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THE 1992 PINKIE AWARDS

Yes, its the Pinkies: ALR's Awards for the biggest bozoes of the year

In a seedy hotel in Sydney's leafy Annandale towards the end of November, the winners of the first annual ALR awards for outstanding contributions to world peace, human understanding and the resumption of history were announced. Unfortunately, none of the winners were able to pick up their prizes in person, but we feel sure that they will appreciate the inscribed Waterford Crystal bowls which should be crashing through their letterboxes any day now.

Here, in no particular order, are the lucky recipients:

The John Elliott Charm School Award for Parliamentary Decorum and Sheer Sparkling Good Humour: Bronwyn Bishop (Peter Reith highly commended)
The Bronwyn Bishop Award for Grace Under Pressure: Noelene Donaher
The Brian Howe Award for Mumbling Under Pressure: Laurie Donaher
The Ross Perot Award for Incisive Political Analysis: Francis Fukuyama (a special mention goes to Boris 'Furious' Frankel)
The Andrew Peacock Medal for a really good effort: Neil Kinnock (Neil keeps the trophy after winning for the third time)
The Joan Kirner Award for Persistent Whistling to Keep your Spirits Up: Boris Yeltsin
Angriest Person Purporting to Act in a Journalistic Capacity:

Joint winners: John Pilger and PP McGuinness
Most Ridiculous Australian Olympic Gold Medallist: Keebah Tic-Toc
The Dr Mahatir Award for International Tact and Diplomacy: Gareth Evans (fifth year in succession)
The P W Botha Commemorative Plate for an Outstanding Contribution to Race Relations:
The Los Angeles Police Department
The Prince Phillip Silver Spoon for Living Off the Public Purse: Christopher Skase
The Gypsy Fire Autographed Suspender Belt for Shameless Self-Promotion: Madonna
Parliamentary Beard of the Year: Phil Cleary
Most Painful-Looking Parliamentary Smile: John Howard (for about the tenth time: he also wins a year's free dental treatment)

The John Lennon Peace Prize:
Slobodan Milosevic

The Michael Dukakis Camouflaged Turret for the Trimmest, Tautest and Most Terrific Election Campaign: George 'Bozo' Bush (award to be accepted by Millie)
The Russell Cooper Memorial Vase for Forgotten Ex-Premiers:
John Bannon (Nick Greiner Highly Commended—try again next year)
The Elizabeth Taylor Tiara for the Shortest Political Honeymoon:
Joint winners: Jeff 'Krash Through' Kennett and John ('You're a Loser') Hewson

Least Impressive Attempt to Hide a Bald Patch: Peter Reith

The Bob Hawke Diamond-Encrusted Megaphone for Keeping your Private Life Private:
Charles and Di

The John Lennon Peace Prize:

THE PREMIER NO ONE SEEMS TO HAVE VOTED FOR, THE MANDATE NO ONE CAME... YOU'LL BELIEVE IN FATHER KENNETTMAS!

Look - the presents are gone - Father Kennettmas has been!

THE EASTER JEFFREY (Thank you, I'll have all the eggs)
THE TOOTH JEFFREY (If you can't afford to eat, you don't deserve teeth)
KENNETT'S DAY (Every day is Kennett's Day)
For, as we were insistently and unerringly told, it was George Bush the 'internationalist' who was the friend of the Australian primary producer, while Clinton was at best 'an unknown quantity', at worst 'a closet protectionist'.

Difficult as it might have been to discern from the prevailing tenor of media commentary, however, there was rather more significance to the US election outcome than could be summarised in the portentous words 'trade war'. After 13 seemingly interminable years, the world neoliberal tide which began with the accession of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 is finally and indisputably on the wane—regardless of what happens in Australia in the next few months.

The question now is what will replace it. However, the answer is more unclear than many on the Left of the spectrum seem to realise. After all, even the London Economist now speaks of a new order 'After the Market'—and goes on to conclude that the new order will be a different sort of market order. And there is the rub. In the absence of any clear 'art of government' in progressive circles after the collapse of the Keynesian-welfare state consensus in the 70s and 80s, any successor to neoliberalism must necessarily be tentative and experimental, rather than boldly radical. And some of the methods of government it will have to rely upon will probably resemble those of neoliberalism itself.

An even more basic question to ponder, however, is what exactly the neoliberal phenomenon was—and is. The economic liberal quest to 'roll back the state' in Britain—a quest which caused epic suffering and social dislocation—hardly shifted the proportion of public sector spending to GDP over a decade (ironically, Labor in Australia cut the public sector's share more successfully through the simple expedient of high growth). In the United States the legacy of a decade or more of supposedly rigorous economic liberalism is the largest budget deficit as a percentage of GDP in living memory. If neoliberalism has been an attempt to return to some 'state of nature' in economic affairs, it has clearly been a remarkable failure, even by its own measure.

Yet if in the realm of economic performance it has been an unambiguous failure, at the level of governmental practice neoliberalism has been a remarkable success. Little today remains of the Keynesian-welfare state consensus of the postwar decades, and all of the 'good ideas' of the broad Left of the spectrum nowadays exhibit the aforementioned features of tentativeness and experimentalism. It is this continu­ing neoliberal predominance in the contest of ideas which, just as much as the US budget deficit, will constrain Bill Clinton's stated intention to become a great reforming president in the mould of Franklin Roosevelt.

It will also colour the nature of Clinton's administration—probably to the dismay of many of his left supporters, both in the US and overseas. Like Bob Hawke and Paul Keating in 1983, Bill Clinton has been elected largely because he was a new kind of Democrat, with a new rhetoric and a new attitude to the techniques of governance: 'pro-business', 'pro-growth', pro-enterprise and entrepreneurship. As with Hawke and Keating, the legacy of this set of governmental instincts is likely to be a mixed bag. On the one hand Clinton will hopefully sweep away much of the tired negativism of liberal politics in the US—its singleminded focus on state-centred welfare programs coupled with a stunning indifference to the economic means of sustaining them. On the other hand, in the absence of a clear set of organising principles or strategy in the social democratic tradition, Clinton runs the risk of becoming once again dependent on the instincts of economic liberalism as a method of decision-making—as a method of deciding when to say 'no' to the various 'vested interests' with which US political culture is currently obsessed.

Certainly the obstacles Clinton faces are formidable. The US labour movement is the weakest and least strategically-minded of any in the industrialised West, and has learnt little from the economic transformations of the past ten or twenty years. And the parlous and irresponsible legacy of 12 years of conservative rule is a taboo against increased taxes that sharply constrains the scope for the reforming imagination.

Whatever his degree of success in implementing his surprisingly sophisticated economic program, though, Bill Clinton's victory suggests one remarkable fact: for the first time in 50 years the United States may once again become a laboratory for progressive politics on the world stage. And the serious Left elsewhere can be grateful on two counts: first, that there is a person of fundamentally progressive instincts in the White House; and second, that he is a real 'internationalist' in the mould of classic American liberalism prior to the Cold War.

DAVID BURCHELL is ALR's editor.
Should I call you Lily or Liliana?
If you say "Liliana" get the pronunciation right.

Well, Lily, you have only been in the position of Women's Officer for a few weeks. Is funding for the position guaranteed?
No. We had agreed funding from the former state government for nine months, but the coalition made it clear that funding will be cut off from union projects first of all, so we are looking at alternative sources. A lot of my time has been taken up chasing funds.

So has this position always relied on government support rather than direct support from the union movement?
That's largely been the case. If our current efforts to raise private or community funding aren't successful, we will have to approach affiliated unions to protect the position through committed funding. This process has already started.

Funding for a position like this really goes to the heart of how much the union movement is involved, not simply in economic issues but also in 'proactive' work to raise issues that sometimes aren't seen as essential to unionism. Child care is the classic example. Do you think that the union hierarchy still sees child care as a marginal issue?

I tend to be a little sceptical about these things. Over the last few years people have learned to say the right things, and to give tacit or nodding support to what are perceived to be the right issues. The real test will come when positions such as mine are supported by those who have been making these noises. Child care is one of the areas where change is necessary, the issues of paid maternity leave, the move towards part-time employment which more and more women are pushed into, the vulnerable employment status of many women and women's particular superannuation needs are the ones which the union movement will need to tackle. A coordinating position such as Women's Officer provides a litmus test of whether the unions are prepared to go beyond token gestures.

In the corporate sector, reference is sometimes made to a 'glass ceiling' beyond which women cannot rise. Is there a metal ceiling in the union movement against which women hit their heads?

Whether or not there's a metal ceiling, there have been recent changes to the structures of Trades Hall, including rule changes to require a certain proportion of female representation at the executive level of Trades Hall. There is now also an Affirmative Action Vice-President; that is, one of the Vice-Presidents must be a woman. So there is steady progress on these structural reforms.

One of the most vivid memories I have of my experience as a full-time worker in unions is of the language of debate, the heated, argumentative, and often loud discussion which I, as a far from demure female, found somewhat intimidating, or at least ugly. Do you think that there is something about unionism at an even deeper level than the elected structural adjustments you have identified which alienates women from this form of decision making?

It really comes down, not to the word structure, but to a whole culture. We can use up a lot of energy changing structures, and this is important in itself, but the cultural problem is more profound for women and will determine whether or not unions survive. Women have entered into unions at the organise level and higher, but there are still many alienating factors. For example, when I worked at the Federated Furnishing Trades Society, I was the first female organiser there, although the union had a reasonably large female membership. A few weeks into my work it was made clear to me by means of a wink and a nudge from a fellow organiser that it would be advisable for me to attend the pub where a lot of unofficial business was transacted. It was not so much a social gathering for its own sake, but one where the boys would confer and exchange information about the day's or week's events. It seemed to be a necessary part of the job. I found this extremely difficult.

Let's get back to the evolultion of unions. Jeff Kennett—a man who does things to the English language which should be illegal between consenting adults—has said that unions, like dinosaurs, are "very extinct". To pick up on the metaphor, or oxymoron, is it true that if unions are forced into or take up a battle position to protect the existence of unions, as such, then women's interests will be pushed right back and women unionists will possibly become even more extinct than men?

Unions will survive, despite Kennett. However, the ones who will really suffer will not be the workers in really strong unions, but the workers who aren't unionised. That is, the women—particularly those in part-time, small enterprise positions. They have no way to negotiate themselves out of bad contract proposals put to them by management. If nothing else,
Kennett's proposals will mean that union organisers will have to spend most of their time with their members on sites, negotiating over contract proposals.

If unions do not expand to include those who are not protected, don't they stop being a progressive force? If unions are only guarding themselves and ignoring those who are perceived of as weak, aren't they replicating the very process Kennett will undertake?

It will be a problem if those unions with massive resources can attract and keep membership at the expense of other workers. The union movement will have to understand that it must take a far greater role in the community than it has to date if it wants to survive. Some of this will be through the pure economics of job security and so on. The nature of employment is changing, and so the relationship between unions and workers must also change. Communities are different, the networks we could rely on say, 30 or 40 years ago, no longer exist.

Would you agree that unions need to get away from the tendency to categorise all employers, particularly small business, as 'the enemy'? Many people in this area of work might be quite sympathetic to some things unions do or should represent but in different ways.

That's right. If a lot of our members had the choice between being a wage earner or running their own business, most would probably prefer to run their own business. It's an issue of control, and we have to accept that what members want is the power to control their lives. This is not a dirty concept, but one we have to be mindful of, and be seen to come to terms with.

Perhaps this involves looking seriously at other examples for different modes of working.

One model we can look at is the AFL. They set an objective, the national game, and asked themselves how they were going to achieve it. They implemented a policy which got rid of some cultural characteristics of the game and the way it's run. Basically these changes will see them into the future, although being a Victorian and fairly parochial in my appreciation of football I don't like to see some working-class teams disappearing. But, in effect, what they are doing is reconstructing the culture of football, and creating something new.

Some would say that over the last three or so years, the union movement has decided on a similarly decisive course. References to 20 big unions and to enterprise bargaining are often made in the context of achieving greater membership. But personally I can't see how unions going around picking off other unions' members will achieve a greater membership overall. Nor is it clear what this actually does for the membership. I am not convinced that bigger is necessarily better. Nor can I see how enterprise bargaining, which is the latest thrust from the ACTU, will do anything positive for many women scattered among smaller workplaces, often ununionised, often unskilled in English.

How is enterprise bargaining going to achieve equitable outcomes for these women? The way things will be structured, there'll be no obligation on an employer to negotiate. When I was an organiser with the Federated Clerks Union a dispute arose at Yakka. The clerks, who were mostly women, had negotiated a deal with management which pre-empted what the National Wage Case was widely believed to be about to decide. The Wage Case was somewhat less favourable than expected, and management tried to renege on the agreement. Industrial action was taken and the matter referred to the IRC, but we got nowhere. It's not enough for people to band together and assert power, it's a question of control.

I have metaphors of fabric running through my head, due to you mentioning the furnishing trade, so let's talk about the Great Flag Debate. Some people on the Left see these issues of national identity as fairly trivial, but symbols are vitally important. Do you think that unions should get involved in this kind of debate?

This comes back to the point about the role unions play in society, which I believe should broaden. The days have to go when unions are relevant to members until they clock off for the day. We have to look at society as a whole and bear in mind the history behind that culture, including the displacement of Aboriginal culture. So, yes, we should be involved in that sort of debate.

Should that include members using union resources, such as journals, to express their views on these issues?

Yes, a lot of members don't have other avenues of public expression open to them. Access to expression is one thing unions can be involved in providing. At one stage a proper newspaper was going to be started by the ACTU but I think that got pushed off the agenda in favour of more important things.

We talked briefly about unions doing more to ensure women take up positions of power within their structures, if not changing their cultures to accommodate women. Do unions also need affirmative action plans for women and men of non-anglo backgrounds, so that real communication with workers from various ethnic backgrounds can occur?

Unions historically must take some of the blame or responsibility for not doing enough in this area. But there has been a definite improvement in this area over the last few years. Not to the level I would regard as satisfactory and once again the possibility of tokenism arises. But affirmative action would be a positive step.

But given that unions have historically ignored women and non-anglo women in particular, couldn't it be argued that it is not so important to be representative of the members as of the non-members?

Electoral processes in unions do need to be reassessed as part of the process of redefining what unions are about. Many people would see a danger in this sort of questioning, but I see it as a very healthy thing. We can't assume that the realities of today are those of yesterday. The unions' 'electorate', if you want to put it that way, has never been and never will be a homogenous group. Tradition of itself is not enough to take us into the future, and there are different traditions within unionism anyway. Part of an institution's ability to stay alive is to be open to the different traditions which make it up.

**PENELIPE COTTIER** has worked for the Federated Clerks Union (Vic) and Actors Equity, and is now an ALR columnist, rank-and-file member of the Public Sector Union and general bonne vivante.
This quote probably best sums up the passion, zeal and combative style brought to his job by outgoing Tax Commissioner Trevor Boucher. It contains all the elements of the Boucher era: the readiness for direct confrontation, the importance of credibility, the challenge to the corporate sector, the threat of documentation and ammunition, the threat of action and the personalisation of issues.

Boucher's angry statement followed a no-holds-barred meeting with the Business Council in 1989 after the council had actively campaigned against an audit of Australia's largest corporations ordered by Boucher. The documents Boucher was referring to were details of offshore tax schemes used by a company identifiable as Elders IXL, headed by Liberal Party heavy John Elliott.

Disenchantment on the part of business and the Liberal Party with the Australian Tax Office (ATO), and Boucher in particular, reached a crescendo at the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee in the period leading up to his resignation in October. There, as if to demonstrate that grand conspiracy theories are not the sole prerogative of those labelled as the Left, NSW Senator Bronwyn Bishop concluded her ongoing battle with Boucher with unspecified smears over his new appointment as Ambassador to the OECD. Yet Boucher's appointment as Tax Commissioner eight years ago, after 24 years in the Tax Office, was welcomed by the Liberal Party with enthusiasm. Indeed, then shadow Treasurer John Howard claimed the Coalition would also have appointed him. To understand their change in attitude, it is necessary to go back to the late 1970s.

By that time, artificial tax avoidance schemes had become prolific, aided and abetted by a compliant High Court led by ex-Liberal Attorney General Garfield Barwick—and the efficiency and equity of the tax system was severely damaged. For those wealthy and clever enough to be able to organise their affairs, taxpaying had become optional. The Tax Office was seen as a toothless tiger; morale was at rock bottom. One can only wonder at Boucher's frustration in his job as second tax commissioner in charge of policy and legislation.

Enter the Labor Government in 1983, then committed to a broadening Accord based upon equity and encompassing restraint over non-wage incomes. More particularly, enter Paul Keating as Treasurer; and then, in 1984, enter a frustrated 'done-over' Trevor Boucher—all zeal and determination, if not with gun smouldering. Keating unleashed the tiger; Boucher provided it with a few teeth; then Keating added a full set of incisors.

Having seen from the operations of the Costigan Royal Commission what could be achieved by computerising records and statistically analysing results, Boucher set about expanding and renewing the Tax Office's computer system. Returns were now assessed by computer rather than manually. This not only enabled occupational and industry benchmarks to be established for comparability purposes, but also allowed resources to be diverted out of time-consuming and inefficient paper-processing into auditing.

While these human resources and their computerised backing enabled the Tax Office to take a more aggressive stand, they also highlighted serious deficiencies in tax legislation—the legal loopholes for avoidance. Hence Keating's push for tax reform, backed by the ATO—a push which culminated in the government's decision of September 1985 to introduce fringe benefits and capital gains taxes and to close the managerial ‘long lunch’ loophole via the entertainments tax.

Whatever one may think of Keating's adoption of 'hands-off' macroeconomic policy, there can be no doubting his passion to clean up the inequities of the tax system. I recall sitting in on the Taxation Sub-Committee of Cabinet, set up after the 1985 Tax Summit, on the day Keating voluntarily withdrew his consumption tax proposal, 'Option C'. It took guts for Keating to withdraw 'Option C' of his own volition, without prompting and without bluster or stonewall (perhaps something Dr Hewson should muse over). Nevertheless, I half-expected him to spit the dummy and come out in opposition to the core items of the victorious 'Option A'—the fringe benefits tax, capital gains tax and entertainments tax—which were next on the agenda. Instead he opened the afternoon session with a withering blast at those who had ripped-off the average Australian taxpayer through a series of artificial tax avoidance mechanisms. They had, he noted, destroyed the fairness, equity, efficiency and simplicity of the tax system.

Such a curt summary doesn't do Keating's speech justice; it remains the best off-the-cuff speech I have heard from any politician on equity and tax justice. The true Labor beacon shone brightly that day. With barely
stage for the great confrontation; he set his sights on the corporate sector. In 1988 he launched the audit of Australia’s top 100 companies over a four-year period. Not just hit-and-run visits, but intensive investigative rolling audits using computer-generated benchmarks and industry standards. “It was very important in terms of sending signals to the community,” he was quoted as saying on his retirement. “The corporate sector thought we couldn’t do it and we wouldn’t do it. We did do it, and we did it pretty well.”

To ensure those signals were received the program was accompanied by maximum publicity. In fact, for the first time publicity and the media became a tool of collection as the Tax Commissioner became a public figure. Tax Office initiatives and successes were publicised, and rejuvenated ATO officers took on the persona of latter-day Elliott Nesses with attendant media publicity. The audit program led to a two-year row with the Business Council—a row which culminated in the meeting from which the opening quote came. It should be added that this audit, now nearing completion, produced an additional $1.4 billion in revenue.

