks to Judy Grainger, National Sales Manager of Macadamia Plantations of Australia, for doing her job with enthusiasm, and giving me nuts and information to play with.)
That Australians such as Gilding are now heading international environmental organisations reflects the fact that Australia has an unusually prominent position in the global environment debate. Gilding is not the first well-known Australian conservationist to head off to Amsterdam; Bill Hare, formerly the Research and Policy Analyst of the Australian Conservation Foundation, departed some months ago to fill a similar position in Greenpeace’s Atmosphere and Energy Campaign. Bob Burton of the Wilderness Society and ACF recently became the fourteenth Australian to be placed on the United Nations Environment Program’s Global 500 honour roll, while yet another Australian, Ken Newcombe, works at the World Bank coordinating its participation in the Global Environment Facility, the current international aid fund for environmental projects.

Part of the reason for the new international interest in Australian environmentalists is that they are perceived to have more credibility in arguing for conservation of ecosystems and wilderness. Europeans, who have virtually completely transformed their own continent, find themselves in an uncomfortable position when they lecture the Third World on conservation. By contrast, Australians are seen to be talking about their own backyard as well as about global issues, because a greater proportion of our wilderness and ecosystems are intact. (Of course, resources industry cynics would respond that such city-based environmentalists are still talking about other people’s backyards rather than their own.)

Paul Gilding is a microcosm of the contradictions that make up Greenpeace. He spent three years in the armed forces, but now heads an organisation which specialises in non-violent direct action. He has a trade union background too, having worked as an organiser for the Builders Labourers Federation, but Greenpeace has had at best an ambivalent relationship with trade unions, and union membership by its employees is not encouraged. The contradictions go on. The organisation which Paul will head from February next year claims five million members globally, and 90,000 members in Australia. Only 50 or so of that 90,000 have voting rights. It is uncompromising in refusing the entanglement of government grants, but is also uncompromising in not allowing any national branch to determine its own campaigns.

Greenpeace has undoubtedly been successful. In the first part of its 20-year existence it concentrated on ocean-based mammals—whales, dolphins, seals—and was clearly crucial in putting an end to unsustainable and sometimes cruel practices. In the process of doing so it developed an infrastructure that gives it unparalleled ability to act anywhere in the world.

Just as importantly, it has carefully nurtured a capacity to convey its message quickly, efficiently and graphically. While the rest of us have sometimes mulled over how to get the media to favourably cover a picket outside Parliament House, Greenpeace has been able to stage demonstrations against the French in Antarctica. It films its own activities and then, through state-of-the-art electronic communications, is able to feed footage and commentary direct to newsmongers around the globe. What happens at the bottom of the world at midday can be witnessed on evening television.

Such an ability does not come cheap. Greenpeace Australia has a budget of around $7.5 million, while internationally some $200 million flows through its coffers. Raising money for a cause was never easy and, in the pursuit of environmental goals, Greenpeace has employed fundraising tactics that others find questionable in a ‘progressive’ organisation. Among tens of thousands of others, I have been the target of Greenpeace education outreach workers tramping the streets for the cause and a percentage of the funds raised.

While I resisted their blandishments, I am now a member. After subscribing to the newsletter to find out more about its activities, I received a congratulatory letter welcoming me as a member. The organisation which runs a fleet of seven ships and operates an instantaneous global computer communications network informed me that the only way their computer could handle my subscription was to enter me as a member. I suspect that there are several hundred government departments, libraries and companies who are hapless Greenpeace ‘members’.

This lack of squeamishness in building up its numbers, both in financial and membership terms, is reflected in Greenpeace’s accounts. Over 60% of its expenditure is in the ‘community action’ division (activities such as recruitment, education and fundraising), while its core ecological strategies division, covering six campaign areas, spends just 19%. Greenpeace is not alone in this trend. Other environmental groups and overseas aid organisations often find that they have to spend more than half of each dollar raised just finding the next dollar. It seems that’s what the market for alternative ideas and action demands. For others who seek to organise and fund alternative strategies there are difficult
lessons to be learnt here. Greenpeace plays the market and accepts the high transaction costs involved, while others, usually with much less success, seek to bypass or transcend it. Greenpeace has been under fire recently, and is experiencing difficult times financially. In the United States its opposition to the Gulf war cost it much support, while the global recession is also having an impact. But this does not seem to have caused an about-face or a loss of morale. If anything, Greenpeace is undertaking even more difficult challenges. Paul Gilding's input will further propel Greenpeace away from simple campaigns around picturesque animals and opposition to the horrible dangers of the nuclear industry to more long-term and less tangible goals. Gilding talks about targeting the phase-out of fossil fuels in 50 years—an heroic and improbable task. Yet Greenpeace recognises that achieving such a goal will require more than its famous 'hit and run' tactics. Although such actions are often deemed necessary to keep the faith with the donating public, Greenpeace employees have sometimes complained of being required to stage major actions in the same way that police complain of having to obtain quotas of traffic tickets.

Greenpeace is starting to argue its case and present alternatives; to work with others rather than only push its own position. Tackling the major parts of the framework of industrialised society rather than peripheral industries such as whaling and sealing is going to require working and negotiating with businesses, governments and communities of working people. It means encouraging business to seek new commercial opportunities rather than simply hanging onto traditional advantage. It means encouraging politicians and governments to seek long-term and sometimes painful solutions rather than focusing on isolated issues—encouraging green industries rather than simply stopping particular mining operations. It is in dealing with organised labour that trends in Greenpeace strategy are most interesting. Whereas in the past there has often been a tendency simply to lecture trade unions, the appointment of a trade union liaison officer and other initiatives have seen a more co-operative approach. Around two-thirds of Greenpeace employees are union members even though the international leadership has often been less than enthusiastic. On the down side, Greenpeace's heavy-handed efforts in the pulp and paper industry, often taking some liberty with the truth, have left relations with the relevant workers almost irretrievably soured.

The extent to which Greenpeace Australia is really able to work with trade unions and other social interests in Australia remains to be seen. The local branch is able to determine the particular nature of the major campaigns, but not what those campaigns should be. The limits to joint work and joint policies still need to be tested. An example of the obstacles to widening Greenpeace's agenda would seem to be its non-participation in the recently-formed Green party; it's simply not part of the international program.

On the other hand, joint work around chemicals in the workplace and around public transport has already occurred, and there seems no reason why employment and industry development initiatives in green export industries could not be jointly developed. How far such experiments can go will be determined by how far Greenpeace is prepared to let itself go in adapting to other people's ideas and priorities rather than simply imposing its own.

The success of this strong international discipline on Greenpeace's activities poses interesting questions for other groups with alternative social and economic agendas. Many profess internationalism but in practice have a national or local basis and operate internationally only at the level of rhetoric. Greenpeace is rare in being able to effectively challenge governments and transnational corporations wherever they may choose to operate.

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Everybody ready? Okay, we'll switch off the gravity now.

Bravo! You're all doing very well indeed!
Parliament is always theatre but in recent times it has more closely resembled a bloodied boxing ring. In the red corner the champion Paul Keating defends his title against the challenger John Hewson from the blue corner. Every question time sees the jab and uppercut of one against the counterpunch of the other. In the rounds of parliamentary battle words and barbs become punches; one week the champion has the challenger in trouble on the ropes, the next the scales have totally turned. Even when the two pugilists are seated as others take to the floor, little love is lost as they snarl at each other. Challenger Hewson is seen to lean over and hiss "you're a loser, Paul". Real enmity is there, the like of which we have rarely seen before.

There are no neutral corners in this intellectual heavyweight clash. Right now we are scoring Keating slightly ahead on points but the challenger is gaining confidence with every round. Ringside commentators see little prospect of a knockout blow from either, but a TKO, a slip-up by either is always on the cards. Only last round the champ Paul Keating lowered his guard and said the recession was over. It was so easy. Challenger Hewson only had to stand back and smile, not even land a punch. From the man who gave us the recession we had to have it is now the recovery that's already here. But as everyone knows, it's a leaden, limping recovery at best. Full-time jobs are still being lost and business confidence is still shell-shocked. Continual reference to the so-called booming export sector overlooks the fact that in a depressed economy it is relatively easy to raise exports as a percentage of GDP.

Like that champion of the past, Muhammad Ali, Paul Keating seemingly cannot control his tongue. In May 1990 he verbalised a layperson's definition of recession—high unemployment, business failures and forced asset sales. That's the way it was then and the way it is now. Many will hold him to his remark that the recession is over. For succour and inspiration Keating spends time scanning the parliamentary speeches and repartee of one of his heroes, Winston Churchill, looking no doubt for some verbal gems to deploy against his opposite number. I wonder if he has ever come across what Churchill felt was his greatest mistake. It was not Gallipoli. It was his decision in 1925 to put the pound sterling back on the Gold Standard at the old pre-war value. This translated into a massive and hugely uncompetitive revaluation of the pound—unlike John Major's ill-fated attempt to tie the pound to the Deutschmark-led ERM.

To keep the pound fixed on the Gold Standard meant keeping British interest rates high. The prolonged and high level interest rate wreaked terrible damage upon the British economy. British export industries, in a bid to remain competitive, forced wage cuts upon their employees. This caused great industrial unrest, culminating in the 1926 General Strike which brought the nation to a halt for eleven days. Churchill regretted for the rest of his life the damage high interest rates had done to the inter-war economy. Even Charlie Chaplin lectured Churchill on the downside of his decision at a dinner party before getting down to pleasant conversation. Lesser mortals never forgave Churchill for putting Britain through deflation to satisfy financial interests at home and

Dr Hewson: "I ask the Prime Minister if you are so confident about your view of Fightback! why will you not call an early election?"

Mr Keating: "The answer is, mate, because I want to do you slowly. There has to be a bit of sport in this for all of us. In the psychological battle stakes, we are stripped down and ready to go."

John Hewson's assertion in October that Bob Carr was not "a full-blooded Australian" because he "doesn't drive" and "doesn't like kids" was far from a random 'blunder'. Rather, it was just one of many contributions that have been made in a continuous media battle between Labor and Liberal images of national identity.

The jousting began even before Paul Keating's ascension, with the launch of the Liberal/National Fightback! package. Much of the media coverage of the Fightback! has concentrated on the GST proposals, but the package also portrays a vision of what Australian society should be like. Fightback! pursues the Thatcherite strategy of attempting to break down class and other group identities by asserting that individualism is the major feature of national identity.

Whether they are wage earners or business people, the Coalition's message for Australians is the same. Australian citizens need to be hardworking, enterprising and independent, standing on their two feet rather than relying on government assistance and special interest groups such as trade unions. Or, as John Hewson put it in a more populist formulation, the millions of Australians who strive to be different need to apply the same ingenuity and industry to their work that they apply to their gardens and their Holden Commodores. No wonder Dr Hewson expresses disdain for Labor leaders who do not own a driving licence! The Coalition's appeal to particular images of national identity is a conscious attempt to create a winning electoral coalition by evoking powerful images that impact upon voters' most intimate senses of self-worth. It is a strategy that links public discourse with personal recognition. Hence the references to personal matters, such as male virility and attitudes to children, that are normally left out of political point-scoring.

In his final parliamentary speech as Prime Minister, Bob Hawke responded to Fightback! by drawing on an old tradition of Labor populism, depicting the Liberals as confrontationist troglodytes whose political ancestors had turned Gatling guns on Queensland workers. By contrast...
Labor governments were depicted as supporting industrial harmony and an internationally competitive economy capable of providing higher standards of living to all. Australians from all backgrounds and walks of life would work to build the clever country. In this way, the Hawke vision of cooperative capitalism had always offered roles for individuals from various groups, including business people and workers, to identify with. However, Hawke’s appeals to national identity were also an inherent part of his own persona: the larrikin reformed who embraced sobriety, monogamy and Pritikin; the sports-loving, dinky-di bloke who would pull his business and labour mates together for the common good.

Keating and Hawke shared a vision of the cooperative, efficient, clever country. However, Keating has had to enter into the debate over national identity much more explicitly, and some would say more clumsily, than Hawke. The collector of obscure foreign clocks and wearer of hand-stitched Italian suits has had to argue for a more multi-faceted national identity, in which alternative images of Australian manhood can be added to that of the drunken yobbo who places shrimps on the barbie. While Hawke made affectionate references to the larrikinism he gave up when his country needed him most, Keating has risked offending large numbers of Australian men with beer glasses in their hands.

Much of the debate has had definite gender overtones as male virility and Holden Commodores vie with Hoganesque yobbos for public attention. Indeed it could be argued that Fightback! derives a great deal of its emotional force from a subtext about emasculation. It is real men who can support their families while taking on unions and competing in international markets. It is real men who can support their families while taking on unions and competing in international markets. It is real men such as John Hewson who can stand up to ‘special interest’ groups ranging from vehicle manufacturers to the tourism industry. The Coalition’s concept of masculinity is implicitly contrasted with a Labor model in which, it is suggested, wimpish men rely on government handouts or corrupt forms of mateship rather than standing on their own two feet to support their families.

Belatedly the two leaderships have only now begun to turn their attention to the question of where women fit in their scenarios. As Dr Hewson’s recent speech to the Liberal’s National Women’s Conference made clear, the insights he gained while ironing have reinforced his commitment to the Fightback! strategy. Labor, he argued, still sees women as members of groups rather than as individuals; only the Coalition can facilitate women’s individual aspirations. Meanwhile Keating, having tried to reshape Australian masculine identity, argues that our UN-approved laws on the status of women should be promoted overseas to improve our image in the rest of the world. Women could be forgiven for thinking that their inclusion in the debates over national identity has been a matter of too little, too late. The agenda has already been set by the debate over national stereotypes, and women are appearing in a bit-part.

While both leaders’ somewhat heavy-handed attempts at populism have sometimes had a humorous side, the issues are actually very serious ones for both sides of politics. Fightback! speaks of the need “to achieve a generational change in policies and attitudes” in which an Australian identity based upon individualism and self-reliance will be asserted. The battle between Liberal and Labor images of identity is not a distraction from the real issues facing Australia; it is an attempt to gain electoral support for powerful images of national and group identity that are implicitly associated with different policy outcomes. Are we going to be Hewson’s self-reliant individuals building a Thatcherite enterprise culture, or are we going to be Labor’s individuals, members of groups working together to create a cooperative capitalism? The answer will have a major impact on how much the health and welfare sector will be cut over the next few years, on the extent of privatisation, deregulation and corporatisation and on whether the trade union movement will be seen to have a positive role to play in society.

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On a cloudless day, the Danube meanders beneath Budapest's graceful bridges, at one with the onion-domed churches and crumbling castles on either bank.

Amid the rich scenery the grey eyesore known as the White House, formerly the head quarters of Hungary's ruling communist party, stands out all the more conspicuously. Since the 1990 elections the tasteless monstrosity has served as the home of Hungary's democratically-chosen parliamentarians. Among its new residents is the radical nationalist Istvan Csurka, one of Hungary's most renowned playwrights and today the powerful vice-president of the ruling right-wing Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF). The irony of occupying the communists' old fortress is hardly lost on the satirist Csurka. For Csurka, communism, like the White House, is an historical blemish, a foreign-imposed interruption of the glorious history of the Magyar nation.

The outspoken playwright heads the largest and most reactionary wing of the governing party, Democratic Forum—the nepi nemzeti, or nationalist, faction. At the time of the 1990 elections the HDF also boasted equally important national-liberal and Christian democratic currents in its ranks. Yet over the past three years the national populists have all but drowned out the party's moderate voices. Though he is no newcomer to controversy, in recent weeks Csurka's rhetorical excesses have come under exceptionally heavy fire, not least from centrists in his own party.

In his drab office in the White House, the 60-year old writer-turned-politician Csurka dwarfs all that is around him. Everything about the man is in giant proportions—his thick...
hands, his drooping jowls, his lion-sized head. Stoop over his toy-like plastic typewriter, his deep, heavy breathing fills the air.

