Science and Society

Pacific Rim Strategy

Catholics and Viet Nam

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IN THIS ISSUE....

We publish a series of articles by members of a Science for People group in Melbourne. The group’s aim is to analyse the use of science in our society and how the direction of scientific and technological research is politically influenced. Helen McCulloch and Lesley Rogers discuss the use of medicine for social control and profit and Mike Ross’s case study on sex change operations illustrates the point. Chris Sanderson looks at the politics of the 245-T debate.

Janna Thompson examines how ideas of science and technology are reflected in science fiction and traces how these ideas change with the prevailing political climate.

Bob Catley and Bruce McFarlane examine the “New International Economic Order”, which they see as an imperialist strategy forced by the decline of the US in relation to other world forces.

Ex-catholic priest Charlie Bowers discusses the role of the Australian catholic church in Sydney in the public debates over the Viet Nam war and Australia’s involvement in it.

In the Reviews section, Ben Bartlett looks at health and safety issues at work, Janna Thompson reviews two books on nuclear politics and Kathe Boehringer discusses The China Syndrome.

The authors of Seeds for Change reply to Hugh Saddler’s review in ALR No. 69. A Comment by Eric Aarons completes the issue.
The following is an edited version of a report given by Communist Party Joint National Secretary, Eric Aarons, to a CPA National Committee meeting on September 22.

The political, industrial, as well as the economic scene in Australia is in a state of flux.

Big battles have taken place, and bigger ones will occur.

Both promise and danger for the labor movement and the left are contained in present developments. The main features of the situation are:

• The continuing world, and Australia, economic crisis.
• The swing to the left registered at the ACTU Congress and evident also in some, but as yet far from all, unions.
• The consolidation of the left in the Labor Party nationally and in some states (not yet including Queensland), and changes in leaderships which provide new openings.
• The clear intention of Federal and Liberal or National Party-led state governments to up the ante in the union-bashing stakes, seeing this as both necessary to a successful capitalist resolution of the economic crisis, and as the main lever for reversing their generally declining electoral fortunes. The ASIO legislation and other state attacks on democratic rights (Western Australia and Queensland especially) are linked in with this, while also casting a wider net.
• The volatility of the political climate, shown especially in the South Australian elections.

More inflation and more unemployment make the economic outlook grim. One commentator (John Palmer), reporting the Tokyo economic summit earlier in the year, said: “The seven leaders have given up the pretence they can manage the world economy”.

They are leaving it, he said, to economic forces, hoping that the recession will bring about a restructuring which would allow a resumption of growth.

But, he concluded, “How much of the capitalist world economic and social order will survive the process remains to be seen”.

OECD says the world recession will be “worse than ‘73 since the recent recovery was not complete”.

A new cyclical downturn, and rising inflation — which is behind the escalating gold price — has hit the US, which accounts for half of the capitalist world’s production.

Recent oil price increases will cost about 70 billion dollars.

But, though grim, capitalism’s situation is not yet catastrophic, or even beyond redemption.

The capitalists face what a Financial Review article called “the hard slog of the uncertain ‘80s” (as distinct from the rosy promise of the “Soaring ‘60s”).

The continuing economic crisis does not mean that restructuring cannot achieve some of the capitalists’ aims, or preclude areas of economic growth in a stagnant or even overall declining state.

And the political development depends on the political battle waged.

While the Fraser government has been somewhat on the defensive, it is moving to go onto the attack, and only some elements of an offensive from the labor movement are yet present. But some of these elements do exist, and we can and should build on them in the broad movement and in our own party.

The higher Australian inflation rate results from government decisions which have boosted petrol prices and health costs; from the rural boom and high food prices; from high rents and lack of houses people can afford to buy; and from continuing decisions by big corporations to raise prices to further boost their profits.

The outburst of pent-up dissatisfaction with partial indexation, productivity and relativities is hampering the government’s efforts to secure higher profits for the corporations while restricting inflation by substantially depressing wages, though
their efforts to do so and to cut the social wage and increase the tax burden, continues.

Substantial increases in unemployment are certain. Four per cent non-farm growth is needed just to absorb the increase in the workforce, without reducing existing unemployment, and growth forecasts are much less than this. The bureaucracy expects at least another 50,000 a year increase till 1983.

As we know, the real unemployment figure is much higher than the official one, as large numbers do not look when they know they cannot find, or are ineligible for the dole.

It's a joke, but one deserving of an angry response when the mealy-mouthed budget papers say:

(The drop in workforce participation) presumably reflects withdrawal from the workforce by those who, while offering for jobs under more buoyant market conditions, do not feel a need to seek work where it is much harder to find (the so-called (!) 'discouraged worker effect').

Another feature of the unemployment figures is that the number of wage workers has actually declined at a time when the total of people in the workforce has slightly increased [from 5,965,600 in '76-'77 to 6,007,300 in '78-'79]. This comes about because the number of employed and self-employed grew from 868,000 in '76-'77 to 933,000 in '78-'79 (i.e. by 7.5 per cent) while the number of wage and salary earners actually fell [from 5,066,000 to 5,049,000 over the same period].

This almost certainly arises from the rapid growth in body hire and sub-contracting, which poses new problems for the unions in a number of industries.

Despite incompetence, despite more appearance of action than real action, despite the fact that the economic forces within capitalism continually escape political control, the government doggedly pursues its economic strategy which involves:

- to flog off resources, minerals and processing (for example of Aluminium) at bargain basement rates
- to move the more labour-intensive industries offshore to take advantage of low wage rates and labour forces 'disciplined' by repression
- to restructure what's left, though with an eye cocked to political effects (hence the vacillation on tariffs, etc.)
- to milk the state (financed by the mass of taxpayers) by sale of profitable public enterprises, and, especially, provision of infrastructures and cheap power supplies.

Politically, they aim to put the unions in a strait-jacket by state action backed by popular sentiment because it can't be made to 'stick' otherwise, and to shunt off into a ghetto that section of people who bear the main brunt of the crisis — the unemployed.

We know that politics is complicated, and not a simple expression of the economic needs of big capital. But those needs are often quite straight-forward.

Recently I spoke with someone who works for one of the big mining multinationals interested in aluminium and uranium, among other resources. He said that these corporations quite openly discuss the political and economic requirements of their enterprises.

The lead time for a big mining development, for example, Roxbury Downs, is 7 to 12 years, so the stability of price projections, inflation rates and labour costs is absolutely crucial in estimating whether the hundreds of millions invested will return the required profit.

You don't need to be a marxist to draw the conclusion that speed is essential for profitable uranium mining in Australia, or realise why certain forces became hysterical over the ACTU debate and the preceding ALP decision.

Nor to conclude that general political stability and wage 'stability' (if possible at a declining level) is sought.

A leftward swinging trade union movement, especially one which can defy penal powers and state-established wage
guidelines and effectively contest the control and plans of the multinationals, just does not suit. And, with most other resource-rich countries very politically unstable, Australia remains one of the last which is conservatively-stable.

So, even here, the issues are not purely economic. Any left thinking can be dangerous to such stability. Any social movement, for example the environmental one, can be a danger, for they are exporting pollution along with capital. Less directly, women's liberation is also seen as 'destabilising' the social fabric.

Despite South Australia, the government is in considerable strife as a result of the intractable economic crisis and the conflicting demands of different sectors and groups, reflected in the growing strains within the coalition and between state and federal governments.

Disenchantment with Fraser is growing, though he is unlikely to be dumped in the near future because there is 'no one more competent'. And, although some members of the ruling class are ruminating on a switch to a Hayden Labor government with a 'good management' and 'stability' program, they have not yet taken the plunge.

We have heard that Fairfax and Packer met recently and decided to stick with Fraser. Murdoch may be keeping his options open, hoping that the Queensland-type rightwing will extend its influence nationally, that Keating will be able to follow the Ducker act in NSW, and that Hayden and the centre-right majority in the Labor Party can be pressured in the right direction.

And, while the media are not all powerful, anyone would be foolish to ignore the awesome power they can bring to bear at an instant, given a situation to work on.

The main political weapons the Fraser government and its supporters are counting on are disbelief in Labor's and Hayden's capacity to manage the economy and restore prosperity (even if the Libs themselves can't either), and especially the escalating union-bashing.

Surveys don't reveal everything, but can't be shrugged off either. A Gallup poll in August found that three-quarters (74 per cent) of those surveyed believed unions should not have the right to strike if an Arbitration Commission hearing had gone against them; the same proportion believed that in those circumstances, if the strike caused great public inconvenience, the union should have to pay a heavy penalty; and three-fifths believed that the federal government should be able to suspend or dismiss employees during emergencies such as the Telecom dispute.

To change this, which is essential, requires a vigorous defence of the unions. But, in a rough parallel with the Union of Students, it requires as well a sustained effort to change the way people perceive trade union actions. And this requires a deeper and more consistent adoption of interventionist and mass-oriented policies and tactics.

It requires also a more determined and well-conceived pursuit of industry unionism and struggle for union democracy and to overcome the constant danger that union officials, including communists, may become bureaucratic and get separated from the party and the union rank and file; and more attention to the role of migrants, women and youth.

There are some events which indicate the new phase of development the labour movement is now in.

In the first place are the victories of the left in the ACTU Congress.

There are the pressures and stirrings in the trade unions arising from the crisis, the squeeze on living standards, the restructuring and technological development of industry, and the emergence of new forces seeking a 'new deal'. These can, in a conjuncture of circumstances, put even left leaderships of unions in jeopardy as the Jim Baird defeat showed, or lead to left advances.

There is the retirement of Ducker from his controlling position in the NSW Labor Party, basically because his health could no longer cope with his accustomed level of service to the right-wing cause.

The appointment of Keating is in some ways a sign of the weakness of the right, because he wished rather to be the string-puller behind the scenes, furthering his ambitions for future leadership of the Labor Party.
This could be jeopardised somewhat by him being so directly involved in the machine. But the rightwing pressured him, realising the dangers of a weak figure in this position.

Keating is neither weak nor lacking ability. But any change is dicey in a tight situation such as the rightwing in the NSW Labor Party now faces. And cutting the link between Party and Labor Council control creates openings for left advance.

I don’t know what is happening in the SA Labor Party following the electoral debacle, but no doubt it will stir things up. Then there is the issue of Queensland following the suspension of Senator Georges and the expulsion of Joe Harris.

If the Casey leadership, with its grouper-like policies, is consolidated in the course of this struggle, it will severely set back the struggle for civil and union rights in that state and therefore nationally.

It will crush or severely constrict the reform movement and the developing socialist left (there are twenty or more other people on charges at present, and if the leadership succeeds now, it can pick anyone off in future).

It will make Hayden, who also comes from Queensland, captive of the right, or open to continual blackmail and pressure in policy and organisationally.

The response in the unions and the Labor Party organisation is very good at this stage. Continued and mounting support is needed from unions and Labor Party organisations from all over the country.

The candidature of Bob Hawke, finally announced, for the federal seat of Wills, coming on top of all the above developments in the labour movement, highlights the changes taking place and adds a further dimension.

Hawke has considerable popularity arising from his positive role in helping to modernise the trade union in the first years after he became ACTU president, from his aggressive and effective media performances against bosses and conservative politicians, and perhaps to a certain extent his ‘larrikin’ streak with which many working class people identify.

This popularity makes him first choice as a prime minister in a recent public opinion poll.

Unfortunately, Hawke is increasingly showing that he will use his popularity to further his own ambitions, rather than as a weapon against the employers and conservatism (the chiefs of some very big corporations are among his close associates). The same ambitions are likely to be very disruptive within the Labor Party, whether Labor wins the next elections or not.

More important are the changes in Hawke’s political-ideological position, as he increasingly makes the left in the labor movement his primary target.

The Murdoch press, which has been rooting for Hawke more strongly and openly than anyone else, said in a revealing editorial the day after he announced his candidature:

The right....believes (with good reason) that the ALP is basically its party.... Thus Mr Hawke’s decision signals the opening of a new round in the fight (against the left).... It is a fight the right wing has to win — for the survival of the ALP as the true voice of Labor and in The Australian’s opinion, for the good of the country.

This editorial (September 24) also hints about possible political realignments flowing from a Hawke-led fight against the left. And Hawke himself made some veiled statements about his future actions if thwarted in his ambitions, which could be taken in the same vein.

In other words, Hawke’s entry into the parliamentary arena could eventually result in quite far-reaching realignments in political formations in this country. Naturally, the left will strive to see that if this comes about, the end result will be favourable to the labour movement and to the socialist cause. But a great deal of damage could be done in the meantime, aiding the multinational and local big corporations to achieve some important parts of their aims.

Will there be a federal election this year?

Probably not. Fraser would be unwise to take the SA result as a signal to have one.
Nevertheless, he is obviously keeping his options open, and we cannot dismiss the possibility.

The thrust of the left's present activity is directed against Fraser, and will be in the next election. Some pleasure can be taken in the quite good chances of his defeat. But it is necessary to look ahead, having in mind the Labor government that would replace Fraser's, and beyond.

The ruling class is clearly looking ahead to this eventuality, whether it accords with their wishes or not. It is supporting the rightwing in the unions and the Labor Party and organising pressures on the Labor Party and its leading figures to make it pliable to their demands.

We must take initiatives and help mobilise forces from the other end of the political spectrum.

On the broad scale, this means especially continuing and deepening the interventionist/worker control content of industrial struggles on the basis of the many positive experiences, and to further develop in number and quality the programs and policies which embody this approach.

On a narrower front, it means also influencing Labor Party policy and direction. There is the example of Hayden's wealth tax proposal.

This should be supported in order to (a) make this class issue also a mass issue (which it is not yet), (b) ensure that the promise is not forgotten, and (c) push it beyond the limits within which Hayden would wish to confine it.

A further example is the aluminium 'explosion' in Australia, especially NSW, which raises also the whole question of minerals and energy policies. The NSW government is spending hundreds of millions ($750 million has been mentioned) on power stations in and around the Hunter Valley. Secret deals have been made with the multinational aluminium companies to provide the huge amounts of electricity needed, for a song.

Even the Financial Review was moved to demur:

To believe that the decisions being taken at the moment are in the best longterm interests of the nation as a whole, one must believe that a vertically-integrated international industry and politicians at the State level — two groups whose interests nestle closely together — would, in the absence of public inspection, resist a strong temptation to play sweethearts. (Editorial, August 8.)

Why the editorial writer excused the Federal government from these strictures is not revealed; perhaps it is just political coyness.

And could the Financial Review's righteous indignation on this occasion have something to do with the fact that CSR missed out in this heat of the aluminium stakes?

We do not know the deal. But Comalco, two years ago, had a fight with the New Zealand government when it wanted to increase the charges by 600 to 800 per cent. It then emerged that Comalco was paying 0.2 cents per unit while private consumers were paying 2.33 cents — 11½ times! In Queensland the cost of electricity to aluminium companies could be as low as one-thirtieth of the general consumer price.