By 1989, the Coalition, having moved from seeing Boucher as a mere Keating acolyte to a threat in his own right, were demanding that a board of directors, with business representatives, be installed to run the Tax Office. Far from being daunted by this political attack, however, Boucher prepared to take on another sacred cow—he began including politicians in his random audit program. By the time of his retirement, over 100 federal and state politicians of all parties had been subject to audit. In the light of the self-interested attacks on Boucher by politicians, particularly the indubitable Senator Bishop (principally over charges being laid against her NSW colleague Phillip Smiles), it’s worth noting that half of the politicians audited had their returns adjusted as a result. Nevertheless, given that the ATO is about to extend its intensive audit program to the next largest 600 corporations, one can appreciate Boucher’s decision to retire to less controversial pastures.

Yet his departure places the challenge to maintain and even further enhance the current rigour of the tax system squarely at the feet of his successor, Michael Carmody. Perhaps the time has come to shift the emphasis of the ATO: to concentrate less strenuously on audits and to direct its focus (and computer resources) instead towards policy and revenue-forecasting issues. And there is something vaguely hypocritical about a Tax Office which challenges others for not maintaining adequate records when it attempts to defer an audit of itself on much the same grounds.

It should never be forgotten that taxes, paid fairly by all, are an indispensable prerequisite for adequate infrastructure and services. In an age in which the cult of deficit-fetishism has demanded large amounts of revenue to his zeal in recouping those able to avoid or evade and to his self-interested attacks on Boucher by politicians, particularly the indubitable Senator Bishop (principally over charges being laid against her NSW colleague Phillip Smiles), it’s worth noting that half of the politicians audited had their returns adjusted as a result. Nevertheless, given that the ATO is about to extend its intensive audit program to the next largest 600 corporations, one can appreciate Boucher’s decision to retire to less controversial pastures.

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THE MOTHER OF INTERVENTION

After unconscionable foot-dragging, a litany of hollow threats and half-hearted, poorly executed aid measures, the time has finally come for full-scale, international military intervention in former Yugoslavia. There is, sadly, no other alternative that now remains to halt the barbarism enveloping the Balkans.

The mere presence of United Nations forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina hasn't fazed the Bosnian Serb aggressors or their masters in Belgrade. Neither rival armies nor Serbia's domestic opposition possess the resources to stop the Serb regime's drive for territorial conquest. A quick, decisive invasion of Bosnia-Herzegovina—on the scale of Operation Desert Storm—is the last real option available to the international community, and one that the Left should rally around with all of its energy.

On simple humanitarian grounds, military intervention could put the quickest possible end to the bloodbath in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The six-month old war has already claimed over 100,000 lives and turned at least 2.5 million Bosnians into refugees. Every report about the savagery loose in the former republic seems more inconceivable than the last. No longer can foreign observers feign ignorance about the war's carnage and the brutal crimes of its combatants, about the concentration camps and the massacres, about the rape and torture.

The international community's condemnation of Serbian aggression, as well as the meagre UN humanitarian rescue aid for the beleaguered people of Bosnia, has proved to be much too little, much too late. If the Serbian siege of Bosnian cities and the 'ethnic cleansing' of non-Serb communities continues into the winter—which it will—the body count is expected to soar to two or three hundred thousand.

That suffering, however, is only a taste of what is to come should international inaction give in to the designs of Serbia's nationalist henchmen. In a larger context, Bosnia-Herzegovina represents a test case for nationalist expansionism in Europe, on the one hand, and for post-Cold War Europe's commitment to a new democratic order, on the other.

So far, the territorial war of the Serbian militants in Bosnia has made a mockery of every principle that underpins the notion of a democratic European House. The Serb leadership in rump Yugoslavia has defiantly thumbed its nose at international protests, warnings and sanctions, breaking every promise that UN negotiators have extracted from them.

Yet their intransigence is paying off. The Serbs, who make up only 32% of the mixed Bosnian population, now control 70% of its territory. The Croats (17% of the population) call the shots in nearly a quarter of the former republic. Serb and Croat leaders agreed a year ago that when the killing is over, the 43% Muslim population will have but a few tiny landlocked enclaves to themselves. Should Serbia and Croatia simply walk away scot-free from a partitioned Bosnia-Herzegovina, Europe might as well toss the 1990 Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) Treaty—the foundation of a united,
democratic Europe—into the dustbin. The capitulation would send a clear message to extremist regimes across eastern Europe that might makes right, and that the rest of Europe will look on without lifting a finger.

After Bosnia the Serbs appear intent upon taking their Greater Serbian blueprint into Kosovo and Macedonia. In Kosovo, Serbia’s southern province, the Serb military is tightening the already tight screws on the ethnic Albanian majority there. Serb president Slobodan Milosevic, who made his name as a communist by stripping Kosovo of its provincial autonomy, is obviously spoiling for a fight that would enable him to homogenise Kosovo as well. The spectre of a Kosovo ‘cleansed’ of its almost two million ethnic Albanians is nightmarish enough. But any such dramatic escalation of tensions would also certainly bring Albania proper into the picture which, one way or another, will come to the defence of its Kosovar brothers.

Serb nationalists have also set their sights on Macedonia, formerly Yugoslavia’s southernmost republic and now an independent state. The fact that Milosevic and his radical supporters consider Macedonia to be ‘south Serbia’ sits well with neither its Macedonian nor ethnic Albanian inhabitants, much less with neighbouring Greece, Albania and Bulgaria, all of whom have claims on the diminutive Balkan plot. A Serbian offensive in either Kosovo or Macedonia would almost certainly ignite a full-scale Balkan war, dragging in Turkey and parts of the Islamic world too.

The debate over military intervention has bitterly split the Left in Germany as throughout western Europe. Critics argue that alternatives such as harder, strictly enforced sanctions have yet to be exhausted. The German Greens insist that domestic sources of opposition such as the various democratic parties or the peace movements, desperately need western support. They call for yet another conference to bring the warring parties together for negotiations.

The fact is, however, that these options haven’t the remotest hope of stopping the slaughter under way now. Tighter sanctions must be applied, and to Croatia as well as Serbia. (Likewise, the arms moratorium against all of Bosnia should exclude the Bosnian army.) A military intervention must also work closely with all democratic forces throughout former Yugoslavia, though particularly with those from Serbia. Once Milosevic and his friends fall from power, the Serbian opposition will hold the key to a lasting Balkan peace. But at present these forces on their own are no match for the nationalist strongmen.

Left opponents of intervention also point to the legacy of western military intervention over past decades, from Vietnam to the Persian Gulf. But in the case of former Yugoslavia, the standard grounds for ‘imperialist’ intervention, such as empire and markets, simply don’t apply in the same way. On the contrary, their absence explains exactly why there hasn’t been more forceful intervention to date.

The applicable precedent for intervention in former Yugoslavia is neither Vietnam nor the Gulf War, but World War Two when the allies (also belatedly) joined forces to defeat Nazi Germany. In Serbia, Europe confronts an expansionist, national socialist regime once again, complete with concentration camps and genocidal policies. The Croats, make no mistake, have it in them to be just as ruthless. Europe’s present policy of appeasement could well cost it the vision of a peaceful, democratic Europe that flickered so briefly with the end of the Cold War.

Europe’s interests in the Balkans are European stability and stemming the flow of refugees. The demise of the Cold War, while leaving the US the unchallenged superpower, also opened the way for independent UN and joint European foreign policy initiatives. The west European leaders should have taken the lead long ago in former Yugoslavia. But in light of their bickering and the UN’s ineffectual interventions. I would have no qualms about the US or NATO stepping in, if that’s what it takes.

Military intervention, however, must have specific goals and a solid commitment to laying the foundations for a viable, democratic postwar order. The first goal of intervention must be to end the war in Bosnia and to restore and secure the sovereign borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina under a protectorate. The Bosnian Serb militants, as well as their Croat counterparts, must be fully disarmed, and demilitarised zones established in Bosnia and other contested regions. All those responsible for war crimes, from politicians and generals to footsoldiers involved in the pillage and plunder, should be tried before an international court and sentenced. Kosovo and Macedonia should also be placed under the umbrella of the UN and new elections called in every former republic.

It is a well-propagated myth that the peoples of former Yugoslavia cannot live together. Every day in the bunkers of Sarajevo, Serb, Croat and Muslim citizens lock arms with their neighbours. They sing and share their last bits of food and live together as they have for the last 40 years. The war in former Yugoslavia is not a popular, ethnic conflict, but a territorial war manipulated from the halls of power and waged by extremists.

Either as a loose confederation or even as independent states, the peoples of the Balkans could coexist peacefully again. Those states, however, must be civic states, based upon equality under citizenship, and not upon superiority according to nationality. They must constitutionally guarantee minority rights, the rights of regional and ethnic autonomy and the integrity of borders. It would be the responsibility of the international community to closely monitor the respect of those rights, taking swift, punitive action against violations.

Decisive international action six months ago could have prevented the war in Bosnia. Once the conflict spills over into neighbouring states, the west will find itself drawn into the Balkan melee anyhow. The longer full-scale intervention is postponed, the more costly and complex it will become.

Paul Hokenos writes for ALR on central and eastern Europe from his base in Berlin.
WHO PUT THE L IN ALR?

Left out of it

THE collapse of the Berlin Wall, the demise of the Soviet Union and the general idea that Marxist command economies have not been universally successful are nothing to the changes confronting Australia's left-wing intellectuals.

In a master stroke of marketing, the Australian Left Review, originally the theoretical journal of the now defunct Australian Communist Party, is changing its name to ALR Magazine. According to editor David Burchell, there are potential readers sympathetic to the magazine's position who may be put off by the unfashionable presence of the word "left" in its title. Mr Burchell hopes the name change will help lift the magazine's circulation, currently running at 4000.

In recent years the magazine has broadened its coverage and in place of witty insights into the finer points of Marxist theories, it now discusses more mainstream politics.

This has not met with the acclaim of all its readers. Mr Burchell says some critics consider it to be "little more than an in-house magazine for ALP factions".

But Round-Up wonders: if not Left, what does the L in ALR stand for?

Yes, festive readers, it's holiday competition time. Above is a column item from the Australian's higher education supplement. Help the Australian newspaper with its query about the 'L' in ALR's new abbreviated name, and you could win yourself a holiday bonus prize of $100 worth of books of your choice from the catalogue of Pluto Press.

All you have to do is come up with a witty, imaginative, scornful or downright daffy explanation (or explanations) for the letters 'ALR' in ALR's masthead. The best suggestion will be printed in the February 1993 issue of ALR (though not necessarily on the masthead), and your choice of books will speed like Santa's sleigh to your holiday destination.

Send your suggestions to: ALR Acronyms, Freepost 28, PO Box A247 Sydney South 2000. The competition closes on Friday, January 15 1993.
WHOSE COUP?

It was said at the time that the 1991 hardliners' coup in the former Soviet Union at least afforded its citizens the benefit of clarifying the old question about power: 'who is who?'

But who was Gorbachev? In those strange times, rumours flew around that Gorbachev had pro voked or even planned the coup against himself.

The former Foreign Minister, Mr Shevardnadze, said at the time that he was "curious", noting: "I have suspicions, but they're just suspicions. I cannot say any more right now without proof, though it's all very strange."

The then Georgian president lent his support to a conspiracy theory, claiming that Gorbachev had engineered the coup to bolster his own popularity. And as late as August 1992, Gorbachev felt impelled once again to deny the rumour that he had had a hand in the plot, as a means to preserve his failing power.

Such rumours appear implausible in that Gorbachev stood to gain little from such a coup—and, as it turned out, gained even less by its collapse. Given the incompetence of the plotters, cock-up seems a simpler explanation than conspiracy. Of course, a distinction between these two explanations is by no means absolute; a conspiracy can all too easily turn into a cock-up.

Stories about the state's instigation of revolt against itself are, however, a staple of Russian and Soviet history. Typically, such stories tell of how the organs of the state encourage or sponsor revolt in order to create chaos, as a pretext for a new bout of repression or reaction. One story, which seems to me of special interest, concerns the actions of the police agent Evny Azef (or Azev) in the early years of the century. It has been established that, at this time, the Tsarist police subsidised the campaigns of terror against the state and its officials.

With the collusion of his superiors, the agent Azef headed up a secret wing of the Social Revolutionary Party. Azef's group assassinated various high-ranking officials, including the military governor of Moscow, the Grand Duke Sergei. Even more bizarre, Azef's group assassinated his own employer—the Minister of the Interior, von Plehve, head of the secret police, under whom Azef's group had been formed. Azef turned over terrorists to the police, and police agents to the terrorists, before he was exposed in 1908. But the intrigue continued. In 1911 a police agent disguised as a revolutionary assassinated then Minister of the Interior Stolypin.

Stories of treason by the state against itself similar to that of Azef continued to circulate under communist rule. The Tsarist secret police had placed agents provocateurs throughout the Bolshevik Party. From the 1920s on, various emigres and followers of Trotsky put about rumours that Stalin had been one of those agents. In April 1956, the American magazine Life lent credence to these rumours in an article entitled "Stalin's Sensational Secret", written by a former NKVD official, Alexander Orlov. Orlov attributed many of Stalin's campaigns of repression to his fear of being 'outed' as a former police spy, after the (alleged) unearthing in 1937 of documents establishing this.

The Russian historian Roy Medvedev has examined, and discounted, the stories about Stalin the secret police agent. But Medvedev did note that Stalin often provoked dissension among his underlings in order to justify new crackdowns, giving them orders and then punishing them for carrying them out. It was in this sense, Medvedev noted, that Stalin and Azef were "soul brothers". Such stories of theuses of power have a Machiavellian touch. When Cesare Borgia wanted to pacify the region of Romagna, the prince sent in his man Remirro de Orco armed with absolute powers, a man whom Borgia knew to be cruel and ruthless. Remirro's job done, the prince arranged for the gratitude of his subjects by leaving Remirro's body in two pieces on the square beside a piece of wood and a bloody knife. "The ferocity of this spectacle left the people at once stunned and satisfied", Machiavelli comments of Borgia's cunning and duplicity.

In the case of Gorbachev, however, the rumours of his self-implication in his downfall probably tell us very little about what really happened while he was on holidays in the Crimea. What they do suggest is that the Soviet state was not as monolithic or as secure as we might have supposed—and that within that state there was a war going on every bit as severe as that which it waged against its own citizens for over 70 years.

What they also illuminate is a continuing fascination with the tortuous ways of power, whereby it may serve the interests of at least parts of the state to invite or permit its own subversion. As Stephen Greenblatt asks in a different context, "why, we must ask ourselves, should power record other voices, permit subversive inquiries, register at its very center the transgressions that will ultimately violate it? The answer may be in part that power...is not perfectly monolithic and hence may encounter and record in one of its functions materials that can threaten another of its functions; in part that power thrives on vigilance, and human beings are vigilant if they sense a threat; in part that power defines itself in relation to such threats or simply to that which is not identical with it."

Power, in other words, displays itself most clearly in a paradoxical relation of vulnerability and strength. The fragile equilibrium in which power maintains itself is carefully crafted so that even its supposed transgression may be initiated by itself.

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The orthodox account has it that in 1989 democracy triumphed and socialism died. Barry Hindess isn't convinced. He argues that if social democracy, as well as socialism, is in peril, democracy itself is looking pretty ill.

The collapse of the Soviet empire has been depicted in many ways. One influential version of events identifies that collapse both with the end of communism (at least in Europe) and with the correlative triumph of representative democracy—as an objective if not yet an established reality. Since these developments in the East took place at a time when social democracy was also in retreat, some commentators have been tempted to see these developments as signalling not only the end of communism as a serious governmental project but also that of socialism. On this view, the victory of democracy and the death of socialism are one and the same.

The most triumphalist version of this representation of events in Europe incorporates them into the global story of the 'End of History', according to which the greater part of humanity has finally come to realise that representative democracy is the only feasible political ideal. All that remains is history—without the capital letter. In the less fortunate parts of the world this mundane history will consist primarily of the struggle to put the End of History into practice—against the resistance of self-interested minorities and perhaps also, in some places, of unenlightened majorities.

The End of History is an easy target and I will not spend time on it except to note that it is little more than a philosophically pretentious elaboration on the political implications of modernisation theory and other influential discourses on the nature of something called 'modernity' or 'modern society'. In this modernisation perspective, representative democracy of the western kind appears as the central political feature of modern society. It is something that other, less fortunate societies must aim to acquire if they are to have any hope of catching us up.

This same perspective underlies a more sanguine version of the end of communism theme, and one that appears to be somewhat more plausible. This is the story of the 'lid of the cauldron. Here the cauldron is the political repression imposed on Russia and its European satellites, and the moral is the terrifying effect of removing that lid: namely, that a host of atavistic national and ethnic chauvinisms are immediately released into the atmosphere. In this version of the modernisation story, democracy remains, as one of my colleagues keeps telling me, the only game in town. There is, however, one important qualification: in many modern—but essentially pre-modern—societies of the old Soviet empire and elsewhere there is likely to be a bloody and a lengthy intermission before that game is ready to be played.

As the tone of these remarks may indicate, I would tell a rather different tale. In place of the triumphalist association of the death of socialism with the victory of democracy I argue that
we should distinguish the fate of communism from that of social democracy. If the latter is in serious trouble—as I believe it is—then there is an important sense in which socialism and democracy are in much the same kind of boat. If the one is indeed sinking beneath the waves of History we should not be optimistic about the future of the other. As to the lid of the cauldron story, it is clear that ethnic and national chauvinism is on the increase throughout Western Europe, albeit on a less destructive scale than in the East. The death of socialism, the problems of democracy in Europe, and the rise of ethnic and national chauvinism are certainly connected, but not in the ways suggested by the more sanguine variants of the modernisation perspective.

The broad traditions associated with the ideas of 'democracy' and 'socialism' both present the idea of a self-governing community in which significant aspects of the life of the community are to be brought under its control. So too, in a rather different sense, do the representations of society involved in ethnic and national chauvinism. In the case of democracy—the case of socialism is only a little more complex—the community is identified both as a political unity and as a cultural and moral unity, usually with a supposed foundation in ethnic or national identity. Although such formulae as 'Government of the people, for the people, by the people' have a strongly universalistic appeal, they also suppose that the people in question has some definite identity, distinct from the identities of other peoples. In this respect at least, democratic politics are no less atavistic than the particular forms of nationalism on which they are based. We should not be surprised to find a reassertion of the importance of such identities under conditions in
'If social democracy is in serious trouble, then socialism and democracy are in the same boat.'

which the community or the capacity of the community to govern itself is thought to be under threat.

To say that a community is democratic is to say first that it is a republic—a community governed by its citizens. In effect, this means that all decisions should be made by the community or by agencies and governing minorities that are regarded as answerable to the community as a whole. Self-government here means that the community can decide which matters affecting the life of the community should be brought under its direct control and which may safely be left to others. The assumption here is that if all citizens have equal political standing then the majority of citizens (the demos) rule.

This sense of republican self-government clearly supposes that the community has the capacity to exercise the control to which it makes claim, but it also conceives of self-government as self-restraint. In this latter case the individuals and groups of which the community is composed agree to subordinate themselves and their collective endeavours to a superior power which they themselves jointly constitute. In effect, they constrain themselves and their government to act only within a specific framework of laws and institutions. A number of different grounds for such restraint can be distinguished, but two have been particularly influential in the history of modern democracy.

First, if the community is to be regarded as a community of citizens, then individual rights must be seen as establishing a limit to communal action. A community whose members are thought to be autonomous actors cannot encroach too far on that autonomy without becoming a community of a very different kind. Modern ideas of constitutionalism and the rule of law are particularly concerned to establish limits of this kind.