The contemporary nepi nemzeti movement is the modern incarnation of interwar nepi writers' tradition, Csurka explains in his slow, steady monotone. Csurka sees himself as one of the heirs of the folk movement that included the names of some of Hungary's most talented authors and poets. During the 20s and 30s the nepi writers extolled the noble simplicity of Hungarian peasant life, lashing out against the corrupting effects of modernisation. They argued that 'foreign' and 'alien' forces—most notably Jews and Germans—stood behind the country's spiritual devastation, just as they had orchestrated its post 1918 dismemberment.

"At the time of the original nepi movement over half of all Hungarians lived in the country," he frowns, removing his brown plastic glasses to wipe perspiration from his forehead. "Today it's only a fraction of that—twelve percent—but we've kept the popular ethos of the movement. Now that movement includes all of society," he explains. "That's why we refer to ourselves as nepi (folkish) and nemzeti (national).

From his window Csurka peers disinterestedly across the Danube. He has become accustomed to "American and Israeli journalists" who "just don't understand the unique Magyar affinity to nepi traditions. "If the West is so concerned about our lack of democratic traditions then it should be so sincerely, out of sorrow, since the roots of the Hungarian nation's predicament lie in Yalta and Potsdam. We aren't in this difficult position today because Hungarians wouldn't choose democracy," he explains, pointing out that in 1945 democratic parties took 60% of the vote in free elections.

"The liberal opposition," he grumbles, "thinks that we have to learn everything from the West. But, because of communism, now we have to relocate our national values and rejoin Europe simultaneously. That's Hungary's dilemma."

Csurka embarked upon his highly-acclaimed literary career after participating in the 1956 revolution. His witty short stories and plays subtly exposed the tragedy of the suppressed uprising for Hungarian society. But the anti-communism of Csurka and his national cronies was never comparable to the disidence of the democratic opposition, the handful of critical intellectuals who suffered the regime's persecution. Csurka's works played in Budapest's top theatres and he was twice awarded the official Jozsef Attila prize for literature. During the 70s and 80s, the nepi intelligentsia cultivated a comfortable modus vivendi with populist forces in the communist party, bartering their collaboration for various concessions.

Now, as during the dictatorship, the nationalists' foremost concern is the significant Hungarian minorities in neighbouring Romania, Slovakia and Serbia. "The reality of Hungary's dismemberment is something that in practice I do accept," he claims, referring to the 1920 Trianon peace treaty's division of Habsburg Hungary. "But in my soul, this is something that I will never accept."

From his writings it is clear that Csurka still harbours very real hopes of Hungary regaining its "lost territories". "In a climate of changing borders, or decades-old injustices being redressed, Trianon should be negotiated too," he writes in the nepinemzeti weekly, Magyar Forum. "There must be quarrels, fights, and local wars, and in the end there will be a big negotiation. This isn't merely a custom in Europe," he speculates, "this may well even be a biological rule."

Since his rise to power, a thinly-veiled anti-Semitism has permeated Csurka's prolific writings and addresses. Nearly every week, Csurka's crude diatribes question the ethnic loyalty of certain "dwarfish minorities", "alien elements" or "cosmopolitan liberals" to the Hungarian nation. The barbs, as every Hungarian well knows, insinuate that Jewish members of the democratic opposition parties are somehow less than fully Hungarian.

Until this summer, Csurka's racist slurs and Greater Hungary posturing went unprotested in his own party. But he went a step too far in late August when he called for a spring-cleaning of moderate elements within the HDF itself. For the first time, HDF centrists condemned Csurka's excesses, letting it be known that they would quit the party should Csurka take over as party chairman.

Liberal critics in the opposition charge that the entire nepi nemzeti philosophy is glaringly out of place in contemporary Europe. Its authoritarian leanings, and emphasis on family, nation and religion, represent a brand of conservatism markedly to the right of Western Europe. Rather than looking to the future, democrats claim, Csurka and the HDF aspire to retum Hungary to the past. Playwright Istvan Eorsi, a left-liberal, asserts that even Csurka's claim to the mantle of the original interwar nepi movement is unjustified. "After 1945 the communists fulfilled most of the nepi writers' social demands, such as land reform," says Eorsi. "All that's left now is a romantic yearning for some mythical Hungarian way of life. Now we see the nepi movement's dark underside—racism, revanchism and anti-Semitism."

In the political arena, Csurka has personally led the HDF's all-out drive to control the media. "We need to get a hold of the media because there the fate of the Hungarian nation will be decided," he says. At demonstrations (well-attended by local skinheads), Csurka bellows that the HDF must "take a whip" to a liberal media that fills the public's head with "marxism". It must "dismiss—if necessary, by police force—the directors and their entourage."

For most Hungarians' taste, the airwaves are already egregiously overloaded with religious shows, folk music specials and endless documentaries about the Hungarian minorities. Polls show the popularity of both Csurka and the HDF at all-time lows.

The current strife in the ruling party could well split it in two. Whatever the shape of a realignment, however, the nepi nemzeti Right is certain to persist in one form or another. Where the Hungarian nation is at stake, Istvan Csurka and his cohorts will fight to the very bitter end. As they do, they will take at least a piece of Hungarian democracy down with them.

PAUL HOCKENOS is a Berlin-based freelance journalist.
Beyond the Industrial Fragments

Jobsback, the Coalition's new industrial relations policy, has unions bracing themselves for the next election. But the labour movement may not be the only loser. John Buchanan argues that Jobsback's flawed conception of the jobs market means it is highly unlikely to achieve what it intends.

Industrial relations is now a major point of conflict in the tussle between the ALP and the Federal Coalition leading up to the next federal election. The debate is not about the issues of the 1970s—'excessive union power' and strikes, political levies and pickets. Rather, it concerns the nature and structure of our industrial relations system. Should bargaining be individual or collective? Should unions be organised on a company or multi-employer basis? Is there a role for industrial tribunals in maintaining minimum conditions?

The Federal opposition's Fightback! manifesto committed the Coalition to recasting key elements of Australia's social, political and economic life. Jobsback, the Coalition's new industrial relations policy released in October, commits the opposition to the most extensive restructuring of the labour market and the industrial system since the introduction of compulsory arbitration nearly a century ago.

Here I want to assess the conceptual and empirical underpinnings of Jobsback. I argue that if implemented Jobsback would further fragment the labour market thereby exacerbating current inefficiencies and inequalities. Labour market reform is sorely needed, but the changes should enhance not dismantle mechanisms of coordination within the industrial relations system.

The social philosophy underpinning both Fightback! and Jobsback is economic liberalism. Jobsback begins by assuming a strict dichotomy between the individual and social institutions: "The Coalition believes that our future lies not with industrial institutions or systems but the working men and women of Australia." Throughout the document it is assumed that competition in freely operating markets will result in maximum social and economic welfare. The market for labour is assumed to be no different to any other. Competition between individuals in the labour markets is the key to improved economic performance. The rigorous application of this principle means that only agreements between individuals will be recognised at law in the new system. These individual contracts, misleadingly called 'workplace agreements', will be enforceable as common law contracts of employment. Unions will be allowed to exist but anyone else may be selected by an employee to bargain on their behalf.

Jobsback is not simply an old-fashioned conservative assault on the trade union movement. Rather, it represents a very distinctive attempt to make unions irrelevant. For instance, where both employers and workers agree, a workplace can remain covered by the award system. Either party, however, can opt out of the award system.

Jobsback assumes that the award system will slowly wither away. A number of 'inducements' have been included in the policy to encourage this outcome. These include the establishment of a new 'Office of the Employee Advocate'. The Advocate will have authority and resources to pursue complaints arising from non-compliance with 'workplace agreements' free of charge to individual employees. The pursuit of individual grievances has traditionally been regarded as one of the core functions of a union. Jobsback also promises minimum standards for 'workplace agreement' employees: a minimum hourly rate of pay linked to awards and limited recreational, sick and maternity leave. There will be a limitation on the amount of damages that can be awarded against 'workplace agreement' employees who take industrial action—but there will be no such limits on the liability of workers staying within the award system. Where an employer elects to leave the arbitration system, his or her workers will no longer have access to it. Under these conditions their employment conditions will be those prevailing in their awards at the time they are deemed to leave the...
In keeping with its rigorous commitment to individual choice, Jobsback clearly envisages the operation of multiple bargaining units at the workplace. Workers will be entitled to join industry, occupational or enterprise unions or have some other agent bargain on their behalf. Employers will be obliged to deal with any bona fide agent nominated by an employee. Employers could, therefore, also be faced with a plethora of regulatory systems operating at the workplace. This prescription is obviously at variance with union policy of promoting unions along industry lines. It is also at variance with the Business Council of Australia’s policy of reducing the number of bargaining units at the workplace.

Finally, Jobsback also contains an extensive range of new penalties and sanctions. It is assumed throughout that the common law will play a greater role in regulating industrial relations. Traditionally the common law has never been kind to unions. And sanctions within the award system will be increased—including deregistration for any union that commences ‘flow ons’ or comparative wage justice campaigns, increased sanctions for industrial action and proposals for new ‘essential services’ legislation. Employers and employees will be penalised if strike pay is agreed to. These proposals will see industrial tribunals weakened, undermine union organising strategies and nurture individual contracts of employment. Jobsback assumes these changes will result in significant efficiency gains.

However, quite aside from their palatability or otherwise to union members, Jobsback’s reform proposals also suffer from a number of conceptual and empirical problems. The central assumption underpinning the policy is that of equal bargaining power between employers and workers. The inadequacies of this assumption have long been recognised. Workers—especially the unskilled and those from minority groups—often have little choice as to which job to take. Labour law has emerged as a special part of the legal system to redress some of this inequality. The Coalition assumes that because unions and employers receive special legal rights, capacities and obligations under Australian law that they are abnormally privileged. They assert that such a situation represents an aberration from the “ordinary law of the land”. Yet marriages and divorces, for exam-
Perpetuating myths about our industrial relations system only serves to distract attention from the critical issues facing Australian workplaces.

People are not regulated by contract law. Equally companies are regulated on the basis of special principles that bequeath large organisations corporate status and limit the liability of directors in the event of business failure. Both family and company law developed because of the inadequacies of common law. Australian labour law developed for similar reasons.

The economic arguments informing Jobsback are also questionable. The major weaknesses of the competitive model derives from its assumption that the labour market is the same as any other. Generations of industrial relations and labour market researchers have questioned the validity of this assumption. Labour is not a tangible commodity—what is traded is a worker's ability to work, not the work itself. Trade in this potential service cannot be analysed in the same way as trade in tangible commodities such as second sports cars or antique clocks.

Labour supply is primarily determined by demographic factors and social customs—the changing role of women and young people in the workforce are examples of this. Labour demand is primarily determined by anticipated demand for output. The price of labour is primarily determined by notions of acceptable living standards. Conditions of supply and demand have some influence, but they are not the critical factors determining pay rates. Consequently, while in theory adjustment in the labour market can involve either changes in wages or employment, most change occurs in employment levels.

If the labour market is to be properly understood, different concepts from the abstractions of economic liberalism are needed. Far from being a potential clustering of harmony and order, arising from free choices made by isolated individuals, the labour market is in fact highly structured and fragmented. Different segments of the workforce do not compete with others for jobs. Instead the workforce is divided into a myriad of groups on the basis of industry, firm/enterprise and occupation. The precise nature of segmentation in any one sector of the economy varies on the basis of production technology, industrial structure and factors such as degree of competition and extent of monopolisation, as well as the outcome of strategies pursued by employers, employees and unions.

Jobsback's prescriptions for the labour market ignore these essential dynamics. From the point of view of equity they would enhance the position of those with considerable power in the labour market and deny the weak access to the resources of either collective organisation or state intervention necessary to redress the power imbalance. More significantly, by failing to grasp how labour markets actually work, reforms motivated by a commitment to an individual bargaining system would intensify the tendency of the labour market to segment. Reliance on 'the market' for coordinating labour supply and demand would leave employers with little choice other than to nurture a core of skilled workers needed for production and draw on unskilled workers as demand fluctuates. The resulting fragmentation of the labour market would have detrimental implications for both efficiency and equity.

It is now recognised that successful modern economies require mechanisms in addition to the market to coordinate economic activity. This applies as much to the Japanese economy where such coordination is informal as to the more openly regulated, multi-employer bargaining systems in countries like Germany. Such coordination does not require state control and ownership of the means of production. The vital formula for success appears to involve concerted action among various social agents. The critical policy issue is to identify and nurture appropriate social structures that can assist in delivering negotiated outcomes at national level, yet allow flexibility at the local level. Industrial relations institutions potentially have a very important role to play in this regard.

Given our recent experiences in national, industry level and workplace bargaining, Australia is currently well placed to develop innovative coordinating mechanisms. On the basis of recent experience, for example, it would seem possible that general wage movements could be regulated by national wage cases involving governments, peak level union and employer representatives. Training arrangements and many employment conditions are probably better regulated on an industry, occupational and/or regional basis. Bargaining at such levels has occurred in many industries, especially over matters associated with award restructuring. Issues such as the span of working hours, on-the-job training arrangements and allocation of overtime are probably best handled at enterprise or workplace level with local union representative reaching agreement with workplace managers. While coordination of this kind already occurs in the industrial relations system much of it has evolved in an ad hoc manner. The challenge is to creatively reform our current labour market institutions, not dismantle them.

This raises important questions for all parties in the industrial relations system. For employers one critical issue is to reconsider the role of their representative associations. For example, German employer organisations play a central role in the running of that countries extensive training system. It is this coordination that has been so important in labour market flexibility in Germany. Equally there are major challenges for enterprise-level management. General managers need to consider how to coordinate their affairs with other firms in their industry. They also need to consider how much autonomy they give workplace managers. Striking an appropriate balance between reliance on external labour markets and internal ones is difficult. The doctrinaire promotion of individual and enterprise-based systems closes off consideration of this vital issue.

There are equally as many challenges for unions.
They have already begun to reduce their number through amalgamations and to restructure their coverage along industry lines. This is a complex and difficult process, one that few other labour movements in the world have even attempted. These initiatives, however, need to be complemented by changes in the support provided by the unions to their workplace delegates. Without well-resourced, well-trained and legally protected workplace representatives, the union movement will become very vulnerable as more matters are settled at workplace and enterprise level.

Public authorities will also have to reconsider their function if they are to assist in establishing a better coordinated system. The Industrial Relations Commission has already commenced this process with its review of union and award structures. Its preparedness to register enterprise appendices to multi-employer awards is indicative of its ability and inclination to create linkages between different elements of the system. Government agencies also need to consider their function. As more issues are subject to at least some bargaining at workplace and enterprise level there is likely to be an increasing demand for information on what is occurring in other establishments. Equally, government training authorities have an important complementary role to play and many are already dramatically restructuring their affairs to provide greater support.

As in the depression of the 1890s the nature of relations between employers and employees is again firmly on the agenda. The Coalition has clearly established that it is now committed to the total recasting of these relations by promoting a fully fledged system of individual contracts of employment and “white anting” the current award system and unions. Yet, contrary to the implicit assumption of Jobsback, the labour market is not like a commodity market. If industrial relations reform is to contribute to economic and social development it is essential that industrial relations policies are framed on the basis of an understanding of its dynamics. Without non-market coordinating institutions the labour market has a spontaneous tendency to fragment. Reforms directed at promoting individual and enterprise bargaining ignore this point. The critical issue in industrial relations reform is not to increase fragmentation but to develop more dynamic and responsive mechanisms of coordination.

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T
he State and the Revolution. Over
the course of the 20th century radical
political thought has been mesmer­
ised by this, Lenin's couple. On the
one hand, the State: the 'coldest of all cold
monsters', the locus of cruelty, violence, and
domination, that nevertheless would provide for
our welfare 'from the cradle to the grave'. On the
other, the Revolution: the event that conquers
all inequality, exploitation and alienation and
brings with it the purity of emancipation. If
today no one really believes in any of this, then
surely it is time this was manifest in our political
reason. It is with this in mind that we should seek
to engage in the task of reflecting on our position
in relation to the political and historical mo­
ment before us. It is my argument here that to
realise the full implications of a political reason
beyond the State and Revolution we must exam­
ine something radical thought is used to regard­
ing as its enemy, liberalism. More precisely, we
should examine the unique political inventive­
ness of liberalism.