There should be a campaign to demand that the agreements be made public, and to develop more concretely policies on control of resource development, resources taxes, environmental controls, jobs, etc.

Alongside activities in the broad movement, we should greatly intensify our own independent work as a political party standing for socialism, and prepare to enter the next federal election, whenever it is, as a major practical way of doing so.

We should link this with party building utilising the occasion of our 60th anniversary in October next year, with emphasis on building in industry, educating our members, improving our organisation, and disseminating our congress documents and other policy materials in a more extensive, assertive and self-confident way than we have in the past period.

This includes, particularly, further improving our fine 16-page Tribune, increasing its circulation, and raising the $60,000 Press Fund target.

Once again, I stress again the menace, but especially the promise, of the present complex situation. I believe we are in good shape to make significant advances in the coming period.
AN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE NEW INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER

Bob Catley & Bruce McFarlane

Introduction

After 1945 there was a global restructuring of capital investment and production. It was designed to rebuild the ex-enemy powers of the USA in order to contain communism and to defend US hegemony over the world capitalist system until such time as inter-imperialist rivalry no longer made this tenable.

The underpinnings of the strategy were hundreds of US military bases, massive US economic aid to Europe, Taiwan and South Korea and a series of international agreements regulating the international flow of trade and payments. Foremost among these were the Bretton Woods Agreement, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the establishment of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). (1)

While Australia and New Zealand hesitated for a while, they soon found that to stay outside these arrangements and international capitalist institutions meant that the doors of European and US banks were closed to them and approval of loans denied. They joined.

During the post-war period, 1945-71, the Australian economy experienced its second long boom, the first having occurred during the four decades which followed gold rushes in the 1850s. The precondition for the post-war boom was rapid growth in the international capitalist economy. But it also required that the Australian state apparatuses inaugurate policies to take advantage of the favourable external circumstances. This they carried out with some success. The post-war social democratic government joined the American-dominated international order — the World Bank and IMF, inaugurated the immigration program to provide labour for the inflowing industrial capital from the UK and increasingly the USA, and tailored state policies — tariffs, subsidies, infrastructure, education — to the task of producing a full employment regime of all-round industrialization.
Despite his laissez-faire, Anglophile rhetoric, Menzies (Prime Minister 1950-63) used the interventionist state for the same purposes after achieving office, and moved Australia out of the British into the American orbit. By the late 1960s Australia was a viable industrialized appendage of the American-dominated order. During the 1970s these conditions collapsed: unemployment, de-industrialization and stagnation are the order of the day. The origins of this crisis, like the boom which preceded it, are to be found in the profound changes which are occurring in the international economy. These may be described as a global reorganization of capital, production and trading patterns. Hence while some sectors of the world capitalist system (South Korea) boom, others (Australia) suffer sustained depression. This is, of course, a classical feature of the capitalist mode of production: a clean-out and reorganization of capital coexists with a depression, for they are two sides of the same coin. What makes the 1970s unusual is that the "clean-out" is taking place on a global scale. The bourgeoisie call it the "New International Economic Order".

As the country was transferred from the British to the American empire(2) so the repressive apparatuses of state shifted their allegiance. The military became integrated with American strategic designs and fought with the US in its major military offensives in Asia — Korea, Indo-China — and Australia became the site of some of America's most important military installations, Pine Gap and North West Cape in particular. And the secret police, ASIO, established under the Labor government at British promptings developed under American auspices. Yet it is true that the strategy brought an extended economic boom (1945-71) which standB alongside that of the nineteenth century (1850s-1880s) in significance for the development of Australian capitalism.

As elsewhere, in Australia the boom seemed to be permanent, bringing with it rising living standards, a full employment regime and a rolling-back of socialist politics. The era of the Keynesian economist had arrived; social democrats swung sharply against public ownership of productive capital, a policy of which they had never been enthusiastic proponents; and the Marxist system of social analysis received fewer adherents. An account of "American imperialism" (1969) centred on its global dominance of economic activity and continued expansion. (3) Yet by 1971 the visible signs of an empire in decline were already there for all to see. What had occurred?

In their seminal work, The Limits of Power, the Kolkos have argued that the post-war strategic objectives of the United States were beyond its capacity to achieve. They conclude by referring to

America's constant, increasingly violent effort to control and redirect a world moving ever further beyond any nation's mastery. In that monumental undertaking to contain and reconstruct the world according to its own needs, the United States was prepared to destroy itself — morally, socially and economically — in a deepening trauma whose effects began to weaken American capitalism far more than the attainment of its expansive, unattainable goals might ever have strengthened it. (4)

The post-war order began to come apart in the late 1960s, but it was from the abandoning of the gold standard in August 1971 that the decline of American hegemony may be dated. It occurred because the social forces temporarily contained within American strategic objectives in the early 1950s presented simultaneous challenges to its power.

One of these social forces and a key source of dissatisfaction was the Asian bourgeoisie. Their import substitution industrialization programs had never got off the ground without Soviet assistance and rarely with it. Their economies continued to be dominated by foreign capital. And the foreign aid programs had for the most part merely served to lock them more securely into this structure by being tied to policy packages which ensured it. These complaints were voiced in various international forums, particularly after UNCTAD in 1964, and grew in strength following the formation of the Group of 77 at the United Nations. In the 1970s they became articulated as the demand for a New International Economic Order.

In addition, raw material exporters, conscious of their vulnerability to
international price fluctuations and long-term downward movement, began the formation of commodity cartels. In 1971 the oil cartel, OPEC, won a significant price rise by collective action giving a spur to others.

New Planning for Global Restructuring in the 1970s

Faced with growing threats to the international order which it had established in the post-war period, American ruling circles in the 1970s undertook a reconsideration of their global posture. This was made more urgent by what was widely termed a crisis of credibility concerning its political institutions among the American public itself. The Nixon-Kissinger administration in its dying years moved in three direction. First, under Kissinger's intellectual guidance it sought to evolve a classical balance of power situation involving the US, Soviet Union, West Europe, Japan and China with scant regard to their domestic regimes. Interests not ideology would be determinant as the new Metternich secretively spun his new Realpolitik. Trade war with the EEC and Japan, and trade deals with the Soviets and China resulted. Secondly, an administration without ideals would use national interest, media manipulation and political repression to maintain political stability without an adequate mask of ideology — since abroad all were potential allies. Thirdly, Third World states could be policed by time-honoured techniques — a torturers' coup in Chile, carpet bombing in Hanoi and perhaps an occupation of the Persian Gulf to secure oil supplies, all directed personally by Nobel Peace laureate, Kissinger. But such techniques and strategies were already under question within American ruling circles.

We may now refer to the Shoup and Minter study of the Council on Foreign Relations. They have used the publications of this influential American institution, whose members included politicians, academicians, military men and corporate capitalists, to illustrate the debate about post-war strategy in American ruling circles. In the 1970s a new institution emerged to supplement if not replace the Council — the Trilateral Commission. We do not suggest its three hundred members drawn from West Europe, Japan and North America merely constitute a conspiracy. What is clear is that its extensive list of publications represents an opportunity to witness some of the discussions undertaken by the American foreign policy elite as it reconsidered its strategy in the 1970s. Since its membership has included a few Rockefellers, Carter, Vance, Schlesinger, Mondale and Brezhinski — apart from numerous but not quite so influential Europeans and Japanese — we must credit it also with considerable influence.

We do not wish to undertake a detailed review of the Trilateral Commission or of its practical influence and refer the interested reader to the research findings of an Australian, David Marcus. In four areas, however, its debates are of interest to this study. First, its organizational basis represents an effort on the part of the American elite to reconstitute the world order under the joint direction of the EEC, Japan and the US. It is an attempt, buttressed by the annual heads of government economic summit conferences, to paper over the inter-imperialist cracks. Secondly, with respect to the Third World it advocates integrating the most powerful of its elites into the global management structure by acceding to some of the demands contained in the New International Economic Order. Thirdly, it reaffirms the objectives of detente but with other tactics. On the one hand, communist regimes should be carefully distinguished from those of the capitalist world and suitably discredited by selective use of human rights propaganda. And on the other, the more "moderate" elements in the political elites of those countries should be offered material incentives to increase their economic ties with the capitalist world markets. In the Soviet case, the incentive would be access to food supplies; in the Chinese case — where opportunity followed hard on the heels of intention — the lure would be the transfer of capital and technology. Finally, the Commission had considered the political crisis of the 1970s within many of the advanced capitalist countries themselves and advocated none too implicitly an all-round reduction in those democratic liberties which it argued had been extended sufficiently to threaten the authority of the capitalist state itself. The transition from Nixon/Kissinger to
Carter/Brzezinski heralded the adoption of this Trilateral strategy by Washington. (7) Before turning to the Pacific Rim Strategy, we must consider policy changes in the OECD member states.

The fear involved in these reports is that national efforts to offset recession by protectionism could spread, collapse world trade and deepen depression, as in the 1930s. (8) To some degree, its recommendations were taken on board by OECD member states, and to that extent represent a consensus among capitalist states on appropriate public policy.

The Lome convention is an example of a partnership between EEC states and fifty-six African, Caribbean and Pacific states. Signed in February 1975, its preamble called for “a new model for relations between developed and developing states compatible with a more just and balanced international economic order”. All products were to have duty-free access to the EEC, although 75 per cent of these exports had already achieved a “no duties” status under GATT arrangements. Special regulations, however, protected EEC Common Agricultural Policy (e.g., sugar and beef). The post-Lome period, 1975-78, does not show any evidence of a change in export flows, but the reverse flow from the EEC to the underdeveloped signatories rose steadily. (9) The total amount of aid that has gone out from the EEC is small and its real value has been reduced by inflation during 1975-78. By March 1978 only 38 per cent of the target for aid had been committed and only 10 per cent disbursed. Any improvement for non-European signatories, however, seems unlikely, because of the EEC insistence that they must keep a balance between its relationship with Lome signatories and the Third World as a whole.

Asian states are now tailoring their policies to attract the favourable attention of those corporate planners who are creating the New International Economic Order. In such circumstances, in order to fully understand the effect of the 1970s crisis on Australia, it is necessary to extend beyond an analysis of the decline of US imperialism and the generalized depression throughout the OECD area, and investigate the effects of the restructuring on the peripheral areas of the world imperialist system. Particularly important here is the Asia-Pacific region since “today almost 70 per cent of Australia’s exports and 60 per cent of our import trade are directed towards Asian and Pacific countries, including the United States. About three-quarters of capital inflow is from North America and Japan and private capital outflow is directed almost entirely to the Western Pacific”. (10) This represents the reorganization of the Australian economy within a new regional division of labour — the Pacific Rim Strategy.

Australia and the Pacific Rim Strategy

The Pacific Rim Strategy represents the application to the Asia-Pacific region of the New International Economic Order. One former Australian Prime Minister has sanguinely described it in the following terms:

It is likely that by the year 2000 the gross domestic product of Japan and China, including Taiwan together with Korea, will be greater than the GDP’s of North America or the EEC. This represents one of the most momentous shifts of economic strength in world history. In the 1950s and 1960s it was appropriate enough to describe our region the most turbulent and deprived in the world. The description will not hold in the 1980s and 1990s.

If the last three centuries were pre-eminently the Age of the North Atlantic, the 21st century will be the Age of the Pacific. (11) He went on to urge Australian integration into this structure by means of tariff
reduction and the expansion of capital investment, trade and aid with the region — policies he had himself pursued when in office.

The Pacific Rim Strategy springs from the conjuncture of circumstances which we have earlier described. The decline of American imperialism has forced on US capital a policy of accommodation with forces it could earlier ignore. The deliberations of the Trilateral Commission make this clear. The reorganization of production in the Asia-Pacific region reflects this fact. On the one hand, Japan has emerged as a rival and cohort with large reserves of capital and foreign exchange which it has been investing throughout the region in energy, resource and industrial undertakings. This has dovetailed neatly with the emerging demands of the peripheral bourgeoisie in the semi-colonial countries of east and Southeast Asia for industrial capital to reorganize their status on the world market. Technological advances in transportation such as supertankers and containerization — which have massively reduced the unit cost of transport — and in communication and travel — jumbos, satellites — have enabled multinational corporations to reorganize their industrial production on a multinational scale with less regard to proximity to markets. The coincidence of these developments is changing the Pacific Basin’s production pattern.

We have already referred to the Trilateral Commission’s projections. It has also established a 1980s Project to determine the contours of the new international division of labour. (12) Other agencies have been similarly concerned to determine the shape of the new world order which international capital is creating. The International Labor Organization has produced a study, The Optimal International Division of Labour, (13) in which, among other things, it lists which industries it estimates will be allocated to which country. The Club of Rome, similarly, has published a report in which it not only calls for global reorganization but also urges that “a conscious attempt must be made to organise intellectual and political lobbies to re-educate international public and political opinion”. (14) Similarly, within each state “think-tanks” are busily making projections of the role that they will be called on to play in the NIEO and politicians are gearing up for the task of making the transition acceptable to their population. And finally, in 1975, the second conference of UNIDO in Lima called for the transformation of the capitalist world by the expansion of Third World industrial production from its 1975 share of 7 per cent to 25 per cent by the year 2000. Since on Club of Rome estimates (which are conservative) by 1988 transnational corporations will control 41 per cent of the capitalist world’s output, it is quite clear who is designing the NIEO. (15)

What will be its shape in the Western Pacific?

Basically we may say that the Pacific Rim Strategy involves reorganizing the international economy of the Western Pacific on four tiers. The first three Peter Wiley identified ten years ago and we have made extended reference to them ourselves (16): the US and Japan acting in condominium as providers of capital, technology and planning; Canada, Australia and New Zealand delivering foodstuffs, raw materials, energy and deindustrializing; and the former colonial areas of the area maintaining their role as neo-colonial providers of raw commodities and cheap labour, supplemented by new infusions of industrial capital. To these three must be added in the 1970s a fourth: the socialist countries of east Asia which are being invited and cajoled to join the system. Let us look at each tier in turn.

We have already referred to the development of US policy in the 1970s. But some additional observations need to be made. The 1971 devaluation of the dollar was accompanied by certain trade restrictions on Japanese imports and the later announcement of Nixon’s visit to China. These were indeed “shokkus” for Tokyo. To them were added the inflation, recession and oil price rises of 1973-4. Since the US then tended to (wrongly) blame Japan for its deficit problems, relations were extremely strained. With the inauguration of Carter and a flexible exchange rate regime this tension has eased and present US deficits are chiefly attributable to its energy import bill which will be resolved only by tough internal policies. But the trade surpluses built up by Japan and its revalued currency placed it in a strengthened position as a capital exporter and therefore imperial power. “Significant
developments in the United States-Japan relationship over these years marked decisively the end of the post-war patron-client relationship between the two countries and signalled the assumption of leadership responsibilities for Japan, side by side with the United States, in the Pacific area." (17) In 1978 the new yen-dollar rate was jointly determined. This inter-governmental cooperation was strengthened by joint corporate penetration of the region, for example, in the area of autos where each US corporation has interlocking ownership or distribution systems with a Japanese producer. They have also combined their China-Viet Nam policies.