Secondly, the community may be regarded as constituting an entity with a life of its own—an 'economy' or a 'society'—subject to its own laws and functional requirements. This perspective suggests that government should take account of those laws if it is to have any hope of acting effectively. Political economy and its successor, economics, have been particularly successful exponents of this way of looking at society. They suggest that practices of economic regulation should operate within restraints imposed by the nature of economic activity itself. There is an obvious tension here between the idea of the community exercising final control of the agenda of government and this notion of society as a practical entity. If economic activity (or other aspect of social life) is governed by its own exigencies then these same exigencies impose an objective limit on what can realistically be placed on the agenda of government. The liberal critique of the economic pretensions of socialist planning is simply a development of this line of argument.

Democratic government, in other words, exists in a tension between two distinct but related aspects; it is a matter of the citizens collectively deciding and acting on matters of general concern on the one hand, and a matter of collective self-control on the other. Where radical democracy tends to stress the first aspect, liberalism as always emphasised the second. Liberal or representative democracy is, as the former name suggests, a somewhat unstable compromise in which the institutions of representative government are expected to play a major part in satisfying both sets of demands. On the one hand, they are supposed to secure a significant degree of individual liberty against the threat of majority or minority tyranny. On the other, representative government is said to allow an active government by the people to be extended to large, geographically dispersed and relatively differentiated populations.

Where does socialism belong in this account? What the many different variants of socialism have in common is not much more than a desire to bring economic activity (and therefore property) within the domain of an active self-government. Like democracy, then, socialism presumes an actual or potential governmental capacity to exercise control over significant aspects of the life of the community. Unlike democracy, however, socialism has not always identified the relevant community as a community of citizens—that is, as consisting of autonomous persons whose capacity for independent action should be secured. Nor have socialists been much impressed by the vision of the economy as a benignly self-regulating realm of social activity, preferring rather to see the economy as a field of dangerous and potentially disruptive forces that must always be carefully regulated. Of the two most powerful liberal arguments for governmental self-control, then, socialists have sometimes—but not always—disputed one and they have invariably been sceptical of the other.

In fact, the two most influential variants of socialism of the 20th century can be distinguished by the position they take on precisely this issue. On the one hand, social democracy has tempered its activist understanding of government by a commitment to governmental self-restraint of a broadly liberal kind. Communism, on the other hand, proposed to bring economic activity under popular control while dismissing what it regarded as the bourgeois idea of governmental restraint. It has been used to defend political regimes that not only failed to protect the autonomy and moral integrity of their subjects, but, rather, actively sought to subvert such values. The difficulties of planning the construction of a complex modern economy in East Europe were therefore seriously compounded by the effects of widespread corruption and unwillingness to speak the truth. The collapse of most of these socialist regimes has no direct implications for the survival or otherwise of social democracy.
To say that a community is democratic, and therefore self-governing, is also to say that it has the capacity to govern itself and, in particular, that it is not governed by other agencies. This is to suppose, of course, that there can be a clear identification of the population and the territory over which its government is said to be exercised. The fact that most of us in the West now live in communities of this kind should not be taken for granted. Many politically significant communities have existed in settings of overlapping territorial claims and jurisdictions—as in the European middle ages, for example. Imperial possessions throughout history have frequently been identified as distinct political units primarily by the fact of their subordination to some particular ruler. In Europe today there are regions in which both the population to be governed and the relevant territory are in dispute. In such cases, the question of self-government, and therefore also of democracy, can arise only if there is some prospect of these disputes being resolved.

This understanding of a democratic community as one whose population and territory are clearly distinguished from those of others, goes hand-in-hand with the further notion of the community as one that shares a common culture. This has often led to the view first that governments should act in accordance with the morality that emerges from what is often now called civil society and, secondly, that government interference with the life of civil society should be regarded as undermining the integrity of these standards. This assumption of a common culture is a particular feature of democratic and republican understanding of political community—and it is normally understood in a somewhat exclusive sense. Notions of descent—of which the idea of a distinctive national culture that cannot readily be acquired by persons who are not born into it is simply a variant—have always played an important part in the way citizenship has been understood within particular communities. In the modern period, such notions have generally coexisted in uneasy relationship with other principles of inclusion and exclusion, as I have argued elsewhere in ALR ('Citizens and Peoples', ALR 140, June).

Democracy is now considered, in the West and elsewhere, against the background of a conception of community in which the unity of a self-governing polity is expected to correspond to the unity of a national culture. Yet it is important to recognise the peculiarity of this assumption of cultural homogeneity. In fact, the experience of cultural diversity has been the normal human condition throughout recorded history.

The modern experience of cultural diversity poses a problem for all societies that claim to be democratic or where democracy is now on the political agenda—precisely because the discourse of democracy presupposes a common culture which functions both to sustain citizens' life together and to distinguish them from citizens of other communities. The appearance of national chauvinism in the European east is often treated as if it were an atavistic remnant. Yet if the notion of a self-governing community as a political ideal plays an important part in political life, so too will the identification of community in terms of a common culture and usually a common descent. We should expect these ideas to come to the fore whenever the community or its capacity to govern itself are thought to be under threat.

This is the point at which the two themes of this article come together. The idea that a community could be entirely self-governing is, of course, something of a fantasy—and it has frequently been recognised as such. However, there are significant features of the modern world that further undermine the limited plausibility it may once have had. The widespread loss of faith in Keynesian economic management provides a particularly clear illustration of the problem here. This loss cannot be understood simply as an ideological counterpoint to the rise of free market doctrines. Rather, it should be seen as a consequence of changes in international economic relationships—the internationalisation of financial markets, the relative growth of trade between countries (much of it within companies) and the relative decline of trade within them, the increasing significance of corporations engaged in multinational operations, and so on. These developments have significantly undermined the credibility of the perception of the national economy as a relatively self-contained entity—a central presupposition of government economic calculation and debate for much of the modern period. My point is not that governments are helpless in the face of these developments, or even that they have all been affected in the same way. Rather it is that there is an important sense in which their room for manoeuvre has been greatly reduced.

There is certainly a problem for social democracy here, but it is also a problem of more general significance. The broadly Keynesian view of economic management that allowed social democratic parties to pursue what they saw as socialist principles within the constraints of a liberal democratic polity was shared by many of their political opponents on the Right. The loss of faith in that view of economic management threatens to undermine any project of democratic economic management, not just for social democratic projects.

My second theme concerned the intimate relations between ideas of democracy on the one hand and cultural and ethnic chauvinism on the other. The fate of democracy and socialism and the rise of national chauvinism are intimately related on both sides of the old European divide, albeit in significantly different ways. In the west the economic sphere is by no means the only area in which the image of a self-contained national community has

‘We should expect chauvinism to come to the fore whenever the community’s capacity to govern itself is under threat.’
been seriously undermined. On the one hand, supra-national agencies (together, in the case of Europe, with a supra-national political community) operate as an external constraint on the sovereign freedom of many national governments. On the other hand, the movement of people, narcotics, cultural artefacts and distinctive life-styles across national boundaries has served to weaken the perception of the national community as a cultural and moral unity.

The reasons why social democracy is in retreat, then, must be seen as part of a larger set of problems now facing any political project that is understood in terms of self-governing national communities. If social democracy is under pressure, so is democracy of any other kind. We should not be surprised to find that reassertion of the importance of imaginary cultural and moral unities is a common response to the perceived incapacity of national governments either to provide economic security or to control the influx of alien persons and lifestyles on the other. The implications of that reassertion for democratic communities based on the liberal virtues of toleration and the rule of law are only too clear.

In Eastern Europe the problems are more serious in almost every respect. Established mechanisms for regulating national economies have, for all their manifest failures, nevertheless had considerable successes of a kind. They have now been dismantled or left to collapse, with the result that governments are unable to provide even a degree of economic security that is regarded as insufficient by many in the West. In many cases, too, both the territories and the populations to be incorporated by particular national governments are in dispute. To raise the spectre of democracy under these conditions is not only to promise a capacity for political and economic management that governments will not be able to provide. It is also to throw the explosive question of the determination of the relevant national communities into an already unstable political arena.

One kind of socialism (communism) has collapsed while the other (social democracy) has mostly been abandoned by parties that claim to operate in its name. The new constraints on the capacities of governments to manage affairs within their own national communities are as ominous for democracy as a whole as they are for the broad traditions of social democracy—and it is in this sense that 'socialism' and 'democracy' sail in remarkably similar vessels. If most of its officers and crew have now abandoned the one, on the grounds of what they describe as political realism, what are we to make of those who continue to promise safe passage in the other?

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Fightback! is not what it appears to be. It is not a liberal document within any of the definitions of liberalism available in the relevant literature. The only way in which it might be understood to be liberal is if neo-liberalism is taken to be non-liberalism: clearly an absurdity. Fightback! is, paradoxically, both conservative and revolutionary. Viewed from the standpoint of one major strand of liberal philosophy—classical Anglo-Scottish liberalism—it is conservative; viewed in relation to the other it is revolutionary.

Classical Anglo-Scottish liberalism originated some time in the 17th century. It was a philosophy of change developed in the face of an existing order. That order was a feudal one. Those people in positions of power held those positions for either of two reasons: because they held title to significant quantities of land—which, in an agrarian economy, is control over the source of wealth—or because they held significant positions in the Church hierarchy. These two groups supported each other.

Within Anglo-Scottish society, however, other groups were emerging as challengers to those who held positions on the basis of the ownership of land or presence in a religious hierarchy. The philosophy referred to as classical liberalism was part of this challenge. In part, the challenge reflected a shift from an agrarian to a trading and, eventually, industrial economy. In part, it reflected the development of a group who held only intellectual capital. However you understand the challenge, it was a challenge. It was a challenge to those who were dominant in society; it was a challenge to position, and it was a challenge to authority.

This is particularly important in the case of land. Land ownership was based upon titles. The way in which land was attained was primarily through inheritance. The classical liberals were not so much concerned with the ownership of land; rather, they were concerned about the acquisition of land and, consequently, social position.

Challenges to dominant orders raise immediate problems. The first and most significant is the problem of chaos. Take away position and you might be left with disorder. Hobbes argued for the use of force to maintain order. Locke argued for the use of reason. The classical economists, of whom Adam Smith was a key figure, had a more interesting solution. In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) Smith did not place his faith in the invisible hand of God as the means of maintaining social order. He placed his faith in the invisible hand of the market.

The beauty of Smith’s position was that the market served three functions. First, it was a coordinator of all economic activities in a given society. Second, it was a distributor of goods and services. Third, the market was a distributor of social position. Success in the market was the means for the acquisition of wealth and, consequently, social position. The market rewarded those who understood it and worked effectively within it; those who did not understand it or work effectively received their just rewards (though it was Malthus who drew the ultimate conclusions from these principles).

The consequence of all this was that the classical liberals were oriented to what Berlin has called negative freedom—that is, freedom from interference. If the market mechanism was left free from interference it would serve both to reward those who were worthy and regulate 

Fightback! is supposed to be the last word in neoliberal thought. Ian Cook disagrees. He argues that it has little to do with classical liberalism, and even less with the modern liberalism of Menzies.
economic activity within society. Those who held significant positions by other than economic means would lose their social positions as long as the market, and not inheritance, distributed rewards.

_Fightback!_ looks like a classical liberal document. Government interference is constructed as a problem. Government interference frustrates people and strips them of their abilities to self-direct. The market is represented as a means to allocate and reward properly. People are represented as autonomous actors who are self-interested and have the ability to further those interests in a market situation. But _Fightback!_ is not a challenge to an existing order. It does not acknowledge difference in social position. The only 'privileged' group that is given much of a mention is unionists. But somehow it is hard to construct them in the same position as the lords of feudalism.

_Fightback!_ does not indicate a recognition of the transmission of power from generation to generation on the part of its authors. Put simply, they do not address the question of inheritance. _Fightback!_ certainly is not a challenge to the processes of the transmission of position and authority from generation to generation. If such processes do not go on, then _Fightback!_ is not inadequate. If they do, then _Fightback!_ from the standpoint of classic Anglo-Scottish liberalism, is both inadequate and pernicious.

If classical liberalism is taken out of its historical situation and, as a result, stripped of its political significance, then _Fightback!_ might be understood to be a classical liberal document. But to take such a view would require, or at least allow, that _Fightback!_ also be taken out of its historical context. Both moves would be mistakes. In fact, _Fightback!_ looks much more like a conservative document. At best _Fightback!_ will merely serve to entrench the interests of white middle-class men. The distributional impacts on workers, women and migrants will be such as to reinforce their inequitable social positions. If white middle-class men were not a dominant group, then _Fightback!_ would not be a conservative document.

People's abilities to achieve success within a market framework depend on a number of things. These things might be described as various forms of capital; social, intellectual and economic are probably the most important ones. These forms of capital are not evenly distributed in Australian society. This uneven distribution will not be overcome through individual initiative within a market framework. Those who already possess these forms of capital will be more successful in a market situation. They will be more able, therefore, to maintain their social positions. To take government out of the market will not be to create greater possibilities for justice or freedom.

It will merely serve to enhance the ability of those in dominant social positions to maintain their dominance. This is not true only with respect to the current generation. Given that _Fightback!_ does not address inheritance, we must assume that nothing will be done about it.

So, we are left with a policy package that will serve to facilitate the maintenance of position by those in dominant social positions. We are left also with a policy package that will allow those in dominant social positions to transmit those positions to their offspring—imperfectly, of course, but fairly consistently. It seems like conservatism to me.

But this is not the end of the story. _Fightback!_ is presented as a document of change. And it is. The question then becomes: against what is the federal Coalition fighting back? I think the answer is clear. The Coalition is fighting back against the second strand of liberalism, the liberal-ism that has been dominant in white Australian politics since federation: revisionist liberalism. _Fightback!_ is a revolutionary document within this Australian liberal tradition.

Conditions in 19th century Britain represented a challenge to those who espoused liberal ideas. The market was failing to deliver benefits to all members of society. Not only were some people a lot better off than others, those others seemed to have little chance to improve their position. Social inequality couldn't be explained simply in terms of a failure on each individual's part to adapt their behaviour to the market. Inequality seemed to be, and probably was, systemic. That inequality exists is not a problem for liberalism of any sort. The market will tend to produce inequality—which might otherwise be understood to be a reward for initiative and effort and a punishment for a lack of either or both. But when inequality becomes systemic, a problem arises. In that situation, individuals are not allowed freedom to pursue their own end without hindrance.

To accept the existence of systematically produced inequality is significant. It is to accept that individuals do not emerge fully formed but go through a developmental process. The revisionist liberals basically introduced the idea that individuals underwent formative processes that were not always equal and which tended to cause them to end up in unequal positions in society. The process upon which early revisionists concentrated was usually education.

John Stuart Mill was just one of the liberals who became convinced of the necessity for the provision of an education that was accessible to all. Mill was also sensitive to, and concerned about, the socially-produced inequality of women. Other revisionist liberals such as T H Green were motivated more by what they took to be the
moral indifference of market relations. Christian liberals like Green were appalled by the spiritual poverty of classical liberalism in action.

The first consequence of this revision of liberalism was that the state was given the task of ameliorating certain social problems—those which seemed to have been produced, to a significant extent, by the unregulated, or the not very significantly regulated, market.

Amelioration, however, was not enough. The problems would be bound to recur, or would continue to be reproduced, if something was not done to provide a greater opportunity to those who would, under normal conditions, have bad their life chances significantly curtailed by the processes of social reproduction. A minimal education had to be provided for all, for example, if everyone was to have close to an equal chance in life. Physical conditions that caused developmental problems in children also had to be addressed. Many aspects of the welfare state were justified within this philosophical system. Later, Keynesian economics provided an economic justification for state intervention in society. The shift was one that placed more responsibility in the hands of those in government to ensure a real opportunity for all. The freedoms that Berlin has called positive freedom had to be ensured by the state, since they would not emerge from the workings of the free market. Freedom needed to be freedom to pursue ends and attain goals, not simply freedom from government control.

Revisionist liberalism has always been the dominant ideology in white Australia. This has been due to a number of factors. Five come fairly quickly to mind. First, the penal origins of white society meant that government pre-existed white society. Second, the government has always been understood to be a provider of social goods and a facilitator of social development. Third, with the rise of the labour movement the government was seen to have a role to play in the redistribution of wealth. Fourth, agricultural interests have always required support and protection from the government—and have usually been successful in getting it. Fifth, those concerned with the promotion of the position of women within Australian society have often looked to the government for support and action.

The liberalisms of Deakin, Higgins and Menzies were liberalisms of the active state—that is, of the revisionist liberal state. While all of these men were committed to ideas of individual freedom, they were also sensitive to systematically reproduced inequality. To one extent or another, they all tried to do something about it. Menzies was also committed to spiritual values that he felt were superior to those found in market relations and saw education, among other things, as one of the sources of such values. While Australia might not be understood to be an active Christian community, it is still a Christian community and a sense of the significance of the Christian values pervades our society.

I agree with Tim Rowse's assessment in his classic Australian Liberalism and National Character that the dominant ideology of both of the major party blocs has almost always been revisionist liberalism. Moreover, the principles that have supported the practices of government in Australia have always been revisionist liberal. When Fightback! calls for a new role for government it is a role radically different from that constructed within revisionist liberalism. Effectively, the role for government that Fightback! outlines is really a non-role. In the view of the authors of Fightback! Australians will be forced out of their 'culture of dependence'. They will be forced to take responsibility for the provision of their own health insurance and retirement. They will be forced to take personal responsibility for their wages and conditions.

The mechanism through which the services that people require will be delivered is, of course, the market. Government provision of services, according to the authors of Fightback! is necessarily inefficient. Market provision is efficient. But market provision will not merely be more efficient, it will also be a spur to individual responsibility. This connection between individual responsibility and the market is used in a very interesting way in Fightback!. The authors of the document make the claim that market-generated responsibility will lead to market-generated morality. An intimate relationship between markets and morality is presented. Markets are understood to require morality and morality is understood to require markets.

Fightback! presents a conception of the role of government that has never before been practised in this country. While Australia has never allowed a particularly extensive role for government compared with, for instance, the European social democracies, neither have we had a theory of government that denies to government anything but a minimal legitimacy. While we have never had big government, neither have we had miniscule government.

Revisionist liberalism might not have been enough to redress the significant, systematically produced inequalities in Australia, but it did address some of the sources of systemic inequality. Fightback! does not. Fightback! is a fightback against the way we have always done things. A new social order, something like the old one, but a lot more unequal, awaits us.

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The closed shop is a prime target in Jeff Kennett and John Hewson's industrial revolution. They see it as a cornerstone of union power. But, as Gianni Zappala reports, the evidence is far from being clear-cut. Maybe unions should give the closed shop away.

The closed shop has long been one of the principal tenets and organising strategies of unions. Some of the bitter industrial struggles fought in Australia at the turn of the century—disputes that led to the system of compulsory arbitration—were over the issue of compulsory unionism. As the industrial relations debate now focuses on enterprise bargaining, workplace practices such as the closed shop are again under the spotlight.

The federal opposition's spokesperson on industrial relations, John Howard, has promised to outlaw the closed shop if the Coalition wins the next election. In any case, in the two most populous states, NSW and Victoria, the closed shop has already been effectively banned by the banning of preference to unionists clauses in awards. So whether unions like it or not, the issue is bound to stay on the public agenda.

Yet while the closed shop has come to be seen as an unquestioned tenet of unionism, little is known about its impact on unions themselves. The case for supporting the closed shop from a union perspective is far from conclusive and needs to be demonstrated. The argument that the closed shop enabled unions to organise workers in seasonal and erratic jobs at the turn of the century may not be relevant to workers in the service sector in the 1990s. Is the closed shop appropriate to a union movement intending to adopt a greater focus on the provision of services, the targeting of special groups, and the portraying of unions as a valuable 'club' to be a member of?