There are two parts to this problem of politi­
cal reasoning. The first concerns the nature of
the present—not only its limits but its possibili­
ties. The second concerns how we derive a
political stance from the present, and what re­
sources we use to do it. Neither of these tasks is
easy. The first is perhaps easier than the second,
so let me start with it.

What are the notable features that consti­
tute our political present? The first and most
visible manifestation of the historic change of
this present is the collapse of communism in
Europe. At the end of 1992, this is now almost
prehistory. Yet it is important to recall its over­
whelming significance. It may be that this event
has wiped the Revolution from the political
agenda of western democracies, but that is not its
most important legacy. Rather, it has posed
problems that socialist thought has not been
able to address: of ethnic confrontation and
violence, civil war, the collapse of the rule of law,
of refugees, of social and economic reconstruc­
tion in post-communist society, and so on. It has
also reminded us of a theme that is the staple of
all variants of liberalism: the limitations of the
state.

Second, we should also note the stagnation
of social democracy and the policy dominance of
neoliberalism within western democracies. The
endemic problems of the former are perhaps the
most worrisome component of our present. The
limits of the state are posed in epic form in the
collapse of communism in Europe. The silent
failure of those strategies that claimed to steer a
'middle course' between capitalism and social­
ism is, if anything, more disturbing. Social de­
mocracy sought to underpin the inequalities of
the market with the equality of citizenship but
failed to take heed of the fragile dependency of
state-guaranteed social rights on continued eco­
nomic prosperity. With the end of the latter, it
was almost inevitable that these social rights
would be sacrificed. The failure of social democ­

With
socialism in
eclipse and
social
democracy
in disarray,
liberalism
holds the
political
field. But is
this all bad?
Mitchell
Dean argues
that a social
liberalism
might form a
productive
basis for a
renewed
progressive
politics.

DOS
minimise public expenditures, as has been noted by most of its critics. It is rather that it aims both to 'economise' government activities and agencies and to 'governmentalise' economic activities. Thus, the public sector now finds itself subjected to quasi-economic norms of efficiency and productivity and private corporations, community organisations, families, and even individuals become enlisted as vehicles of governmental objectives. In its capacity to enlist such agencies in governmental objectives and to 'act at a distance'—notably through the 'enterprise culture' and 'entrepreneurial self'—neoliberalism reveals a political inventiveness that has outflanked both communist and social democratic versions of socialism.

Third, moving our gaze from political ideologies to wider issues, there is the globalisation of the world economy, the changing international division of states, and the decline of the capacities of the nation-state. This, of course, raises the plethora of macroeconomic, industry, trade, and foreign policy issues which are receiving an airing in Australia at this moment. In such a context, the limitations on the nation-state are real, not theoretical. Consider the widely-accepted consequences of the pattern of low growth and external debt in the absence of the capacity to raise levels of taxation. Consider also the internationalisation of the financial markets, the massive growth of trade between countries (and the relative decline of trade within countries), and the role of multinational corporations.

Fourth, and by no means least, our political present is constituted by the decline in the relative standard of living in previously affluent countries (like Australia) over the last decade or so. Increasing inequality, long-term unemployment, and rising lev-
els of poverty are the base line of our political present. If anything is a testimony to the success of neoliberalism it is that it has ensured the political acceptability of previously unacceptable levels of unemployment and poverty. This alone might suggest that liberal and neoliberal political discourse and modes of government are worth examining rather more seriously than has often been the case on the Left.

This brings us to the problem of deriving a political stance from this situation. It is perhaps easier to list the limitations on that stance rather than the potentials of the present. The Revolution is no longer, if it ever was, a feasible component of a political stance. This is not to say that one should rule out the possibility of mass uprisings of the Left or Right in western democracies, but simply that it is unlikely that such events would remove the problems that incited them. For our purposes, the problem of the practice and limits of government will still remain. As indicated above, there are also problems with resurrecting social democracy and its emphasis on state redistribution founded on economic growth. Similarly the pursuit of neoliberal policies over the last decade should have convinced all but true believers that the market is unable to solve the equity and distribution problems it creates.

The problem of how to define an effective political stance at this moment is, then, confronted by a dual limitation. It is confronted by the absence of viable available models and a certain urgency of adopting a stance. I qualify the latter because it is far from clear that having a political stance will be of help in solving current ills. A relatively coherent political stance would, however, be able to act as a counterpoint in a present in which historic change is in danger of being driven by the world financial markets and in which odious forms of racist and reactively nationalist political activity are again on the rise.

The position I believe we should explore will no doubt seem controversial for some readers of ALR. I think we should look seriously at liberalism and its variants for guidance in the kind of stance we can adopt in the present. There are several reasons for this. First, I would suggest that liberalism has become coextensive with effective political discourse. To discuss politics today is to talk the language of liberalism. In considering this language, however, we should be careful not to underestimate the historic varieties of liberalism or, more particularly, to efface a deep division between what might be called economic liberalism and social liberalism.

Second, liberalism is much more heterogeneous and capable of political invention than socialists have given it credit for and today's neoliberals believe. Socialists have typically felt that the state and public administration were either irredeemably located inside the contradictions of the logic of capital (and thus doomed to eventual failure) or inherently neutral and capable of being taken over for good and virtuous purposes (replacing the 'administration of men' with the 'administration of things'). What has not often been noticed is the degree to which liberalism has recognised something of the paradox of a capitalist government and sought to invent ways of reconciling what socialists thought to be irreconcilable. It is precisely this solid body of historical effort, both extraordinarily innovative and persistent to our day, of attempting to govern the un-governable, of attempting to provide a rationale for the paradoxical government of a market economy that we should not leave unnoticed.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, it is also worth underlining that liberalism is as much a reflection on the practice and art of government, on how to govern, as a political philosophy or doctrine. In contrast, socialism has tended to develop a political philosophy but not an independent reflection on the practice of government. This is why socialism aims to make the state a neutral instrument that can be used to different ends (social democracy) or something that will eventually wither away (communism). This is not to say that socialism has displayed no political inventiveness. However, this has tended to be restricted to the government of things in the belief that if this were done properly people would automatically be able to govern themselves.

Despite their differences, variants of liberalism are united by two features that are perhaps the source of this persistent and elaborate inventiveness: the doctrine of limited government and the attempt to install freedom and autonomy as central political virtues. I would argue that both features are clear components of what has made liberalism an enduring and effective form of political reason. The notion that there are limits to government is extremely powerful. It means that there are other forces and features of the political and social landscape that are external to government and which government must attend to if it is to be effective. It also requires political thought to define what constitutes the agenda of government and which features of the landscape must be taken into account. Importantly it must consider how these features operate and consequently what type of governmental action is appropriate to that operation. This non-governmental terrain has been variously thought of as 'civil society', 'the community', 'the economy', and so on.

The problem with neoliberalism in this respect is not that it seeks limits to government, nor that it conceives that which is external to government as an economy. It is rather that it fails to define the limits proper to 'the economic'. One fundamental way in which those limits have been defined for the last two hundred years is through what might be called 'the social'. As I shall argue in a moment, the social—the field of activity and thought associated with the realisation of the well-being and meeting the needs of members of the population—also presents limits and potentials for government.

I argued previously in ALR (ALR 138, April)
that freedom is a key term in our political reason. Another virtue of variants of liberalism, and another cause of their practical inventiveness, is their attempt to base their actions on a notion of 'the free subject'. The 'free subject' does not have to entail the full classical notion of the self-governing individual. Rather, it simply entails the recognition that the subject could 'always act otherwise' and that government ignores this at its peril. Liberal forms of government seek to act upon the subject not by means of domination or subjugation but as a 'free subject'. This is an elementary way of defining the ethical limits to government. And it is through the practices of government that types of citizenry are formed—that is, that definite modes of the conduct of life are promoted and shaped.

This is not to say that the idea of freedom has any necessary content beyond this elementary supposition. It may be possible, however, to distinguish broadly between political, economic and social freedoms. Political and civil freedoms of expression, assembly, and suffrage are evidently quite different from one form of economic freedom, the freedom from constraint in the market. These political freedoms are freedoms to act in a certain way, positive freedoms secured by political and legal institutions and thus quite different from the negative market freedom. In this political freedom is like another economic freedom, the freedom from poverty which, although expressed negatively, requires definite institutional conditions (social security benefits and insurance, the provision of subsistence) in order to be fulfilled. In all these cases, the practice or art of government is to create (whether negatively or positively) the conditions that allow types of action. Social freedoms are different in this respect; they depend upon the use of socially developed capacities which are only available through the elaborate provision of things such as education, health-care, and community services, and so on. They require a much more complex and difficult process of the governmental formation, shaping and fostering the attributes of subjects.

As can be seen from these examples, the institution of freedom as a core political virtue is not necessarily opposed to considerations of social justice and equity. It is certainly not opposed to governmental actions which form and foster the capacities and attributes of citizens. Indeed, 1940s liberalism, animated by the ideal of the welfare state, recognised the need for governmental provision and a degree of equity and social justice as a condition for realising the potentials of individuals both in the market and in their lives more generally. But this may be too narrow a view. For a liberalism which stressed social freedom would not oppose governmental action to the actions of the free subject, but would presumably see both as the mutually necessary presuppositions for the other.

This brings us back to the problem posed above of the limits and potentials of government conceived by liberalism. For neoliberalism these are largely thought of in economic terms. The economy is that which is outside the state. The economy is not a part of the formal apparatus of government; nevertheless it provides the rationality by which government is to be made accountable and a means by which governmental objectives can be secured. What is interesting here is not the actual reality of 'the economy', or the correspondence (or lack of it) between political doctrine and economic reality. Rather, what is interesting is that 'the economy' is a component of a particular type of political thought which enables specific governmental actions and interventions to be undertaken and policies to be formulated. It is one way of rendering what is governed governable, of defining the limits and possibilities of government.

It may be said that neoliberalism thus cuts itself off from a host of other aspects of reality, from the needs of specific social groups, and from the irreducible reality of society as a whole. More significantly for present purposes, however, neoliberalism severs itself from another influential way of constructing that which is to be governed: 'the social'. By 'the social' I mean all those practices, political ideologies, associations, and actors which have been formed in relation to a knowledge of social groups and segments of the population, their wellbeing, their needs and security. I do not mean society as a whole but a sector in which actions and interventions give rise to, and are facilitated and directed by, a social rationality and a social ethics.

The attempt to anchor government in the complex and troubled element of the social, the attempt to form a 'social government', has its own irreducible history, one that overlaps the trajectory of liberalism. Thus one could trace the 19th century development of the social through the effects of industrialism or urbanism and the formation of the 'social question' concerning the living conditions of the new working populations. One could also trace the social through the myriad medical and educational agencies that sought to intervene into and on behalf of members of families, through the development of group solidarities and communal loyalties, and through the rise of philanthropic, religious, ethnic, class and other social and political associations.

It was on the basis of the social that liberalism often sought to undertake its own critique. Thus the 'social liberalism' of the end of the 19th century sought to invoke the notion of an organic society which was inevitably progressive and rational, and which would secure positive freedoms. The ethical state, committed to developing the ethical personality of its citizens and operating through their participation, would be the vehicle which steered this happy course. The 'social liberal' perspective does not require ignoring economic issues and problems or subjugating them to moral outrage of the religious or humanist type. Forms of 'social liberalism' have sought to define the limits and practice of govern-
It is tempting to look back to the Keynesian-welfare state form of government in our hour of need. Such political nostalgia is ultimately ineffective.

It is indeed tempting to look back to the Keynesian-welfare state form of government for guidance in what amounts to our hour of need. But, for reasons I have suggested above, such political nostalgia is ultimately ineffective. Whatever else, neoliberalism is surely correct when it asserts that it is not possible for the state to solve all our problems. This is not to argue for a minimal state. However, a condition for the increase in public expenditure today is an increase in the revenue base of the state. As that is unlikely to come through economic growth, it will have to come from increased taxation. But how will support be gained for this? I would suggest that this could only come with a renewed sense of the ‘social economy’ of government as one which maximised capacities and freedoms and minimised domination and constraints. Any effective political stance can only come from a position that takes into account the aspirations, desires, needs, and choices of individuals and families.

How is such a political stance to be distinguished from neoliberalism? It is no longer helpful to invoke an organic community or the ethical state after the manner of old-style social liberalism. Rather a new social liberalism may be distinguished by the active attempt to invent ways in which the limits and potentials of government, and the capacities and life-chances of individuals, are defined according to a social rationality. This invention would entail a social economy of governmental practice. It would follow 19th century social liberalism in stressing the role of government in the ethical formation of the citizen. It would undoubtedly draw upon the vast intellectual, political and technical resources of what I have called the social. It might follow the invention of people themselves and extend the notion of government beyond the state to self-governing associations. In short, one thing seems clear: both a renewed discourse of social reform and a renewed social invention are more likely to emerge from a liberal critique of liberalism than from any other source.

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The need to conserve Australia’s natural wonders seems to be so obvious that it’s hardly worth arguing about. But Denise Russell disagrees. What should our relation be to the natural world—especially the most beautiful parts of that world such as the Great Barrier Reef?

I would like to defend the ‘no-harm principle’: that if we know that an activity is harmful or if we are unsure of its effects then we should prohibit, restrict or encourage against it. But what is behind this? Why not harm the Reef? Is the answer—as a number of environmental thinkers have claimed—based in ethics?

Traditional ethical theories have recently been extended beyond the human domain so they could be a useful starting point to answer this question. Some writers have offered a case for not harming non-human animals and ecosystems on the basis of morality. Some people resist this argument, partly because we are used to thinking of morality as exclusively in the human domain, and because we are used to regarding it as a feature of human interaction that involves intention and will.

The first plank of this opposition to the use of morality could simply be based on human chauvinism and habit and so not constitute a good reason for not extending the moral domain. Again, while it’s generally believed that only humans exercise intention and will, this belief can be challenged just by close observation of, for instance, your local dog. And there is enough evidence that dolphins interact with humans in some situations with obvious intent and will, for example, when they have saved humans from shark attack or drowning. One account I particularly like is of a person who was sitting on a beach on Hinchinbrook Island when a dolphin came by and threw her a fish and then swam off. Of course, this observation doesn’t provide a sufficient argument for an ethical defence of the environment, since it only embraces some exceptional members of the non-human world, and it doesn’t encompass ecosystems.

It should also be noted that, following the above reasoning, some humans would be excluded from the purview of morality. Very young infants and people in a coma may lack intention and will, but surely they should be in the moral domain? Tom Regan suggests a way out of this dilemma mounting a distinction between “moral agents” and “moral patients”. Moral agents are “individuals who have...the ability to bring impartial moral principles to bear on the determination of what...morally
ought to be done and...to freely choose or fail to choose to act as morality requires". "Moral patients lack the prerequisites that would enable them to control their own behaviour in ways that would make them morally accountable." The person in a coma and the young infant would fit into this category but so, also, would non-human animals who are conscious, sentient, and have beliefs and memories. Regan then goes on to claim that moral patients should be included in the moral domain along with moral agents. In particular, moral agents or patients have a right not to be harmed. However, even if Regan is right this argument will not help me in my endeavour, as Regan's ethics do not extend to ecosystems. Some animals are also excluded—such as those who are conscious and sentient but not capable of having beliefs or memories.

Regan's stopping point does seem rather arbitrary. Others make no distinction in the animal world. Peter Singer's slogan is that "all animals are equal". This is based on his claim that "there are..."
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TROUBLED WATERS

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park was set up in 1975 with an Authority (the GBRMPA) to manage the Park. The management philosophy is at odds with the position I have developed in this article. Rather, its seeks to achieve conservation with the minimum of regulation. It aims to ensure a high level of usage which is consistent with maintenance of the ecological system and which will be accepted as reasonable by society.

The management states that "An understanding of the Reef and the processes which maintain it is necessary before sensible decisions can be made about competing uses, and before limitations can be placed on potentially destructive uses".