The second tier involves the former colonial areas which we may consider in two groups. First, Taiwan and South Korea. In socialist literature the so-called Baran-Frank thesis assumed dominance in accounts of the capitalist periphery in the 1960s. (18) On this thesis the epoch of colonialism had seen the underdevelopment of the Third World. It has been reorganized under the dominance of metropolitan capital with the result that even after independence, post-colonial societies were essentially producers of raw materials exported to the metropolitan countries in exchange for industrial products. This "unequal exchange" maintained their underdevelopment and dependency which was occasionally augmented by military power. A few settler colonies — Australia, Argentina — provided exceptions to this picture, but when Baran wrote his *Political Economy of Growth*, 1957, the model was a reasonable representation of reality. Indeed, Third World governments took the same perspective in their growing demands for a NIEO. But by the early 1970s this picture had changed.

In 1973 the late Bill Warren wrote his much discussed article in the *New Left Review* claiming that independent industrial capitalist development was taking place in many areas of the Third World. (19) The figures he presented crystallized the problem and confirmed the lurking suspicions that manufactured goods with "Made in China or Korea" stamped on them had stirred up at the local supermarket. In fact, as a quick response argued (20), the process was certainly not widespread and probably rarely independent, but the possibility of Third World industrialization had to be conceded, since it existed in, if limited form. And the two pacesetters in this respect were Taiwan and South Korea.

These countries shared two important legacies. They had both been colonies of Japan, whose imperial policies included a widespread education policy and did not exclude industrialization in the colonies — both almost unique features. In addition, after 1950 both states were front-line areas in the US strategic policy of imperial defence. As a result the aid programs provided by the US were not exclusively designed to maintain their economic integration into the imperial system. They were among the highest per capita recipients of economic assistance designed to produce showcase states in the strategic battle with Asian communism. (21) They were both also military dictatorships, Taiwan from its inception and Korea from 1960. Further, they were, for reasons of strategy, military presence and geography, early recipients of US and Japanese industrial capital. By the mid-1960s both states had utilized this combination of circumstances to produce an export-led industrialization program, which during that boom period did not encounter significant protectionist resistance.

The success of these strategies has led to these states being widely touted (along with Hong Kong whose unique features are well known) as models, so some indication of their character should be given. Their almost unique legacy and location gave them advantages as did their early development as export/production platforms for multinational capital. Domestically the policy has required savage repression, no internal democracy, no trade unions, female labour working a 58-hour week for 20 cents an hour in Korea, and unmatched secret police powers. Also when the American aid program stopped providing free infrastructure construction, the state was forced to borrow abroad to provide subsidies for capital, and Korea's external public debt stands at over $30 billion.

Under the impact of the apparent success of the Korea-Taiwan package, and at the prompting of the World Bank (22) and multinational corporations, each of the states of ASEAN determined on a new strategy. Although the timing varied, we
may briefly describe its essential elements. The key step in each state was the removal of even the semblances of parliamentary democracy which had been adopted by all during the 1950s and 1960s. This process took place in different ways ranging from a bloody military coup in Indonesia to creeping authoritarianism in Malaysia and Singapore. The repressive state apparatuses then set about dismantling the restrictions on foreign capital and trade which had been erected either by state planners or even at the behest of an embryonic local bourgeoisie. This policy was accompanied by the destruction of any organized labour movement or patriotic opposition — and, of course, savage repression of socialist politics. By the early 1970s, this process was completed and the ASEAN states undertook strategies designed to attract the capital of multinational corporations — chiefly but not exclusively Japanese and US — in pursuit of an export-led development strategy. Two sectors became important in this process: industrial capital for the export of manufactured goods, and agribusiness for the further development of export-oriented agriculture and primary production. Alongside this, as Malcolm Caldwell so perceptively documented, the region also became a new potential source of oil and other energy supplies developed by multinational capital. (23)

In order to achieve this strategy, quite marked changes have occurred within the ASEAN states. Not only must labour be quiescent, it must also be cheap, and since these states compete with one another for corporate capital they have each driven down wage rates to attract it. In addition, they have competed to provide the most generous state subsidies, taxation holidays and infrastructure. And in the rural areas they have used the repressive state apparatuses to break up traditional social patterns, where these provided an obstacle to the development of agribusiness or the “Green Revolution”, thereby further destroying traditional agriculture, increasing unemployment and worsening per capita calorie intake. Alongside this repressive process has been built the most modern enclaves to cater for tourism and the needs of expatriate corporate executives. These developments represent the domestic face of the much vaunted New International Economic Order.

The enthusiastic supporters of the NIEO in the advanced capitalist countries see it as
breaking up the exploitative trading patterns which had been established in the colonial period. Clearly there is some truth in this proposition — but old patterns of exploitation are being replaced by new ones. While aggregate statistics enabled Warren to point the finger to industrial capital accumulation in peripheral states, he missed the dramatic effect this is having on social relations in those areas. In many cases slave labour is not uncommon:

When she was brought to Bangkok at the age of 12, Maem thought she was going on a family outing. Instead, her father, a dirt farmer, sold her to an employment agency for $80. Maem ... was then sold to a factory where she and 58 other girls worked 15 hours a day wrapping candy. They were supposed to be paid 50 cents a day, but no one received any money because the owner said they had to pay for bed and board ...

5,000 of the 17,000 factories and cottage industries in Bangkok are sweatshops; they employ mostly children and habitually violate laws regulating working hours, sanitation and safety. The children are usually sold to the factories for $50 to $100 to supplement their parents' 75 cents a day income from the fields. (24)

Export Processing Zones

The essence of this process is perhaps best seen by looking at the industrial estates inaccurately known as Free Trade Zones. This is an area set aside for industrial production for export, usually ringed by barbed wire or concrete walls. It is reserved for corporations prepared to export a high percentage of production and, in official terms, "an enclave in terms of customs-territorial aspect and possibly other aspects such as total or partial exemption from laws and decrees of the country concerned". (25) The zone has its own authority and its workers are subject to special repressive ordinances and anti-combination practices. It is usually located near an airport or seaport. The state provides the roads, power, labour and factory shell. For metropolitan capital the investment credit or "free trade" zones are like beachheads, ensuring operations which will eventually integrate much of the economy of the host country. Moreover, these zones reproduce the wage-labour/capital situation of classical capitalism in its pure form. As they spread their impulses they will widen and deepen those relations. In Sri Lanka it is hoped that about one-half of the present size of the industrial labour force (250,000) will be recruited to one zone during the next five years. Such zones are projected for or exist in all the ASEAN states. They represent the subservience of the post-colonial state to its master, multinational capital. And in order to achieve this status it must not only repress and cheapen its local labour power more thoroughly, but also expand its public debt via loans from the World Bank or financial corporations in order to provide the necessary bribes. Hence the growing and massive indebtedness of the Third World as a whole.

In order to illustrate more concretely the process underway, let us take the cases of the Philippines and Sri Lanka. In the Philippines transition to independence, a stunted but lively caricature of capitalist democracy was constructed, partly to assist in the crushing of the powerful socialist rebellion (the "Huks") of the post-war period. By the early 1960s some internal nationalist development was taking place and controls were established on foreign capital (by currency regulations). Under the Presidency of Marcos this was wound back in the late 1960s. Following the coup of 1972 and the imposition of martial law, the technocratic-military regime under the personal dominance of the Marcos family and coterie of associates unfolded a familiar package. The entire array of democratic rights, however stunted, was abolished; about 60,000 political prisoners were jailed in six years; American military assistance more than doubled; the World Bank made lavish loans available; Japanese and American capital flooded in; per capita calorie intake plummeted to below India's level; unemployment, despite official figures, is around 30 per cent on ILO estimates; and the foreign public debt has leaped from $1 billion in 1972 with a service debt of 10 per cent of export earnings to over $8 billion in 1978, the service on which is over 25 per cent of export earnings.

Why did this happen? Despite its ideological rhetoric about the "New Society", the Marcos regime is the agent of multinational capital and propagates the "trickle down" theory of foreign investment-led development (which it is unlikely to
believe). With that in mind, its strategy leads inexorably to the results described above. Its foreign public loans are designed to provide an infrastructure for foreign capital investment. Here, its projects include the provision of power through the Chico Dam, the Lake Cebu hydroelectric power scheme and the nuclear power station — destroying local society. US military aid and the expansion of the armed forces are to ensure its ability to cheapen labour power which is now touted in its development brochures as the cheapest and most efficient in the region. In the rural areas export-oriented cash crops have been further developed with a consequential decline in the availability of food and a rise in its price. (The cost structure in Manila is approximately the same as Sydney with average wage rates 5 per cent of Australia’s.) This rural decline takes place despite a “land reform” program, the chief purpose of which is to transfer rural political power away from the old “oligarchs” to Marcos’ supporters.

The centrepiece of the program is the Manila Bay land reclamation project complex, the most expensive single item in the foreign debt ledger. It involves reclaiming 6,000 hectares of land in the bay at central Manila. On it already exists the massive Philippines Cultural Centre which rivals the Sydney Opera House, a conference centre, some luxury hotels, a hydrofoil port, a yacht club and a floating casino. To them will be added a marina, sports complex, a mini-forest, a luxury corporate executives’ housing estate, the technocratic faculties of the University of the Philippines, a banking headquarters and a new Presidential palace. The whole area will be enclosed with a moat and finally the international airport added. Alongside this enclave development runs Roxas Boulevard with its luxury hotels and Playboy Club, and ITT and Asian Development Bank offices. Behind them lie three streets of brothels. It is flanked to the north by the US embassy and the south by Sangley Point US military base.

Across the bay, on an isolated peninsula, lies the Bataan Export Processing Zone at Mariveles linked by hydrofoil. In it work, at a dollar a day, nearly 25,000 Filipinos, mostly women, for foreign companies who have had the infrastructure, including an executive hotel, golf course and swimming pool provided. Their products are exported. To its north stands the unfinished nuclear power plant. Around it live the 10,000 workers on the government’s reserve list which it guarantees to provide to capital as and when required. The entire complex is not the product of a megalomaniac latter-day Asiatic despot. It is the lure to attract three sources of capital: regional MNC headquarters to the downtown banking centre; industrial, to the export processing zone for export and Manila for domestic markets; and tourism cum conferences, to the Manila Bay complex. No doubt some egos (and other things) will also be flattered by visiting UN Security Council meetings, ADB and UNCTAD conferences and American dance and film companies. Again, this is the domestic face of the New International Economic Order.

The government brochures which seek to attract foreign capital make it quite clear that the basis of the strategy is labour exploitation. Certainly extensive reference is made to other facilities but:

The workers at the EPZA outnumber their capitalists and managers by thousands to one; they overwhelmingly comprise the people at the export zone… they are the lifeblood of the Zone, the hub and wheel that turn the industry at the EPZA — the mainsprings in fact that make the cash registers ring… They are the prime attraction that induces most companies to converge upon Bataan. (26)

It is on this commodity — thoroughly exploited labour power — that the Philippines entry into the New International Economic Order is riding.

Similarly, in Sri Lanka, an export “free zone” managed by the Greater Colombo Economic Commission will employ 100,000 workers producing manufactured exports — and the total industrial labour force in Sri Lanka is less than 250,000.

The first feasibility study for the free trade zone, to extend over a geographical area of 180 square miles north of Colombo City, was done in 1974. The second and major stage will be completed by 1982. Foreign investors, except in textiles, are permitted to hold 100 per cent ownership of their enterprises; there is to be no planned transfer of assets to Sri Lankan ownership. Bilateral investment
guarantees were negotiated with governments of the main foreign investing countries. Investing firms will set their own guidelines on wages policy; offshore banking arrangements have been made.

The key aspect is that the “zone” is being treated administratively as if it were a separate country despite the fact that if it is successful in terms of attracting investors, it will have crucial economic and social implications for all of Sri Lanka. It will, under present circumstances, dominate industrial strategy instead of promoting industrialization as one amongst a number of industrial projects and employment-generating policies.

New International Economic Order and Australia

The New International Economic Order is being widely portrayed as a progressive development, even in some socialist circles. In fact it represents a strategy, already touted by the Trilateral Commission, of coopting restive peripheral ruling classes into the new international division of labour which the multinational corporations were in any case, for their own reasons, undertaking. The first demand by the Third World states, for industrial capital, will be met by raising the Third World share of capitalist world industrial output from its 1970s level of 7 per cent to 25 per cent at the end of the century. This was declared at the 1975 Lima conference. Much of this will remain under the control of metropolitan capital and serve to improve profit rates. “Progressive” peripheral ruling classes will deliver the labour input. The second demand, for a stabilization of commodity prices via a Common Fund, will again serve the need of metropolitan capital, still conscious of the 1972-3 commodity and energy price explosion. The third, for larger foreign aid programs, will be met by public capital transfers (mostly loans) to provide the infrastructure for corporate investment to ensure the further integration into the world market on the lines described in the Philippines. The New International Economic Order is a shorthand for the plans for further expansion of capitalism into the peripheral areas on terms still dictated by metropolitan capital’s needs and with social and political effects in many cases that may well be as disruptive as the impact of nineteenth century colonialism, and which has already produced violent reaction in Iran and elsewhere. As a progressive project it is a fraud. And it was entirely appropriate that the fifth UNCTAD conference in June 1979, which made very plain that the advanced capitalist countries would structure the New International Economic Order, should have been held in the $150 million convention centre on reclaimed land in Manila.

A common theme since 1967 in US foreign policy, and later in the Trilateral Commission and in the OECD, has been to re-integrate the socialist states, particularly of Asia, into the international capitalist economy. At a time of the decline of the American empire, this was seen as a way of helping to prolong American hegemony by use of offsetting boosts such as expanding markets, investment outlets and cheap-labour based manufacturing export platforms and tourism.

The “four modernizations” program of the Teng Tsiao-Ping section of the Chinese leadership was particularly welcomed as a way of enabling this program to be implemented: joint ventures, foreign investment in two free-trade zones and military/security co-operation. Despite recent political opposition to the speed of the new Chinese program (and consequent scaling down of targets and massive foreign borrowing), the new economic policy in China was widely welcomed as a harbinger of future re-integration of China’s economic system with the international law of value. Some Asian Development Bank officials, Manila planners and Canberra economists note the dangers also posed by this development for other tiers (such as Australia) in that China provides even cheaper labour and subsidies for manufacturer’s exports – a development which makes China competitive not only with Australia but with South Korea and Hong Kong.