Not only is the closed shop coming under attack at the legislative level in both state and federal spheres, but many union members themselves are opposed to the idea of the closed shop. One estimate suggests that at least 25% of all unionists were unwilling conscripts in 1990. That is, one quarter of all unionists would probably not have joined their trade unions if it were not for closed shops. Moreover, 82% of all union members favoured voluntary union membership. What will happen to union membership and density if compulsory unionism is banned federally as well as at state level? Here I want to question the implicit acceptance of the closed shop by unions. This is meant as a stimulus for debate on possible future organising strategies for the labour movement. In particular, I want to focus on four (contrasting) propositions concerning the impact of the closed shop on unions.

1. Do closed shops reduce union militancy and activity?

First, it is sometimes argued that if all employees are forced to join the union, the apathetic members may tend to 'dilute' the militants within the union. That is, are unwilling conscripts more apathetic and conservative than volunteers? This argument rests on the assumption, popular among European unions, that a union's strength lies not in numbers but in the percentage of strongly-committed members. Second, this prompts the question: are central union organisations less militant under compulsory union membership? Given that the influence of unions on policy matters within the central organisations tends to depend on their size, and traditionally non-militant unions gain relatively more members through closed shops than do militant unions, it may be expected that compulsory unionism also leads to less militant central union bodies. Third, it is often argued from the contrary perspective that the closed shop encourages 'responsible' unionism. By ensuring organisational survival, the closed shop allows union organisers to take a longer term view of industrial relations, and not engage as frequently in industrial action in order to demonstrate their effectiveness to potential mem-
Fourth, employers often use the closed shop to strike agreements with less militant unions in order to keep more militant rivals at bay. This was one of the reasons it was thought management became enamoured of the closed shop in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Australian research has suggested that there are significant attitudinal differences among union members who have joined their union voluntarily and those who have been compelled to join because of closed shop arrangements. Those who have been compelled to join (conscripts) have been found to be more conservative in their political outlook and less inclined to support union policies. Voluntary union members were likely in the more 'aggressive' unions and were inclined to prefer an increase in the level of their union's activity. In contrast, the conscripts belonged to less aggressive unions and tended to be satisfied with their present level of activity and militancy. The evidence from these studies would support the view that the impact of militant members may be diluted due to the entry of unwilling unionists.

A recent (albeit tentative) source of evidence comes from *Industrial Relations at Work: Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey* (AGPS, 1991). One interpretation of the survey data is that the closed shop may lead to lower levels of union activity and poorer levels of service to union members. For example, according to the survey, the workplaces with the highest number of closed shops and the highest level of payroll deduction of union dues also had relatively inactive workplace unions. General union meetings were conducted irregularly or not at all. Little time was spent by union delegates on union activities at these workplaces relative to the others. Industrial action was commonly of a non-strike nature, and bargaining, when it did occur, was sporadic and reactive.

Another measure of militancy which can be used to explore this proposition is strike patterns. If the closed shop leads to less militant unions, we would expect that workplaces, industries or regions with a greater prevalence of closed shops also display lower strike frequencies than those without closed shops. Recent research in the US found that strikes were more severe and probably in states where closed shops are outlawed. This is consistent with the proposition that unions without a closed shop are inclined to strike more, first, because they are less
prone to 'dilution' and, second, because they need to demonstrate to non-members that they are working to achieve better wages and conditions.

2. Do closed shops lead to poorer services to union members?

This is one of the more popular propositions regarding the impact of the closed shop on unions. It is pertinent to unions as they look to become more service-conscious. The argument is that the threat of union members withdrawing their membership is a necessary condition to ensure unions adequately service their membership. With a secure membership resulting from the closed shop, union officials may turn their attention to other goals which may not be in the short run interests of the rank and file. The ability of an employee to either willingly join or leave a union provides an incentive for the union to 'earn' that member through the provision of services that they may not otherwise receive.

A relevant measure of this proposition is the union/non-union wage mark-up. If the proposition that the closed shop leads to poorer services for union members is correct, we would expect the union/non-union wage premium to be higher in workplaces, industries or regions where there is no closed shop, as unions will strive more effectively to make union membership more attractive. In other words, unions attempt to 'sell' their services by raising the union wage rates higher than they otherwise would be. This has been tested empirically in the US and studies have found the union wage premiums to be higher in states with no closed shops than in states where the closed shop is permissible. This finding is consistent with our second proposition that closed shops lead to poorer services to union members.

Another US study examined how unions reward their members. The primary aim was to investigate whether unions in states with no closed shops rewarded their members more equally than union is other states. The hypothesis was that unions without closed shop provisions would need to take greater account of individual members' interests, which would be reflected in union pay growing less rapidly with seniority in states with no closed shops, as unions need to cater to all members' interests. The conclusion from this study is worth quoting at length as it aptly supports the second proposition:

"Our results indicate that 'Right to Work' legislation [closed shop outlawed] affects how unions reward members. Unions in 'Right to Work' states [no closed shop] reward members more currently and more equally and are less concerned with day-to-day administration of complex bargaining agreements. This is not simply because unions must negotiate in a more hostile environment in 'Right to Work' states... more direct control over the union by members does that. 'Right to Work' legislation forces a union to bargain more in the immediate interest of all members because members can withdraw from a union at any time without cost to themselves. It is tempting to conclude that ease of withdrawal is as beneficial in unionism as it is in governments, where costless withdrawal and competition ensure that government is in the interest of the governed rather than the governors."

3. Does the closed shop increase union bargaining power?

This proposition assumes that bargaining power relies almost solely on a union's ability to achieve and maintain collective action against an employer. The closed shop is seen to assist in this—first, by ensuring that union membership will be at a sufficiently critical mass to make collective action effective; and second, by providing a 'discipline function' over the membership. If collective action is to succeed all must be a part. The threat of exclusion from the union for recalcitrant members and the loss of certain privileges and even their job, is seen to strengthen the union's position in taking strike action. Unlike the first hypothesis, strength is seen to reside in numbers and in the ability to ensure the numbers add up when needed.

A convenient measure of bargaining strength is to compare the wages outcomes of workplaces or regions which have closed shops with those of workplaces or regions without closed shops. Earlier evidence in the US suggested that the closed shop did increase a union's bargaining power. Recent thinking in the US, however, has cast doubt on the validity of these results. Research in Canada has also concluded that the presence of a closed shop made little difference to a union's bargaining strength as measured by wage outcomes.

In contrast, and perhaps more relevant for Australian unions, a number of recent studies in Britain lend support to the hypothesis that the closed shop does increase unions' bargaining power. If workers are compelled to join a union then strength is, however, the pre-entry closed shop (where the union controls the labour supply) which appears to have most impact in enabling unions to increase wages. The post-entry closed shop has a very small to negligible impact on pay over and above unionisation, and may be more a function of high union density at the workplace.

Evidence about the impact of the closed shop on union bargaining power is them somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand the US and Canadian evidence suggests that the closed shop may not increase unions' bargaining power. On the other hand, the British evidence suggests that some forms of closed shops, specifically the pre-entry closed shop, enables unions to enjoy greater bargaining power. Post-entry closed shops add little to union bargaining power over that resulting from a high level of union density.

4. Does the closed shop lead to increased union membership?

If workers are compelled to join a union then the ranks of unionists will most likely increase. The
important assumption here is that this is worthwhile in itself, because it will also increase union strength through increased membership and financial security. This assumption is in contrast to the assumption of our first proposition. Does the banning of the closed shop affect unions' ability to organise?

The evidence from the US suggests that, while the presence of a closed shop does not seem to have a great impact in the long run. One study revealed that the number of union members was 5% lower than it would otherwise have been a decade after a state had passed anti-closed shop legislation. The worrying result from a union perspective was that the level of unionism was permanently reduced after the closed shop was banned.

In New Zealand a post-entry closed shop has been the norm in most workplaces since 1936. This form of compulsory unionism had a positive effect on aggregate union membership growth. In 1984 closed shop provisions were abolished; they were subsequently reintroduced by a Labour government in 1985; and were again recently revoked in the dramatic changes to New Zealand's industrial relations system. The impact on union membership of the first removal of closed shop provisions was considerable. Interestingly, the smaller unions fared much better than the large unions and in some cases even gained members. This may indicate that smaller unions are more effective in providing services to their members and may caution against the assumption that union amalgamations and the deregistration of small unions will necessarily strengthen the bargaining powers of unions.

In Australia, the positive effect of preference clauses and closed shop provisions in assisting some unions increase their membership since the 1970s has been well documented. The impact of some preference clauses on union membership seems to have been substantial—as in the cases of the growth of the Clerks and Retail trades unions, and the rapid growth in unionisation in the early 1970s in the ACT and the Northern Territory. This tide was turned in the early 1980s due to conservative government attacks on these provisions. Union growth in Queensland and Western Australia suffered for similar reasons due to legislation against compulsory unionism.

It is clear that the closed shop does assist unions in maintaining higher levels and growth in union membership. The proposition that unions can justify striving for the closed shop for this reason alone, however, may be tenuous. If union strength and bargaining power rests primarily in the size of membership, the closed shop may be worthwhile for unions. However, it is far from clear that this is in fact the case.

It is probably not possible to provide definitive answers to the question of what impact the closed shop has on unions. My purpose here is simply to question the implicit acceptance of the closed shop and to challenge the view that the closed shop is vital for union survival. Indeed, it may be suggested that the removal of the closed shop would be in the union movement's long-term interest.

The closed shop may lead to reduced union militancy and activity and lower and poorer services to union members, and may not necessarily lead to increased bargaining power. The exception in the latter case seems to be the pre-entry closed shop. This form of closed shop is not a widespread phenomenon in most countries and seems unlikely to grow in the near future. Union-operated employment agencies could be one option to be explored. The one area where the closed shop seems to have a definite positive impact from a union perspective is in sustaining higher levels of union membership than would otherwise be the case. If union strength and militancy is not only a function of numbers, however, then this may be a pyrrhic victory in the long run.

Should unions strive and channel their energies into establishing and supporting closed shops or concentrate on improving services and organisational effectiveness in order to attract members voluntarily? The latter would seem the more sensible option. Certain cautionary remarks are, however, in order. First, the nature of certain industries and occupations makes voluntary recruitment difficult, and a closed shop may be the only viable option. For instance, it was in industries subject to casualisation and high turnover rates such as stevedoring and construction that the closed shop originally arose. Second, there is the 'free-rider' problem. Is it right for all workers to enjoy the fruits of a few without contributing to this effort? This will no doubt remain the battle cry of most union activists. However, it may well be that a few free-rider members are worth having in exchange for a more committed and better serviced membership in the long run. Third, and perhaps most importantly, none of this addresses the question of union ideology. It may be that a militant union will not be adversely affected by the closed shop because of other union goals and policies. On the other hand, the closed shop may exacerbate the negative tendencies discussed above in a moderate or conservative union. Unions of all persuasions, however, need to consider seriously how useful it is to base their activities on an apathetic or even hostile membership.

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Bill Clinton’s victory in the US elections closes the chapter on the neoliberal ascendancy of the 80s. Yet the obstacles facing him are immense. David Burchell interviewed Chicago magazine editor James Weinstein (right) and academic and industry policy specialist Joel Rogers (overleaf) about the task ahead.

AMES WEINSTEIN is the founding editor of In These Times, a Chicago-based weekly founded in 1976, during Jimmy Carter’s quest for the White House.

A lot of people in American liberal circles—and particularly on the left of the Democratic Party—were, at best, very sceptical of Bill Clinton and in some cases downright hostile. The Nation weekly, I recall, ran an article by Christopher Hitchens enumerating what he saw as 17 good reasons not to vote for Bill Clinton. How do you think American liberals ought to view Bill Clinton’s victory?

Well, there may have been 17 reasons not to vote for Clinton, but there was one overriding reason to vote for him, and that was George Bush. I myself was quite sceptical about Clinton; after all, he comes from the more conservative wing of the Democratic Party, and I myself was a delegate for Tom Harkin. But I have to say that Clinton ran a very, very impressive election campaign—an almost perfect campaign. And he has put forward a series of important promises on a whole number of policy issues such as health care, jobs, rebuilding American industry and infrastructure, guaranteeing access to education for all Americans, and so on. That was the basis of his campaign so those expectations are now very strong.

For the first time in 12 years we have a Democratic president and a Democratic Congress, so that many of the initiatives that Congress took over the last three or four years which were vetoed by Bush—Bush vetoed some thirty Democratic bills that passed Congress—will, I expect, be reintroduced and very quickly passed: things like the family leave act, which provided for mandatory parental leave, and a bill that outlawed the replacement of striking workers during a strike. It’s very important that we now have a president who will appoint more progressive members to the Supreme Court—and there will probably be two or three quick resignations now. All of these things will create an entirely new climate which will see a lot more political activity, a lot of expectations being raised, and a lot of encouragement for people to become active in social and political movements of one kind or another.

So what you’re saying is this. Regardless of how keen one is about Clinton the individual, and regardless of how many of his promises he’s able to deliver in these difficult economic circumstances, simply by creating an environment which enables more progressive initiatives to happen which couldn’t happen before, he has fashioned a crucial turnaround.

Yes, it’s very important. Even in foreign policy—where, in my view, Clinton is weakest—I think we can say that he would be very unlikely to pursue most of the initiatives that Bush and Reagan took. I can’t see a Clinton administration invading Panama or Grenada, or even prosecuting the Gulf War—in the last case because he wouldn’t have done all of the things which led up to the war and which virtually incited the Iraqis to think they could invade Kuwait.

That’s on one side. On the other, the pressure for cutting military spending and for rearranging our economic and social investment priorities in this country, will come, as it always has come, from the Democratic side of Congress. The politics of the last dozen years has pitted a Democratic Congress against a Republican Administration—in the course of which the differences within the Democratic Party had to be largely suppressed. Now I anticipate we will see the emergence of much more significant, active and open conflicts within the Democratic Party—because American parties, unlike those in parliamentary systems, are not really political parties. They are part of the state apparatus; they are open to anybody; there’s no party membership; there are no rules; there’s no basic policy or principles to be adhered to. And so you have a very mixed bag of Democratic members elected, particularly in the House of Representatives. There was a core of 50 or more House members who consistently took Left positions and opposed aid to the Contras and the El Salvadoran dictatorship, for example. That core is going to grow substantially, as have the numbers of the Congressional Black Caucus, Hispanic representation and the representation of women in Congress in this election. We now have a body of people elected who will represent the more liberal elements in this society. So I anticipate you’re going to see quite a new mix in Congress, and a lot more agitation for more progressive legislation and changes in policy than was possible under the previous administration.

In the election campaign Clinton’s rhetoric was markedly different from that of some past Democratic presidential campaigns. He obviously tried to stress things that Democratic candidates hadn’t been noted for stressing—like being ‘pro-business’, wanting to ‘create more millionaires’, a stress on economic
growth ahead of redistribution, an emphasis on the 'forgotten middle class', and so on. This was clearly an attempt to counter the image of the Democratic Party as simply a coalition of the dispossessed. That wasn't exactly popular on the left wing of the Democratic Party. But isn't it true that there was, in fact, a political problem with the way the Democrats were perceived in the electorate—particularly somebody like Walter Mondale in 1984?

If you go back and read what Walter Mondale was saying in 1984 it wasn't all that different to what Bill Clinton's said. Certainly towards the end of the campaign in 1984 Mondale sounded as if he were a social worker and was only concerned with the poor and the homeless and so on. But basically he was no less pro-business; in fact, he talked about tax increases and suffering across the board—something Clinton was smart enough to avoid. Clinton talked about tax increases but he talked about tax increases only on families with incomes of $200,000 or more—a very small percentage of the population. He talked about tax cuts on the middle class—but in this country 'middle class' is a euphemism, broadly speaking, for the employed unionised working class.

It's true that previous Democratic candidates—in an attempt to appeal to what is in fact, or historically has been, the popular base of the Democratic Party—have used rhetoric that made it appear that they were the representatives only of the poor and the unemployed. The rhetoric was much smarter in Clinton's case. The difference in substance between Clinton and Mondale was very, very slight but the way in which they presented themselves was strikingly different. Clinton was much shrewder, which is not to say more principled, in the way in which he played the race question. He went out of his way not to identify closely with blacks in a way that differentiated them from whites. He presented his programs as universal programs—and this to me was always the smarter way of doing it anyway, because they should be universal programs. But a lot of what he said about welfare and education and health care is just as important—if not more important—to the minority constituency, as it is to the so-called middle class constituencies, most of whom have health insurance because they are working in unionised jobs, and have much greater abilities to get decent education. The main difference is simply that in the campaign he was identified much more closely with the Cold War wing of the Democratic Party.

Obviously this is a difficult question for Democrats, because the coalition around the Democratic Party has historically been a very broad one. Yet clearly one of the big problems over the last decade or so has been trying to reconnect those disparate constituencies which seem to have become disconnected—on the one hand the concern for welfare programs and for trying to protect and advance the interests of minority groups, and on the other hand the skilled blue collar Democrats who may not be particularly sympathetic to that style of politics.

The concerns of those constituencies are not identical, but they're not completely different. The success of Reagan was largely based on being able to scare white working class people on the race question—as well as the jingoistic rhetoric and interventions abroad. Yet white working class people who were swayed by this rhetoric, and who went for Bush and Reagan, were just as much victims of those policies as the poor and the non-unionised sector of wage earners and the unemployed—and so most of them came back into the Democratic fold this time.

Yet they rather spectacularly refused to return to the fold for Walter Mondale in '84 and somewhat less spectacularly also for Dukakis in '88.

Well, Dukakis is a special case. Just about any other Democrat could have won in '88. He just begged to be trampled on, and Bush was only too happy to oblige. In fact, almost any other Democrat would have won by a bigger margin in '88 than Clinton won by this year. Clinton's margin was really just under 6%, so it wasn't an overwhelming victory. But the interesting thing was that the victory was won primarily in the large industrial states of the Midwest, Michigan, Ohio, Illinois and Wisconsin, as well as in New York, Pennsylvania and California—which has the highest level of unemployment on the West Coast. And that's exactly where the so-called Reagan Democrats are.

So to a very considerable extent Clinton won because he focused on the economic hurt that non-Americans would call the working class were feeling? Then the policy of industrial renewal that he has outlined somewhat generally in the election campaign would assume a fairly important role in the early stages of his presidency.

Very important. In fact he had a sign up in his campaign headquarters in Little Rock which said "The Economy, Stupid"—an instruction to his campaigners to remember what was important.

It is obviously not going to be easy, but how likely is it do you think that Clinton will be able to build up a viable, coherent strategy that could help to transform American industry?

That's hard to say. I think that he's genuinely concerned to rearrange the economic priorities so that they go into the development of new high technology industries, to research and development, to educating people so that they can function in a modern sophisticated economy, and so on.

On the other hand he's going to have to be able to find the money for it. He's not committed to cutting military spending rapidly enough to do that—though he may be forced to do so. And so far
he's supported the North American Free Trade Agreement—which would open up Mexico to American capital under conditions of low wages, no environmental protections, no safety protections and so on. This in turn would undermine all those standards here and result in massive loss of employment in the high wage industries. So there are contradictory elements in his platform. The real question is going to be the balance of political forces in the next few years; who's going to be pushing him harder, and what forces are going to be operating in Congress. Moreover, Clinton's going to be pursuing his agenda for industrial renewal under very difficult circumstances. The budget deficit is very large, the national debt is extremely large, and it's not going to be easy to to turn that around without raising taxes on working people—something which he has promised not to do and which, were he to do it, would be the end of him as a politician.