Zoning plans have been developed in line with these management principles but it is important to note that a Marine Park is not the same as a Marine National Park. Most of the GBR Marine Park is zoned for general use which restricts mining and spearfishing only. Less than 10% in the Cairns section, for instance, is zoned Marine National Park and even this area has various sub-zones. The largest has only fairly light restrictions on some fishing and collecting. Very small areas are designated as Preservation Zones.

Yet the aim to support a high level of use and a diversity of human activities in a fragile environment runs counter to the aim of conservation. Marlin fishing is a good example of weaknesses in the management philosophy. Marlin fishing competitions were widely promoted in Cairns as recently as early this year and Lizard Island hosted a Marlin Classic where marlin weighing hundreds of kilos were hauled onto the beach. This is a barbarous sport, little different from big-game hunting. It has been reported that big game fishing boats frequently call into a local Preservation Zone to entertain their clients when the marlin aren't biting, whereupon the crew dangle a tail roped tuna from the back of the boat and the cod fight for the bait. In the process the fish inflict wounds on each other. The cod which gets the bait incurs mouth and body damage in the resulting tug-of-war. This activity is not illegal as it doesn't count as fishing, since the line has no hook. That this is permissible in an area of the tightest zoning should lead us to reflect on the philosophy behind the zoning.

Another weakness in the management philosophy is contained in the phrase from the quote above "before limitations can be placed on potentially destructive uses". In other words, if you can't prove that an activity is hazardous, allow it to go ahead. One member of the GBRMPA even followed this philosophy through to oil drilling on the Reef, arguing in 1977 that "if no research is done or if no unacceptable risk can be demonstrated, exploratory drilling may well be permitted leading to exploitation if oil is discovered". Overseas witnesses to the Royal Commission on Petroleum Drilling in the Great Barrier Reef Waters in 1974 testified that an offshore oil industry, once established, could do more lasting damage to marine life through small but continuous spills, detergent treatments, discharge of water and mud used in drilling and other kinds of pollution than would large and spectacular oil accidents. Yet the GBRMPA's comments assume that no unacceptable risk has yet been demonstrated. If that is the view of the body set up to conserve the Reef, what hope is there to reject the recent government initiatives to allow oil exploration adjacent to the Reef?

My central thesis is that when we are dealing with an area of such profound importance and fragility it is far preferable to prohibit, restrict or discourage activities unless we have good reasons for thinking they are harmless. This should apply to all activities in the Park, not just oil exploration or drilling. Two others that desperately need further restrictions are fishing and tourism. The harm that tourists and tourist development are doing to the Reef is abundantly clear to the casual observer. Yet tourism in the Cairns area is increasing at a rate of roughly 30% per annum, and the GBRMPA gives permission for development which could be predicted at the outset to be destructive.

The harm done by depletion of fish stocks may not become apparent until it is too late. There is very little research into the long-term viability of Reef fishing and attempts at monitoring reef fish have not been successful. There is not even consensus on the appropriate method for monitoring. Yet very little restriction is placed on what fish are taken. Again, the philosophy is to wait and see if these practices are dangerous. Sadly, we might not have very long to wait.

Further flaws in the management philosophy stem from its acceptance of a land-based model which assumes that the area can be divided into reasonably distinct regions. This model is questionable on land, but it is nonsense in the sea. The larvae of marine plants and animals are sometimes dispersed in the plankton for hundreds of kilometres. The cod do not always stay in their small Preservation Zones; they may stray into the nearby zone where trolling is legal. And scientists working in the Scientific Zone may be frustrated to find their subjects killed in legal fishing a few hundred metres from the shore.

A member of the Park management, in a book Managing Marine Environments, designates 'conservationists' as an interest group to be given a hearing along with the fishing and tourist interests. This position sits rather oddly with the claim of the management philosophy to be concerned with conservation. It might be thought that this concern would make the managers 'conservationists' too, and not just people responsive to conservationist interest groups.

Finally, Managing Marine Environments further claims that the goal of "preserving coral reef undisturbed by humans" can be met by preserving 5% of reefs free from human access other than for purposes of approved research or management projects and, further, that this 5% should, as far as practicable, achieve minimum disruption to fishing and tourism. The intention is to preserve small "representative examples of ecosystems". But this misunderstands the idea of an ecosystem; by definition, the parts can't have autonomous existence. There are threats to the Reef from activities in areas adjacent to the Park—in particular from land run-off and proposed oil exploration/drilling. A philosophy which accepts the zoning model within the Park makes it easy to look upon the Reef as a unit separate from the adjacent land and sea. It makes it difficult for the Authority to act as a political force countering the threats from adjacent areas. An acceptance of the interconnectedness of regions within the Park would make it easier to see the interconnections between the Reef and non-Reef areas.

[End of article]
forms of the Reef. Other, less personal, instrumental reasons might relate to the Reef's utility to science, medicine and the Australian economy. Some non-instrumental reasons for valuing the Reef are that it is a remarkably stable self-regulating system in some places largely untouched by humans; it is a system of great complexity and diversity.

Values, whether instrumental, are preferences. The above list reflects preferences of mine which seem to be fairly widely shared. Others may hold different values and find different reasons for valuing the Reef. Equally clearly there will be some who place value on the Reef for narrow instrumental reasons, or they may place no value on it at all. If values are merely preferences what basis is there for preventing actions that harm the Reef from people in these two groups?

If the Reef continues to be valued for narrow instrumental reasons then the outlook is very bleak even for the relevant resource. Take, for example, commercial fishing. Here we run the risk of what has been described as the parable of the 'tragedy of the commons'. According to a Canadian author, Berkes, the tragedy is that fishing, left to itself, will be pursued to the point where there is no longer a sustainable yield. This follows when the following conditions hold:

(i) the users are selfish and are able to pursue private gain even against the best interests of the community;

(ii) the environment is limited and there is a resource use pattern in which the rate of exploitation exceeds the natural rate of replenishment of the resource;

(iii) the resource is common property and freely open to any user.

In the case of the Great Barrier reef there have been attempts to resist 'the tragedy of the commons'; there are permit regulations concerning net sizes, quotas and seasonal bans. However, policing is difficult and there may be an economic incentive to break the regulations—and this of course may lead back to the 'tragedy of the commons'. In other parts of the world resource collapse due to over-fishing is not uncommon. Yet there are some enlightening examples of self-regulation. Many are in small non-western societies, but there are increasing instances in the industrialised world: whiting in the New York Bight region of the US; smelt in Lake Erie in Canada, and Cornish oyster fisheries in the UK. In all these cases the individualism of the fishermen was effectively limited for the good of the community.

What about those who place no value on the Reef? Is there any way to persuade or cajole them into not harming it, given the position I have presented? Government regulations, including fines and other penalties, are necessary here, but a strategy which is more likely to be effective in the long run is to try to encourage a change of mind. Just because values are preferences that doesn't mean that there can't be debate about them. It's usually easier in our culture to get people to place a value on something on which they don't already place a value if we can persuade them of its instrumental value. A possible argument could be: you shouldn't harm the Reef as the unpolluted waters house excellent fish and many parts of the world have such pollution that the fish die or are contaminated. (Of course, this argument should only be pursued in moderation, since taken to extremes it could lead to over-fishing.)

Increasingly, Australians are expressing concern about environmental degradation such as the blue/green algae problem in our rivers and the continuing problems with the ocean outfalls around cities like Sydney. These sorts of local problems foster an awareness of the limitations of normally self-regulating systems and are likely to lead to an attitude of caution towards human practices in relation to the environment even in those who do not put a great deal of value on it.

The management philosophy of bodies like the Barrier Reef Park Authority (see box) is based on achieving conservation with a minimum of regulation, in order to ensure a high level of usage consistent with maintaining the ecosystem concerned. Yet supporting a high level of use and a diversity of human activities in a fragile environment runs counter to the aim of conservation. One tenet of this management philosophy is that any activities which have not been proven hazardous for the local environment should be permitted. I would argue on the contrary that in areas of profound importance and fragility such as the Barrier Reef it is far preferable to prohibit or discourage activities unless we have good reasons for thinking they are harmless.

Policies which aim at overall protection, not just preservation of representative examples of ecosystems, would seem to be suggested by the sorts of arguments I have outlined here. Such policies would allow activities only if there is reasonable assurance that they won't disturb the self-regulation of the Reef. Such a direction is dictated by prudence, not by ethics.

Can this endpoint be used to develop an environmental philosophy in general? It might be worthwhile thinking about. If such philosophies are centrally located in ethics, they face the problems mentioned above. Juxtaposing the two main environmental concerns: (1) the limitedness of natural resources; (2) the stress put on natural resources by the expanding human population, it would seem that a philosophy based on prudence might have a better chance of warding off destruction than any other.

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Bureaucrats have had a bad press: they've been blamed for everything from the recession to 'economic nationalism'. Ian Hunter and Jeffrey Minson suggest that many of the 'remedies' to bureaucracy may be worse than the 'disease'.

Nearly everyone agrees that public service bureaucracies need reforming. But to what extent and in what directions? Should they be made to 'perform' like corporations in the private sector? Or should all bureaucracies—both private and public—be made more 'democratic' and hence more attuned to equity and social justice? Here we want to focus on the second question, and in particular to show the resistance of bureaucracy to democratisation. However, we also want to suggest in passing that the 'corporatisation' of bureaucracies may represent a variation on—rather than a transformation of—their fundamental nature. As a reference point for the issues involved we will focus on the post-Fitzgerald Report reforms to the public service in Queensland.

The question of whether and how to democratise bureaucracy is a perennial one, but it remains important, not least for the anxieties and confusions it generates in the relations between ethics, politics and government. Of course, a good deal depends upon the level at which the question is pitched, and especially on what is understood by democracy. Current discussions usually conflate two quite different senses in which bureaucracies might be made more democratic. Seen from one aspect the issue might be one of ensuring the formal accountability of various public service bureaucracies to parliament, and hence in some sense 'the people'. But the question is also often posed in terms of the personal ethics of bureaucrats. In this case making bureaucracies more democratic means encouraging bureaucrats to take individual ethical and political responsibility for their decisions.

Clearly these different interpretations involve two very different diagnoses and cures for the problem of unelected bureaucratic government. The former sees the problem as one of the mechanics of government, something that might be readdressed through a renovation of Westminster conventions—for example, the greater use of expert parliamentary subcommittees to open the higher echelons of the public service to parliamentary scrutiny. The second line of analysis leads in quite different directions; it construes the problem in terms of the failure of bureaucracy to conform to the ethical and political principles of individuals. Here what is envisaged, presumably, is transforming bureaucracies into little theatres of bureaucracy—for example, by introducing democratic decision-making procedures that will allow bureaucrats to connect the objectives of government to their ethical and political principles as citizens.}

Failing to differentiate these different levels and kinds of analyses not only obscures the relation between bureaucratic government and democratic politics, it also generates quite unreal ethical-political proposals to make bureaucracy subject to democracy. Michael Pusey's Economic Rationalism in Canberra epitomises this kind of failure. Pusey's central argument—that the Australian state has lost its 'nation-building' capacities because its senior bureaucrats have lost their moral and political faculties—is a clear example of the attempt to analyse the shortcomings of bureaucratic government in terms of the moral and intellectual shortcomings of bureaucrats. For Pusey the problem—of which 'economic rationalism' is a symptom—is that the 'technocratic' discipline of economics has divorced bureaucrats from the ethical and political principles that should govern their decisions. These principles, which Pusey locates in culture, community and ordinary life, provide the values for which bureaucrats should have (corporate) personal responsibility. The absence of such responsibility has transformed the bureaucracy into a value-free instrument, ideal for dismantling the welfare state and unleashing socially rapacious market forces.

But this alleged failure to embody the collec-
It's not the absence of values which is held to be the problem, but their presence—where they are of the wrong kind.

tive moral personality of the community is not the only way in which the non-democratic character of bureaucracy can be attributed to the moral shortcomings of bureaucrats. Sometimes it's not the absence of values which is held to be the problem, but their presence—where they are of the wrong kind. This is the way Helen McKenna, editor of an important public policy journal, saw the problem in her presentation to a public seminar, held by Queensland's Electoral and Administrative Review Commission (EARC) to develop a code of conduct for public officials.

According to McKenna, the professional ethos of the Australian public service merely expresses the cultural values of white, anglo-saxon, Protestant males and is therefore out of touch with contemporary social and political reality. In a society where women have assumed a more prominent role in the public sphere, where multiculturalism has fragmented communal values, but where the community (apparently) demands that public officials take personal responsibility for their actions, the professional ethic of public servants has become an obstacle to democratic government. If they are to avoid the misguided professionalism of 'Nazi' public servants—in providing technically competent policy advice to the government of the day come what may—Queensland's bureaucrats need a code of conduct that will allow them to bring their personal and political values into play in making ethically difficult decisions.

We will return to EARC's code of conduct for public officials below. For the moment, a particular case may provide us with an initial insight into the limits of these proposals for a more democratic and organic bureaucracy. In August this year The Australian reported on a decision of the Tasmanian Ombudsman, concerning a senior public servant who had refused to implement a policy requiring the installation of condom vending machines at Hobart's Elizabeth College. Commenting that "the purpose of colleges is to educate students, not to stop them getting pregnant," the
public servant argued that he was prevented from adhering to this policy of the government of the day by his religiously-based moral convictions. In ruling that the bureaucrat had acted improperly, the Ombudsman formulated the following general dictum: "A public servant's moral views are not an appropriate basis on which to make an informed administrative decision."

One doesn't have to travel as far as Bosnia to suggest that community values may be less benign than McKenna presumes. Neither need one be a dedicated pessimist to wonder whether history will ever deliver community consensus on divisive moral issues. But these doubts prompted by the Tasmanian case are only pointers to a far more fundamental problem with the Pusey and McKenna diagnoses of bureaucratic ethical malady. In proposing that the non-democratic character of bureaucratic government derives from its failure to express the values of bureaucrats as citizens or community members, these diagnoses make a number of implausible assumptions. In particular, they assume that the ethical domain is unified and that the role of the bureaucracy in a democracy is to function as the instrument of this moral will.

The model for this unified moral domain—which Pusey locates in 'culture' and 'ordinary life'—is the philosophical ideal of the integral moral personality whose actions are determined by fundamental moral principles. What the Tasmanian Ombudsman is objecting to, however, is in fact the failure to distinguish between the different codes required in discrete ethical domains. It is precisely by claiming to act on conscience—that is, as a unified moral personality—that the public servant in question fails to honour the duties invested in him by his office. The moral and intellectual conditions of bureaucratic judgment do not and cannot lie in the moral and institutional ethos of bureaucratic office. While acting in his official capacity the public servant's moral comportment must be governed by the ethos of his office, not by the ethic of his religious beliefs. In making this demand the Ombudsman is insisting on norms of conduct first described in Max Weber's classic theory of bureaucracy.

Weber refused to accept that there was a unified moral personality underpinning and unifying human action, and this refusal is sometimes traced to his Nietzschean leanings. Still, in the case of his account of bureaucracy, this ethical particularism is less philosophically than sociologically and historically based. For Weber, the differentiation of public administration from private conscience is not a moral failure but a historical achievement rooted in the sociological organisation of the bureaucracy itself.

According to Weber, modern bureaucracies, unlike patrimonial officialdoms, are not characterised by the official's personal loyalty to the chief or lord. The actual organisation of the bureaucracy—fixed salaries, tenure, strict jurisdictional demarcation, hierarchical organisation, procedural operations—creates the social circumstances in which the official's first loyalty is to the office itself. Weber also emphasised that in modern bureaucracies access to office is dependent on trained expertise, and that the official's capabilities are the result of 'habitual virtuosity' in specialised office routines—the recording and storing of data on files, procedurally determined analysis and decision-making.

What Weber called the 'ethos of office'—the capacity of public servants to comport themselves according to the routines, norms and objectives of the bureaucracy itself—thus cannot be seen as simply the expression of WASP values. Neither can it be understood as the corporate failure of bureaucrats to act on the principles of a collective moral personality located in culture, community or the 'public sphere'. Weber sees the bureaucratic ethic as a positive and irreducible human comportment arising for the technical-ethical organisation of the bureaucracy itself.