Viet Nam’s refusal to join the trend to reintegration, its tough foreign investment laws, its initial refusal to disavow a revolutionary foreign policy was one of the first obstacles, and helped to sponsor Washington’s attempt to make Viet Nam an international pariah by using the boat-people fraud. The aim, especially since the
Brzezinski visit to Peking in May 1978, has been to destroy Viet Nam’s post-war reconstruction policies and remove any “force of example” (socialist revolution in agricultural property relations, nationalization of private trade) for people in Thailand and Malaysia.

Australia’s Future in the Pacific Basin Economy

Australia stands, with Canada and New Zealand, as a distinct tier in the emerging, reconstituted Pacific Basin economy. As sparsely populated, high-productivity economies with abundant natural resources, their role in the new international division of labour will be different from that of the metropoles, the Third World or the socialist states. It is the repercussions of that transition which provide the key to understanding the processes of political and social change experienced by Australia in the 1970s. We will conclude with a broad brush review of the major features of this development.

The first involves the development of new mining and energy industries under the control of multinational capital. This process began in the late 1960s with coal and iron providing the lead sectors for export to the rapidly growing Japanese economy. These industries are chiefly located in the states of West Australia and Queensland where they rapidly developed strong influence on the state apparatus and political parties to articulate their political objectives. Being capital-intensive they provided limited employment opportunities (the mining workforce declined in 1978) and being export-oriented had less interest in the condition of Australian aggregate demand levels than in its currency level and inflation rates. They demanded and got an extensive system of government financial support which continued to grow, despite some brief opposition by the Labor Party, during the 1970s. It is from their states that the lead sectors of Australian reaction emerged in the 1970s.

The other side of this coin has been the growing de-industrialization of the Australian economy. This process also started in the late 1960s. It first surfaced as a slow-down in investment rates and than from 1969 on was compounded as imports progressively seized a larger share of the domestic market. At first, the principal source of these employment-displacing imports was Japan which reflected not only its growing trade surpluses but also the decline of American and British manufacturing industries in Australia, for the lead sectors of manufacturing capital in the country were owned by those declining imperial powers. Later, the export-oriented industrialization programs of the poor Asian states had their effect. For the one year, 1976-7, it has been estimated that 20,000 persons were unemployed by ASEAN imports alone, contributing to the 80,000 jobs “shed” each year in the manufacturing industry since 1974. This corresponds broadly to other estimates of a decline in manufacturing employment by more than 200,000 during 1970-8; or, to put it another way, a drop of the percentage of the workforce employed in manufacturing from 27 per cent to 20 per cent. The problem was worsened by the geographic concentration of the industry in exactly the opposite part of the country, the southeast of the mainland, to the new mining ventures. (27) Facilitating this shake-out of capital and labour and despite the Fraser government’s reputation as a high protection one, the nominal rate of assistance (tariffs, import restrictions and subsidies) has declined quite dramatically in the 1970s. This is bringing Australia, with an historically very successful protectionist policy, into sharp conflict with the interests of the Asian bourgeoisie, the economic program of which is the “New International Economic Order”.

The openness of the Australian economy has also ensured that within this structural remoulding, it has shared the short-term oscillations of the world economy. In the late 1960s, it shared the growth; in 1971, recession; in 1972-3, the short boom which capital inflow and rise in commodity prices ensured would both inflate domestic prices and push the currency value up; since 1974 it has shared the depression. This has been intensified as a result of the pronounced decline in new foreign capital inflow in 1973-4, which has ensured that a major objective of state policy would be to create an investment climate favourable to multinational capital.

The Australian capitalist class has similarly accommodated to this process — a
strategy consistent with its history and one which gives little credence to the term “national bourgeoisie”. Across the board the leading firms in each sector of the economy are now multinational, and where this is not so evident, as in banking, the interlock of directorships and share holdings is strong.

Not only is the Australian economy unusually monopolistic but also only four of the top ten corporations are Australian, and the two largest of those are deeply involved in joint ventures with multinational corporations. All are transferring their capital into energy and mining operations to take advantage of the new international division of labour. And, finally, they are joining the rush to invest their industrial capital in ASEAN states. (28)

Notes


5. Shoup and Minter, Imperial Brains Trust.


12. Shoup and Minter, Imperial Brains Trust, Ch. 7.


15. Reshaping the International Order, pp. 274ff.


17. Drysdale and Rix, op. cit.


24. Newsweek, 23 July 1979, p. 34.

25. Free Trade Zones and the Industrialisation of Asia, AMPO (Tokyo, 1977).


Medical Manipulation for Social Control & Profit

Helen McCulloch
Lesley Rogers

Medicine practices under the benevolent banner of treating the sick, but this becomes malevolent when it is the medical profession itself which decides what is 'sick' and what is 'not sick'; as it does in psychiatry or psychological medicine. Its involvement in the treatment of the so-called 'socially deviant' represents a potent form of social control.

"We give major tranquillisers to try to manipulate the patients to get them as near to normal as possible", said a neurologist from the Prince Henry's Hospital. Of course, he thinks that he is doing a good thing, but what does he mean by 'normal'?

In our society people are defined as not 'normal' when they deviate from the heterosexual male or female stereotype operating along a narrowly channelled state of mind. Operation outside of these constraints leads to labelling ('homosexual', 'transvestite', 'transsexual', 'schizophrenic', 'manic depressive', 'neurotic', 'psychotic', 'psychopathic', etc.) and this opens the doors to a range of medical treatments. If you are a homosexual who seeks a 'cure' from the medical profession, or who is given a shorter jail sentence by agreeing to medical treatment, you can get hormonal therapy or psychosurgery. If you are labelled schizophrenic or psychotic you will be manipulated into a more easily controllable state by major tranquillisers; these do not 'cure' 'the mental disease' but simply blunt the emotions and perception. Increasingly, the medical profession is moving into these areas of social control, often working in conjunction with the law courts.

Another appendage of this same expanding practice involves the development of trendy, spectacular and expensive operations which manipulate the body to conform to a psychological state, such as the 'sex change' operations. They involve years of psychiatric examination and therapy coupled with major surgery. It is a very lucrative operation for the medical practitioner, and it sells well in these times when it can be promoted as an advancement which a society more liberal in its attitudes to sexuality should accept. We do not see it as such an advancement, but rather as a conservative force intimately concerned with continuing the division in roles between men and women.

The Sex Change Operation

Social pressures to conform to the ideal type of 'a man' or 'a woman' are everywhere. Only actors and children, those allowed to play, can change personalities while remaining socially acceptable. 'The man' and 'the women' have become ideal-types of social behaviour linked to biological determinants of male and female appearance. Thus one is born into one sex or the other, then finds that a set of behaviours
and opportunities is handed to one as a follow on.

Men get social and political power, a wide choice of jobs and physical activity, and a tightly restricted 'ideal' of masculinity to live up to. Women get emotional power over children, a subordinate position among other adults, political and economic frustration; they are, however, allowed to be less consistent in attitude and have more freedom of dress.

People who fall physically, or more usually behaviourally, between the types are now being offered much publicised 'sex changes'. A convincing sex change of appearance is possible, but not an effective change of sex: a man changed to 'a woman' cannot bear children, nor a woman changed to 'a man' sire them; the 'sex-change' is only a sophisticated form of make-up. Therefore it must be assessed for its social rather than its physical effects.

For a man who wishes to do some of the things ascribed to the ideal 'woman', gaining a woman's appearance means gaining anonymity and therefore social approval. For a man who believes that it is wrong for a man to act like a woman, the change of appearance means gaining peace of mind. There is a belief that the change in appearance has validated the behaviour.

Many men are homosexuals, seeing themselves as men who relate sexually to other men, but some men are so thoroughly socialised into a belief in mutually exclusive 'man' and 'woman' roles that to them a man who wishes to relate sexually to another man can only feel happy about it if he re-defines himself as a woman. The behavioural role has been tightly fastened to the physical sex, and one can only be changed if the other is also changed: a homosexual man with these beliefs, requesting a 'sex change' has rejected a wider definition of male behaviour in favour of attempting to fit completely into the 'woman' social category.

What does a man gain and lose by socially becoming a woman? He gains the right to have an apparently heterosexual relationship with another man, the right to elaborate and change his dress and appearance, and he gains permission to express his feelings freely. He loses power and credibility, because as a woman his opinions are patronised and disregarded. He loses money, unless he exhibits himself as a freak, because women's jobs are less well paid. He gets rid of the obligation to live up to a 'big male' image, and so he can shrug off responsibility. But, viewed from the outside, he rejects 'being a man' and that is disturbing to society, seeing as men are socially defined as 'best'. It is better for the status quo if those who reject 'being a man' do it quietly and disappear into the suburbs for the rest of their lives without disturbing others. Alternatively, he can be made a public spectacle and freak.

In recent years the publicity surrounding 'sex change' has concentrated on the man-to-woman change. As such, it has been used as a practical alternative to political action for the social acceptance of sexual diversity and, in particular, the social acceptance of homosexuality as a valid way of life. ‘Poofs and women’ is the social scrap-heap on which non-'men' are thrown, for ‘poofs and women’ are powerless and therefore unimportant.

Lesbians are often accused of wanting to be men, and so derided since everyone knows that that is impossible; the weak cannot turn into the strong. Yet it is more to be expected that a weak individual would want to

"We want you to do some pure disinterested fundamental medical research into something immensely profitable."
metamorphose into a strong one than vice versa. A convincing woman-to-man change would give greater social status and political credibility, a choice from a wider pool of higher paid jobs and the opportunity to have an apparently heterosexual relationship with another woman. This last may not be as important as the others, since lesbian relationships seem to benefit in terms of peace and quiet from the assumption that what women do does not matter anyway.

The idea of a woman increasing her status and power by a ‘sex change’ seems to be less acceptable to society. Probably as a result of this, much less publicity is given to changes in this direction...

This could well be an indication in itself that political considerations play a major part in ‘sex-change’, both in terms of power-status maintenance and the lack of stress on women’s sexuality. While women who ask for the operation may say that they want it for personal relationship reasons and not to gain status or a better job, this does not negate the general social pressure based on status. Individuals are not always conscious of this operating in their own lives. We are aware of cases where women have cross-dressed in order to obtain better employment and pay. It is conceivable that women might also ask for ‘sex-changes’ for the same reasons, and that this has gone unreported.

‘Sex change’ operations involve deliberate physical elimination of people who stand between the two ideal types. They are socially killed as effectively as if they had been shot, and thus society loses some of its most valuable members — its social critics, individuals urging society to pull down the fences and extend its possibilities.

Individuals have a right to do what they want to do with their own bodies, but just as social pressure may drive one individual to dye fading hair, another to re-shape a nose, it may also drive a third to have a ‘sex-change’ operation. In a compassionate human society none of these changes would be necessary. Rather than making individuals believe that they are alone and worthless, it is up to society to change its attitudes and accept that people can be grey, or differently shaped, or free to behave how they want regardless of their sex and still be valid people. As long as people feel compelled to dye their hair, etc., how can society get used to anything else?

If one argues that ‘curing’ homosexuals and giving ‘sex-changes’ is justified seeing that society is not yet ready to accept these people, as some medical practitioners have done, is like asking blacks to paint their faces white rather than fight for equal rights to education and employment.

People who stand somewhere in between the ‘ideal man’ and the ‘ideal woman’, the homosexuals, the transvestites, the drag queens, who have learnt to fake a personality to ‘pass’ in straight society, have done so as the result of shrewd social observation. They know of the prejudices, foibles, and blind spots of the majority of conformers. They show by their existence that the ‘ideals’ do not cover the field and are unnecessarily restrictive to the individual. It is therefore to be expected that a society committed to rejecting change will want to either keep them quiet or destroy them.

Over the years religion and law have played this role, and now medicine is taking it over. To label a person as sick, instead of immoral, is saying the same thing in different words. Medical power is growing. As medical knowledge increases, it is being jealously guarded by the profession instead of spreading to the general public. Non-medical people have come to believe that they are incompetent to deal with their own bodies, and the doctor is replacing the priest as an authority and guidance figure. But instead of using this power to educate people about their own capacities, doctors are often using it to sedate people into conformity. A new tranquilliser is invented and suddenly thousands of people need it. The doctors say ‘We can do sex changes’ and suddenly hundreds of people want their sex changed. Medical finance, facilities, and doctors are in short supply in the world compared to the number of people who need medical treatment to maintain life and health. We question the morality of expending these limited resources on expensive, complicated and spectacular operations, like ‘sex-changes’, instead of turning them to cases of real medical need.

We feel that the ‘transsexual’ person is a victim of social and medical manipulation and it is time doctors spoke out against this racket.
Why People Change their Sex: An Empirical Study

It has been suggested that people ask for sex-change operations because society will not allow them to behave in a way which deviates from the rigidly prescribed roles of male and female. People who seek sex reassignment will in most cases be either individuals who wish to express behaviour which society has labelled as 'feminine' or 'masculine', and who are so taken in by societal strictures regarding sex roles that they change to the other sex physically in order to be legitimately, as they (and society) see it, a member of the now-appropriate sex; or homosexuals who have so strongly internalised societal attitudes that only heterosexual relationships are acceptable and natural, that in order to validate having a relationship with another person of the same sex, they must change their sex and thus make the relationship heterosexual. Such people are conservatives with regard to sex roles. Empirically, these propositions can be tested by looking at incidence and ratio of the transsexual phenomenon in a society with less rigid sex roles and less repressive attitudes towards homosexuality as compared with a more rigid and repressive one.

Comparisons were made between Sweden, a society approaching the former situation, and Australia, approaching the latter. National figures for the transsexual phenomenon for both countries were collected by circularising all psychiatrists in Australia and obtaining figures of number of individuals seriously requesting sex reassignment surgery, and comparing these with the total Swedish figures which are based on a similar official sample (see Ross, Walinder, Lundstrom and Thuwe, 1979, for an extended report of this study).

Results were in line with the hypothesis. The incidence in Sweden was .23 per 100,000 of population over 15 years of age: in Australia, .79 per 100,000 of population over 15 years of age, well over three times as high. This supports the argument that repressive attitudes towards homosexuality and more rigid sex roles are associated with a greater degree of transsexualism. In societies which are less conservative in these regards, people appear to be able to express themselves, as either homosexual or by exhibiting feminine or masculine behaviour regardless of their sex, without needing to alter their genitals in order to feel free to do this.