To his credit he has acknowledged that we face very deep problems and they are not going to be solved overnight. I don't think anybody expects that he can do it very quickly but I do think that we are going to be in for a period of rising popular expectations and that that does create a lot of pressure to make changes more rapidly than he might otherwise be inclined to do.

LOw BUDGET

Bill Clinton has an industry policy, but not much room to move.

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In the election campaign Bill Clinton produced a fairly comprehensive industrial and economic plan for the new administration. How do you assess that plan, and what chance of success do you think it has?

I think if they're able to implement their industrial strategy, virtually all of it is worthwhile. I also think the bulk of it is relatively uncontroversial. US investment in material infrastructure from about 1948 until the late 1970s was about 2 per cent of GDP, but that fell by about a half during the 80s. So we've really been starved of infrastructure in the 1980s. The mainstream of the economics profession and many other observers believe that significant increases in infrastructure investment are entirely appropriate given historical norms in the US. And everyone believes that sort of investment will have long-term economic payoffs. So there's no great controversy there.

On education and training it's widely agreed we need to make substantial improvements in the stock of human capital in the US. The present system of education has bad effects on inequality. Again, everyone agrees we need to substantially increase the capitalisation of American industry, and that present rates of business investment in plant and new equipment are historically quite low. So the investment tax credit that Bill Clinton has proposed is not a particularly controversial item. Nor are the manufacturing extension services or advanced technology centres—everybody wants to get better and newer equipment into the economy faster, and to diffuse its use among small and medium-sized firms, as well as larger industry leaders.

Where controversy begins is with more deliberate efforts to string firms together, to pick winners and losers—in other words to do something other than facilitate the provision of broad public goods or increased access to them. Here Clinton's advisors are very cautious and, given the experience of other countries, maybe properly so. They are interested in supporting basic research in different ways—creating a civilian equivalent of the defence research and development agency, for instance, and creating industry consortia for research on generic technologies, like batteries for electronic cars. But they're not going to pick winners and losers in the way that those hostile to industrial policy have characterised the process.

The problem is one of magnitude. We have an approximately $6 trillion economy, with an ap-
proximately $290 billion deficit at the moment. Bill Clinton is proposing additional expenditure of $20 billion a year on infrastructure. The idea of that $20 billion making a significant impact on employment is therefore somewhat remote. Most growth projections for next year are about 2.5 per cent. When you have growth at that level you get increased revenue from tax receipts, and that will bring the deficit down at the rate of around $20 billion a year. But in order to get a really substantial deficit reduction through growth alone, you've got to be at much higher levels—around 4 or 5 per cent. So the question becomes, can you get to that level of growth by spending an additional $20 billion? Nobody thinks that you can.

You could conceive of a program which would stay within the budget constraints, if Clinton made much deeper cuts in military spending than he seems ready to contemplate at the moment—if you freed up say $50-80 billion a year from defence cuts, that really would have a significant effect. And I think they'll be more prepared to cut defence the more successful they are in their short-term program.

Nearly all the things you've mentioned are things that the Australian governments made their priority in the 80s. And a lot of the shortcomings you've mentioned are precisely the same shortcomings we experienced. They have, for instance, been criticised for placing an overemphasis on training, without—so it's argued—creating appropriate jobs for trainees to take their training to.

There are two parts to that problem. The first is the general problem of job creation; the other is pushing the structure of existing jobs up the human capital ladder in such a way that you're not just creating jobs for ditch-diggers, but generating jobs for skilled engineers or skilled blue-collar workers, or whatever. And both of those involve interventions that I think the new administration will be reluctant to make.

The easy way to create the necessary jobs is to spend a lot of money, and really heat up the economy—but the existence of the deficit makes that unlikely. Clinton's advisors are already extremely skittish about financial markets and long-term Treasury rates. The other problem—that is, increasing the value content of jobs in firms—is constrained by the absence of the microeconomic mechanisms to force change at the plant level. You don't get significant industrial upgrading through a movement to so-called high-performance work organisation unless you have some pressure inside firms for it. A lot of firms will make no more extra money by upgrading than they can by deskilling work and sweating labour. And the only way to get beyond that is to build a significant floor to wages and to get some sort of disciplined force inside the firm that is effectively forcing upgrading.

One way of doing that is through a revived labour movement—but that doesn't seem to be on the horizon. Another way is to introduce government mandates of various sorts in terms of purchasing contracts—requiring firms to meet certain quality standards or environmental controls. The Clinton-Gore plan has a little bit of all those things: they do favour increasing environmental requirements; they will increase the minimum wage; they've talked about government purchasing a bit. But the crux of the matter is getting some kind of pressure inside the firms themselves, and in general we don't have that in the US.

You mentioned that there's a certain amount of scepticism in the Clinton ranks about the 'picking winners' approach, and that's a scepticism that's obviously not totally without foundation. But in Australia and elsewhere there's been some movement in the industry policy debate towards different models which rely less on picking winners and more upon a different role for the state, which is less directive and more facilitative.

The Clinton camp certainly talk the language of a facilitative state, as opposed to a command and control state. However, I don't think they've thought very carefully about how to encourage the appropriate institutional basis in the private economy. My impression is that they haven't been looking at the interventionist policies used in, for example, Italy or Denmark, although there are lots of people in the Australian governments made their priority in the 80s. And a lot of the shortcomings you've mentioned are precisely the same shortcomings we experienced. They have, for instance, been criticised for placing an overemphasis on training, without—so it's argued—creating appropriate jobs for trainees to take their training to.

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'Apologies for the above utterances which were not intended to be part of this text.'
It's hard to appreciate how highly fragmented America is. Whether you read it in a book, it's hard to appreciate existentially, I think, how liberal a society America is, how highly fragmented. We don't have anything like the level of associative action you have among labour and capital even in Australia. We have an incredibly decentralised labour movement, which covers a very modest fraction of the workforce. And employers are, by and large, very weakly grouped. If you want to get serious concetration of interests in regional economies, you need to have some structures of co-ordination both among and between firms and unions. And then—given the extraordinarily low rates of unionisation in the US—you need to build links between those parties and the non-unionised workforce. At present those links are simply not there.

In Milwaukee we were able to create such structures after long negotiation and deliberation.

If it takes off it'll be one of the most advanced, and certainly the largest, of such labour/capital partnerships in the US. But the very fact of its novelty tells you something of the problem. The co-ordination that we've achieved so far has been the relatively easy part. We've been able to get firms and unions to agree to talk about common credentialling systems, a re-ordering of their internal labour markets, and the provision of training in those markets. But we have not, by and large, gotten to the hard issue of what obligations follow from people getting increased training.

We're not at the point of, say, the German system which requires that once you get increased training you have to get paid more for a certain period of time—a system which concentrates employers' minds on better exploiting the more advanced human capital that it has as a result of this training. I don't want to exaggerate in any way what we've done—it's very promising, it's extremely advanced, relative to national practice in the US, but it's still extremely modest and tentative.

Given those obstacles, how do you think the kind of process that you've gone through in Milwaukee could be nurtured on a federal level? Is it that simply beyond a national administration given institutional inadequacies in America?

Let's take the issue of training. The largest federal training right now is some thing called the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), which allocates something in the order of $4 billion per year for the training of displaced workers. Clinton advisors are talking about substantially increasing that amount of money. But the JTPA is administered locally through what are called Private Industry Councils (PICs). And these PICs are, by law, dominated by business. Labour enjoys very modest de facto representation, perhaps one person on a 20-member PIC. The experience with PICs has been, by common consensus, extremely unhappy. They are given to all manner of corruption and inefficiency, they are not well staffed, and it's not clear why they spend the money at their disposal in the way they do.

Second, there is an incredible number of federal training programs—approximately 130 or 135 separate programs. These programs are a real nightmare for consumers of the services, and indeed for many state training providers, because the rules by which they are required to spend their money often conflict. Each state has a multitude of different pots of cash, usually distributed between very different agencies which are not properly co-ordinated with one another. Its bare description is the province of experts, let alone its effective navigation.

But if you put those two problems together, a possibility suggests itself. One could devise relatively comprehensive labour market boards, defined in terms of the regional labour markets, which could assume significant responsibility in a revamped and streamlined national training system. This would amass quite a large pot of money—large enough I think, to excite employers to want to get their hands on it. And if you had that level of interest you would be able to impose various conditions on them getting their hands on it. For example: they might have to demonstrate that they were representative of the communities from which they came, and they would have to include representatives of business, labour,
public training providers and so on.

So, you would say to a reasonably savvy employer in the US: how would you like to have training simplified, and administered by a regional labour market board, which would have a general mandate to promote industrial upgrading in your region? However, as a condition of giving you training we want you to submit to a full-scale evaluation of your operation, we want to talk to you about how you might upgrade it, and so on—this approach has been tried with considerable success in at least a few states in the US. That is at least a plausible scenario. It wouldn’t be a radical reform and would have, I think, rather substantial support from the key players, including the business community. It would be opposed by some bureaucrats and lobbyists from the existing training structure—but it’s always easy for a government to go to war on one of its own bureaucracies.

If that model worked, all manner of things would become possible. The boards could set a tone for industrial policy on a regional basis; they could in turn be closely co-ordinated with the ILO or so manufacturing technology sectors that Clinton is interested in creating. I don’t know if the new administration will have the wit to do that, or the political will to stand up to the bureaucrats. But I think it’s certainly plausible.

You’ve also been working on a book on associative democracy and democratic governance. How do you see associative practice as contributing to this sort of model of industrial regeneration?

There are lots of problems where the answer to the question 'should we give this to the state or should we give it to the market?' is a double negative. This is where associative forms may be appropriate. By ‘associations’ I mean non-firm, non-state and non-political party organisations—employer associations or trade unions or community organisations.

There are lots of areas where enforcement mechanisms and information services can be provided through voluntary associations more effectively than through either private markets or public hierarchies. Again, given inequalities in access to information and resources, the pattern of associative action which arises ‘naturally’ under advanced or non-advanced capitalism is inadequate. And a lot of the organic solidarities that might have weighed against that distorted pattern of associations in the past—trade unions for example—are fast eroding. For those reasons, if you want an associative order which can complement the state and other institutions, you’re going to have to have a deliberate politics of association. You’re going to have to supplement nature with artifice. Otherwise, you’re basically condemning yourself to a world with a choice only between states and markets, and you’re going to condemn yourself to an associative order which is in many ways quite destructive of democratic norms.

In Australia in the 80s there was something of a revolution in the union movement over some of these issues. Unions found they had to become involved in a far wider range of industrial and workplace issues than ever before. How do you see the role of US trade unions in this process?

American labour is not very advanced on a lot of this stuff. Labour in the US does not have a particularly well-developed vision of how it should insert itself constructively into industrial upgrading. The typical union president, or member of a union local, has never heard of most of the terms we’ve been talking about. They would certainly never have heard about the high-performance work organisation, industrial upgrading and so on. And it’s not only a difference of language, it’s also a basic difference in the conception of what a trade union movement can do. These people have been kicked around for so long. They’ve been subjected to an unending assault in the 1980s, and they’ve had to fight just to staunch the flow of members out of the movement. They just don’t have any time to think about this stuff. And that means that on the labour side of things, there’s no alternative plan for economic development. That’s a problem. If you set up a labour market board you’ve got to have union people and business people involved together. For that to be real there has to be some real debate—but the unions don’t yet have the capacity to have that debate.

In four years time, when Bill Clinton runs for president again, what would you be happy with seeing achieved in the area of industrial policy?

If they actually establish the manufacturing centres I mentioned at the beginning, and have provided them with institutional linkage to local labour market boards, that would be a fabulous advance at the local and regional level. That by itself would make me quite happy. Again, if they can really open up higher education in a significant way to poorer sections of the population, that obviously would be a huge egalitarian gain. I am frankly sceptical of the ability of youth apprenticeships to change the skills base of the workforce: you’ve really got to change the practices of firms if you’re going to train kids adequately on the job. But if they get something going in that area, that would be great. I have very low expectations, so I’ll be easily satisfied.

DAVID BURCHELL is ALR’s editor. February’s ALR will continue our series on the new direction in US policy: we interview Charles Sabel, co-author of The Second Industrial Divide and originator of the debate around ‘flexible specialisation’.
First the Mabo ruling, then the political advertising case: the High Court is clearly turning 'political'. A common Left response is to defend parliamentary sovereignty. But Angus Corbett disagrees. He argues that the supremacy of parliament is already a thing of the past.

The recent decision of the High Court that the federal government's legislation on political advertising was unconstitutional raises a number of important issues about the nature of Australian democracy and society. It comes at a time of great change in Australian politics, society and law. Discussion of the Court's decision has, for the most part, been addressed to defining the proper role for the High Court in the Australian political system. Much of the discussion has questioned the legitimacy of the High Court's authority to limit the power and authority of Parliament.

While the political advertising case does raise these issues this is not the chief reason why it is such an important contribution to the ongoing debate about the direction and future of Australian democracy. It is an important contribution because, by questioning the role of parliament in the Australian political system, it brings to the fore one of the great, sleeping issues of Australian politics—notably the problem of defining an acceptable and effective role for parliament in the Australian political system.

In the political advertising case the High Court found that parliament's recent amendment to the Broadcasting Act, which had the effect of banning political advertising during election campaigns, was unconstitutional. The basis of the decision was, in general terms, (each of the judges expressed themselves slightly differently) that the Constitution embodied an implied freedom of communication in political affairs. According to the Court, the amendment to the Broadcasting Act which introduced the advertising ban was unconstitutional because, whatever the intentions of parliament in enacting the law, it limited this implied freedom in an unreasonable and unjustifiable way.

The responses which immediately followed the High Court's decision were rather muted and somewhat confused. This perhaps reflects the inchoate and rather uncertain perception that the decision marks an important turning point in the direction of Australian society and government. Critical responses to the Court's decision have followed two paths. One has been to focus on the judicial method adopted by the judges; the other has been to focus on the changed relationship between the High Court and parliament in the form of a challenge to the principle of parliamentary sovereignty.

The first form of criticism has been concerned with the question of whether the High Court is capable of making decisions about issues of fundamental importance which have substantial economic, social and political impacts. The subject of a recent Debating Final at the University of NSW captures this form of criticism—"That the High Court should adjudicate and not legislate". Yet, while discussion
about the institutional capacity of the High Court will continue, the primary focus will remain on the second path of criticism—the challenge to the notion of parliamentary sovereignty.

Parliamentary sovereignty is a legal term which describes the ultimate authority of parliament to pass any law and the duty of courts to recognise and enforce those laws where appropriate. As a central element in what is described as responsible government it is also a practice and an idea which has been central to Australian politics and society. On the one hand, the primacy of parliament in Australian politics has been supported by a strong belief in the legitimacy of majorities. It has been a central tenet of Australian politics that a majority should be able to decide upon the direction of government. This belief in the legitimacy of majorities has been political with relatively little concern about the capacity of majorities to oppress minorities. This is one respect in which the political and legal traditions in Australia and the United States differ markedly; the American Constitution is founded on a basic distrust of majorities.

The legitimacy granted majorities in Australian political culture has been matched by a high level of distrust of courts, especially on the Left. At the time of Federation there was a high level of concern about the interference of the US Supreme Court in labour relations and its generally conservatively-minded restrictions on the capacity of state legislatures to introduce progressive social legislation. Since World War Two one of the enduring fixations of the Labor Party has concerned the conservative impact of decisions of the High Court. The primary source of this concern was the decision of the High Court in 1948 declaring that the Chifley government’s bank nationalisation legislation was unconstitutional. Indeed, one of Gough Whitlam’s achievements as opposition leader was to convince Labor that the party could work within the framework established by the Constitution even though it was an essentially conservative and antiquarian document.

The decision of the High Court in the political advertising case is a fundamental challenge to the notion of parliamentary sovereignty and to the practice of responsible government. Both the method and approach which the court adopted in deciding upon the constitutional validity of the political advertising law implied a reconsideration of the significance of the practice of parliamentary sovereignty.

The High Court’s traditional approach to determining the constitutionality of Commonwealth laws required that it decide whether the particular law fell within one of the heads of power set out in Section 51 of the Constitution. This section lists the subjects upon which the Commonwealth Parliament may legislate, and defines the division of legislative power between the Commonwealth and the states. If the relevant law fell within one of the heads of power included in Section 51, the High Court has not (except in some limited circumstances) traditionally placed any further restrictions upon the power of parliament to pass that law. In this way the court has been able to divide legislative responsibilities between the states and the Commonwealth and, at the same time, preserve the central notion of parliamentary sovereignty.

In the political advertising case the Commonwealth followed this model of argument in support of the law. The argument was in two parts. The first was to point out that the Constitution included a requirement that the system of government would be one of ‘representative government’. The second was to assert that the decision as to what kind of ‘representative government’ operated in Australia is one left to parliament. The only role for the High Court is to define the limits of the very broad spectrum which, so the argument ran, falls within the general description of ‘representative government’. In this way the actual form of ‘representative government’ adopted in Australia would be left to the ‘democratic process’—in other words, left to parliament to determine.

However, the approach taken by the High Court diverged markedly from this model. Having found that the Constitution contained an implied freedom of communication in relation to political affairs, the Court claimed the right to decide on whether this implied freedom had been unreasonably restricted by the legislation introducing the advertising ban. Chief Justice Mason argued that, in reaching a decision about whether the legislation was a reasonable restriction on the implied freedom of communication, the Court would “give weight to legislative decisions”—but that “in the ultimate analysis it is for the Court to determine whether the constitutional guarantee has been infringed”. In this manner the Court substantially qualified the notion of parliamentary sovereignty in two ways—both by defining the implied guarantee of freedom of communication and by claiming the right to decide whether the parliament had infringed that freedom by introducing the political advertising ban.

In other words, the High Court has used the political advertising case to qualify substantially the operation of parliamentary sovereignty. The importance of this decision cannot, though, be reduced to a discussion about either the relative capacity of the Court or of parliament. Nor can the full significance of the decision be resolved by reference to an abstract discussion about the legitimacy of Parliament as the elected arm of government as against the “unelected judges”.

"The primacy of parliament has been supported by a strong belief in majorities"
The wider legal and political context within which the High Court reached its decision renders abstract debates about the legitimacy or otherwise of parliamentary sovereignty as one only of historical interest.

Parliamentary sovereignty, and its practice in the form of responsible government, represents ideas and practices which were first developed in the 19th century. Specifically, the principle of parliamentary sovereignty and the notion of responsible government are based on a particularly simplistic model of the relationship between individual citizens and the state. Both are based on the assumption that parliament will be the primary institution which mediates between the popularly expressed views of the citizenry and the power of the state. In this analysis the principle of parliamentary sovereignty provided the essential flexibility necessary for parliament to mediate between the citizenry and the state.

Yet changes in the structure of Australian government and society have made the relationship between citizens and the state far more complex than this model allows. The range and sophistication of economic and social activities carried on in the Australian polity, and the accompanying growth in systems of regulation to support these activities, have created a far more complex relationship between civil society and the state. The boundary between citizens and the state is now more indistinct and the role of mediating between citizens and the state is largely left to complex and inter-related systems of regulation.

In the last two decades the form of regulation used to mediate between citizens and the state has changed. During this time there has been a general move toward the creation of systems of regulation formed around independent regulatory agencies. These systems of regulation are based on the assumption that specific areas of activity—such as broadcasting or the operations of companies and of securities markets—are so complex that they need dedicated agencies to administer the framework within which the activities are carried on. Independent agencies like the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (now replaced by the Australian Broadcasting Authority) and the Australian Securities Commission have a wide degree of discretion in administering and enforcing the law. They are independent in the sense that their controlling members are subject to limited direct political direction from their relevant ministers.