For Weber, bureaucratic 'faculties' of analysis, decision and action do not derive from the conscience and consciousness of individual bureaucrats but from technique-based intellectual practices built into the organisational routines and structures of the bureaucracy itself. This then is the ultimate reason why it makes no sense to assess the non-democratic character of bureaucracy in terms of its failure to represent a more fundamental political will or ethical principle. The conduct of bureaucrats in their official capacities is not the expression of a fundamental moral personality (the community, the people) to which they might be held ethically responsible. Rather, this conduct is part of an ethical and intellectual comportment arising from the bureaucracy as an autonomous 'life-order' and as a set of administrative techniques.

If Weber is right then it's vain and fruitless to attempt to judge and govern the conduct of bureaucrats according to criteria deriving from other departments of ethical life. This is particularly the case where the proposed standards are derived from the overly 'principled' character of these ethics that makes them incapable of comprehending the specific character of the bureaucratic ethos and its radical independence of religious and humanist moral absolutes.

In this regard it needs to be kept in mind that at the time of its historical emergence—in the period of the European religious civil wars, fought in the name of various moral absolutes—it was precisely the bureaucracy's capacity to divorce public administration from private moral passions that made it the privileged instrument of a new and radically pragmatic statecraft. This is not to say that all attempts to found government on
 Neither the reassertion of the merit principle nor the tighter specification of what is to count as corruption would seem to depend particularly on bringing bureaucracy into line with democratic principles. Certainly, the content and social stakes of 'merit' today will be very different in some respects from what it was in the days of the 1850s English civil service reforms. Where, for example, the 1854 Northcote-Trevelyan Report on the British civil service was concerned with it being a dumping ground for 'sickly youths' or the dimwit offspring of the well-heeled, we today are more concerned with promoting access for women and members of ethnic minorities. Thus one section of the recommended code of conduct provides that reasonable account shall be taken of cultural diversity in determining what is to count as appropriate dress. However, whatever McKenna may feel, taking account of Australia's multicultural character or the enhanced status of women does not require overturning the traditional bureaucratic ethos. Reform remains a question of ensuring—as much for the benefit of the organisation and the nation as for the individuals themselves—that careers in expert and hierarchically related positions are 'open to talents'.

Still less do these reforms seem to require bureaucratic decision-making and practice to be opened up to the influence of its officials' fundamental personal (including political) values. To the contrary, it is doubtful whether the Report's concerns about the blurring of the line between political policy and administration—that is, with the proportion of public servants' time and energies currently dedicated to formulating, anticipating, or working to shore up party-political policy—can be addressed by attempting to go beyond the Westminster system in this way.

The ethos of bureaucratic office, with its chief point-of-honour the capacity to set aside one's private political, religious, regional or other commitments, should not therefore be regarded as obsolete. This is not to suggest that bureaucracy can or should be entirely depoliticised. It is to say though that attachment to the ethos of office at least makes officials capable of recognising that their obligations as public administrators may come into conflict with their political allegiances and their moral ideals. There are officials in some areas of government—education administration, for instance—who seem to be all too happy to treat their office as a vehicle for expressing their own preferred radical political agendas (both Left and Right).

Yet it is precisely over this issue of the place of personal values that the Report displays a certain confusion. It is repeatedly asserted that as 'trustees of the public interest' public officials must learn, where necessary, to distinguish their personal ethical standards from those appropriate to the conduct of their office. But it is also insisted that
personal values can and must figure as one ingredient at least in the public servant’s deliberations in respect to ethical problems which arise in the context of their work.

This is perhaps a case in which the Report writers have been poorly served by the language and thought of modern ‘personalist’ moral philosophy. Such philosophy is constitutionally incapable of distinguishing two quite different senses in which values might be ‘personal’. Values may also be personal in the sense of simply providing a focus for individual moral commitment and ethical action. Clearly the two senses are not identical. Individuals can and do find a (personal) focus for moral life in ethoses that derive from impersonal ethical institutions, rather than their own individual moral reflections. It is in this sense that bureaucrats can and should be personally committed to the ethos of their office even though that ethos lies outside their personal moral predilections or principles.

The implication of this is that a single individual may be implicated in multiple ethical ‘personas’. This can lead to confusion, particularly where our habits of ethical reflection assume the existence of a single unified moral personality or conscience. Neither is the confusion helped by the existence of values that overlap different ethical personas or domains; for example, honesty and integrity, which are required in public service and in private friendships. But it is made much worse by the feeling that the ethos of bureaucratic office at bottom amounts to nothing more than a set of formal procedural rules which are devoid of substantive ethical values and hence of anything capable of engaging officials’ personal commitments. Something like this feeling is responsible, at least in part, for the EARC Report’s attempt to pretend that its code of conduct really derives from a higher code of ethics ‘proper’, a set of fundamental principles appropriate to a democratic society.

Certainly, bureaucratic ethics can never be reduced to formally-defined conduct—least of all in the era of new managerialism. There may also be good and practical reasons for attempting to incorporate into the Code more general principles of democratic conduct which are distinct from the traditional bureaucratic ethos. Such principles might for example help to facilitate the procedures of Freedom of Information and Judicial Review, by framing them in terms of the rights of citizens to initiate reviews of bureaucratic decisions. Yet such principles will themselves necessarily be limited by the bureaucratic character of the review procedures. Review requests are indeed passed to the officer responsible for the decision in question. But in reviewing the decision the officer is not required to bring it before the bench of his or her ‘innermost’ conscience, only to decide whether it was taken with due care in accordance with promulgated policy guidelines. Verification is provided by the officer’s supervisor.

The notion that the bureaucracy is a substantive ethical domain in its own right, and the associated idea that individuals are involved in multiple ethical personas and modes of conduct, are no doubt difficult to assimilate, particularly from the perspective of a personalist morality committed to the generalisation of democratic participation. However, the attempt to democratise bureaucracy by grounding it in personal morality may in fact squander an important ethical and political resource: the bureaucracy’s capacity to divorce the administration of public life from moral absolutes with their incentive to social fanaticism.

It is encouraging in this regard that, in some other social and legal domains, commentators have been arguing for an approach similar to the one that we have been advocating. The American philosopher Amelie Rorty, for example, argues that taking a less fundamentalist view of the rights of the person might lower the social temperature of the abortion controversy:

In the case of the abortion issue...apparently conflicting intuitions on the primacy of theological, biological or sociopolitical criteria for personal identity might be reconciled by regionalising their respective dominance. Even if a particular sectarian theology classifies the fetus as a person, nothing follows about the propriety of importing that particular theological conception to legal and political contexts. However detailed and articulated it may be, a theological doctrine does not, by itself, establish the propriety of its dominance in a non-theocratic legal system.

Similarly, in a non-theocratic administrative system, the bureaucracy occupies an autonomous ethical region that should be strenuously defended against both religious and humanist moral fundamentalisms.

To conclude, there may be a compelling case for making certain bureaucracies more accountable and responsive to the publics they serve. It is even possible that some services currently performed by big state bureaucracies might be better run by smaller civic ones. This is a pragmatic question concerning the efficiency and equity of service delivery, rather than an issue of principle. Whatever the case on this issue, it is important not to lose sight of the bureaucracy’s crucial civic and ethical role in separating public administration from moral absolutism. Our concern has been to remove bureaucracy from the ‘amoral’ limbo to which so much contemporary thought on the shape of ‘a democratic society’ consigns it, to restore to it something of its civic autonomy and ethical gravity.

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THE TARIFF TRAUMA

AFTER A DECADE OF CONSENSUS OVER CUTTING THEM, TARIFFS ARE BACK ON THE AGENDA. BUT HOW DOES THE PUBLIC DEBATE OVER TARIFFS SQUARE WITH THE NEED FOR A VERSATILE INDUSTRY POLICY? AND ARE TARIFFS AND INDUSTRY POLICY ULTIMATELY ONE AND THE SAME THING? ALR ASKED FOUR COMMENTATORS FOR THEIR DIVERGENT VIEWS.
Questions concerning the future role for tariffs in the Australian economy must be addressed within the context of overall industry policy strategies. The purpose of industry policy is to achieve long-term changes in the composition and orientation of production in an economy. The major structural problem confronting the Australian economy is the inability of existing production patterns to generate sufficient (net) export earnings to reverse persistent current account deficits.

However, there are fundamental differences over the appropriate industry policy strategy for Australia. On the one hand it is often asserted that reductions in assistance to 'inefficient' sectors open up industries to foreign market 'discipline', with the increased competition being the key to improved economic performance in such sectors. Therefore, microeconomic reform and the removal of all industry assistance represents the desired policy direction. If this strategy is accepted, the eventual elimination of instruments of protection such as tariffs is imperative. On the other hand, those supporting a more interventionist approach to industry policy would argue that there is an important role for government to complement or even replace 'market forces' through specific sectoral planning and assistance packages. In such a setting the role of tariff protection is less clear-cut.

The non-interventionist or 'market forces' approach to industry policy is one of the jewels in the crown of the 'economic rationalist' approach to policy making. Particular economic structures or directions for change, it is argued, are predominantly determined by the natural endowments of the country concerned rather than strategic choice. Competition enables trade flows to be directed by the market according to a nation's comparative advantage determined largely by its natural or pre-existing endowments of resources. Economic theories are tailored as testimony to the losses in a country's overall welfare inevitably arising from market distortions created by measures such as tariffs.

However, the real world does not conform to the relationships portrayed in these economic models. Markets are, instead, characterised by imperfect competition and subject to numerous, complex and effectual market interventions by governments of all political persuasions. In such a setting international trade flows fail to bear witness to natural endowments or the doctrine of 'comparative advantage'. Instead, as strategic trade theorists argue, trade flows increasingly reflect the arbitrary or temporary advantages to one country or another chiefly resulting from economies of scale or shifting leads in technological races. Intra-industry trade, rather than the exchange of commodities of one industry for another, now dominates trade between industrialised countries.

It follows therefore that theories based on the notion of competitive markets such as those regularly expounded by the Industry Commission, need to be supplanted with policy recommendations derived from the premise that strategic decision making by firms is made in a context of imperfectly competitive market structures characterised by increasing returns and barriers to market entry. Competitive advantage is not something which is simply inherited, but is created. The central point is that governments can alter the strategic game played between domestic and foreign producers by using measures which are, by their nature, unavailable to individual firms. Once this point is understood, the imperative for an interventionist approach to industry and trade policy becomes apparent.

It is generally agreed by advocates of the interventionist approach that a solution to Australia's current account difficulties requires a reduction in Australia's dependence on commodity exports, which are subject to a declining terms of trade and a falling share of trade. The major challenge therefore is to increase the export income generated from Australia's production of manufactures. To achieve this requires export-oriented assistance measures targeted at manufacturing activities. As the Pappas-Carter Report commissioned by the AMC highlighted, it is activities which integrate Australian manufacturing selectively into global scale industries which would most usefully attract government assistance. Also of particular importance are 'value-adding' activities associated with the processing of Australia's natural resources. Useful assistance measures could include export subsidies, perhaps in the form of selective and conditional depreciation allowance, particularly for large capital intensive downstream processing projects. A system of condition grants or concessional interest loans with the specific aim of accelerating the application of advanced manufacturing technology would also play an important role. Risk-
sharing assistance to established firms investing in targeted export developments—a technique used in Sweden, France, Japan and the US—also seems a productive approach. Governments need to actively seek bilateral and multilateral trading agreements and assist in the international marketing of Australian produced manufactures.

It needs to be emphasised that support for this type of industry policy strategy does not necessarily imply opposition to a programmed reduction in tariff protection, or to microeconomic reform in areas such as transport and communications. However, reduction in existing forms of protection such as tariffs should be taken as being contingent on the introduction of positive industry assistance packages. What is required is a fundamental renovation of the structure of industry assistance, not its demolition.

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WOLF IN SHEEP’S CLOTHING

In recent years there has developed within the labour movement a greater appreciation of the role of the market in shaping economic development. In line with this greater understanding, it is now broadly accepted that tariff protection has not helped the development of world class industries. The most internationally uncompetitive sectors of the Australian economy are, in most cases, also the sectors which have been most heavily protected.

The connection between tariff protection—a specific form of protection—and internationally poor performance has been grudgingly accepted by some sections of the labour movement. In general, the damaging consequences of protection on economic performance have not been fully appreciated—hence the current search for a new form of protection to replace the final removal of tariffs at the end of this decade.

The search for a new protectionist framework, has been dressed up as a search for industry policy. What precisely is meant by industry policy is not very clear, but it seems to have something to do with positive industry assistance initiatives and structural adjustment assistance. Presumably it is the government that is to provide these assistance measures.

Since these measures will incur costs on the community purse, the government will either have to increase taxation or draw resources from other areas of need to pay for them. Irrespective of how these measures are funded, it is clear that government provision of assistance to one group must be at the expense of another group or activity. The cost may well be borne by the more needy in the community, who have traditionally been provided for by government, and who are unable to afford to fund glossy reports and lobbyists to convince government of the importance of their special interest. Given the competing claims on government, the key issue is how to choose which claims to meet. It is in this area that the latter day protectionists have failed to make a convincing case. The advocates of industry policy have advanced two major arguments in favour of it. These stress:

• the need to export more high value-added products such as elaborately transformed manufactures (ETMs). These high value-added industries are desirable because of their growing importance in world trade and because they provide the platform for high value-added input services.

• the need to create and develop industries which have a strong ‘linkage relationship’ with other industries (such as the car industry). These linkage relationships generate positive effects across a range of activities, including high value-added services.

The first argument, that ETMs should be encouraged by active industry policy, is not convincing because it fails to establish the market failure the policy is supposed to correct. Agreement that ETMs are desirable is not an argument for active industry policy. If these high value-added industries are generating returns above those to be achieved in sectors that are low value-added, one could expect, all things being equal, that capital and other resources would flow into these sectors.

The fact that Australia runs a trade deficit in ETMs is not a sign of market failure. It is a sign that some other country is a more efficient producer of these items than we are. The desire on the part of some special interest groups to encourage the government to increase support for these industries is understandable but it should, nevertheless, be rejected on economic grounds.

The second argument put forward by advocates
On the one hand, protection has served Australia badly. On the other, its removal leaves us decidedly vulnerable. The dilemma leaves Sue McCreadie feeling uneasy.

The recent backlash against 'economic rationalism' has challenged our over-reliance on market forces to accomplish restructuring and the subordination of social goals to economic ones. In the commonsense of many on the left, tariff reductions belong in the litany of 'economic rationalist' sins allegedly committed by the Labor government over the 80s, alongside financial deregulation, the erosion of universal welfare provision, corporatisation, privatisation and, more recently, the shift away from centralised wage fixing.

But while the debate about tariffs is part of a wider debate about the power of the market to allocate resources effectively, not all those on the side of interventionism are in favour of protectionism. The recent debate over Australian industry policy was inaugurated by the Australian Manufacturing Council's (AMC) report Global Challenge and the Garnaut Report in 1990. In that debate, those who argued for government assistance to industry on the grounds of market failure and the unlevel character of the international playing field also generally insisted that protectionism was not the best way to assist industry and that highly protected industries

The dilemma leaves Sue McCreadie feeling uneasy.
were not the best foundation for the future. Rather, they argued, Australia should find a niche in the international division of labour which is based on high value added traded goods and services.

While many critics of 'economic rationalism' warn that attempting to compete with lower wage/low tax countries in the region without protection will inevitably force down our own living standards, those advocating a strategic industry policy respond that we shouldn't even be trying to compete with low wage countries. But is this debate a helpful and realistic one? Perhaps it would be more helpful to couch the debate in terms of possible futures rather than inevitable outcomes and to concede that while protectionism in the past has had some negative outcomes, there are still good reasons for being sceptical about the intrinsic benefits of removing it.

There was little doubt that protection historically allowed an inward-looking culture to flourish behind high tariff walls and stifled innovation. It is undeniable too that protection has raised the costs of inputs to exporters and imposed costs on the consumer and hence the economy as a whole. However, prices are known to be downwardly 'sticky', not the least because of the oligopolistic power of retailers and importers who may be tempted to boost their own margins rather than reduce prices to their customers.