Results with regard to sex ratio support this interpretation. In Sweden, equal numbers of males and females present for sex reassignment (1:1 ratio). In Australia, one female to every seven males presents (1:7 ratio). This difference highlights the social and political aspects of the change. Where men and women are considered equal, equal numbers of each request reassignment. Where women are considered second-class citizens and denied equal rights in law and in remuneration, 'misfits' from their roles, or people wishing to change for other reasons, are allowed to if the change devalues them in status, as does the change from man to woman. If the change means an increase in status, from women to man, it is made much more difficult. People who fall outside the rigid roles prescribed for them by society may be degraded in status, but the reverse happens very infrequently.

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Reference
POLITICS OF 245T

Chris Sanderson

Is the chemical herbicide 2,4,5-T responsible for birth defects and alterations of behaviour? Australian health authorities say that there are no grounds for preventing its use. But in other countries, including parts of the US, it has been banned on the basis of scientific reports. The 2,4,5-T issue raises questions about how scientific information should be assessed, and about the relation of scientific research to political decision-making. Is there really a case against 2,4,5-T and, if so, then why have our health officials been so reluctant to acknowledge and act on it?

The Case Against 2,4,5-T

2,4,5-T contains dioxin, one of the most highly toxic substances known to organic chemistry. We have already seen effects of dioxin poisoning. In July, 1976, leakage from a factory near Seveso, Italy, which produced hexachlorophene (a powerful antiseptic cleaning agent) resulted in the release of about 650 grams of dioxin. This settled in an urban area southeast of the factory and affected a population of several thousand people. The immediate effects were acute skin lesions, especially in children; myasthenia, a weakness characterised by extreme muscular fatigue; and an increase in the incidence of miscarriage and birth deformities. The full effects of this accident will not be known for many years.

Seveso is the most publicised of accidents involving dioxin, but there have been others. Steven Rose in New Scientist mentions reports of hushed-up accidents involving 2,4,5-T production and dioxin contamination in factories in Britain, Europe and the US. I have found reports of dioxin contamination from accidents in Florida and Missouri, involving 150 grams and 5 kilograms of dioxin respectively.

A mixture of 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D formed the basis of the defoliant Agent Orange, used by the US government in the massive crop and forest destruction program in Viet Nam. Its use was poorly controlled, with a rate of application many times the recommended usage and an estimated dioxin content of 50 parts per million (some 500 times the upper limit now allowed). There is no doubt that this defoliant caused harm to the people of Viet Nam, as well as to some US and Australian servicemen. Vietnamese authorities have reported an increase in miscarriages, birth deformities and liver cancer in areas affected by the aerial spraying. These increases have not been found in areas which escaped direct spraying.

The US government failed to acknowledge the reports of the Vietnamese. However, veterans of the Viet Nam war have filed some 500 claims against Dow Chemicals for damages to health incurred through exposure to the defoliant. In Australia, at least 40 ex-servicemen have been informed of a possible four-year delay in the processing of their claims — apparently to allow a survey of scientific data, even though the case against Agent Orange is well established.

The toxicity of dioxin clearly poses a threat to workers in plants producing 2,4,5-T and to people living near such factories. However, chemical companies claim that with modern manufacturing methods, they can maintain dioxin levels at less than 0.1 parts per million, and that at such low levels 2,4,5-T poses no threat to human health.

It has long been known that fetal abnormalities and an increased incidence of fetal mortality occur when laboratory animals are exposed to 2,4,5-T. However, the
research prior to the 1970s was frequently criticised as inadequate; because the population samples were too small, the doses of 2,4,5-T very large, and because the levels of dioxin and other impurities tended to vary. The evidence could be dismissed as not representing the hazards actually faced by the use of 2,4,5-T in the environment. Failure to examine the effects at low doses led to the misconception that 2,4,5-T was indeed harmful only at high doses.

More recent evidence has established that 2,4,5-T, in low doses, does cause birth deformities in animals. In addition, Swedish researchers in 1975 reported that 2,4,5-T affects the behaviour of rats when given in a single low dose to the mother at a critical stage of pregnancy. This has important implications for the 2,4,5-T issue, for it suggests that the behaviour and learning of animals and humans may be affected at doses lower than those that cause physical deformities. 2,4,5-T may be exerting a more subtle and insidious effect on creatures exposed to it.

Much of the evidence against 2,4,5-T is based on correlations between its use and increase in birth deformities and cancers of certain kinds. For instance, a doctor in Yarram, Victoria, revealed a disproportionately high incidence of deformities in children born to women living in an area known to have been sprayed with 2,4,5-T. But an inquiry initiated by the State government failed to find a statistically significant link between 2,4,5-T and increased birth deformities.

However, on March 1, 1979 the US Environmental Protection Agency placed a ban on the use of 2,4,5-T on the basis of evidence relating a seasonal increase in the rate of miscarriage in the women of the Alsea Basin, Oregon, to the aerial spraying of 2,4,5-T. Dow Chemicals, however, won an appeal against the deregistration of the herbicide, which, they objected, came on the “eve of the spraying season”.

Australian health authorities, having failed to act on evidence accumulating in Australia and New Zealand, were somewhat
shaken by the EPA's move. The Victorian Minister for Health, Mr. Houghton, strongly advised against the use of 2,4,5-T in built-up areas because of the evidence from Oregon. A few suburban city councils acted to prevent its use in their municipalities.

However, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) advised the Federal government against further restriction on the use of 2,4,5-T, claiming that the restrictions in the US were based on evidence which is inconclusive because it does not establish that 2,4,5-T caused the birth deformities and miscarriages.

As the scientists responsible for collating the Oregon data admit, the study is correlative, and as such, cannot prove that 2,4,5-T is the causative factor involved in the increased incidence of miscarriages. This is a limitation that scientific research into this field simply cannot escape. The alternative — of deliberately administering 2,4,5-T to pregnant women — is obviously unthinkable. There is causative evidence from animal experiments that 2,4,5-T is harmful; there is statistically significant correlative evidence. What more does the NHMRC require?

The Politics of 2,4,5-T

In the face of the evidence now accumulating, the NHMRC have continued to reaffirm their stand that there is no evidence to link 2,4,5-T with birth defects. According to them, the cluster of birth defects which have occurred in certain areas are simply inexplicable. They do admit that workers involved in the production of 2,4,5-T may be at risk. But no scheme to monitor the health of workers producing 2,4,5-T exists in Australia. The scheme used by Dow Chemicals in the US was abandoned when positive effects began to show up.

No-one who examines the 2,4,5-T issue can avoid becoming aware of the political power of those who manufacture and promote the use of herbicides, particularly Dow Chemicals, the American company which is responsible for making and distributing most of the chemical herbicides used in the Western world. This use of power extends to the suppression of scientific evidence. Reports have come to light in the US of a 'mafia'-type operation set up to suppress experimental results unfavourable to the pesticide and herbicide industries. It appears that scientists who have 'detrimental' information find that they cannot get a hearing from the government, that they are sometimes threatened with the loss of their grants or even their academic positions. Could this sort of thing be happening in Australia?

Dr Barbara Field of Sydney University claims that the NHMRC tried to prevent her from publishing the results of her study of the effects of 2,4,5-T — that she was asked to withdraw a paper submitted to the international medical journal Lancet. Her report, linking the national sales of 2,4,5-T with increased incidence of spina bifida and other neural tube defects, is not nearly as convincing as the Oregon study. Nevertheless, whether this paper was worthy of publication was not for the NHMRC to decide. The action of the NHMRC amounts to an attempt to suppress results of scientific research and as such the implications reach far beyond the 2,4,5-T issue.

Can the stand of the NHMRC be justified? There is substantial and growing evidence against 2,4,5-T. But this evidence is inconclusive and is likely to remain so. What causes harm to laboratory animals may not be harmful to humans. The miscarriages and birth defects in Yarram and Oregon may have been caused by something else. It is possible to doubt that 2,4,5-T causes harm to people. But even if our health officials don't accept the evidence against 2,4,5-T, they have no right to assume that this substance is harmless. The decision to ban or not to ban is inevitably political. By making the decision in the way they did, these officials are tacitly supporting the practices of those who manufacture and promote this chemical.

From the point of view of the public, it would be more rational to assume that a substance is guilty until good evidence is found for its innocence. If this principle were followed, 2,4,5-T would be banned, and so would many other chemicals now in use. But this is only likely to happen when people bring political pressure to bear on those who pretend that their decisions are justified by scientific evidence.
We find the main character of the Robert Heinlein story, "They", in an insane asylum, convinced that his whole environment is a gigantic delusion perpetrated by a shadowy organisation which has enormous powers to manipulate and control. His wife, friends, and psychiatrist try to argue him out of this strange idea. It turns out, however, that he is right. What we never find out is who They are, and why They should go to all that trouble.

"They" is a science fiction short story of the early 50s. It contains the preoccupations of hundreds of science fiction works of that period pared down to the essential skeleton. The protagonist, a rather colourless everyman (the representative human in these stories is almost always a male), becomes a victim of technological powers which threaten to destroy his life, or worse, his identity, his personality, his memory, his autonomy. Sometimes the threat comes from non-human invaders who have abilities or technology which earth people can't cope with. But more often the technological power is a human creation, used by an elite to dominate the rest of humankind. Star Wars, which systematically appropriated the traditional themes and devices of science fiction, finds Them in another galaxy in the form of a military dictatorship which aims to wipe out rebellion by using a planet destroying space station.

In most stories, as in Heinlein's "They", the identity of the controllers is unclear and their motivation uncomplicated: controllers want to control. There is, in fact, no clear distinction between the controllers and the devices they wield. The manipulatory They may indeed be a machine.

In Star Wars the human status of those who seek control is, at least, in doubt. The insectlike army of the dictatorship could just as well consist of robots. If there are human faces behind the exo-skeletons, we never see them. The same doubt applies to the mastermind, Dar Vahda. The forces of evil are an appendage of their technology.

There is a dreadful logic to technological development, these stories are saying. It
increases human powers, and at the same time subverts, destroys, makes people over into its own image, enslaves them in one way or another. With this as one of its main themes, science fiction is a naturally pessimistic literature. The individual is swallowed up by the machine; there is no escape but in escapism. Improbably, some of the characters do escape their fate. Battling their way through long odds, against overwhelming forces, the heroes triumph, as in Star Wars. These heroes have their technology too, but it is a technology with a human face, or at least, human sentiments. The scarecrow and the tinman of Hollywood’s Wizard of Oz have been reincarnated as friendly robots. The heroes win, not because of good planning or a superior social organisation, but because of pluck, cunning, individual initiative and a considerable amount of luck. By these means, the human spirit, as this is understood in Western capitalist societies, vanquishes the technological Leviathan.

Star Wars celebrates the victory of humanity, but paradoxically it is the technology it portrays or uses which is the centre of attention. The humans are far less interesting than the special effects. Though individual initiative triumphs, the individuals themselves are impoverished creatures. The story makes do with conventional stereotypes for characters and the relations between these people are equally stunted. It is not that the social relations of middle America have been projected into another galaxy. Nobody’s social relations have ever been that simple. As for political structures, the inhabitants of Star Wars seem to make do with institutions derived from a period before the industrial revolution.

Star Wars isn’t responsible for the paradoxes it contains. It takes them over from the traditional themes of the science fiction written in the decades after the War. This science fiction is about technological change and its effect on people. Technology is the variable, human nature the constant. Few writers of this period seriously consider human relations themselves as subject to change, or take social relations and political organisations as a subject for speculation. Even less does traditional science fiction see technological change as a result of changing human needs and relations. Technological change simply happens and humans must either cope or go under.

The Stars are Ours — But Who are We?

Histories of science fiction generally begin with Mary Shelly, H. G. Wells or Jules Verne. But it was during the 30s and 40s, particularly in the US, that science fiction became a self-conscious, ghetto literature, that is, a literature firmly walled away from mainstream fiction, with its own magazines, publishers, fans, writers, and conventions. Its readers (especially in the 40s and 50s) were mainly in the upper levels of the working class or the lower rungs of the bourgeoisie. They were tradesmen, technicians, mechanics, people who had some scientific or technical training. Readers included a few academics, some students. But intellectuals in general, regarded it with contempt, and if they read it, they wouldn’t have admitted it.

Early science fiction was preoccupied by bug-eyed monsters and improbable adventures on worlds light years away from the grim reality of the Depression. But at the beginning of a more optimistic decade, the mainstream was directed into a channel which was to become well worn and thoroughly explored in the next 20 years. The emphasis was more and more on developments in science and technology. Readers began to expect plausible sounding explanations for devices and unusual events in the stories, and writers and editors of science fiction magazines took pride in successful predictions of future developments.

The optimism and energy of a rising technocracy in an increasingly powerful nation is evident in many of the US stories of the 40s and 50s. In the early Heinlein stories (eg, those in the collection Green Hills of Earth, 1951) humans build orbiting space stations, build colonies on the moon and journey to the planets. There are tragedies amid the triumphs, but Heinlein obviously thinks that these add zest to the March of Progress. The vanguard of this march consists almost entirely of white American males. As far as the science fiction of the West was concerned, America was the imperial country. It was the US which was furthest along on the road it was assumed
everyone else would follow. So writers in Australia, even in Britain, tended to see the US as their future, and launched their tales of speculation from American shores.

Heinlein himself has always had definite ideas about who qualifies for a membership in the technological vanguard. In the notorious Farnham’s Freehold, he imagines a post-atomic society ruled by black people. Incapable of maintaining a civilised state, they lapse into barbarism, turn white men into slaves, and do unspeakable things to white women. Farnham manages to free himself and his women, and sets them up on a property which he defends with a gun.

As for the women of traditional science fiction, they are man-made copies of the pulp fiction stereotype: sexy, stupid, emotional, dependent. By comparison, Heinlein’s saucy, rebellious women are something of a relief, but he insures that they are always firmly put in their place by their men, who use physical force if necessary. Heinlein is probably more insistent on his chauvinism than are most science fiction writers. For the most part they picked up their prejudices and ideas about human relationships from their own social background. They didn’t examine these conventions or consider the possibility that they could be changed because they regarded technological change as being the dynamo of history and the key to the future.

But if technology is the force which sweeps us irresistibly forward, then there is no good reason to believe that the March of Progress will take up where we want to go. Optimistic enthusiasm about the technological conquest of nature easily converts itself into pessimistic contemplation of the technological destruction of humanity. The atomic bomb did its share to shake everyone’s confidence in the future. Not surprisingly, nuclear disasters and post-atomic was survival stories were common in the late 40s and the 50s. Science fiction writers were quick to think up other ways in which humanity could end in a bang or a whimper: mplaques, ice ages, floods, insect swarms, earthquakes, as well as the old standby, invaders from Mars, the stars, the depths of the sea. Long before Ehrlich or Commoner, science fiction was foreseeing a world drowned in its own population or buried in its own junk. Alongside these “twilight of humanity” stories come tales about more subtle forms of annihilation: the destruction of individuality, freedom, will; the triumph of order, conformity, control — the dehumanisation of humanity. This was clearly a theme which preoccupied writers and their readers — the technicians and skilled workers who were finding themselves, not at the heady heights of technological ascent, but in a system increasingly beyond their comprehension and control.