The role of parliaments in the creation of these independent regulatory agencies has been chiefly to establish the general principles and policies which form part of the framework within which the activities are carried on. The administration of these principles and policies has then been delegated to the independent agencies. Parliaments and governments have established the independent agencies both because it insulates specific areas of activity from immediate political control and because it insulates governments from the day-to-day conflicts which the administration of these activities generates. A primary consequence of the use of independent regulatory agencies is that the relationship between 'citizens' and the 'state' is substantially modified. The bodies mediating between the citizen and the state are bodies created by parliament—but they are, to a substantial degree, independent of it.

In this context the decision of the High Court in the political advertising case takes on particular significance. The Court's claim to have found an implied freedom of communication in the Constitution and to be possessed of the power to decide upon when that freedom had been unjustifiably transgressed, was made within the context of a scheme of regulation administered by an independent agency—the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. One of the factors the Court considered when it ruled upon the validity of the law banning political advertising was that this particular law, aimed at particular goals, was introduced into an existing set of laws which generally regulated the rights of companies and individuals to use the electronic media. It was the particular and partial nature of this piece of legislation which the Court found to be suspect.

In this sense the Court has a problem of coming to terms with particular instances in which the traditional definition of the function and role of parliament no longer adequately describes the actual function of parliament. The limitation which the Court imposed on the power of parliament in this case is not just therefore a challenge to the centrality of the principle of parliamentary sovereignty. The limitation on the power of parliament, and the identification of implied rights in the Constitution in the political advertising case, are the beginning of a long process of reassessing the role of parliament in the structure of Australian government.

The great importance of the political advertising case is that by challenging the principle of parliamentary sovereignty it may help to bring into focus an issue of primary importance for the future of Australian democracy: the appropriate role for parliament. The current criticism of the political advertising case as a threat to democracy because of the limitations which it imposes on popularly elected parliaments serves only to obfuscate the discussion of the important changes which have taken place in Australian society.

ANGUS CORBETT teaches in law at the University of NSW.
PHILLIP ADAMS became a communist in his teens, and an advertising agency director in his 20s. He is a well-known broadcaster and commentator. He presents Late Night Live on ABC Radio National, and is a columnist with the Weekend Australian. He is thought a strong possibility to become the next Managing Director of SBS Television.

In one of your newspaper columns recently you lampooned the Liberal Party for believing in God, Sovereign and Theory (GST), but above all Theory. Do you see it as a good thing that it now seems to be the Right rather than the Left which is wedded to the pursuit of abstract principles?

It certainly helps you see where they're coming from, doesn't it? It is very new to them, and I don't think they'll keep doing it, particularly after the experience they've had with the GST—and also perhaps observing what's happened to Bush. But it is a sort of role reversal. Our tradition—by which I mean the Left in the broadest and fussiest sense—has always been burdened with theory, and now we're grooping around trying to find another one.

Does the Left really need another one?

Yes, I think it does. I think the world needs another one. Because all there is now, apart from a few energetic people on the fringes, is just a big wobbling mass in the middle. It's awfully hard to see fundamental differences of belief systems. I was interested to read the introduction to Paul Kelly's recent book The End of Certainty, because it's so committed; it's a really gung-ho piece of writing in favour of what he calls the realists, versus the sentimentalists. Now I'm still a sentimentalist. I still feel that, if we...
were wrong, we were wrong for the right reasons, whereas if these bastards are right, they’re right for the wrong reasons. And if you put it to Kelly, he convinced, if his juggernaut really starts accelerating, that there’ll be any attention to social justice at all, there’s a little silence and then he says “no, I’m not”. And I think everyone senses that.

I’m perfectly willing to give up a lot of the intellectual baggage of the Left; I didn’t go into a great emotional decline when Bob Carr told the Fabian Society that socialism was dead. I don’t really care what the mechanism is as long as, at the end of the day, there is social justice.

I suppose the problem with those sentiments for people who are involved in day-to-day politics is that they have something to say about ends, but not means.

I concede that; I’ve never been very good at means. What I’ve done, I’ve done through contacts, through networks. I’m a member of the ALP but I’ve never been to a branch meeting—I’ve got a special dispensation. I’m at a distance from all those grassroots processes, and I’ve never really understood them or been comfortable with them. I’ve always tended to focus on abstract ideas, rather than on how you get from A to B. In my experience you did that by talking to the prime minister. So that really devalues my political experience.

Many people see the Right now not just as the ideologists, but also as radicals. If that’s correct, are you happy to be counted among the conservatives?

If you’re playing those sort of word-games, then yes, I suppose so. The fact is, all of us are creatures of our time. My influences when I was growing up were a lot of romantic Comms, and you don’t really escape that. Like most members of the Communist Party I used to go into the International Bookshop and buy all the Russian volumes of Marx and Engels—even though I didn’t read much of it.

What’s extraordinary at the moment though, is the fluidity of the situation, the way no-one can predict outcomes. It’s almost as though Chaos Theory has come into politics. Not long ago you could talk to some of the really heavy-hitters from major English newspapers, and they’d tell you that Major had had it, and the election would be a triumph for the Labour Party. A week later, the same people are telling you that not only did the Labour Party lose the election, but they are now effectively destroyed and can never win again. Then there’s another crisis for Major. We all heard that the Republicans had permanent tenure of the White House—and a year ago I would have thought that was plausible. We now know that that wasn’t true. So there’s this extraordinary volatility, and in this volatility, a lot of things can happen.

It’s because people have no memory. I think. People live in this huge, instantaneous ‘now’ of the media. They’re very susceptible to change, which means you have opportunities to change views quite radically—with the recognition that those same views are likely to change as radically again. History no longer moves in a long, majestic procession; time is shattered. Television has shattered time with commercials and fast editing. You’re in Yugoslavia one second looking at the war, then you’re in a Milo commercial, then you’re back in Somalia. And I don’t think any political theory begins to take this into account. That, to me, is the dilemma of the Left and also of conservatives, because they’re still living in another world.

So within that wobbly mass, as you called it, where do you locate yourself? Does it still make sense to you to talk of being on the Left?

I hope so. I use the Left not so much as a position, but as a direction. I think socialism has gone for all practical purposes for the next 20 years—we’ll have to brush it off and bring it back later. Certainly communism’s looking just a little bit shop-soiled. But I think we’d be mad to give up all the language that we use, all the shorthand. It’s still a useful piece of shorthand.

Is it more important to you to be considered left, or to be considered liberal?

I’d much prefer to be considered left than liberal. But I’m in a context where I’ve got to be very careful what I do. I’ve been the permitted leftwinger in rightwing publications for a long time, often used to prove their diversity. As long as they’ve got a couple of characters there like me and Humphrey McQueen, they can say it’s OK. Things have changed dramatically in this respect. I remember the legendary editor of The Age, Graham Perkin, bemoaning the fact that he couldn’t find a good rightwing columnist—he felt the paper needed just to sharpen the dialogue. And now editors believe, with some conviction I think, that the opposite is true.

And is it?

If you go through the names of people writing in left-of-centre publications, so many of them are very ancient. They’re my generation and even older. There aren’t a lot of new voices that you could take to Paul Kelly or whoever and say, look, this is really good. Especially stylistically—the Right are now the great stylists, certainly in the US.

When Robert Hughes was in Australia recently he said that, as far as the art world was concerned, the function of democracy was to safeguard a space for elitism. Is that the space you see the ABC occupying?

I find the Julie Burchill phenomenon interesting; the attitude that says that popular culture is where it’s at, and the important thing to write about, usually with approval, is the latest Amie Schwarzenegger movie. There’s been a decay of high culture, of what used to be elitist, and a very strong move towards populism. It’s now OK to look at commercial television or to go to Hoyts cinema complex and get your rocks off there.

If you look at Radio National, the poor old thing is vulnerable to attack from without and indeed from within, because it gets such miniscule audiences. Now privately I can say, yes, but we know who listens. If you did it as a Who’s Who, rather than counting the numbers, it would be very impressive. But you can’t save its bacon by saying that Bob Carr listens every night while he’s driving between meetings, or that Tom Fitzgerald never misses the program. It doesn’t matter.
So how do you justify its existence?

Well, I don't think I have to really. In practical terms, you just do pious things like pointing to the ABC Charter and saying that this is the only program area that accords to Charter. But I'd also defend it because if you took it off the air, I don't know where the new ideas would trickle in.

I had a public blue with David Hill about it once. I said "look, let's concede that the ABC is leftwing and biased. Let's be honest about this, Radio National's a seething hotbed of political correctness". Surely we can justify that by pointing out that it's a fart in a windstorm compared to the overwhelming bombast and bigotry that's pouring out of commercial radio. Now David, of course, can't accept that argument; he can't even allow it to get on the table. And I can see why he can't.

Do you accept the description of yourself as an intellectual?

No. It's a faintly embarrassing word, it's always made me laugh a little when I see people applying it to themselves or to others. I'd prefer to be called a dilettante.

But you're clearly interested in ideas.

Yes, although not necessarily political ideas. They're often ideas which have absolutely no political connection. In fact, one of the things that makes me less passionate about political issues is that in politics you can reach a stage where you just think the answer is obvious and then you move on to look for other areas.

To what extent do you think ideas play a role in domestic, day-to-day politics?

I remember asking the parliamentary librarian in Canberra who uses the library, and she said "virtually nobody". She said you could guess who goes in; I did, and I was right. Apart from those individuals, National Party members are the biggest users, because they've got longer train trips. So basically I don't think politicians read any more than Australian businesspeople read. Very few of them in my experience are comfortable in the world of ideas. They wait until an idea is bitting them on the bum and then they react to it—and even then it's usually just the stuff that the pollsters alert them to.

The ALP is a case in point. Bill Kelty and I have been working on a plot to revive the flagging fortunes of the ALP by making some dramatic structural changes. It's an idea which in essence involves turning almost every second issue into a conscience vote, rather than simply having a lot of party dogma that allows intellectual laziness on behalf of the mass of parliamentarians. The way the party is structured at the moment militates against the penetration of ideas, or even of genuine debate.

You once said that the monarchy, having outlived its usefulness, would also outlive its uselessness. Do you still think that's the case?

Not in Australia. It doesn't anger people very much any more, and finally it's easier to laugh things to death. We've dumped so much of the imperial connection already, and what's left is so fragile and so tenuous that I think the fight's almost over. I think the conservatives will stop fighting on it, just as they stopped fighting on imperial honours.

Do you think that will turn out to be a significant moment for Australia?

Not terribly, I wouldn't have thought. Because it won't be achieved through passion, but rather through osmosis. And if you write down a list of the issues that we thought were going to galvanise public opinion 10 years ago, most of them have just disappeared. Abortion doesn't have anything like the effect it's had in America. No-one's really discussing bringing back capital punishment. Maybe there's something in the water here that makes us less passionate, less angry—something which in its own way is just as capable of facilitating social change as activism.

Tolerance in Australia, I've often argued, isn't a positive virtue so much as a lack of intellectual energy or lack of passion. But it's produced a society where, for instance, we've coped pretty well with the AIDS crisis—better than any other society that I can think of. We went from being one of the stiffest censors in the world, to being the most laissez-faire. We just gave up on things like that. Eventually we just said 'Oh fuck, who cares?'. And that's not a bad national motto, when you contrast it with other nations that care too much. And so Australia probably gets further than most other societies without too much conflict. There is one huge anomaly, though, in this picture—our attitude to black Australia. I think when the fallout from the Mabo case starts to involve land claims, then things are going to get very nasty.

Do you still get a lot of hate mail?

No, not much. And that's another measure of the fact that nothing makes people angry any more. If I felt like it—and sometimes I did—I used to sit down and write a column that I knew would get sugarbags of mail. If you were to give me that job today, I'd find it very hard. When you expect anger, or at least some reaction, you don't get one. I find now that I can do a piece even on commercial radio about the desirability of the total decriminalisation of all drugs. People just ring up and say "yeah, that's a good idea". It's moving from tolerance towards passivity.

Probably the only exception is environmental issues. When we started to promote the greenhouse problem through the Commission for the Future, there was an almost apocalyptic view among greens, almost like Koreans waiting for the rapture. We had a big meeting in Melbourne with an American scientist who'd done some of the first computer models on greenhouse. There was a palpable sense of disappointment in the room when he said the oceans weren't going to go up six feet. They wanted to hear that it was the end of the world. They also wanted to hear that the enemy was the multinational corporation. When he said, well, it's termites farting and cows belching and gas rising from rice paddies, there was the same sense of disappointment. So the green movement has picked up a lot of the same waffly, romantic, quixotic feeling that used to be a part of the Communist Party.

MIKE TICHER is ALR's assistant editor.
John Anderson is usually seen as the father of Sydney scepticism as against Melbourne sentiment, and a bit of a Cold Warrior. The very Melburnian Peter Beilharz begs to disagree.

Sydney and Melbourne, the cliché has it, are like cheese and chalk. As with most clichés, there's something in this; climate alone suggests an inner orientation in Melbourne, outer in Sydney, even though everybody really knows deep down that it rains more in Sydney, where umbrellas sell like cigarettes in exam time. The colonial legacy still counts. We need think only of protectionism as a Melbourne phenomenon, and of the severity of Melbourne's economic crisis because of its reliance on manufacturing. Then, alongside the tinseltown stuff in Sydney there's the supposed libertarian legacy of John Anderson, while in Melbourne there's the sense of moral earnestness, even moralising, which is Melbourne indeed.

Viewed from a sceptical distance, the Melbourne-Sydney (or is it Sydney-Melbourne?) biff all looks a bit contrived. Probably it simply looks silly from Brisbane or Adelaide. Like the great debate about Australian national character, nobody seems to take it too seriously except some with professional interest. Yet there does seem to be something at stake here, and there do seem to have been some changes, as Boris Frankel argues in his recently published book *From the Prophets Deserts Come* (Arena Books, 1992).

Frankel's argument suggests, in effect, that Sydney has invaded Melbourne; Nietzsche arrives in Brunswick Street looking for trouble but is instead embraced by the black of clothing if not black of heart. Even modernist journals like *Thesis Eleven* have been unable to resist the northern virus. Frankel is correct, I think, to suggest that in some senses radical culture in Melbourne and Sydney are becoming more alike; I am not sure that I would agree that this is altogether a bad thing, or that the process is unilateral in influence. Nietzsche, of course, had a long line of influence in Australia, not least of all through the Lindsays. Probably it is true to say that communism in Sydney was more libertarian and in Melbourne was more right wing. Althussrian marxism may have become culturally dominant in Sydney but, as Boris acknowledges, it also had indigenous Melbourne roots.

Now the left-literary magazine *Editions* is coming to Melbourne. The monthly *Modern Times* in its present form is over; welfarism and fabianism are under threat in Melbourne, too. And ALR looks to me, in effect, rather like a 'Melbourne' magazine (perhaps that's why I like it)—sceptical but pragmatic, sober and modest, prepared to take John Howard seriously and to contemplate, at least in principle, the possibility that socialism as we knew it is washed up. So Nietzsche's arrival in Melbourne (via the influence of 'postmodernism' and its variants) seems perhaps also to be a sign of the times, of the global shifts and crises which mark the 80s and 90s.

A vital shadow which Frankel detects in this scenario is the ghostly presence of John Anderson, the figure
often taken as defining the peculiar temper of the Sydney intelligentsia in the context of the Sydney-Melbourne dispute. Anderson (and by extension his legacy in the Sydney intelligentsia) is often derided as a simple Cold Warrior, though Frankel is astute enough to avoid this temptation—even if that was one predominant use to which his thought was put. There is no shortage of people who take Anderson to be first of all an anti-communist. But he was, first of all, a communist.

So who was Anderson, what did he think, and why do people still sense his presence in the Sydney-Melbourne divide? The phenomenon needs to be placed and dated. A Scottish philosopher from a socialist family, John Anderson came to Sydney to become Challis professor of Philosophy from 1927 to 1958. He wrote little, by contemporary standards: some essays, no single book. He taught, lectured superbly if his papers are any indication, exerted a magnetic personal influence over that select group of students who went through the university when it was still small and people talked over cigarettes in the Quad. Across this period from the 30s, Anderson seems to have constructed an enigmatic sense of presence which may only be equalled, in more pedestrian terms, by social democrats such as A F Davies at Melbourne and Hugh Stretton at Adelaide. Certainly people speak of Anderson with awe, tell tales of conversion as he spoke, construct him as a guru without equivalent.

As Frankel indicates, Anderson’s Left and Right followers were united at least by their anti-marxism and their opposition to welfarism. Bearing in mind that Anderson was both theoretical adviser to the Communist Party in the early 30s and then a Trotskyist until the late 30s, the question then arises whether Anderson was just another representative of that marxism-as-measles fat, just another bright boy who advocated radical causes with adolescent enthusiasms only then to bury them in the backyard, or whether there was some more persistent oppositionism here at work.

What then was Anderson? One tempting answer is this question to suggest that he was a nay-sayer—a companion, in different register, of Bernard Shaw. A freethinker, he shared with Marx the maxim that everything should be doubted and criticised. The trouble with marxism, in his moment and in ours, is that when you begin to rethink it you find it hard to stop. This was essentially his path, from an earlier endorsement of marxism to a later, postwar sense that marxism, too, was part of the problem. Anderson often opposed censorship, in academic and political life alike; he also came, finally, to view marxism as a set of self-imposed limits on thinking, which had therefore to be rejected. He came finally to view marxism as a falsely harmonistic utopia which had, in any case, been ruined by the Soviet experience.

Anderson’s early biography is part of what Christopher Lasch has called the syndicalist moment. He read The New Age and was attracted to guild socialism, to what, after Georges Sorel he called the ethics of the producers. He identified with the workers, scientists and artists who created an active culture, a culture of creation. In the early 30s, however, he identified the ethics of the producers with the actual producers, with the working class movement itself. Like Lukács, in this sense, he imputed a creative ethic to an actual working class movement which was so caught up with the burdens of everyday toil as to necessarily disappoint his hopes.

The younger Anderson therefore expected that the proletariat would act heroically, whereas the labour movement tended actually to seek meliorism, protection, and the servility of the welfare state. This is one theme which unites Anderson’s early and late thinking: opposition to the state, especially in our times to the welfare state, and to philanthropy, christianity, and all manner of do-gooding. While other radicals such as Davies in Melbourne and later Stretton in Adelaide cultivated Fabian, localist and social democratic sensibilities, Anderson saw reformism and dependence on the state as the major problems to be combated. In his marxist phase he attacked the state as a tool of social control, instrument of repression of the allegedly heroic working class. Into the 40s, he remained implacably opposed to welfarism but dropped his revolutionary politics in the absence of a revolutionary agent. He came then to anticipate the later criticism, associated with Marcuse in the 1960s, that the working class had been integrated, bought off by consumerism. The working class had dropped he noble producers’ ethic, traded it in on the mere subservience of consumption.

Anderson’s hostility to the state was not only political. He also stood philosophically against the statolatory of the idealists like Hegel and Green, for whom the state could somehow embody the collective will. This, for Anderson, was a suggestion both deceptive and dangerous, for the state did not represent a general interest, rather it had a particular interest of its own. Anderson’s sense was that society was and would ever be conflictual. Conflict reflected difference. Marxism therefore became redundant, not least of all because it posited the idea of socialism/communism as a condition beyond class and hence beyond conflict.