And in a situation of less than full employment of resources it is clear that moving labour and capital out of protected industries does not in itself lead to greater allocative efficiency while, at the same time, it clearly leads to losses of output, jobs and income, all of which has a multiplier effect at regional and national level. This being the case, it is more than possible that the negative income effects—direct and indirect losses of jobs and output—will outweigh any positive price effects.

The AMC's Global Challenge report, among others, argued that simply reducing protection will lead not to a level playing field, but an empty one, and that reductions must be coupled with microeconomic reform and positive assistance measures. Union support for reduced protection has been further contingent on adequate labour adjustment and regional adjustment policies. And while economic liberals believe that Australia will benefit from dropping out of trade barriers, irrespective of what happens elsewhere, unions have also noted the need for reciprocity of our trading partners and the observance of minimum labour standards in countries exporting to us.

The current economic dilemma is whether or not it is possible to find a niche in the new international division of labour which doesn't entail dismantling our arbitration system, undermining our welfare state and our living standards, and worsening social inequity.

There is no doubt that, since tariff reductions began, manufacturing exports have grown and a cultural shift has overtaken many firms who are now enthusiastically embracing 'international best practice'. However, many among the more recalcitrant have instead responded by moving into sub-contracting and outwork, and attempting to undermine award conditions. Again, the lure of export processing zones with tax holidays and weak unions has proved too strong for others who have simply packed up and gone offshore.

Our great dilemma is that neither governments nor unions have any significant control over corporate strategies. Of course, the role of industry policy is to nudge firms into making desirable restructuring decisions, and a range of positive assistance programs now offer export and investment incentives, advice on strategic planning and marketing, grants to encourage international best practice, and so on.

However, leaving aside the adequacy or otherwise of the industry assistance budget, there is nothing magical about the capacity of positive assistance—sometimes it has the desired effects, sometimes it doesn't. And while it is true that we relied too heavily on trade barriers in the past, it does not follow that there can be no role for this instrument in the future. A sensitive and sophisticated industry policy needs to include a mix of positive assistance measures as well as selective use of trade barriers. By 'trade barriers' I mean not just tariffs, but also various non-tariff barriers, including environmental and health standards and voluntary export restraints.

Commentators are now warning darkly that in the event of the Uruguay Round of GATT talks failing, the hand of protectionism could be strengthened. It is fashionable to talk of 'vested interests' and to hint at privilege, as if there were no vested interests on the side of liberalisation. It's worth noting that the latter side has been bolstered by the conversion to zero tariffs of at least one Australian 'multi-domestic'—Pacific Dunlop—which has staked a significant part of its future on offshore sourcing rather than local production.

Among those bearing the brunt of industrial restructuring at present are many of the least privileged members of the workforce, including many migrant women, older women, and those with little formal education. It is not adequate simply to dismiss this as an unfortunate side effect. Of course, the social inequities of tariff reductions could be lessened if we had much more generous income support arrangements for people who were displaced. The regional burden could be lessened if we had a coherent framework for regional economic development, rather than an expectation that displaced workers should pack up their belongings and move.

Although the direction of change in tariff policy may be right, the size of the March 1991 tariff reductions in particular went further than expected and the timing was socially irresponsible. In the current recession, there are strong grounds for slowing the pace of tariff reductions—whether through a straightforward pause through linking reductions to a reduction in the unemployment rate.
There is a strong case also for linking trade liberalisation to the development of trade union rights in countries exporting to us. While not without problems this approach is also not without precedent. The US has operated a social clause in its trading arrangements with the Caribbean. The EC Social Charter is a variation on this theme. During the Uruguay Round the EC and the US have strongly supported the establishment of a GATT Working Party to examine the social clause formula which would link market access to observation of minimum labour standards.

The government is fond of invoking our moral obligations to developing countries as part of its argument for trade liberalisation, but it seems remarkably disinterested in the fate of those workers who are drawn into the sweatshops of the Export Processing Zones. But does Australian industry and the Australian consumer have an inalienable right to cheaper products if this is a result of exploitation of labour or ruination of other countries' environments? A code of conduct for Australian companies investing and sourcing from abroad could be the foundation for a socially responsible policy on trade liberalisation.

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Evan Jones argues that a more creative business culture is emerging regardless of the outcome of the tariff debate.

Industry policy is the workhorse of industrial dynamism. This axiom underpins the relationship between the market and the state in the life of national capitalist economies. The nature of an economist's training in the English-speaking world obliterates the comprehension of this simple truth, self-evident to anyone residing in Europe or Asia.

Behind the noisy debate on tariffs, a quiet revolution is occurring. Pockets of business practice in Australia are gradually being transformed. The change is embodied in the intangible aspects of business culture, of business strategy, of workplace organisation within firms and of relationships between firms. Some examples of these developments follow.

1. In 1984 the Victorian government set up an Industrial Supplies Office (ISO) under the auspices of the Employment Ministry. Despite major bureaucratic antagonism and corporate indifference the institution flourished. NSW copied the concept in 1985 and it has since spread to the other states (except WA, where it met with antagonism from the major resource companies). The ISOs provide to companies needing equipment information on the availability of supplies produced within Australia. The ISOs enhance the operation of the market because of massive information disjunctures, and because management and purchasing officers in many companies operate with conventional prejudices that imported equipment is either of superior quality to that produced locally, or is not available locally. It is estimated that the ISOs have been responsible for import replacement to the tune of $790m.

2. In 1985 the Victorian Department of Industry developed a scheme to assist heavy engineering firms in that state. It was pursued at state level partly because of fears that a plan mooted for the national level would never be approved by bureaucrats in Canberra. The Companies Development Scheme was an early pioneer in the development of bureaucratic support schemes to reconstruct business culture. Department personnel consulted in depth with management, arrived at mutual agreement on needs, and tailored a package to meet those needs. The scheme aimed (successfully) to entrench strategic planning in the target firms. It introduced a 'key persons' approach to try to redress the manifest deficiency in broad management skills; this subsidised the cost of recruiting and employing for one year a specialist in a particular field. The scheme cost a mere $5m, and dispensed about $30-50,000 to about 90 companies. While the Victoria Economic Development Corporation (VEDC) was dispensing considerable sums to companies without safeguards, this unheralded scheme was enhancing cheaply the integrity and dynamism of the heavy engineering industry.

3. More generally, business practices are being assisted by the National Industries Extension Service (NIES). NIES field officers are contract staff, all with technical and/or financial experience in industry. Considerable effort is expended in selecting and training field officers and in the accreditation proc-
ess for consultants. A recent evaluation concluded that companies which had used a 'package' of NIES programs (for strategic planning, product quality, export enhancement and so on) had experienced a qualitative transformation of organisational culture. NIES is costing the federal government less than $17m in 1992-93, $11m of which goes to the states (where it is matched) for program delivery. On a median grant of about $6-8,000, about 6,000 firms have been assisted since the service's inception in 1986.

4. Assisting in reconstruction of business culture at the 'top end' is the Australian Manufacturing Council. The AMC was created in 1985, reconstituted from a moribund coalition body. The meetings of the AMC and (until 1990) its Industry Councils have been a crucial vehicle for the building of consensual workplace politics between the representatives of labour and capital. What went before certainly reflected predictable class antagonisms, but its defensive character was neither conducive to socialist consciousness nor to healthy capitalist workplaces. Despite the buzzword of 'tripartism', it is clear that it has not been organically cemented in Australian industrial politics. It has taken patient and repeated meetings of the captains of industry and labour to effect that change.

Since publishing its report Global Challenge in 1990, the AMC has moved to implement its recommendations regarding workplace culture (among other things). It is undertaking a comprehensive survey on recent successful exporters and the lessons to be learnt from those successes. It is co-ordinating a Best Practice program using international benchmarks, in conjunction with the federal Department of Industrial Relations and with NIES. (The 40 recipients to date are committed to publicising its implementation and its results in their plants.) It is co-ordinating tangible programs for the development of inter-firm linkages through networking. The AMC exists on a $2m annual budget and draws on invaluable voluntary labour from key decision-makers in industry. The AMC has no more love for car tariffs than do free-marketeers, but it is painstakingly trying to effect a productive integration of the local car industry into global structures rather than through the purist zero tariff option of blasting it off the map.

5. The lack of discretion on the part of the management of the subsidiaries of multinational companies has been a major impediment to a more dynamic national economy. The new era is represented by Glaxo Australia. In the space of five years it has achieved autonomy from its British parent and has rapidly expanded research and development expenditure, exports and employment. It has recently formed a joint venture with Faulding & Co for collaboration on new product development. This change is the product not only of assertive local management; it is underpinned by the federal government's 'Factor f' pharmaceutical industry development program, based on the leverage the government possesses as a major purchaser of pharmaceutical products.

6. The Australian economy is damned with massive import bills for elaborately transformed manufactures and capital equipment. Most attempts to drag suppliers of big-ticket items (aircraft) into local sourcing through civil 'offsets' programs have failed. However, after some ministerial pressure some local companies (ASTA, Hawker) are now benefiting from long-term 'strategic agreements' providing components for the global aerospace industry. And after a slow start a complementary program in the information technology sector, Partnerships for Development, is poised to succeed by using a shrewder combination of procurement leverage, stronger threats for non-compliance and flexible firm-specific packages. Oriented in the first instance around information technology companies, the program has gradually achieved more 'mandates' from overseas corporate head offices for locally-based research and development and for exports.

These programs and institutions are directing the reconstruction of business culture in Australia. Their tangible contribution highlights that real-world markets are fragile constructs, and need substantial infrastructural support for their viability. Government 'intervention' rather than its absence, is vital to renewed adequate living standards.

All the programs are relatively cost-effective. All their subsidies are closely targeted, time-specific, and their receipt is subject to considerable hurdle-jumping on the part of the recipients. They could probably all be funded in their entirety by the privatisation of the Industry Commission, whose removal from the public purse would constitute an enormous leap in the intellectual clarity required for coherent industry policy-making. Indeed, the expectation is that such programs will become more cost-effective. A more strategically-oriented business culture and more coherent industrial networks ought to survive on their own profit-driven momentum. Limited industry policy funds would then be free to be applied to 'downstream' applications using lessons learnt from the existing programs.

Finally, these programs have been produced and are administered by branches whose status is low in the bureaucratic hierarchy. They function despite an antagonistic general policy environment. They function despite persistent institutional fragmentation such as continuing deficiencies in capital markets which a predominantly free-market culture promotes.

The industry policy debate in Australia needs to get smart. The sooner it moves from Rattigan-type zealots and their mythical protectionist enemies the better.

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BUFFY POWER

The Last Days of Chez Nous (directed by Gillian Armstrong, written by Helen Garner); Buffy the Vampire Slayer (directed by Joss Whedon). Reviewed by Jenni Millbank.

It’s hard to imagine two films more different in style, theme and genre than The Last Days of Chez Nous and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Chez Nous is a deliberately small-scale personal drama set in inner-city Sydney, based around the relationship between two sisters, Beth (Lisa Harrow) and Vicki (Kerry Fox). It is filled with familiar images, from the loving shots of Glebe to the scenes where Beth (having just had a tantrum) is down on her hands and knees sweeping up plates she’s broken, because no-one else is going to. In contrast Buffy (Kristy Swanson) is, as the title suggests, a cheerleading LA rich girl whose unexpected mission in life is to save her home town from vampires. The whole production is a sly parody of American teen-horror flicks, full of lots of nicely choreographed action, plenty of great one-liners and probably not one jot of reality. The most bizarre conclusion from comparing these two films (I saw them within two days of each other) is the feeling that it is the lightweight Buffy, not the complex ‘women’s relationships’ Chez Nous, which provides the more positive portrayal of women, and the more feminist underlying message.

To all appearances Chez Nous is a ‘women’s film’. Helen Garner (Monkey Grip) wrote the script; Jan Chapman (who worked with Garner on the ABC telemovie Two Friends, about teenage girls’ friendship) produced it; and Gillian Armstrong (My Brilliant Career, High Tide and Mrs Soffell) returned to Australia from the US to direct it. It’s about how a household (composed of fortyish feminist, Beth, Beth’s husband JP and Beth’s teenage daughter Annie) is disrupted when the precocious younger sister Vicky from a disastrous trip overseas. It is filled with the detail of women’s everyday lives, and complex, interesting characterisations. The warning bells sounded for me when, on the eve of the screening, Helen Garner described it as a ‘post-feminist’ film—a statement which immediately brought to mind a postcard on display in a Sydney bookshop which responded: “I’ll be post-feminist in post-patriarchy”.

The story sets up Beth as a long-time feminist who is strong, independent and a successful writer. It then proceeds to demolish her life in a quietly understated way, with little sympathy for her niggling suggestion that it’s all her fault because she’s too tough to be truly lovable. Her independence is a brittle facade, she’s too controlling, she’s never really been happy—it’s kind of a subtle, tertiary-educated equivalent to Fatal Attraction. When she cries no-one really cares, when she smashes things no-one moves, when her lover leaves her it’s because she was ‘too proud’ for him to ever to get close.

Na na na, Beth, you’ll have to face your midlife crisis on your own.

It could be argued that this is simply a fair portrayal of the kind of nasty behaviour middle aged straight feminists have to deal with in their relationships with ‘new’ men. The film, however, veers towards the implicit view that it is all really Beth’s fault, and that feminism has ruined women’s lives. A striking example of this is the contrast between Beth and JP’s relationship and that of another couple who have a baby in the course of the story. The couple appear for only a few brief scenes. In the first, the woman tells Beth that she’s having a boy and Beth blithely responds, “oh well, better luck next time”. In the next, JP is crooning over the baby in the distance while Beth dismisses the importance of marriage. The couple sternly tell her that it “doesn’t look good” to say this, and when Beth argues the man responds, “what have you women done to yourselves? You’re husks”. Distracted look on Beth’s face; silence: cut to next scene. The couple appear again towards the very end of the film for dinner, watch JP yelling at Beth, shake their happy heads sagely, and then over a tense dinner hear Beth’s declaration that Cheryl (a family joke character; a rough working class ‘moll’) is a better woman than she is —because Cheryl at least has heart and soul.

Or take young Vicki. She’s weak, manipulative, not ambitious and not a feminist; she regrets her abortion, thinks men should protect women; and she scores the all time prize of JP’s amorous attention. And of course it is she, not JP, that Beth hates for it. JP in ‘C’est la vie’ as his parting line.

Now I wouldn’t go so far as to argue that Buffy provides a complex or thoughtful treatise on the situation of
women in post-industrial society, but I do feel it offers a more positive portrayal of women's strength than Chez Nous. Like the earlier, and somewhat blacker, Heathers, it is part of a new genre of mocking hyper-American films, which sometimes feature smart-mouthed girls as unwitting heroes. Buffy, the central character, begins as an archetypal 'airhead' who is unbelievably rich, has unbelievably rich friends and handsome boyfriend. Ambitions? To marry Christian Slater and perhaps, if a career is unavoidable, to be a buyer—although of what she is not sure; she just liked the sound of it. Her parody of femininity is too complete to be truly offensive. She's a cheerleader, she sneers at non-WASP boys, she has vast quantities of blonde hair, will almost certainly be the prom queen, and won't buy a jacket because a friend scoffs that it is "so five minutes ago". Her name is Buffy for God's sake.

What is fascinating to watch is the transformation as she is told by Merrick (Donald Sutherland) that she is the "chosen one" who must single-handedly fight the vampire nation. At first she is contemptuous and disbelieving ("Get out of my facial"). Then she is pleased to discover that someone understands her dreams—dreams she has always kept secret. She's not so dumb after all. When Merrick tricks Buffy and betrays her trust she responds by punching him so fiercely that she knocks him over—and then remarks she hadn't known she was so strong, because she'd never hit anyone before. (A nice parable of female empowerment if ever I saw one.) Now that she does know her own strength, Buffy takes rather a liking to it. She works out, she jumps and kicks, she slays a few vampires—she's got a knack for this, and the camera emphasises the power of her physical work in the (plentiful) action scenes.