The visions of the future, even those which are basically optimistic (as is Star Wars) are almost universally of an autocracy in which technocrats and their machines — the two being virtually inseparable — dominate humans and the natural environment for better or for worse. Freedom, democracy, the sanctity of the individual — these liberal ideals — are incompatible with our technological future; this is the message of these stories. They magnify the reader’s worries, and sometimes cater to a natural desire for an escape route. Thus heroes manage to singlehandedly topple the system, or escape their oppressive world and find liberty, equality, fraternity in the stars.

Science fiction is a radical literature insofar as it is a protest against technocratic
domination. However, the protest inevitably has its limits: it ends in improbable escape or a hopeless shrug, or turns in a reactionary direction. The complaint about technocracy turns into a paranoia about Them; and They can easily be converted into the bogey of the times: The Communists, the Nazis, the Yellow Peril. Most of the older generation of science fiction writers served their time as cold warriors. Even without this reactionary turn, the protest against technological manipulation and technological manipulators is doomed. The human characters of science fiction are, after all, insubstantial creations, abstract individuals. The pace is set, and the future is made by the machines; the result is bound to be a triumph of mechanisation.

Dangerous Visions

In Ursula LeGuin's The Word for the World if Forest (1973), Heinlein's white American vanguard is about to engulf another world. The invaders have the weapons and the arrogance of a technological elite. The natives appear to be natural victims of the March of Progress: weak, stupid and 'uncivilised'. But they do turn out to have methods of co-operation and a relationship with their environment which prove to be more than a match for technological might.

In Squares of the City (1965), John Brunner's main character is a planner, a technological trouble-shooter. He comes to a model city, newly built by a South American dictator, to solve a traffic problem for the government. Like most technical experts, he sees his work as non-political and had no intention of becoming involved in the political unrest that unaccountably disturbs the harmony of this 'perfectly administered' society. Eventually he comes to realise the role he has been assigned in the political game played by the rulers, and goes over to the side of the popular uprising.

Anyone familiar with science fiction knows that in the last decade or so, there has been a kind of revolution in the ghetto — a development commonly referred to as the New Wave. At the same time science fiction has found new readers among university students, teachers, and people from the counter-culture, who have made their way from Middle Earth, over the bridge provided by Dune. The New Wave has breached the old laws of science fiction. Anything goes.

In the new science fiction, sex roles, political systems, the human mind and the human body become objects of speculation and subject to alteration. In Samuel Delany's Triton (1977), men nurse babies, women prospectors seek male prostitutes in brothels, and even sexual identity itself becomes confused: the main character, at the outset a man, turns into a woman. The subversiveness inherent in such freedom to speculate is deliberately suggested in the title Harlan Ellison gave to the most well-known anthology of the period: Dangerous Visions (1967).

Those who wanted to make use of the subversive potential of science fiction found it an excellent vehicle for working out and presenting social critique. The ideals and ideas which are usually stated only in speeches, can be realised in another time or world — and vicariously lived by the readers. Social conventions and practices, taken from their usual context, are turned inside out, reversed, and metamorphosis into exotic forms.

Joanna Russ, in her feminist vision of the future, simply takes sexist assumptions and conventions and turns them inside out. In Picnic on Paradise (1968), the competent, cool leader who gets a group of weaker folk out of a jam, is a woman. Russ gets her revenge on the all-male technological fraternities with the exclusively female society of Whileaway in the Female Man (1975), and long-suffering women readers of science fiction, even those of us who don't go along with the Final Solution to the male problem, will get their revenge through Jael Reasoner, a woman specially equipped for 'man-slaughter'.

Ursula LeGuin's Left Hand of Darkness (1969) puts across a basically feminist message in a more subtle way. Genly Ai, the narrator, is the representative of a galactic United Nations on Winter, a planet where sex roles as we know them do not exist. For the purposes of reproduction, people temporarily assume the biology of a male or a female (though not always of the same sex). In the words of Genly Ai: "Consider: Anyone can turn his hand to anything. This sounds very simple, but its psychological effects are
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incalculable....There is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive....One is respected and judged only as a human being. It is an appalling experience." The novel is a presentation of this experience.

LeGuin wants to point out something about the way in which sex roles limit people in their actions and in their perception of others by contrasting our arrangements with those of the inhabitants of Winter. In the Dispossessed (1975), the ways of life she is contrasting both appear in the novel. Annares is an anarchist world; Urras is capitalist, very much like our own society. Annares has its faults, but Urras is clearly much worse. Shevek, who moves from Annares to Urras so that he can do the scientific work that he values, gains more possessions than he ever had before, but he is dispossessed, not only of his wife and child, but of the kinds of relationships with people which he regards as valuable. These relationships aren't possible in a society founded on competition, dominance, and egotism.

Whether intentionally political or not, the new science fiction has avoided the traditional preoccupation with the inexorable march of a non-human technology. When characters are presented as social beings rather than as abstract individuals, technology loses the character of an overwhelming, independent force. Frank Herbert's Dune novels (1965-76) stress the interaction between the natural environment, a way of life and a technology. This relationship is especially visible because of the harshness of the desert world, Arrakis.

In a world without Them, we can, like LeGuin or Herbert, have an optimistic view of human possibilities. However, the dogged pessimism of science fiction has managed to translate itself into the new era. In Sheep Look Up (1972) and Stand on Zanzibar (1968) John Brunner rubs our faces in the consequences of our society's propensity to populate and pollute. In these books it is the institutions and practices of a capitalist society, not technology, which are running amok. Brunner is obviously trying to warn us, but never does tell us how we should act on his message. None of his multitude of characters have the slightest idea how to avoid their fate. Some become angry, some make futile rebellious gestures, some opt out, but they all remain isolated and ineffective, and all become victims sooner or later. Revolution is not on Brunner's horizon, and he has no idea how the future he foresees can be prevented. So American capitalism goes down under the weight of its own garbage, taking everyone with it.

Brunner's books are powerful because he cares about the fate of his characters and he makes us see their plight as our plight. But the hopelessness which, in the end, the books convey, easily turns into detached cynicism about humans and their prospects. Behind the crest of the New Wave has come science fiction which expresses the point of view of the Nixon and the post-Nixon years. In the novels of Ron Goulart (eg, After Things Fall Apart, 1970) and John Sladek (eg, Muller-Fokker Effect, 1972) the old theme returns: humans are once again destroyed by the System. But this time the logic of technological development has become the illogic of the operation of multi-national companies, defense industries and intelligence agencies. The technocratic elite are no longer motivated by anything as clean as a desire for power; the bureaucrats, managers, agents, etc. are driven by grubby little desires for wealth, revenge or status, and are generally too stupid or narrow-minded to pursue even these goals effectively. There are virtually no sympathetic characters in Sladek's or Goulart's novels. All of them are portrayed as children playing with dangerous technological gadgets, and they often talk and think in the manner made familiar by the officials of the Nixon period.

Another direction science fiction is taking in the harsher world of the 70s is an escape into fantasy. The dragonrider stories of Anne McCaffrey, the Barjarum of Beaujolas, the Klau, the False Giambol, and other well-named but ill-mannered creations of Jack Vance show, among other things, that children don't have a monopoly on imaginative life. But the people who have come to see in science fiction an expression of their own doubts about conventional roles and existing social institutions will also have their say in determining the direction of the future, in science fiction, as in the real world.
The Catholic Church in Sydney & the Vietnam Conflict
C.F. Bowers

This article discusses and attempts to account for the rise of opposition to the Viet Nam war within the Catholic Church in Sydney in the years 1966 to 1972. In order to illustrate this, I will describe the development and growth of the group “Catholics for Peace” in Sydney during these years, and my own involvement with this group as a Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Sydney. Vital to any consideration of the development of this organisation “Catholics for Peace”, is the attitude of the then Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Sir Norman Gilroy. But before proceeding with my consideration of this period, I will examine at some length attitudes prevalent in the Catholic Church to Viet Nam in the decade prior to this period, and the attitudes and associations of Cardinal Gilroy in particular, who was, in many ways, the key figure in the whole affair.

One of my first personal recollections of Cardinal Gilroy, after I had entered the seminary to study for the priesthood in 1958, was of his return from a visit to Europe in 1959. He came to St. Columba’s College, Springwood, and described, in an address he made to us, how satisfying his visit to Spain and Portugal had been, and how he regarded Franco and Salazar as the greatest living examples of Christian leadership in the world in their defence of the Church against Communism.

Ignorant as I then was of international politics, and having been thoroughly conditioned in cold-war attitudes to communism, I remember being somewhat taken aback by the effusiveness of his praise of these, to say the least, controversial national leaders. I realise now that this powerful and autocratic man was politically to the extreme right. To him, democracy was an irrelevant consideration in his evaluation of world leaders — the touchstone was their attitude to communism. The more opposed to communism, the more acceptable they were, regardless of any merely humanitarian considerations. Similarly mentioned by Gilroy at this time as models of Christian leadership in the South-East Asian area were Marcos of the Philippines and Ngo Dinh Diem of Viet Nam.

Cardinal Gilroy’s relationship with the Ngo family and with Ngo Dinh Diem was closer than with the others because he had studied for the priesthood in Rome with Diem’s brother Ngo Dinh Thuc, who later became Archbishop of Hue. Their relationship was so close in fact, that Thuc visited Sydney several times, and prominent in Cardinal Gilroy’s study in his palace at
Manly was a large autographed photograph of Diem, Thuc and Gilroy together.

I will now go into some detail about the relationship of Archbishop Thuc and the Catholic Church to the Diem regime, for I feel that this is important background to understanding the attitude of Cardinal Gilroy and the Catholic Church in Australia to the Viet Nam war, and to the opposition to it that arose in the years following the downfall of this regime.

After Ngo Dinh Diem came to power in Viet Nam in 1954, Archbishop Thuc assumed the role of his close adviser along with another brother, Nhu, whose wife was the famous “Dragon Lady”, Madame Nhu.

Thuc made at least three visits to Australia, and his last known visit was in April 1963, the last year of power for the Ngo family in Viet Nam. This visit was announced in the journal of the Archdiocese of Sydney, The Catholic Weekly in two consecutive issues, those of April 11 and 18 of that year. The first issue announced that “Archbishop Ngo Dinh Thuc will visit Australia and New Zealand this month” (1), describing him as “a classmate and friend of several archbishops and bishops of Australia and New Zealand at Propaganda College in Rome”. The second issue notes that “the Archbishop went to Propaganda College in Rome in 1919....” (2) the year that Cardinal Gilroy began his studies there. The strange silence which follows these two announcements is explained by the fact that Thuc was not here in his propaganda role, but on private family business, as Denis Warner notes in an article which appeared in The Reporter in October 1963, “In April of this year Thuc made a private visit to Australia, and invested heavily in real-estate there.” (3)

Thuc was quickly back in Hue after his last Australian visit, and that May 1963 was to be the turning point both of his own fortunes and those of his brother Diem, for that was the month of the Hue massacre, and of the beginning of the Buddhist revolt against Diem. Denis Warner has this to say about Thuc in The Last Confucian:

“Thuc, the Archbishop, had a reputation once for being jolly and relaxed. Though he was widely regarded as corrupt because of his real-estate holdings, and closely identified in Hue with the brutal and bloody Can (his brother Ngo Dinh Can, the provincial governor), he did not really become widely unpopular until the beginning of the Buddhist affair in May 1963.” (4)

The Buddhist rebellion erupted in early May at Hue, where nine Buddhists were shot and killed in consequence of an argument over the right of Buddhists to fly their flags, hold mass meetings, and make radio broadcasts during the commemoration of the Buddha’s birth. The celebration overlapped with a Catholic one commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Archbishop Thuc’s consecration as bishop. When the Buddhist leader refused to send Thuc a congratulatory telegram, the government gave orders for strict enforcement of a five-year-old ban against flying religious flags, despite the fact that, during Thuc’s celebration the Vatican flag was displayed along with the national flag and Thuc’s pictures were all over Hue. On the morning of May 8, Buddhist crowds which had gathered at the Hue radio station were ordered to disperse at Thuc’s behest (5), but fire hoses, blank shells and tear gas failed to move them. The Catholic deputy provincial chief then ordered his troops to use live ammunition and grenades, and the killings took place.

Thuc’s involvement and part responsibility for this massacre can no longer be questioned. Denis Warner makes Can responsible for the order to shoot, but says that this final instruction was “issued apparently with the knowledge and approval of Archbishop Thuc”. (6)

The first Buddhist self-immolation quickly followed on June 11, 1963, and world-wide public sympathy was quickly aroused for the plight of the Buddhists of South Viet Nam. Archbishop Thuc, however, was seemingly unperturbed by these happenings. While in Rome attending the 2nd Vatican Council in September of that year, during an interview about these happenings with a reporter from the Sydney Catholic Weekly he explained that those killed in Hue in May had not been killed by Vietnamese police but by a Viet Cong bomb (7). Even more remarkable is his description, in the same interview, of the first Buddhist immolation of June 11. Concerning this the Archbishop had this to say:
"The monk, stupefied by drugs, was taken by car to the gates of the Cambodian Embassy, where he was doused with gasoline by the driver who set him on fire." (8)

The reporter then goes on to note that "the Archbishop considered this not a case of suicide, but of premeditated homicide". (9) In the same issue of the Catholic Weekly it is noted that:

"Archbishop Thuc later told reporters in Rome that the Vatican had ordered him to keep silent about his activities and the affairs of his country while he was outside Vietnam." (10)

The Archbishop was obviously not taking this admonition very seriously. Thuc happened to be in Rome on November 2, 1963, and thus escaped the violent death which befell the remaining Ngo brothers who were in Viet Nam at the time of the coup, Diem, Nhu and Can. Thuc never returned to Viet Nam, and I should imagine has been living since on his overseas investments, including those which he arranged during his visit to Australia in April 1963.

To understand fully the extent of the anti-communist mania of the Catholic Church in Sydney in the years prior to 1965 is difficult for a non-Catholic who has not been subjected to the Catholic school system, or to the constant diatribe against communism which issued from the pulpit or from the Catholic press of that period. Suffice it to say for the sake of this article that the quality and consistency of the anti-communist attacks far outshone the excesses of the McCarthyist cold-war period in the U.S.A. of the 1950s, and survived much longer. Its history is closely intertwined with that of the industrial groups, the split in the Labor Party and the bitterness and recriminations which followed that event.