Anderson therefore sacrificed the idea of the good proletarian society to that of the good pluralist society, one where groups could pursue their own interests and enthusiasms in particular rather than general ways. Society had no centre; the idea that parts of society should serve other parts (for example, that education should serve ‘the economy’) was to him completely alien. So as the state became more plainly the enemy, so did the communism which was fundamentally statist. Anderson parted ways with the Sydney trotskyists, unable any longer to endorse waffle about the abstract workers’ state which rode on the backs of the empirical workers. By 1949 he supported Chifley in the Coal Strike, opposing the ban on the Communist Party but refusing to allow the Sydney Freethought Society to hear the case against the ban.

By contemporary criteria, much of his argument sounds distinctly dated. While primarily oppositional, Anderson’s case also has its positive
basis, but this is somehow suggestive of a world we have lost—small-scale, able to work around or without the state, masculinist in its connotations, productivist in its implications. There are plainly other resonances here as well—for Anderson dared to question the idea of progress, puzzled over the idea of humanism, denied that there was a centre to things, and understood that planning generated at least as many problems as it could resolve.

In the most general of terms, it seems to me that it is still meaningful to identify some of these attitudes, good and bad, with what has in the past been called Sydney libertarianism. It is probably no accident that Melbourne, by comparison, was included in Asa Briggs' book on Victorian Cities. My own sense has always been that Melbourne radicalism has been more prone to compromise with the state than to oppositional politics. If there's some kind of process of cultural exchange that goes on between these two cities I'd like, however, to imagine that the learning process could be mutually advantageous. If these are times when notions of Left and Rightness come up for grabs on a global level, then it might also be reasonable to hope that notions of what constitutes these cultures can be negotiated and extended.

The Sydney-Melbourne standoff, like the furies exchanged between Paris and Frankfurt, seems often to paper over sensibilities which are coming closer—about the problems we now face, about their apparent inscrutability, and about the continued necessity to talk of changing the world while experiencing it. Viewed from the Yarra or the Harbour, the social prospects slip closer together, more like a torn and maligned photograph than vistas world apart. Sylvan waters that run deep, these optics both jar and resonate as we commute between them and the other colonies, or postcolonies. This is what we are stuck with, and need to respond to, in ways that John Anderson could not have imagined.

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GOING FOR A SONG

Culture has become a political battlefield. Colin Mercer scouts ahead.


When I was in London recently, the Guardian Weekend Magazine ran a feature on political leaders with cultural talent. Along with the saxophonist US President-Elect (who prompted the piece), a clarinettist King of Thailand who jammed with Benny Goodman, and the symphony orchestra-conducting Edward Heath, our boy from Bankstown was given honourable mention for his garage band and pub circuit days in Western Sydney. And then, of course, there was that picture earlier in the year by Juan Davila with Paul Keating featuring prominently in petomanic pose. He has even been honoured by a profile in ALR, and we know what style of underwear he prefers and that he is not averse to a spot of ballet dancing. Apart from an occasional aristocratic indulgence in pig-shooting, the terms of popular reference for this Prime Minister, unlike his predecessor, are broadly cultural rather than sporting.

And now we have a book by Australia's most innovative and interesting cultural critic, Meaghan Morris, in which this ambiguous cultural icon, both 'street smart' and 'high flying' as she puts it, bobs and weaves in and out of the main essay, Ecstasy and Economics (A Portrait of Paul Keating). This essay is prefaced by the poem 'Watching the Treasurer' by John Forbes (to whom the book is dedicated, and whose poem assists the author in charting a complex cultural map of contemporary Australia in which this cultural object named Keating shakes, moves and, above all, figures).

And, of course, Paul Keating is not just the 'object' of all this cultural stuff; he also has something of an active role beyond his French Empire clocks. Hosting a lunch earlier in the year for the newly appointed Cultural Policy Advisory Panel which will guide the development of a Commonwealth cultural policy, the PM is said to have charged the panel with coming up with 'ideas that sing'. This was just after he had made a speech to writers in Melbourne about linking cultural development to national growth and, of course, after he had made an earlier mark in the wider cultural debate with his comments on the flag, national history and cultural self-confidence. And then, of course, we shouldn't forget his very important cultural role and contributions in the reform of parliamentary language. These contributions came after the essays in this book were written but they provide another interesting edge in the 'Keating as cultural form' genre.

There are plenty of ideas that sing—and nag and muse and murmur and sometimes mumble—in the two essays which comprise this book. Both skilfully and suggestively try to situate the project of cultural studies beyond the academy and the romantic-aesthetic paradigm in which it has all too often trapped itself. The author puts it in this way:

Both essays nag about class: both argue that aesthetic critics should engage more seriously with the cultural forms in which economic understandings of society have been disseminated for the past ten years; both explore the complex roles of stereotypes and 'portraiture' in mediated popular culture; both consider what it means to speak and write as an Australian in a 'globalising' cultural economy.
Cultural forms of economic understanding? Isn't culture one domain, or 'level' or discipline, and economics another? That, surely, is what both marxism and the discipline-bound education and training systems have both taught us. It's also what the format of newspapers, magazines and most journals teach us: culture, normally reduced to the impoverished category of 'Art' has its special place in a curious complicity between even the most 'revolutionary aestheticists' and publishers. Both consider the 'Banana Republic', the 'J curve' and even the religious Jeremiah-like 'Recession we had to have'.

These are not terms of economic analysis but something approaching moral figures or images: they were intended as such by their utterer and exploited as such by that domain which gives or returns to us the fundamental terms of the economic and political lexicons: the media. Just as Margaret Thatcher used to compare (reduce) the complexity of the national economy to the image of the 'housewife's purse', economics is here simultaneously a cultural matter: a realm of evocations, connotations and associations rather than the clear, albeit greyish, light of economic science. Not economics ('the base') first and then culture ('the superstructure') afterwards: but both at the same time.

Recognising that it is predominantly in these cultural and figurative terms that most of us understand or grasp what we can of economics, Meaghan Morris confesses here to the curious emergence of "an entirely new emotion: adulation of a national leader" partly provoked by Keating's skills as a "great describer...eloquent, not hysterical or paranoid, and lyrical, not communicative, in promoting economic reform". Ideas that sing indeed or, perhaps, whistle now more furtively in the dark night of international recession. The adulation is, of course, leavened with a fair deal of outright criticism, but the author owns up to the necessary ambiguity of her reactions here. This ambiguity is partly produced by her own biographical empathy with Keating ("mixed working class and petty-bourgeois Irish-Australian") but also, and much more importantly I think, by the urgent plea which is threaded through the two essays: to make this sort of analysis matter by connecting rather than holding as discrete 'levels', the political, the economic, the historical and the cultural.

Cultural studies has frequently tried to do this but, in the anglo-saxon tradition at least, has more frequently failed because of a tendency to treat politics, economics and history as forces 'bearing down' on culture rather than as cultural phenomena themselves in a broader anthropological sense. The analysis of culture has been sidetracked by an historical tendency to treat it in aesthetic or textual terms, seeing it as a warmer domain of liberation, fulfilment and potential, as opposed to the harder and colder structures of economics, history and politics and their related domains of administration, policy and planning. Even the shift towards 'lifestyle' in
cultural studies has only broadened the critical reader's purview rather than question some of the fundamental assumptions of critical analysis. Why not (as Morris begins to do in her second essay) take the ordinariness and everydayness of culture seriously—stand back from special pleading and recognise that it is there at every moment, every 'level' and every utterance: from the representation of 'economic rationalism' to the characterisation of the Prime Minister's Zegna suits and John Hewson's Ferrari.

Culture is, in the end, a question of resources like any other: an issue nicely summarised by Morris in a quote from Rey Chow where she stresses "the experience of consumption and reception...that store of elusive elements that, apart from 'wages' and 'surplus value', enable people to buy, accept and enjoy what is available in their culture". In other words, stress shopping centres—favourites of semiotists, politicians, most people and an awful lot of women—rather than cultural centres, visited by only a few with starkly ritualised gestures and clothing.

If lifestyle, patterns of living and, crucially, quality of life are to intrude effectively on the agenda of cultural analysis, policy and development, the patterns of allocation, distribution and consumption of cultural resources—from artefacts and images to clothing and cosmetics—will need to be understood in much more piecemeal and economic landscape. This is where cultural studies has only broadened its purview rather than identify the sinister operation of power in governmental and economic structures. Yet it has not, so to speak, made the operational move and come up with positive strategies for the 'management' (and, potentially, the reallocation through training, distributive measures, industry assistance strategies and so on) of cultural resources. In other words, it has failed to make the move from the grand theoretical space marked out by 'wages' and 'surplus value' to the rather more mundane sphere of 'what is available in their culture'.

What is available matters a lot, of course, to people in shopping centres or watching television, listening to the radio, reading books and newspapers, sitting in libraries or going to the movies. It matters a lot, in other words, to the majority experience of 'culture' in Australia. It matters too (despite the author's scepticism about this category) in the definition and elaboration of a more complex category of citizenship, one which can address the resources necessary to complex cultural identities in dominant, indigenous and non-English speaking background cultures. (Examples include access to media resources, fair representation of and access to heritage resources, assistance programs, and so on, as citizen-rights rather than the prerogatives of patronage and welfare.) In making this move, contrary to many assertions in current and rather sterile debate, cultural studies does not have to leave critique behind. It will remain a necessary and constitutive component of a more complex, more productive and more effective grasp of the contours of the cultural domain in Australia and its comparative geopolitical situation.

Hesitantly but productively Meaghan Morris here sketches out just such a path, even if it has to weave its way cautiously around—or, indeed, with the assistance of—Paul Keating and John Forbes.

COLIN MERCER is director of the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies at Griffith University and has a few nice suits and antiques himself.
THE POOR MAN'S ORANGE

The film Romper Stomper has raised enormous controversy. David Greason tries to get under its skin.

Romper Stomper, a film by Melbourne writer/director Geoffrey Wright, chronicles the shabby and tragic last days of a neo-Nazi skinhead gang in Melbourne's western suburbs. Led by Hando (played by Russell Crowe, and Davey (the late Daniel Pollock), the gang spends its days alternately whining about the Asian hordes, getting pissed, and terrorising local Vietnamese kids. In other words, it's one big happy family. When Gabe (Jacqueline McKenzie), a disturbed young girl, enters the circle and begins an affair with Hando, the seeds are sown for the family's destruction. It is almost as if Hando's fears about outsiders are justified: it's just that the really dangerous outsiders are each other.

The unremitting violence has brought the film some considerable controversy. The Movie Show's David Stratton called it "A Clockwork Orange without the intellect" and accused it of racism. The NSW Jewish Board of Deputies also expressed concern that the film's graphic scenes of violence might incite racial hatred towards Asian Australians. In other words, it's one big happy family. When Gabe (Jacqueline McKenzie), a disturbed young girl, enters the circle and begins an affair with Hando, the seeds are sown for the family's destruction. It is almost as if Hando's fears about outsiders are justified: it's just that the really dangerous outsiders are each other.

On the charge of racism, Wright is probably in the right. The racism of the film is lost in a blur of fists: only the most obtuse could miss the point that, for these lads, indignation at "being a white coolie in my own country" (as Hando says) comes a poor second to a punch-up. So is it in real life: while neo-Nazi skins are obviously racist, it's the thrill of living on the edge that keeps them in, not the theoretical minutiae of Nordic skull measurements and exegeses on the Protocols of Zion.

Most of the violence in Romper Stomper is directed at outsiders: Vietnamese, hippies, the propertied bourgeoisie. But at the film's end the inevitable happens: gang members turn on each other. In real life, however, the troops of National Action, its openly neo-Nazi offshoot, the Australian Nationalist Movement, and the lonewolf gangs didn't wait for the suspense music to start before they began culling their membership lists with a sawn-off shottie or a baseball bat.

Wright has also made an issue of this. "The film is more concerned with the audience's involvement with the characters after they've reached a point of no return, rather than the liberal tradition of: 'let's turn inside out the process of how the characters got this way'," he said. "What we were doing was providing vicarious thrills with a serious theme, and that's what some people find so disturbing about the film. It's probably got more in common with a rollercoaster ride than something that is usually done. It's not so much about thoughts as about feelings, and I mean that in the most primitive way."

When one talks about primitive forms of expression in such matters, it pays to be cautious. Wright hasn't been. Cinematically, there is much to be said for Romper Stomper and, even if the storyline falls down in places, Wright's rollercoaster technique takes the audience right into the skinheads' circle. What that means, of course, is that Romper Stomper is an almost unadulterated document of Australian fascism. And presumably that isn't what Geoffrey Wright set out to make.

There is no political context for the film, which is not necessarily surprising given that, for the most part, the world of the Australian far right owes more to psycho-pathology than politics. We learn nothing from Romper Stomper. The skins bash the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese bash back. The police bash and shoot. What are we meant to do with these people? Film-makers and writers have grave responsibilities when bringing people like Hando and Davey to the world. And as their boots sink into yet another Asian, the question has to be asked: who's getting the vicarious thrills in this exchange, and why?

DAVID GREASON is a Melbourne journalist who spent his teenage years on the far Right. His autobiography of those years, I Was a Teenage Fascist, will be published by McPhee Gribble in 1993.
ALREVIEW

IDEAS ON HOLD
Parliamentarians leading the public debate?
Hugh Emy is not entirely convinced.


It is certainly welcome to see MPs seeking to lead intellectual debate in Australia, as this book claims. Only the indefatigable Barry Jones, however, makes any real attempt to either ask or answer the questions raised by the title. Several of the authors do not mention the key term, socialism, at all. Others use it only for rhetorical effect. The title is, therefore, annoyingly misleading. It is really a collection of small set-piece essays discussing particular Labor policies in the possible aftermath of economic rationalism.

As such, it has a place. It is instructive to find a number of Labor MPs declaring that the “leadership no longer believes in the neo-classical...baggage of the 1980s” and even that Mr Keating opposes “narrow” economic rationalism. By and large, all the contributors are unhappy with the direction taken by the government in the 1980s and wish to modify or reverse the trend (although Brian Howe is suitably ministerial and much prefers social justice to socialism). Nick Bolkus wants to put regulation back on the agenda. Others, including Peter Baldwin, want a more dispassionate, less ideological approach to public enterprise and government intervention in the economy. There are coy calls for some kind of industry policy; stronger calls for a progressive tax system, for enlightened education, rights and environmental policies.

The tone is progressive, reformist but cautious, and rather short of ideas, especially where ‘socialism’ is concerned. Only Jones seems to have a strong sense of the real nature of the current intellectual vacuum on the left, and what must be done to address it. Duncan Kerr writes (and Jones agrees) that “Labor’s main chance is to rediscover its ideological distinctiveness”, but how? While all the writers would welcome an ideological alternative to the free market, none really have much idea where it might come from. This book also illustrates, if unwittingly, the gap left by the eclipse of socialism. It is almost certainly time to start rethinking the language of “democratic socialism”. If the market is here to stay, and there seems to be a fairly strong case for that, then it is time to take a more discriminating attitude towards property rights. The question will be what rights private property owners can reasonably claim in a free market society where there are already strong groups, Aboriginal and environmental, who wish to qualify and redefine property rights in new ways. Labor has to think more creatively about the property issue.

This book is really about the deficiencies of existing policies. It is, mostly, an early call to swing the pendulum back. Many of the points the writers make would find a place in a new conceptual framework for the Left. However, the gulf between where these writers are now and where they would like to be is a large one. How to bridge it, how to develop a new ideology which would synthesise Labor’s traditional values with the kind of policies which will be electorally attractive in the next ten years? These essays provide some clues.

Labor has to rethink its position on the proper relationship between state and market. This is crucial to debates about welfarism, interventionism or industry policy. It has to distance itself from the confining language of ‘market failure’ and assert clearly that while the market may be a necessary component of complex,
 industrial societies, there is no guarantee that the market will work or evolve in a manner compatible with the nation's long-term interests and security. The state must retain a significant residual responsibility to steer the process of economic development, to ensure that productive (or strategic) investment occurs as and where the nation requires it, cope with the impact of technological change upon society, and compensate (or retrain) those adversely affected by structural change.

Redefining the state's role should go together with reasserting the principle of collective social responsibility. Society is not just an aggregate of individuals. Wealth is produced by social cooperation as well as individual effort. Society is fully entitled to appropriate some portion of this wealth (or surplus)—by means of a graduated income tax or by taxes on wealth (or inheritance)—to spend on infrastructure, the social wage, or the less fortunate. Labor should stress the complementarity of state and market (on the model of non Anglo-Saxon market societies); the superiority of communitarian value-systems to individualistic; and it should affirm the importance of social equality as a counter to the current stress on freedom, although it may have to shift the emphasis to equality of life chances (or to Mr Whitlam's "positive equality") from equality of outcomes. It should press for a fully democratic constitution with basic rights, including now the right to withdraw one's labour.

Overall, Labor should not make the mistake of looking backwards, of trying to "reinvent socialism" too literally: substantial parts of the socialist program really have gone. It should try instead to develop a more critical and informed approach to the market, which means especially constructing a more balanced and selective view of the state's role in contemporary society. There is plenty of literature available, critical of the neoclassical paradigm, to develop a supporting communitarian perspective in which many of the ethical concerns of socialists would find a home.

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**MALE ORDER**

Sexual violence is back on the agenda, reports Ros Mills.

Crimes of Violence: Australian Responses to Rape and Child Sexual Assault, Jan Breckenridge and Moira Carmody (eds). (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1992.)

Sexual violence is on the public agenda. Not so long ago only feminists, and radical ones at that, spoke out publicly about the prevalence of male violence. Issues concerning male sexual practices which were previously shrouded in secrecy are now part of mediaspeak and government policy. Jan Breckenridge and Rosemary Berreen note Judith Allen's comment that 'domestic violence' is "a practice without a history". Writing on incest they suggest that "the effectiveness of an incest taboo is not evidenced in a capacity to prohibit the occurrence of incest. Rather its effectiveness is best witnessed in the capacity to inhibit public discussion and acknowledgment of the nature and extent of the problem". Feminists have achieved what previously seemed impossible: public discussion of men's sexual violence against women and children in the home.

'Speak-outs' by feminists are, on the whole, now a thing of the past. Non-funded crisis phones run from private homes and voluntary services in ill-equipped and overcrowded conditions have been replaced in most Australian states by funded (albeit underfunded) public services. In many instances these services are run by feminist professionals with a focus on efficient service provision and therapeutic healing processes. The general feeling is that a battle has been won. But have feminists been too hasty? Have we really dealt once and for all with the question of how, and if, to use the state (government funding, policy, legislation, policing and so forth) to bring an end to male violence? And can we keep male sexual violence on the agenda, other than as aberrant behaviour? For despite the statistics now available, and despite feminist challenges to widely held notions of rape and incest, sexual violence is still understood as the pathological behaviour of a few rather than as the actions of many ordinary men known and sometimes loved by their victims. 'Normal' male heterosexual practices have yet to come under public scrutiny.

The contributors to Crimes of Violence are sexual assault workers, researchers and policy makers involved in the area of sexual violence. The collection is, generally speaking, addressed to workers and various professionals who, in the course of their work, come into contact with sexual violence.