It becomes clear that Buffy doesn't fit in any more, and she's no longer happy with her old life. When her boyfriend's sleazy friend grabs her arse, as he has done on previous occasions, she responds by hurling him to the floor. We start to see her in flannelette shirts and cutoff denim shorts. At one stage a biker's offer of "something hot and powerful between your legs" is taken up; his face hits the tarmac and she roars off on his motorbike to cries of "Dyke!" from his mates. "Yo tough Buffy!" cried someone in the audience.

There are a lot of nice messages about this transformation. When Merrick complains that Buffy is the most difficult girl he has ever trained and that she "does everything wrong", he adds that it's just fine that she does it all her way. Merrick knows, and we know, that she's going to win because she's stubborn and strong. Buffy's obligatory love interest is a daggy boy, Pike (Luke Perry) who, although he tries to be of assistance, is mostly just overpowered and faint. She won't do what he tells her to do, either, so he ends up accepting his limitations and sharpens wooden stakes for her. A nice finishing touch comes when Buffy and Pike (Those names! A match made in heaven, really) go to a dance together. Pike asks defensively "I suppose you want to lead?" "No" says Buffy, "Do you?" He shakes his head, and they try to work a way around it. Cutesy perhaps, but also a striking contrast to the she's-tough-but-bows-down-to-the-man-she-loves theme of film orthodoxy.

Of course there is a gulf between the films' approaches; after all, Buffy is a fantasy while Chez Nous is making a stab at social realism. And it's always a lot easier for women to be naughty and get away with it when no-one's going to take it seriously. Still, when it comes to having a fun night out and getting an 'it's really good being a girl' feeling at the end, my vote is: go with Buffy and leave the post-feminists to sit at home with their insight and their AFI awards.

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fess he had not warned the family they might not enjoy the show. It would be nice if everyone involved with a film or TV production—right down to the audience, if possible—could receive such a warning.

The true postscript, however, to Sylvania Waters was the Hard Copy screening of Noelene and Laurie watching the final episode of the show at home. From pervering on ourselves on telly we've made a quick leap to pervering on ourselves watching telly on telly! And the worst thing was that we don't have the slightest guilty feeling—it's too fascinating.

Meanwhile, the Australian family unit has come under attack in other quarters in Barry Humphries' More Please, an exceptionally readable and personal autobiography by a man who has probably done more than anyone else to change the way Australians think about themselves.

Humphries' work is not always good, and he is the first to admit it. On the other hand, when he's spot on, he's so spot on that some of his sketches—early suburban Edna and Sandy Stone—now read almost as social realism. Australians (over 25, at least) know all too well the feelings Humphries experienced in the mid-60s as he leafed through the pages of Australian Women's Weekly in a Cornish farm cottage. "I felt instantly transported back home to a world of cosy certainties," he writes, "a land of sponge cakes and pavlovas and curried Hawaiian spag hoops." Perhaps Sylvania Waters is more upmarket, less cosy—but when it comes down to basics, it's really just some exotic dip with only nominal resemblance to its European ancestor (or a new way of cooking chicken so the fat falls off) which has taken the place of the curried Hawaiian spag hoop.

Humphries, constantly attacking Australians, is under constant attack himself. He writes of being confronted over his 'Neil Singleton' character by a journalist who appeared to be a living, breathing version of Neil. "There's a cultural renaissance going on here, y'know... You're living in the past, mate, and so are your characters." Oddly enough (and Humphries is happy to admit it when not defending himself from Singleton critics) it's quite true; he does live in the past, in a sentimental version of old Australia.

Opportive yet innocent, blindly prejudiced yet refreshingly naive; it's a vision which had already begun to fade by the time Barry was born. On the other hand, he can capture the essence of modern Australia in a vulgar aphorism, neatly wrapped like Bex powders, Barry McKenzie, Edna, Sandy, Sir Les: they're all bloody Australians, crystallised.

Barry Humphries appeared on Ray at Midday to publicise his book to Ray's audience—most of them, like Humphries himself—probably nudging 60—the day before Sylvania Waters' Paul and Dione appeared on JJJ to farewell the Australian public. Both are selling us back to ourselves in one way or another; both find us incredibly eager to know what we're like.

There can't be too many countries like Australia, self-conscious to the point of watching TV programs with the hope of putting ourselves in the place of the overseas country at which they are really directed. Travelogues by local celebrities made good are lapped up here; we may never go to see Uluru ourselves but we would really like to see how Olivia Newton-John presents it to the Americans, thanks.

The dual attack of Humphries/Sylvania Waters on the Australian family might not have had quite the sensational impact of the Murphy Brown vs. Dan Quayle phenomenon in the US—another 'family portrayal' issue. But in its own subtle way it made us take a look at ourselves, if only to say, "Christ, we're not really like that..."

"Or are we?"

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THE VERNACULAR REPUBLIC

Meaghan Morris' work skates between the popular and the academic, between the metropolis and the antipodes. Ken Wark explains.

Meaghan Morris writes essays that are at once international and uniquely Australian. Most high theory written 'from the antipodes' ends up being a provincial imitation of what is going on elsewhere. Morris has found a way to be local without being provincial.

Over the last 20 years academia has 'imported' a staggering amount of foreign theory. In the 70s it was mostly continental marxism; in the 80s, French 'poststructuralism'; now in the 90s, British cultural studies. This internationalism in the flows of academic work is part of a wider trend. All types of cultural product are now increasingly being drawn into global marketing strategies, from world music to TV coproductions. This phenomenal increase in the volume and velocity of transborder cultural flows is making all of us into "cruising grammarians" (to borrow a phrase from Morris).

Unlike a lot of now rather academic poststructuralist writing in Australia, however, Morris stays true to the problem of reinventing a form of writing suitable to the political, economic and cultural situation. In particular, her work is a process of creating spaces in which feminist voices can be heard (and can listen), somewhere between the popular and the academic. This is no simple task. Academia is all too often a place where specialists speak about the 'masses', everyday life, popular culture and so on as if they were in some way removed from it. On the other hand, one cannot just insert the speech of the oppressed or the marginalised or the trivialised into academic discourse. This either ends up being dismissed by academia as 'not serious', or is so utterly transformed in the process of being made the subject of 'serious' discourse that it no longer has anything to do with its origins.

Morris writes with an acute awareness of these problems of the 'place' from which one speaks. Without claiming to solve in writing what are really questions of institutional power, she does have a tactics and a style for negotiating a way through them.

Take, for example, a passage from a classic Morris essay, 'Panorama' in the book Islands in the Stream (Pluto Press). The subject is quintessentially 'popular cultural text', Australia Live, the 4-hour transcontinental 'celebration' which appeared as television's contribution to the Australian bicentenary. Morris' first move is to place Australia Live in the genre of 'panorama'. She then distinguishes two variants of the panorama, the imperial and the touristic. These two sub-genres of the panorama have a particular resonance in the Australian context, as both have been popular ways of recording the antipodean experience of landscape.

Many criticisms of Australia Live drew attention to its lack of historical depth and blamed this on television when, as Morris explains, in fact this was simply a feature of the panorama as a genre. Panorama always sacrifices historical continuity in favour of spatial grasp. Morris thus sidesteps conventional rhetoric by defining the object differently: the 'Australia Live effect' is not an effect of television, but of panorama—a genre which has both a current televisial form but also prior ones to which it can be compared.

Panorama is a genre through which Morris makes us see changing forms of power. If the imperial panorama presented the image of the dominions as a possession to its imperial administrators, the tourist panorama shows off the acreage to potential real estate developers. This relation to the land is fundamental, for it is at the centre of both the fragility of antipodean political-economic power and the culture of the antipodes as a lived relation to that power.

Lest this seem overdrawn, compare Morris' attitude with this straight-faced remark from The Financial Review: "It all sounds a trifle cold and calculating but facts are facts: one Japanese tourist is equal to 10 tonnes of wheat or 15 tonnes of coal, 5 tonnes of sugar, 7 tonnes of alumina or 60 tonnes of iron ore in real dollar terms." In other words, Australia is a site for the most primary and most tertiary of industries, for the extraction of raw rock and the manipulation of pure allure. Imports—and practically everything in this country is imported, from cars to cultural theories—have to be financed on the back of these precarious activities.

While in London or Paris or New York one can treat culture as separate from economic issues, Morris is keenly aware of how intertwined they appear when viewed from Sydney, Australia. The antipodean relation is one where no such separation is possible. As is evident in her recent book Ecstasy and Economics (EmPress), for Morris the national always hinges on a problematic relation to the international, and the cultural to a crisis-prone antipathy to the economic. Morris finds a solution to this tight coupling in the antipodes of what the metropolitan discourses keep distinct by making a vir-

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tue of necessity. Having established the local event as the minor, antipodean pole in relation to the theory, Morris has nevertheless established a relation, and can write along a line which might work back in another direction, from the antipode back again.

Morris says of *Australia Live* that it enacts a certain critical dilemma which is not at all unique to high theory: "There is no single 'source' making sense of the world in communication with a captive audience. Complaints about collapsing standards (in aesthetic quality, in reality values, or in degrees of critical distance) are side effects of this process. It is not that aesthetic standards cannot be stated, historical reality asserted, or distance maintained (critics do these things all the time)—but that there is no guarantee of 'a' public who will care to validate the outcome, or be 'mobilised' by the result. This experience of a lack of common narrative, central authority, unity of place and time is an antipodean experience as much as it is a postmodern one.

'Postmodern' critical theories always problematise the relationship people have to their culture. Morris finds something uncannily similar in Australian experience: "If it is now conventional for feminist essays to begin by questioning the place from which one speaks; it has also long been customary for Australian essays to pose the question of speaking of place." By discovering in Australian experience something which prefigures a more general experience of postmodernity, Morris produces a unique take on it.

In antipodean experience, all authority is either too close and too shallow or too distant and too obscure to have any real effects. One either worships imperial power or resents it—both relations at a distance. In Morris' essays there is an ironic version of the whole antipodean neurosis about identity. Morris writes in a manner which is self-consciously antipodean but which does not necessarily have anything to do with being an Australian. It is antipodean in the sense that Morris writes from the perspective of the minor term in any relation.

What she does not do is position herself as the great other, the great excluded, oppressed, unloved, un-washed, or any other term which resents and berates the master discourse. Her essays are premised on the assumption that there are always a great number of possible trajectories. Not all of these positions are equally possible or equally effective. This is no vague call to pluralism. It is a will to use whatever resources are to hand to outwit the lazy ways of authoritative discourse.

For instance, in "Politics Now"—a paper originally given at a conference with a decidedly 'political' flavour—Morris positions herself as a petit bourgeois intellectual, pitting her faint hearted persona against the militants who would speak the part of the working class. She speaks as the antipodes' antipode.

The petit bourgeois figure is a refreshingly candid one. Neither too 'privileged' nor too 'popular', and certainly not so powerful as to be capable of strategic control over the space of culture and its technologies, the petit bourgeois "makes the best of things", and as Michel de Certeau points out, is capable of "heroism in small affairs". As Paul Virilio asks, "when we can go to the antipodes and back in an instant, what will become of us?" As the media vector which brought us *Australia Live*, the Gulf War, the Tiananmen Square massacre demonstrates, the age of the instant connection between the antipode and its other has already arrived. The instability between these poles oscillates nightly on TV. What becomes of cultural identity when the breathing spaces which regulate the paranoid reaction of cultural identity to its external bearings collapses into the time of the televisual edit? What becomes of meaning when there are no shared codes and conventions? The answers, I think, ought to come from the antipodes. From the antipodean point of view, Morris gives us a way with the other's grammar in which to phrase a response other than silence, resentment, paranoia—the dominant styles of what remains of the old new Left. Our condition predicates a new mode of inquiry. It requires that we write differently.

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It's nice to be flavour of the year—and Spain and Spaniards are certainly that in 1992. What with the Barcelona Olympics, Seville's Expo, Madrid's status as the cultural capital of Europe, and the stomp-on part that the Spanish-Australian family get as the featured ethnics in Strictly Ballroom, it's enough to turn a muchacho's head. Add to this the attention that Latin America is receiving in the media at the moment as a result of Columbus Week—even on the flickering screen, where none other than Gerry Depardieu is strutting his stuff (and his nose) as Cristóbal Colón—and there's a real argument for 1992 being named the year of HO (Hispanic Overdose).

On the publishing front, there has been a plethora of books on Barcelona already this year (the best one being the magisterial survey of that city's history and art by Robert Hughes); a number of biographies of Columbus have appeared (Felipe Fernández-Armesto, who sounds disarmingly like Peter Sellers doing Prince Charles doing Gryphythe Thynne, was interviewed about his Columbus book recently by Jill Kitson on ABC radio's The Book Report); and there's Inga Clendinnen's brilliant book on the Aztecs.

This frenzy of cultural hyping has been patchy in quality. Television in particular has a tendency to flatten the contradictions and complexities of cultural history into a parade of seamless clichés and visual stereotypes.

The Buried Mirror by the Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes embodies much of what is both good and bad in this slick commodification of culture and history. It is the book of the five-part television series of the same name which was recently run on ABC-TV and its sumptuous design, glossy paper, wide margins and 160 illustrations (many in full colour) are a testament to the high production values of the publisher. The text itself is also quite laudable in its accessibility and flow.

I thought Hughes had taken on a Herculean challenge and was sometimes over-ambitious with his 2000 year history of Barcelona, but Fuentes outdoes him in terms of sheer scope. Fuentes' book actually begins with the Paleolithic cave paintings of Altamira in Spain, and with the crossing of the Bering Strait into America by Asian mammoth hunters 48,000 years ago. He doesn't dwell too long on these Ice Age wastes, but he does take us right through to post-Franco Spain and to the graffiti-painted tenement wastes of contemporary East Los Angeles and the looming reality of 'Hispanic USA'. (It is estimated that, by the middle of the next century, half of the population of the USA will be Spanish speakers.)

The quincentenary of the encounter between Columbus and the New World is obviously a political minefield. I expected Fuentes to be much more corrosive about the Spanish invasion of America and the subsequent obliteration of many of its native cultures. But, without ever being an apologist for genocide or ethnocide, Fuentes is surprisingly celebratory about the coming of the Spaniards. As against the usual stereotype of the Spanish as genetically predisposed to siestas, corruption and military dictatorships, Fuentes chooses to emphasise the little-mentioned democratic tradition in Spain:

In fact, the first European parliaments that took hold and incorporated the third estate, the commons, all appeared in Spain...In 1188, the first Spanish parliament was convoked by King Alfonso IX of León, preceding all other European parliaments by at least half a century, while the first Catalonian Cortes, in 1217, and those of Castile, early in the thirteenth century, preceded the first English parliament, in 1265.

When writing about Spain's siglo de oro or Golden Age—the 16th and early 17th centuries—Fuentes stresses that, despite its proverbial reputation, even then, for "unpunctuality, sloth, aristocratic self-indulgence, and innate corruption", Spain was "perhaps the most energetic nation of the post-Renaissance world". Later, in relating how Napoleon ousted the reactionary Spanish despot Ferdinand VII and installed his own brother as King of Spain, Fuentes enthusiastically tells the story of how the Spanish, given the opportunity to embrace the French revolutionaries as 'liberators', answered instead "Long live our chains"—and were mown down by French firing squads.

Fuentes' strategy is clear: he is trying to claim for Latin America a continuity with this democratic and heroic strain of Spanish history. The revolutionary heroes of Latin America (Zapata, Villa, Juárez, Bolívar, Sarmiento, San Martin, and so on) are portrayed not so much as extraordinary men but as products of the ordinary experience of the people. And their aspirations for self-government and an equitable division of wealth are presented as the recurrent (and constantly frustrated) surfacing of a common desire for democratic ideals.

Fuentes draws an analogy between the decadence and eventual collapse of the once-mighty Spanish empire and the inexorable slide in the same direction of present-day US and its (military, industrial, economic) empire. Such analogies, however, are
rhetorically showy but of limited usefulness. And when Fuentes claims that Latin America, having rejected both capitalism and Marxism, is in the process of developing its own home-grown political structures, I started wishing he had stuck to writing novels.