There is the opinion abroad that Cardinal Gilroy was more moderate in his attitude to communism than was Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne, because he refused to allow the National Civic Council to function in Sydney. This is not so. A priest, who had been Gilroy's secretary in the 'fifties said to me in a conversation recently that, if anything, Gilroy was more fanatically anti-communist. His only objection to the N.C.C. was that it was lay-controlled and had its headquarters in Melbourne. Money that the N.C.C. and the Movement raised in Sydney, considerable in that period, went to Santamaria and the Melbourne headquarters, and out of his hands, and Gilroy would not stand for this.

It was with this as a background that three ladies from Sydney's North Shore sent a letter to Cardinal Gilroy in 1966.

Catholics for Peace

In June 1966, three Sydney Catholic women concerned about the possibility of the conscription of their teenage sons to the Viet Nam war, decided to send a circular letter to all the Catholic bishops of Australia, pointing out to them the growing divergence between Vatican and Papal pronouncements on war and the war in Viet Nam, and the attitudes of bishops and clergy here in Australia regarding the war. This letter, signed by Noreen McDonald, Jeanne Ashbolt and Mary Garnsey, said in part that:

"The war in Vietnam has caught the conscience of Catholics all over the world. We, the undersigned Catholic women, have tried to find proper spiritual guidance on the problem. We are especially disturbed at the various public expressions about Vietnam made by our own clergy in Australia, since these statements seem to us to be in conflict with recent significant Papal pronouncements." (11)

Cardinal Gilroy replied very promptly to them on July 8 with what is a very remarkable letter, for it is the only occasion in his dealings with what was to become the Catholics for Peace group that he reveals his true feelings on this issue in writing. I feel that in this letter, as he felt that he was only dealing with three uninformed housewives, he allows his truly virulent hatred of communism to come through. I quote in part from his reply:

"People whose 'conscience is caught' by the war in Vietnam have reason to be gravely concerned — as indeed have all people who cherish freedom. This dreadful war, by which international Communism seeks to dominate South Vietnam, as it dominates North Vietnam, is a tremendous threat to world peace. The importance attached to this campaign by the leaders of Communism is evident from world wide propaganda favouring the Communist viewpoint. What is particularly sad is that many decent people are completely deceived by this clever
Charlie Bowers, then chaplain at Lidcombe Hospital, addressing a Viet Nam Mobilisation rally in Sydney Town Hall, April 27, 1968

propaganda .... If you are Catholics I suggest to you to pray for peace and for the conversion of Communists. Never forget that the one permanent, immovable object of Communism is to dominate the world and that includes Australia. Victory in South Vietnam would be another step towards achieving that plan." (12)

Cardinal Gilroy was already very much out of step with previous pronouncements of Popes John XXIII and Paul VI in the sentiments that he expresses in this letter, particularly his last sentence calling for victory in South Viet Nam. Contrast this with the following excerpt from an encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI, issued on September 15, 1966, where, referring to war raging in South-East Asia, he says:

"... let all those responsible strive to bring about those necessary conditions which will lead men to lay down their arms at last, before it becomes too late to do so, owing to the mounting pressure of events .... We cry to them in God's name to stop." (13)

This very clear appeal from the Pope was included in a "Statement on Peace" promulgated by the Australian Bishops' Conference which met in Sydney in April 1967 (14). In response to this more moderate statement made by the Australian Bishops' Conference (where the more moderate elements, led by Archbishop Guilford Young of Hobart, sometimes prevailed over the hawks led by Gilroy) a meeting was held on 15.4.67 at the house of Mrs Noreen McDonald in Longueville, to form "Catholics for Peace", with Colin McDonald as its first president. A letter announcing the formation of the group was forwarded to Cardinal Gilroy with 25 signatures attached, four of them being priests of the archdiocese of Sydney (Roger Pryke, Ed Campion, Dick Synott and myself). At this meeting it was decided to hold a seminar on peace at St. John's College. This seminar was held on June 18, 1967, there being addresses by three priests, Roger Pryke, Denis Kenny and Dr. John Burnheim, who was at that time rector of St. John's College. Colin McDonald opened the seminar with the following statement, in which he outlined the aims of "Catholics for Peace":

"The recent statement by the Catholic Bishops on peace said that as well as supporting and urging all reasonable
initiatives for the restoring of peace, all citizens must share the responsibility of reviewing constantly the moral issues involved in the conduct of the war. In the light of this statement, and the teachings of the several thousand bishops who were responsible for the decisions of the 2nd Vatican Council, the individual efforts of a number of Catholic clergy, laymen and women were fused into the organisation known as 'Catholics for Peace'. In broad outline, the objects of Catholics for Peace are for the purposes of
(i) Education on matters of peace and non-violence
(ii) Self-education to become peaceful persons
(iii) Influencing others to the same ends. (15)

Things moved forward quickly for "Catholics for Peace" after this seminar, with its resultant publicity. With close on one hundred active members in Sydney, groups were set up to advise and give legal aid to Catholic conscientious objectors. The first conscientious objector member of Catholics for Peace came before the court in July of that year, with Dr. John Burnheim giving evidence on his behalf. The Sydney Morning Herald of August 23 noted in a feature article on Catholics for Peace that:

"Recently, Mr. Rogers S.M., used to having Catholic clergy appearing for the Crown in conscientious objector cases, heard the Rector of St. John's, Dr. Burnheim, give evidence for the applicant.... At one stage it seemed that the Commonwealth Court would be the venue for theological debate between Dr. Burnheim and (the Catholic Church spokesman in Sydney) Dr. W. Murray, whom the Crown wanted to call." (16)

Dr. Murray, who had publicly criticised the pacifist and non-violent attitudes of Catholics opposed to conscription, was not available for the hearing.

During the next few months, the number of Catholics for Peace increased, with more clergy becoming openly sympathetic to its aims. At the same time the lines of confrontation were drawn, and on a number of occasions members of Catholics for Peace received rough treatment as they tried to distribute copies of the Popes' statements on war and Viet Nam outside Catholic churches after Sunday Mass. I remember one occasion when members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, a charitable organisation of Catholic men, tore leaflets out of the hands of a woman member of Catholics for Peace on the front steps of Concord Catholic Church while the priest-administrator to Bishop Freeman looked on. Her arm was twisted behind her back and badly bruised in the process. During this period groups from Catholics for Peace marched in demonstrations under a Catholics for Peace banner and in such demonstrations as the march to Holdsworthy army camp to protest against the imprisonment of Simon Townsend.

In April 1968 a protest meeting against the war was held at Sydney Town Hall, where I was one of the speakers, along with Charmian Clift, Alex Carey, Ken Thomas of T.N.T. and several others, none of whom were members of the Communist Party. During my speech at the Town Hall I said:

"On Easter Sunday morning, when expressing his hopes that the peace moves in Vietnam might be successful, he (Pope Paul VI) emphasised his absolute neutrality.... Any notion that the allies are waging a kind of Holy War against Communism is obviously not subscribed to by the Holy Father, even though some Catholics would seem to hold this view."

During this speech I also said that I was "disillusioned by the Christian Church's complacency in the face of this killing, and in particular with the complacency of my own Church, the Catholic Church in Australia ...."

The only newspaper which reported my speech in detail was the Tribune (17); and of course some well-meaning Catholic sent a copy to Cardinal Gilroy. I was called in to see him, and in this interview he warned me that I had spoken at the Town Hall alongside known communists. He said that I was being "used" by communists, and when I suggested to him that just because an issue is supported by communists this does not necessarily make it wrong, he came out with the remarkable reply that "everything that communists do is evil". It was then that I realised that I was not dealing with a reasonable man. During the remainder of that year Catholics for Peace groups continued to march under their banner at moratorium demonstrations. To avoid further confrontation with Cardinal Gilroy, I had agreed not to speak at public meetings.
on the Viet Nam issue without first consulting him, but matters came to a head in August of that year when it was announced in the press that I would speak on the same platform as Dr. Spock at a Town Hall meeting. I immediately made an appointment to see the Cardinal to discuss this with him, thinking that such a well known figure as Dr. Spock could hardly be classed as a communist. In the meantime, I heard that it had been publicly announced at a meeting of the D.L.P. in Sydney that the Cardinal was about to stop me from speaking at the Spock meeting and to suspend me from priestly duties. Knowing the direct link between the Cardinal’s staff and the D.L.P., I took this seriously, being concerned at that stage to be able to continue working as a priest. So I began seeking overseas for a more sympathetic bishop under whom to work as a priest.

Meanwhile, Catholics for Peace was still making itself felt. The Bishops’ Conference of April 1969, in a move by the moderate faction, led by Archbishop Guilford Young of Hobart, did at last appeal to the government to provide some form of alternative service for conscientious objectors, and to recognise objection to a particular war. Several members of Catholics for Peace had made statements in defiance of the National Service Act, and several priests had stated publicly that they would advise young men not to register for the draft until the provisions of the act were changed to allow for selective conscientious objection, thus leaving themselves open to a charge of treason.

One last all-out effort was launched by the Church in Sydney to stem public opinion in opposition to the war just prior to the May 1970 moratorium demonstration. Receiving much publicity in the Sydney Morning Herald, Cardinal Gilroy, through his spokesman Dr. W.E. Murray announced that:

“A demonstration in support of the kind of peace that would only mean the withdrawal of all opposition to the things against which the people of South Vietnam, supported by their Allies, have been fighting now for many years, is hardly worthy of Christian participation.”

But the people voted with their feet, and over 30,000 massed in front of the Sydney Town Hall to hear the speakers. The crowd included a large contingent of Catholics, led by the redoubtable Colin McDonald, under the Catholics for Peace banner. The Melbourne moratorium, after a similar attack from Dr. Knox, Archbishop of Melbourne, drew 100,000 people. The battle in many ways had been won.

Conclusion

In the two years following, until the withdrawal of Australian troops from Viet Nam, the Church hierarchy in Sydney fought a losing battle on the Viet Nam issue. I even remember meeting a group of sixth form students in school uniform from Aloysius’ College, one of the more conservative Jesuit colleges, at an anti-war meeting outside Sydney Town Hall in September 1971. General public opinion slowly turned against the war, culminating in the election of the Whitlam government in November 1972.

Cardinal Gilroy stepped down from his position as Archbishop of Sydney in the same year and it was the end of an era. The Catholic Weekly ceased commenting on the international political scene, confining itself to reporting nuns’ and priests’ jubilees, with the occasional mention of the State Aid issue. On the surface all appeared to be normal, but underneath the Church in Sydney was suffering a massive haemorrhage of membership. I believe that this was due among other things to loss of confidence in the Church because of its inability to take a moral stand on the Viet Nam issue. Of the group of 24 priests with whom I was ordained in 1965, thirteen only remained at last count. It is hard for me to think of one person who was active in the Church in the late ’sixties, including those in Catholics for Peace, who still remain active in the Church. All around the world, the Church has suffered great setbacks in recent years, but none greater than in Sydney where Catholics saw their leaders, bishops and priests, first backing a corrupt regime in South Viet Nam, and then supporting to “final victory” a cruel, unjust war which was eventually condemned as hopeless and unwinnable by the majority of the Australian community.

Colin McDonald, as president of Catholics for Peace, received many letters of appreciation from ordinary Catholics. I will
conclude by quoting from one which I feel summarises the feelings of many Catholics about the Church’s attitude to the Viet Nam war at that time. It refers to a paid advertisement placed by Catholics for Peace, presenting Papal statements referring to the Viet Nam war:

“One day, perhaps, it will not require an advertisement to bring such views regularly before readers of the Catholic Weekly. But, while awaiting the proprietors’ conversion to Christianity, I enclose a donation towards the cost of publicising a Christian point of view.”

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Sydney, because of their behaviour over the Viet Nam issue and on many other moral issues, has been rejected by these former Catholics as unChristian in any acceptable meaning of that term.

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Cardinal Gilroy (left) ordaining the author, Charlie Bowers (right), in St Mary’s Cathedral in 1965.

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In 1950, four years before Diem came to power in Viet Nam, Thuc accompanied his brother Diem on a visit to the USA. Here Thuc introduced Diem to Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York, and fellow-student in Rome in the '20s with both Thuc and Gilroy. Bernard Fall, in The Two Vietnams, says that on this first visit to the USA:

"... the Vietnamese nationalist leader was given a polite brush-off. His brother, Monsignor Thuc, was more successful, however, with the Catholic hierarchy. Francis Cardinal Spellman became interested in the far-away country with its small but fiercely militant Catholic community and became a strong advocate of American support for Diem over the following years." (p.242)

Fall continues:

"Shepherded by Cardinal Spellman, Diem made ... trip after trip to Washington to harangue Congressmen and Government officials in the cause of Vietnamese independence." (p.243)

Gettleman includes in his collected sources on Viet Nam an article by Robert Scheer in which he says of Spellman that:

"... the Cardinal became one of Diem's most influential backers in the United States, and there is no doubt that this support was crucial, for among other things, it certified Diem as an important anti-Communist — no small matter during the McCarthy period." (p.247)

I feel that in order to fully understand the extreme anti-communist mentality of men such as Cardinal Gilroy it is of value to note Spellman's attitude to communism. Robert Scheer quotes in the same article an address given by Spellman in 1954 in which he advocates US intervention in Indochina

"... else we shall risk bartering our liberties for lunacies, betraying the sacred trust of our forefathers, becoming serfs and slaves to Red rulers' godless goons." (p.249)

He goes on to warn that:

"Americans must not be lulled into sleep by indifference nor be beguiled by the prospect of peaceful co-existence with Communists. How can there be peaceful co-existence between two parties if one of them is continually clawing at the throat of the other...?" (p.249)

After Diem came to power in 1954, Thuc assumed the role of close adviser to Diem, along with another brother Nhu, whose wife was the famous "Dragon Lady", Madame Nhu. Joseph Bottinger, who acted as a US adviser to Diem in Saigon for some time, describes Thuc's position in the following excerpt from his work Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled:

"... Thuc, who held no official post, acted as unofficial advisor to the President, as leader of the Catholic clergy, and occasionally as one of the regime's propagandists abroad. Opponents of the regime said that he not only forced local administrators to make available public funds for Church projects but accused him also of participation in lucrative business transactions, for the good of the Church as well as himself." (p.954)

Referring to rumours circulating about corruption in the Ngo family in 1957, Bernard Fall comments that:

"Similar charges have been levelled against Monsignor Ngo Dinh Thuc, who was said to have acquired large real estate and business holdings for both the Church and his family...." (p.252).

Archbishop Thuc was subsequently excommunicated from the Catholic Church for the unauthorised consecration of five men as bishops, among other "irregularities". This happened in the Seville diocese in Spain in 1976, where Thuc was living at the time.
DISCUSSION

In ALR No. 69 (June 1979) Hugh Saddler reviewed Seeds for Change: creatively confronting the energy crisis. Here the six authors (Deborah White, Philip Sutton, Alan Pears, Chris Mardon, John Dick and Maurie Crow) reply.

In Seeds for Change, we, the six authors, invited readers to write critiques to encourage debate. In this spirit we welcome the review by Hugh Saddler, and we respond to it.