And, like many edited collections, it tends to be a mixed bag. Its importance for sympathetic professionals unfamiliar with feminism is indisputable. The debunking of patriarchal myths of rape and incest, the critique of the family and of mother-blame, the importance of believing women's and children's stories and giving positive feedback on responses and survival techniques, are familiar to femi-
Perhaps the title Crimes of Violence is telling. After all, can we really define rape and incest in terms of a crime of violence and leave out sex? Is it any more useful to define rape in this way than it was in the 70s to define rape as sex and leave out power? Given the nature of patriarchy as eroticised power, can rape be measured in terms of the level of violence acceptable in 'normal' sex acts? And, given the connection between power and sex, can a definition which recognises both be accommodated within 20th century liberal discourse which is based on the myth of 'gender-neutral' equality? Both Breckenridge and Carmody acknowledge these problems in various ways but slide away from confronting them full on. Crimes of Violence is not just about men's rapacious sexual violence, it seems to me—although this is central to the content—but about feminism in the 90s. Perhaps the importance of this text is that it highlights the necessity for more feminist debate—between feminists in service provision, policy making, academia, and, most importantly, between states. Feminists need to undertake a thorough reappraisal of 'rape culture', male sexuality and feminist interventions. And there is a clear need to acknowledge and locate 'welfare feminism' somewhere within the political grid of feminism. Some of the writers in this collection depict welfare feminism as somehow different and more radical than liberal feminism, but at the same time as offering a more useful negotiating position than radical feminism. Is welfare feminism the only way to go? And is radical feminism really such an anachronism as this collection seems to suggest?

ROS MILLS works in the Women's Health Policy Unit of the Queensland Department of Health.

MY FAVOURITE READ

We asked seven interesting people about their most memorable reading moments of the year. These are their stories...

SHAGGY DOG DAYS

It's been a dog of a year. I look back on dear friends who perished—ones you never dreamed would be gone by Christmas—ABC Radio's Peter Hunt, businessman Ken Myer, and Francis James. Books were picked up and read fitfully, not in my usual unstoppable way. When we used to go to a tropical island with the kids they would ask: "Why d'you come all this way just to sit on a beach for nine hours turning pages?" "Because this is my idea of paradise," I replied.

But I did devour Margaret Atwood's Catseye (Bloomsbury) with its chilling evocation of young cruelty. Her writing is like perfect glass: clear and fragile yet shining in pat­
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I'm still moving in fits through A S

Byatt's Possession, 511 pages of deli­
cious whimsey and symbolism. The tale

is of obsessive involvement with the

niceties of a past age and how their

reflections are there, just the same in

modern relationships. Byatt's scholar­

ship is impressive, but you don't have
to let that put you off. I read it as a

long-distance eng lit shaggy dog story.

Captivity Captive by Rodney Hall is

quite a contrast. The writing is spare

and pungent. The story is of murder

and mystery. Hall is one of our inter­
national stars; he's read less than he

should be in Australia. This book is a
terrific one to start a Rodney Hall
quest.

I tried Understanding The Present
by Bryan Appleyard but got roundly
put off on nearly every page. Appleyard
writes for the Sunday Times in London
and his theme is the hegemony of
science—how it spreads like a cancer

invading other territories that should

be discrete—taking over spirituality,
moral welfare, even commerce.

Appleyard opens by telling us of his
dad who replied to a question about
the capacity of a container by giving a
formidably exact figure after barely a
pause. Dad was an engineer. Such
cocksurety can be one of the least
attractive aspects of blokeish science
(and engineering, with its 'Toys for
Boys' ethos, has been among the worst
offenders).

But other writers tackled that
chestnut effectively years ago. Fore­
most among them is Steven Rose,
professor of biology at Britain's Open
University. Rose showed back in 1973
how one can obtain credible views of
humanity described at the chemical,
physiological, psychological or etho­
logical level. Yet you can make sense
of them in terms of social policy and
'the spiritual' only when you put them
all together with the other essays we
have of the human lot—the socio­
logical ones, political ones and so on.

Bryan Appleyard finds the world as
defined only by science to be arid and
fearful. So does everyone else. That's why anyone purveying such a restrictive definition of human understanding is either a clot or a reactionary.

So it would be good to end this year's roundup with three books celebrating the other side of the picture (the same picture, mind you)—the artistic one. This year I very much enjoyed The World of Islam, edited by Bernard Lewis and The World of Buddhism, edited by Gombrich (both Thames & Hudson). Like so many of the volumes produced by this house they combine prose with illustration in a way that creates a delightful synergy—one that was singularly absent in the art books of my youth. T&H also published Virginia Spate's terrific work on Monet which shows how that genius understood and experiencing the other side of the picture the way that generations of 20th century bystanders find the 'new wave' a confusing and difficult period in the history of rock. The re have been plenty confusing twists and turns since Elvis drove the first cab off the rank into Sun Records with the meter running, but the punk era of the mid-70s provided the last red hot go.

One final thought. One cannot mention books of 1992 without mentioning Anne Deveson's superb Tell Me I'm Here (Penguin) about her experience of schizophrenia in the family. It's a compelling read and a wonderful achievement.

ROBYN WILLIAMS is producer of ABC Radio National's Science Unit.

UNCONTAMINATED HATRED

Late night fiction: I often want someone to tell me a story before I go to sleep. Jan McKemmish's Only Lawyers Dancing (HarperCollins) was one of the few recent novels to pass the first-page test: lively and living prose, an ear for 80s argot, a sense of media bombardment and of a certain Sydney: 'the old heartbeat of the ocean suburbs, paint peeling and trees bent on the winds...'. The demand to read on came from McKemmish's way of dealing with 80s greed, corruption, yuppiedom, the fascination with the fast lane. This isn't a thriller where the bad guys get theirs, but a superbly unfolding dance where crimes and lawyers and all those weaving among them move in patterned symbiosis: where the 'facts' of plot and subplot are persistently overwhelmed by film noir fictions.

Biography/letters/memoirs: Simone de Beauvoir's Letters to Sartre (Radius) and Sartre's newly-translated Witness to My Life (Hamish Hamilton). For a commissioned article I wove about for weeks among her letters to him, his to her, her memoirs, his, and the Deirde Bar biography of her. From that welter of intertextuality I'd say: grab the lot while you can, and play around again in the fictions and histories of these monsters sacres; they still have much to give us, from lives lived as from writings written. Their own compact succeeded or failed—judge as you will. De Beauvoir put survival ahead of the principles of resistance during the Occupation; as an intellectual Sartre faced intrepidly into absurdity and nothingness while, as a man, he never did grow up. But the recent debunkings, from feminist and misogynist directions alike, have been sour and mean-spirited. From the self-involved feminisms of difference, de Beauvoir invites a return to a timely and courageous, if unfashionable, feminism of equality. The whole legendary milieu suits recession lifestyles, and rebukes the consumerist obsession.

High Journalism: For weeks now I've run round reading this piece of ferociously sustained, incandescent invective to anybody who'll listen. It's Christopher Hitchens' review-essay 'Touch of Evil', on Walter Isaason's Kissinger (London Review of Books, 22 October). Hitchens uses the occasion to build his case for considering Kissinger a serial mass murderer. He arranges the evidence in order and at length: Bangladesh, Chile, Cyprus, Kurdistan, East Timor; then, more briefly, Angola, Portugal, the Iran-Iraq conflict; then the man's drop-dead comments on tiananmen Square. 'Since leaving active politics, Kissinger had been looking bored an ill, as if cut off from his death-support machine...Will anyone say what Kissinger's achievement was? Will anyone point to a country, not excluding his own, which is in the slightest degree ameliorated by his attention?...There have been other war criminals, law-breakers, phoney and pathological liars during the long decline of empire and the Cold War, but they haven't...been met at every airport lounge with an orgy of sycophany and a chorus of toadying, complicit mirth at every callous, mendacious jest.' In these days of endless, boggling equivocation, there's nothing like a shot of straight-black, uncontaminated hatred.

SYLVIA LAWSON is a freelance writer.

Savage Summer

I have admired Jon Savage's work on and off the paddock for years and with England’s Dreaming—The Sex Pistols and Punk Rock—the big man has thrown open the doors of the garage and roared out of the shed with the punk ablate up front of the ute. Innocent bystanders find the 'new wave' a confusing and difficult period in the history of rock. There have been plenty of confusing twists and turns since Elvis drove the first cab off the rank into Sun Records with the meter running, but the punk era of the mid-70s provided the last red hot go.

Put simply, there were two great back-to-back summers way back then, the Long Hot summer of '76 and the Silver Jubilee summer the following year. They were summers of great torpor in English youth and the music business. What livened the Old Dart up was a bunch of youngsters with courageous hairdressing, dolled up in bondage trousers, bin liners and razor...
VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

It has been a year of belated discovery. Chance brought me to Maurice Gee's *The Burning Boy*, a book of understanding. Not since I happened upon Herman Hesse and Chaim Potok, at various ages, has any writer struck such a chord. I've since read several of his earlier books, all set in New Zealand, and found them hardly less profound. Perhaps I fell upon him at the right time.

Allan Massie has been around for years, too, writing stories in fiction of powerful characters. I can't vouch for the accuracy of *The Caesars and Augustus*, but it is raw, compelling and appealing, and led me towards Massie's other fine books. Peter Ackroyd is another favourite English writer; his *Chatterton* is worth reading even if it does not match his marvellous *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*.

A trip to South Africa to cover the cricket tour there prompted widespread reading. Two histories commended themselves: Marq De Villiers' *White Tribe Dreaming* (the story of Afrikaners told through the story of one of its oldest and most liberal families) and Allister Sparks' *essential* *The Mind of South Africa*. I also enjoyed biographies of President Kruger and General Smuts (who published a critique of Walt Whitman at 24 and first propounded holography). To add the novels of Christopher Hope and Andre Brink is to gesture to a literature still merely sampled.

So far as Australian writing goes, my reading has been narrow. David Malouf's *The Great World* was marvellous, as was *The Treatment and the Cure* by Peter Kocan; both have been around for years. Apart from these I've concentrated on reminiscences such as *The Innocent* by John Kingsmill, a book about his days growing up in Bondi. Bernard Hesling's *Dinkum Pomme* captured the Australia of 30 years ago while Richard Twopeny's *fascinating* *Town Life in Australia*, written in 1883, spares no class of society and, as the blurb says, describes "the insanitary, tasteless mansions of the wealthy" as well as telling of the "roughs of the worst description whose favourite sport is to kick every Chinaman they come across". It was written in 1883, not 1993.

Last, but not least, a cricket book. (Why have I left sport for last, as if it were an index? It's hard to say which is worse—those who think only of sport or those who only sneer upon it.) Greg Growden's biography of Chuck Fleetwood-Smith, *A Wayward Genius*, is a study of a flawed, even failed man. Sport is just an activity and players are as much a mixture of hot and cold, sweet and sour as anyone else. Growden's book reminds us of this forgotten fact.

PETER ROEBUCK is a cricket columnist for the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

NAPOLEON SOLO

The most highly acclaimed work of fiction produced in Australia this year, Simon Leys' *The Death of Napoleon*, is a book that, typically, has gathered comparatively little attention within Australia itself. That is partly because it is only 105 pages long, and is therefore assumed by literalists to be lightweight. Its subject is not Australia, nor is it even about what anti-grammarians call 'the Asia-Pacific'. Again, while full of verbal inventiveness and lateral thoughts, it is ultimately a moral, not a postmodern tale. Finally, and most significantly, it is written by a man who prefers the company of his family, books, paintings and little yacht to that of literati or glitterati.

This wonderful novella-cum-fa-
ble is introduced by a quotation from Paul Valery—a quote which 'Simon Leys' (aka Pierre Ryckmans, Sydney University's Professor of Chinese Studies) says he only unearthed after he had finished writing it: “What a pity to see a mind as great as Napoleon’s devoted to trivial things such as empires, historic events, the thundering of cannons and of men... How could he fail to see that what really mattered was something else entirely?”

In the story—Ryckmans’ first published fiction, astonishingly—Napoleon escapes from St Helena and returns, dishevelled and unrecognised, to haunt the scenes of his glorious triumphs and defeats. At the village of Waterloo l'Eglise he visits the Brasserie de l'Empereur, a converted farm, on which hangs a sign: “The Emperor spent the night here before the battle. Visit Napoleon’s bedroom.” He does so, accompanied by a dozen English tourists—and realises with horror that he has never been there before. Recoiling like a cannon from such traumatic scenes, Napoleon starts to lose his identity, even his name—and gains a true understanding, in mundane relationships of “what really matters”.

In my 20 years in journalism, I have interviewed far more people on the Christopher Skase end of the spectrum (including pre-Spanish spine Skase himself) than at the Mother Theresa end. Ryckmans, like Mother T, emanates goodness—but with a more appealing sense of humour.

He came to Sydney from Belgium via Taiwan, Peking, Hong Kong and Canberra. And he is a delight: modest, witty, remarkably widely read in French, Chinese and English (though he speaks the latter impeccably, this book was written first in French, then translated by Patricia Clancy and himself). He does not seek, but nor does he seek to escape, moral confrontations. It was he who first blew the whistle on the repressiveness of Mao's China in The Chairman's New Clothes. He must be unique among academics in Australia in refusing to recommend his own seminal works to his students. Indeed, the Chinese works are now mostly unavailable in Australia.

The Death of Napoleon rightly attracted overwhelming praise in Europe and the United States. But Ryckmans has been underwhelmed in Australia, which he has made his home with his Taiwanese wife and children. That's OK. He, like Napoleon, ultimately likes it like that. ■

ROWAN CALLICK is a journalist with the Australian Financial Review.

A BOOK FOR BEDTIME

1992 has not been an exciting year for Australian books. The recession has meant most publishers are taking less risks, investing heavily in their mass-market authors, deserting the costly hardback in preference to the more attractive paperback format, and minimising the output of low profit areas like literary fiction. Apart from such outstanding new books as Marion Halligan's Lovers Knots and Thea Astley's Vanishing Points (William Heinemann), the year has been marked by a slide into spiritual and nostalgia.

My own favourites? Patrimony from Phillip Roth is terrific. I'm not a fan of the tedious caricatures in his fiction, but Roth’s account of his father's death is rich and astute in cultural detail, hilarious and deeply moving. My all-time favourite book is Eloise by Kay Thompson. The six year old heroine dominates life at the Plaza Hotel and "ooooo... just loves room-service". Side-splittingly funny for the eight to 38 age group, I also recommend Eloise because it is a novel that can be read in its entirety as a one-off bedtime gig. Happy reading! ■

LOUISE ADLER is the publisher for William Heinemann.

OUT FOR YOUR COMFORT

Recently, an Australian writer wrote me a very rude letter berating me about this, that and the other, and included for good measure the admonishment that if I didn't name Australian books as my Best for the Year, I ought to be ashamed of myself. 'Ought' is a lovely word, don't you think?

Well, despite the fact that I have enjoyed a number of ripper Australian books in 1992, I ought to tell you that I can't think of one that leaps out to be touted, not one that I want to shove under people's noses and say, please read and enjoy. But Christopher Hope's Serenity House I do want to wave about a bit, not because it's a satisfying book in every respect, but because it's such a controlled, angry book, with deeply felt and deeply thought-out responses to the late 20th century. It's wickedly funny too.

Briefly, it's about a man named Max, who appears to have been employed by the Nazis to experiment on Jews during the Holocaust. The interesting thing that Hope does is to take such an obviously negative character and confound our expectations, putting us in the position of moral arbiter. Everyone around Max is pretty horrible, in quite normal ways, and it's hard not to be onside with the poor old man—but wait! you find yourself saying, this poor old man has been party to horror.

I was comparing it, for a while, with another novel—an Australian novel this time—David Foster's Mates of Mars, but a clever friend of mine pointed out that where Mates of Mars doesn't build any compassion within the nastiness, Serenity House makes these strangely empty, hopeless people matter. It's a surprisingly humane book, but it's written in a way that seems to want to fool you into believing otherwise. I like its complexities.

ROSEMARY SORENSEN is the editor of Australian Book Review.
A
fter being replaced as Liberal leader by John Howard in 1985, he was asked at the ensuing press conference whether he still wanted to be prime minister. "I'm not sure I ever did", quipped the deflated soufflé. Then, realising his mistake, he broke into an appallingly wan grin, which was intended to convey self-deprecation, but which actually said: "Please don't be cruel to me, I'm only a harmless buffoon".

It was far too late for Peacock by then, of course, but his dilemma about how much of his true self to reveal is one shared by his successor. John Hewson has recently been making frantic attempts to 'humanise' himself, rather in the same way that aliens from outer space do in Hollywood films, when they try to take over the earth by posing as normal, small-town Americans. Despite reasonably convincing outward appearances, they always give themselves away in the end by striving too hard to be 'normal', occasionally misusing what they take to be idiomatic English, and completely misjudging social contexts. They're just too 'normal' to be normal.

This seems the most likely explanation for Hewson's recent remarks about Bob Carr not being a 'full-blooded' (presumably he meant 'red-blooded': see what I mean?) Australian. And what else can we make of his comments, supposingly in connection with the Coalition's policies, that "everybody is apprehensive about change"? "I have trouble changing my socks", he admitted, "unless I've actually focused on the fact. And people are like that". Obviously a data error in the intergalactic training program.

Whether the evil plot of the Android from Planet GST succeeds, or whether Paul Keating's deadly gamma-rays leave him in a smoking pile of transistors and wires come election time, may depend on the success or otherwise of the humanisation process. Hewson's recent appearances on Live and Sweaty and Burke's Backyard, along with a variety of photo-opportunities of him playing soccer or riding a motorbike, are all meant to convince us that, like the rest of us, his real enjoyment comes from going bowling and digging up the dahlias when he gets the chance. Honest, you could take the bloke down the pub on a Friday night and he'd have his money (plus 15 per cent) down on the pool table before you could say "Your shout, John".

Personally, I'm not entirely convinced. But the real test of Hewson's ability to convince the electorate that he is in fact human is yet to come. I refer, of course, to the apparent absence of pets in the Hewson household. Pets are a vital campaigning tool for any politician who feels the need to humanise him or herself. The fact that Richard Nixon had a spaniel, Checkers, was in itself enough to persuade a substantial part of the American electorate that he couldn't possibly be the paranoid, scheming crook that all other available evidence seemed to suggest. It may be true that you can't fool all of the people all of the time, but with the help of a four-legged friend you can have a damn good try.

George Bush, of course, wasn't averse to enlisting his dog as a member of the White House staff either. Millie, he frequently asserted during the election campaign, had a better grasp of foreign affairs than Bill Clinton. Since Millie has apparently been running the State Department for the past three years (if Barbara Bush's testimony is to be believed), perhaps this shouldn't be too surprising.

Clinton too, although hardly in need of the same level of humanisation as either Bush or Nixon, clearly learned some lessons. No sooner had Millie cleared her desk at the White House than Clinton himself made a crucial policy speech designed specifically to differentiate himself from the previous administration. The Clintons, he announced, had a cat, Socks. What better response to the changing mood of the country than to highlight the feline qualities of the Clinton team? Look at his welfare policy. Americans have become too dog-like, he argues: dependent, but always ready to respond to problems with a show of aggression. 'Tough love' on the other hand, means you have to make like a cat. You may get fed, you may not—if not, you have to fend for yourself.

American voters may have lapped up the message, but clearly John Hewson and his minders have not. One problem may be that dogs, with their strong sense of smell, can detect anything posing as a human being from 100 metres away. Or it may be simply that Hewson is worried about choosing the right dog and, above all, the right name. He's OK as long as 'normal' means white, male, home-owning, car-driving, flag-loving citizens. It's when it involves anything beyond these stereotypical human qualities of the Clinton administration. The Clintons, in their policy speech designed to persuade a substantial part of the American electorate that he couldn't possibly be the paranoid, scheming crook that all other available evidence seemed to suggest. It may be true that you can't fool all of the people all of the time, but with the help of a four-legged friend you can have a damn good try.

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