Spanish and Latin American history, as told by Fuentes, is a tragedy of great potential stifled and cut short by accidents, blood-mindedness and missed opportunities. In fact, the best parts of The Buried Mirror are those sections where Fuentes subsumes his historical narrative within the tragic: extreme and often absurd personal narratives of historical figures like Cortés and Columbus, Santa Anna and Jovellanos, or regular and extensive asides about Hispanic writers and artists like Cervantes, Calderon, Velázquez, Goya, Posada and Orozco. His opinions on their lives and art are fairly commonplace but at least Fuentes brings to these sections the immediacy which is the domain of a novelist.

The Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano's Memory of Fire trilogy is a stunning history of the encounter between Spain and Latin America which foregrounds the importance of personal experience within History by chronologically deploying hundreds of self-contained mini-stories. Building up over about 900 pages, these individual narratives combine operatically into a kind of mosaic of voices and incidents which is satisfying both as history and literature. Fuentes in The Buried Mirror does not approach the power and directness of Galeano's method, but I kept reminding myself that this book is, after all, the book of the TV series and, as such, is better than your average travelogue.

The Buried Mirror is a lively introduction to the intertwined histories of Spain and Latin America, and its extensive bibliography is a good place to start further reading. What worries me is that in 1993, when it's Albania's or Bhutan's turn to be flavour of the year, then Fuentes' book may be the place where the 'average reader' (who can afford $59.95) has actually stopped.

José Borghino is a freelance Spaniard.

SHORT CHANGED


Susanna Short's biography of her father, Laurie Short, former General Secretary of the old Federated Iron Workers Association (now the Federation of Industrial Manufacturing and Engineering Employees) is a wonderful example of history being written by the victors. This is not to denigrate the author's work—despite the familial relationship she has managed to write a reasonably critical political life of Short. While we get little flavour of her own relationship with her father, there are small hints along the way, such as her frequent references to the effect it had on his behaviour. She also notes the fact that Laurie would go to the FIA office even on the weekend just to read the newspapers. While Laurie Short is certainly no Daddie Dear est, we shouldn't be surprised that Susanna followed in the footsteps of her mother, Nancy Borlase, as art critic of the Sydney Morning Herald, rather than in the footsteps of her father. The life of a 40s union official (whether Grouper or Communist) was full of ugly macho bloodsport.

When I attended the funeral of Short's long-time FIA assistant secretary Harry Hurrell at a large Catholic Church in Sydney in the late 80s, I and the rest of the congregation were harangued by an elderly Grouper during what should have been a panegyric to Hurrell. At that point it was nearly 40 years since Mr Justice Dunphy of the old Arbitration Court had effectively replaced Ernie Thornton with Laurie Short as FIA secretary after a spectacular ballot-rigging inquiry which marked the end of communist domination of Australian trade unions. The eulogist spoke as if it had all happened last week. Susanna Short has been able to convey something of the almost Shakespearean drama which was the fight for control of the Australian trade union movement at the start of the Cold War. It was to determine the nature of Labor and union politics to this day. Laurie Short was born in 1915 into a 'respectable' working class family of Protestant Irish ancestry. With that kind of background Short must, at times, have felt uncomfortable in later life working inside the ALP-sanctioned Industrial Groups with the predominantly Catholic members of Santamaria's 'Movement'. As a teenager Laurie moved away from the influence of his father, an avid Lang supporter, into the world of the Unemployed Workers Movement and the Young Communist League (from which, ironically, he was expelled in November 1932 for challenging the expulsion one month earlier of Ernie Thornton). Disillusioned by the stalinist excesses of the local Communist Party he immersed himself in American Trotskyist literature and, in May 1933, was among those who formed the workers' Party of Australia (Left Opposition) with people like Professor John Anderson of Sydney University. The history of that party reads like the script of The Life of Brian (remember the titanic struggles between the People's Front of Judea and the Judean People's Front?). During the course of his Trotskyist activities he met John Kerr (who, with Jim McClelland, would form part of his legal team to ultimately defeat Thornton), Jack Sponberg (sometimes...
Metalworkers' official and source of the events leading to the cataclysmic Boilermakers' case of 1956, and the irrepressible Nick Origlass, a long-time industrial and community activist in the Balmain area.

Short's break with the stalinists in 1932 when he was only 17 can be explained in a number of different ways. His ultimate break with marxism and defection to the Groupers is a little more problematic. Inevitably one must wonder if he simply wanted to run the FIA and whether the only way he could achieve that end was not from a tiny trotskyist base but by using the machine created by the Industrial Groups—who were, of course, well positioned both organisationally and politically to challenge the hegemony of the existing stalinist leadership.

Susanna Short attempts to answer this but her father's almost simultaneous rejection of trotskyism and membership of a Group are hard to explain.

To my mind, the best part of the narrative is the court case in which Short challenged Thornton's win in the FIA national election of 1949. Ballot-rigging was alleged and found proven on a grand scale. This case was brought under legislation created by Ben Chifley, according to Susanna Short, at the instigation of her father who believed the Thornton leadership had remained in office by the employment of dishonest means.

The political affiliations of Thornton's group would, of course, have been already well known to Dunphy. In the Cold War atmosphere of the early 1950s it was obviously considered a relevant fact by Short's lawyers. It was noted by Dunphy that a number of the union's female office staff were members of the Communist Party and that the proprietor of the printing firm employed by the union was a member of the Realist Art Club "alleged to be a subsidiary of the Communist Party". His Honour concluded that these persons would be sympathetic to the aims of Thornton's group.

Communist domination in the FIA was over.

Among the many interesting issues the book raises is the question: what makes someone change political sides? Why did so many trotskyists of the time turn into rabid rightwingers? Didn't the ALP, in attempting to contain communist influence in the unions by the sanctioning of the Industrial Groups, realise they were creating Frankenstein's monster? To what extent has intervention by the state guaranteed democracy in Australian trade unions? Why were Australian communists so keen to toe the Moscow line when it clearly didn't always fit local conditions?

My own father worked as a boilermaker during some of the period in Short's book and his stories have made me ponder why Thornton's group commanded the support they did (despite the ballot irregularities) as long as they did. They must have been doing something right. Many large shops remained loyal to Thornton and the communists after the leadership change, including Babcock and Wilcox at Regents Park where my father worked. Another story remains to be told. The defeat of Thornton, McKeon et al probably means that they will remain in the footnotes of history. Academics rarely write about losers.

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**DISCUSSION**

**ERIC AARONS** disputes Richard Rorty's advocacy of banality; **PETER COLLEY** on modelling the environment.

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**Banal Fixation**

**Banal: trite; threadbare; lacking interest or originality**

Richard Rorty practices what he preaches—his comments on past politics and his recommendations for the future are banal in the extreme. This is a pity, because questions he raises (ALR 144, October) are not. Among them: is an alternative to capitalism available? Does any alternative presuppose the existence of a new kind of human being? Can we fruitfully continue to use the word socialism to describe an alternative? Is there any theoretical basis for political action?

Rorty asserts that the Cold War was a good war, and good because the West won it. That war certainly deserves reassessment. For instance, it seems that the North initiated the military strike which launched the Korean war. And the disastrous situation in Somalia today arose largely out of the contest there between the Soviet Union and the US. But the existence of other powerful world forces such as the Soviet Union and China, whatever their failings, provided a counter-weight to US efforts to dominate, creating at least some room for forces seeking self-determination. Or should we regret that Castro defeated the Bay of Pigs invasion, or that the US lost their war in Vietnam? Should we rejoice that the US-backed torturer Pinochet overthrew the socialist Allende?

Rorty states that "...Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin (were) three ruthless gangsters, distinguishable only by their facial hair". Rorty looks behind the appearance—despite his proclaimed rejection of the procedure—and finds an "essence". Yet this approach tells us little about the causes of socialist failure. In more than a dozen countries with vastly different histories and cultures, great movements of dedicated people led by originally able and independently minded leaders finished up in a similar condition. We don't need to invoke marxist theory to conclude that there was more to it than the failings and crimes of a few leaders.

Was there something in the socialist project itself which helped generate the outcome? I cannot argue a case in this short space, but in my opinion a major cause lies in the fact that Marx (and subsequent socialist theory) equated the abolition of commodity production with the abolition of capitalism.

Marx thought that when social ownership replaced private, production would be "regulated in accordance with a settled plan" in consequence of which "the practical relations of everyday life [would] offer to man [sic] none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellowman and to nature". Experience indicates that this was a utopian objective, and that commodity production cannot be done away with in any foreseeable future. If the market is not there to give feedback to producers as to what extent their labour is social, an army of bureaucrats is needed to (unsuccessfully) attempt to decide on the many questions involved. This army then commands the power and has the opportunity to develop its own interests.

The word 'socialism' has drawbacks because it conveys the view that the socialisation of the means of production is the essence of any radical social change. If wholesale socialisation of property is no longer on the agenda for principled and practical political reasons, the term itself becomes questionable. However, the crucial problem remains of how to curb the social power contained in wealth, evidence of which we see daily exercised all over the world. If we cannot destroy that power at a stroke, we will have to tackle it piecemeal, and from the various directions in which it is vulnerable.

The fact that "grand theories of everything" in society (as elsewhere) have not delivered is no reason to reject theory in general. A rainforest, for example, requires a theoretical as well as a practical understanding of the role of rainfall, soil, sunlight, the species of flora and fauna involved, and so on. But this does not necessarily give rise to an overriding theory of the rainforest as a whole. Perhaps none is or will be available, in which case the need for concrete study is emphasised: no great disaster.

In my youth, almost without exception, people from right, left and centre held the view that humanity should dominate the rest of nature. Now a radical change in values in this regard is well advanced. And it will continue to develop because it is a crucial issue for the survival and well-being of present and future generations. Rorty does not even mention it.

Many on the Left came to owe prime allegiance to a particular theory, forgetting that their values provided the deeper and more lasting basis of their dedication. We don't have to believe in a new kind of human being to recognise that people do change, sometimes in radical ways.

Most leftists have changed their values on the environment and other issues. But the core of values we held remains strong in our hearts. Values are the source of our motivations; the passion with which we hold to them gives us the strength to face the many difficulties we experience today. That Rorty's
politics are banal is bad enough; worse still, they are lukewarm.

ERIC AARONS' memoirs will be published by Penguin early next year.

This Year's Model

It seems that everybody uses statistics from economic models when it suits them, and rejects the model when it doesn't give the right answers. Graham Dunkley (ALR 142, August) criticises my article on greenhouse (ALR 138, April) by making the same mistake of which he accuses me. He questions the credibility of economic modelling of greenhouse measures, but then proceeds to quote from such modelling exercises where they suit his purposes. Unfortunately, the greenhouse debate is plagued by competing economic and scientific assertions.

I, too, have a healthy scepticism of economic modelling, particularly that which is based on the notion of an economy moving towards a state of balance. My point was that one model was a Keynesian one, run by the National Institute for Economic and Industry Research. Its results were particularly interesting in that they were a reversal of previous work by that group which had indicated some net economic benefits from greenhouse measures. Now, despite their best efforts to discern a positive economic outcome from greenhouse measures, they were forced to conclude that costs in terms of employment and wage levels would be high in the short to medium term.

As Graham should also be aware, one reason the Industry Commission decided that the adverse economic impacts of greenhouse measures would be relatively small (small in percentages that is, but high in terms of actual people who lose out) is that the Industry Commission model assumes that people and capital adapt smoothly and effortlessly to new taxes and industry restructuring. We all know that doesn't happen in reality, and the more 'sticky' or difficult the restructuring process is, the higher the economic and social costs.

Also of interest—and paid scant attention by those who claim that greenhouse targets can be met at minimal or no cost—is that the Industry Commission's model assumes that Australia makes up for losses in coal and energy-intensive industries by switching back to traditional agricultural industries, not by developing new manufacturing or services. As it is agriculture which has been responsible for most species loss and environmental degradation in Australia, it may be that major measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will cause as many or more environmental problems than they solve.

I agree with Graham's central conclusion: that we should seek to reduce greenhouse gases through energy efficiency and conservation measures, and the use of most appropriate technology. Where we diverge is over his fall-back position that draconian measures such as a carbon tax should be used if necessary, even at the expense of falling wages, employment and living standards.

I don't believe the economy and people should have priority over the environment: I accept they are interdependent. My objection is rather that achievable solutions must benefit rather than penalise people if they are to be implemented by a popularly-elected government. If the Coalition fails to win government at the federal level it will only be because the people believe they will be worse off under Coalition economic policies than under Labor. It is hardly a winnable strategy for Labor to add yet another justification to its armoury of reasons why real wages and living standards must be held down.

The challenge for all of us with a commitment to both people and the environment is to devise tangible solutions that improve social equity and the quality of life while reversing environmental loss. It isn't going to be easy.

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Becker's crowning achievement, *A Treatise on the Family*, deals with marriage, the division of labour in the household, children, and divorce. The wealth of insight in this work makes it difficult to decide on what morsels to offer ALR readers. However, the chapter 'Assortative Mating in Marriage Markets' is revealing. For those unsure as to why their recent attempts at mating have been "assortative", the following explanation should be helpful:

An efficient marriage market usually has positive assortative mating, where high-quality men are matched with high-quality women and low-quality men with low-quality women so that 'superior women receive a premium that is determined by their additional productivity as wives'. Becker, however, does concede that 'some participants choose to be matched with inferior persons because they feel superior persons are too expensive.

Mating and marriage are thus the outcome of utility-maximising decisions by free, equal, self-centred and "rational" individuals in the market place. As long as there are no impediments to the efficient operation of this market (such as government redistributive policies) we will have what economists call a "Pareto optimal" situation whereby 'no person can improve his [sic] marriage without making others worse off'. Obviously there should be a copy of Becker's Treatise on every guidance counsellor's desk.

The beauty of this analysis is that it is timeless and universal. It applies equally to relationships in 20th century Brisbane and 12th century Baghdad. And, in an admirable rejection of specieism, Becker modestly asserts that his economics also explains the family structure of grous, antelopes and mountain sheep, along with many other of our fellow non-human market participants.

How does one react to this sort of thing? An immediate response is to protest that economics should not intrude into emotional/sexual relationships. But Becker can't be dismissed that easily. Indeed feminists have shown that the family, marriage and the market are inextricably linked. Of course, they have done so with considerably more insight than Becker, who fails to adequately grapple with history, social institutions, cultural constraints, collective practices and power relations. Yet an intellectual response doesn't fully explain the revulsion his writing often induces. It must partly come from the depiction of human beings as overwhelmingly motivated by individual greed, as purely reactive rather than creative and as anti-social at base.

Why then does someone with these thoroughly dodgy ideas end up with the Nobel Prize, supposedly the pinnacle of public recognition and achievement? The sad thing is that Professor Becker is one of the most widely admired and cited economists on the planet (despite strong criticism of his work by a minority in the profession). As befits a leading exponent of the "economics of everything" approach beloved of free market economists, he resides in the prestigious University of Chicago, centre of free market economic thought in North America.

Out of such an environment has emerged the economic explanation of drug use, discrimination, crime, even sleep. Superficially, such a list suggests a commendable versatility. Unfortunately the analysis and the results are largely sterile. This has not stopped the increasing spread of this particular type of neo-classical economics into other academic disciplines, a contemporary case of economic "imperialism".

One small step to address this situation would be to abolish the Nobel Prize for 'Economic Science'. Sitting alongside physics and chemistry, the other, genuine, Nobel sciences, economics looks very much out of place to all but a few naive positivists who hang around in economics departments. Introduced in 1969, the economics prize has been dominated by the conservative North American establishment. It has too often served as a political vehicle for academics who don't merit such attention. It has never been won by a woman. Becker's Treatise, of course, has a clear explanation for this:

biological differences in comparative advantage between the sexes explain...why women have usually spent their time bearing children and engaging in other household activities whereas men have spent their time in market activities.

Perhaps he should have got the Nobel Prize for fiction.

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