Naturally, we are gratified with Saddler’s description of the model for an alternative lower-energy Melbourne — more than half the book — as an “exciting blueprint for liveable cities”. However, we are somewhat mystified why he objects to this model being advanced as an effective way to reduce energy consumption.

Saddler wants to remove the energy crisis first, under capitalism, then “energy conservation and the gradual transfer to a reasonable energy economy” would be “one item on a whole slate of changes that would accompany the transformation to a socialist society. Changes in urban structure and transport systems of the type described in the book would, in all probability, be another item on the agenda”.

Why, we ask, do changes in urban structure/transport and energy conservation have to be dealt with as separate items? Why not together? And why should we not expect such changes to start now?

As Tribune columnist Dave Davies says: “While Fraser’s energy saving may stop a few dribbles of petrol, hardly anyone seems concerned to stop the gush of waste. How about planning cities to cut down on the length and number of trips by private car? Or would that hit too much at vested interests?” (‘1-Minute Parking’, 4.7.79).

Seeds for Change model did just that, but did not, we admit, “hit at vested interests” to the extent of demanding socialism or nationalisation, or even to the extent of naming the corporations obviously involved. The book was sponsored by a non-party conservation body, and the authors do not share any one political-party attitude anyway.

But, of course, Seeds for Change has given birth to a lusty energy-saving baby in the shape of an alternative city model, and this baby is now, in effect, lying on the doorstep of all big decision-makers — state and private — precisely because the model involves interventionist forward-planning. Industrial production and physical and social aspects of city structure are involved, as well as energy management. We agree with Saddler that ESSO-BHP and SECV cannot be bypassed.

Saddler defines “energy fundamentalism” as forgetting what are, in effect, socialist objectives and giving “the reduction of energy use as the sole or principal reason” for “all sorts of political social and economic changes”. We believe that Saddler, in his determination to avoid the rigidity of fundamentalism, has over-reacted to the extent of overlooking something crucial. An energy crisis will set new conditions. We should take this opportunity to involve people in attaining a more equitable society, instead of allowing the authorities to create greater inequities.

This brings us to the first of the three cardinal sins with which Saddler taxes us: “energy fundamentalism”, “parochialism” and falling for “idiotic official energy plans”. The authors agree with Saddler that each of these are sins that can be committed, but the review, we believe, fails to prove any of these charges.

Energy Fundamentalism

It would be wrong to hold that a given level of energy shortages would give rise directly, inevitably and mechanically, to a particular pattern of a restructured city model. Seeds for Change does not contemplate any such connection. The model in Part 3 was not exactly tailored to conserve just that amount of likely shortfall described as the “energy gap” in Part 1.

Maybe, it could be argued, that it is risky politics to propose a model as a solution to a predicted energy crisis. For if, in 5 or 10 years' time, the model has not been implemented and no crisis has matured either, then supporters of a car-based city can triumph: “You see. The model was unnecessary!”

The answer? The model does more than save energy. It avoids crippling capital investment causing massive pollution and employing minimal labour. These are the heavy costs of not adopting a model that also lifts the quality of life.
can least afford it in any business-as-usual approach to the energy crisis.

A second confusion about "energy fundamentalism" is the notion that the model is an exciting blueprint for liveable cities "but one would want such changes in their own right, not because they reduced energy consumption, though that would be an additional benefit". What does "in their own right" mean? In any case, Seeds for Change does, in fact, argue for the model on the basis of integrating town-planning, transport planning and social planning.

The book was explicitly written about the energy dimension of life in our cities; this is not to say that other factors were not considered. In fact, the interrelationships between energy considerations and other physical, social and economic problems and objectives is one of the continuing themes of the book.

A third difficulty is that Saddler apparently defines "energy fundamentalists" as those who "forget" socialist objectives. We plead guilty to this. The authors, for reasons explained, did not write the book with a socialist objective, or any other objective than creatively confronting the energy crisis with a liveable city.

The book says: "We have not felt it necessary, or even possible, to deal in detail in this book with the far-reaching political and economic effects of this alternative future for Melbourne" (The Introduction). Just so. It would be nice for a book now to appear making good these deficiencies of which we ourselves were conscious. This is something different, though, to proving that the book is "permeated" with "energy fundamentalism".

The illustration that Saddler relies on is that "the only reference to the hideous toll of death or injury which our present car-based transport system exacts was in the context of the energy used by ambulance, hospital and legal services. Death and injury on the roads are alone reason enough to change the system. That they result in extra energy consumption is to my mind irrelevant."

We agree that accidents provide, in themselves, a persuasive argument against the road system of transport, as is implied in the very sentence complained about (on p. 213) which used the words "road carnage". That our attitude is the same as your reviewer is clearly evident in the mention of the kindred toll of lung cancer due to car exhaust pollution (p. 79). We think your reviewer has overlooked the context in which the offending reference occurred, which was to get some conception of the total urban system-forming effects of car transport.

Parochialism

"Another characteristic", writes Saddler, "which I found somewhat irritating, was its parochialism. It is an excellent idea to take a particular city, Melbourne, as the basis for elaborating a blueprint. But to analyse energy supply and demand patterns purely in terms of 'Victoria's energy prospects' is another matter."

This accusation is just plumb wrong. "Victoria's energy prospects" happens to be the title of chapter 2. But chapter 1 deals with Australian black coal and gas, and Australian and worldwide oil prospects. Even chapter 2 itself says: "Although we are most concerned in this book with Victoria's energy situation, we must also take into account the overall Australian situation. After all, Victoria is not a totally independent entity — a fact we might appreciate in years to come if we become dependent on North West Shelf gas!" We have, therefore, made reference to important energy sources in other states, such as black coal in order to formulate a realistic picture of Victoria's energy prospects" (p. 33). We could say more, but need we?

The book shows how energy consumption patterns and energy resources vary widely from state to state, so that appropriate but often different solutions have to be developed for different areas. Seeds for Change is a case study for Victoria and Melbourne in this respect. If this is "parochialism", we need more of it! The microplanning that Saddler approves for social planning applies also to energy planning.

We like Saddler's positive contribution about constitutional obstacles presented by divided state/federal powers over energy, enabling competition between states to flog energy resources cheap, and the possibilities of export control.

Idiotic Official Plans

Saddler writes: "Now it is true that such proposals" (i.e., resulting in drastically reducing brown coal) "have been made by so-called energy planners in the Victorian bureaucracy. But the existence of the proposals does not prove that Victoria faces an imminent fuel crisis on all fronts. Rather it proves how idiotic official energy plans are." However, the problem is that a number of these plans are already "in the pipeline" and will be realised in the near future.

There may be a genuine difference of assessment of energy realities by the reviewer here, but there is also some misunderstanding. Saddler says that the Seeds for Change case is that "Victoria is going to run out of all fossil fuels within, at most, a few decades". No such claim is made. Chapter 1 explains how crisis occurs not with the exhaustion of a reserve, but years or even decades before it "runs out", when investment and production realities climax in a production peak (or plateau) and subsequently decline although demand is still increasing.
We agree with some elements of Saddler’s recipe for energy planning, but have some reservations about others. Although we wonder what he proposes should petrol be in short supply, we agree with him that plans for conversion of brown coal to oil should be “thrown in the wastepaper basket”. It was Seeds for Change which pioneered the analysis which showed why oil-from-coal was a disaster course, leading, as we have since emphasised, directly to plans for nuclear plants, foreshadowed already by the government’s “Energy Policy for Victoria” of March 1979.

We think the case for gas-from-coal is different from oil-from-coal. Manufactured gas is a more efficient conversion of brown coal than is electricity for heat production (55 per cent of Victoria’s current primary energy — see p. 69). And there are other reasons set out in chapter 13 on “Strategies”. Scrapping Newport and Jeeralang power stations, although desirable, would postpone gas deliverability problems only 4 or 5 years (see pp. 40-41). As for Saddler’s idea of raising the price of gas for industrial consumers to a level just less than petroleum fuels, there could be some merit in this. However, if it leads to the expected decline in natural gas demand, the substitution that conserves one resource, hastens the depletion of another. If electricity is substituted, then it means expanding electricity generating power which is less efficient than gas-from-coal. So the short-term advantage of a lower usage rate for natural gas has to be weighed against a long-term disadvantage of a system geared more to electricity than gas from coal.

Finally, the degree of idiocy of official energy plans is not uniformly the idiocy of over-provision of energy-generating capacity. That may be true of SECV over-estimation of electricity growth demands (for some years linear, incidentally, and not exponential). The idiocy of oil from coal plants is different: an oil crisis is likely long before they could be on stream. But it may not be as easy to consign these plans to the wastepaper basket as the review makes it appear. It is true that, originally, these plans may have emanated from the “so-called energy planners in the Victorian bureaucracy”. They have now been elevated to official government energy policy, a Brown Coal Council has been set up in January for this very purpose, and 12 multi-nationals including all major oil companies have contributed funds for research and development. The third idiocy has been easy reliance upon oil import prospects, and over-estimation of availability of world oil supplies of which we have been warning since 1977, and which did not surface as a daily press topic until 1979.

Seeds for Change exposes these idiocies. It did not fall for them. Nor did we say, as Saddler claims, that Victoria faces “an imminent fuel crisis on all fronts”. We said we would experience an oil crisis, a gas crisis and a coal crisis, in that order, if present growth trends continued. We believe that events are beginning to prove us right. And we still hold that models for alternative low-energy capital cities with industry, city design and transport restructured to conserve energy are a better solution than short-term energy brinkmanship based on business-as-usual.
in favour of the company. For him, the government, and for the media, which lauded his report, the views of the opponents of the plant seemed to entail too much of a change of social priorities.

But one of the ideas that these opponents were trying to get across is that the desperate attempt to use nuclear fuel to prop up our industrial system is likely to result in social costs which citizens will find more and more obnoxious. Two books, recently arrived in Australia, concentrate on some of the political implications of the nuclear commitment.

Reading Breach's account of the public inquiry into the Windscale plant is a more daunting task than it should be, because of the clusters of initials which he liberally sprinkles throughout the text. There is no glossary to help the reader who forgets what the numerous collections of letters stand for. But the scene that Breach describes is familiar: A company which has been doing a profitable business in reprocessing nuclear fuel wants to expand its operations. It already has a very lucrative business in reprocessing nuclear fuel wants to expand its operations. It already has a very lucrative contract with Japan. The workers are in general in favour of this expansion. And so is the Labour Government. The expansion goes along with future plans for a commercial fast breeder reactor program. But because the company has been secretive about the safety of its operations, because local people are concerned, the Government is induced to hold a public inquiry.

In his account of these proceedings, Breach raises two main questions. The first is about public participation in policy-making. Those who participated in the Windscale Inquiry had time to devote to their cause and enough money to hire lawyers. How can a public inquiry be truly public? Can decisions about momentous matters like energy policy be made democratically? Breach's answer is that this is possible but not likely under present conditions: "The Windscale inquiry was regarded by a majority in both the Government and in Parliament as a horrific concession; to contemplate an exercise which would take perhaps six or seven times as long, consume sizeable amounts of public money, and be designed virtually to dash contemporary official plans and objectives, is to dream."

The second is about the future of the anti-nuclear movement. Breach regards the Windscale inquiry...
as a demonstration of the political impotence of the environmental lobby. Anti-nuclear activists may have good arguments, and they may have considerable public support. But they have no influence in the major political parties, no voice in Parliament, no significant support in the unions, and can therefore be disregarded by those who make the decisions. Breach does not seem to be hopeful that this will change. "The politics of nuclear power and reprocessing will increasingly be those of disillusion, anger, frustration and mistrust. We shall all be the losers."

In a country where the nuclear industry established itself early and the movement against it only recently got underway, this is an understandable point of view. But it is a parochial view nevertheless. It fails to take into account the political influence which anti-nuclear movements elsewhere have achieved. In any case, Windscale has proved to be a launching ground for a movement which will find its own ways of becoming politically significant.

When Scargill, representative of the Yorkshire coal miners, appeared at the Inquiry to argue against Windscale, he was accused by the British Nuclear Fuels' workers of betraying the labour cause. In particular, these workers insisted that the safety of their plant compared favourably to the safety record of coal mines. Breach suggests, however, that the employees do have fears about their work and suspicions about management secrecy, though they were reluctant to express their criticisms at the Inquiry. Workers in the nuclear industry, in fact, have a greater than usual problem in dealing with safety issues. A new regulation excuses employers from giving safety representatives of unions "any information the disclosure of which would be against the interests of national security".

The workers at the La Hague nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in France, who took Robert Jungk into their confidence, cynically describe themselves as "radiation fodder". These permanent employees have to worry constantly about the threat of contamination. But the casual workers, which the plant increasingly relies on are even less well protected. "Nobody asks whether they might previously have been employed at other nuclear installations and exposed to radiation there. It is simply assumed that they have not, with the result that they are usually given the most dangerous work straight away. These men are the mercenaries or the Lumpenproletariat of the atomic industry who may be asked to do anything."

In 1976 the workers at La Hague went on strike. However, a reprocessing plant, like other nuclear installations, can't simply be shut down, and eventually when the whole community was in danger, the key workers realised that they had to go back. The strike collapsed. "In the nuclear industry the right to strike has its limitations."

So, too, does the right of dissent. The nuclear industry and the governments that support it increasingly identify opposition as subversion; they carefully screen and watch their employees, keep their operations secret, demand absolute loyalty from scientific workers, and use underhand and even criminal methods to silence those who rebel. Some of Jungk's informers were afraid to give their names for fear of retaliation.

The idea that the nuclear state will result in loss of civil liberties and the undermining of democratic institutions is not new. But Jungk contends that the repressive measures of the nuclear state already exist, at least in embryo, in the countries involved in the use or supply of nuclear materials. "The totalitarian technocratic future has already begun. Chances of preventing it still exist but time is short." Jungk provides a detailed account of methods of surveillance and social control which are already used or could be used in existing nuclear states.

He suggests that the nuclear industry is in fact being pushed by those who want an authoritarian state. "Is it surprising if we begin to ask ourselves whether it is not these repressive and harshly authoritarian aspects of the nuclear industry that make it so attractive to some people and some interest groups, even though the prospects of profit from this new source of energy have grown so doubtful?"

Though this is an over simple account of the forces behind nuclear power, Jungk does have evidence suggesting that in Germany nazis and their sympathisers find the nuclear state especially congenial.

The hope for the future lies in the anti-nuclear movement. Jungk's picture of this movement is similar to, though more optimistic than Breach's: a collection of sincere idealists who stand alone—outside politics as this is usually understood. The purity of this movement is contrasted with conventional political organisations which are all part of the nuclear state. But this is not an accurate or helpful picture of the situation. It does not account for the effect that the anti-nuclear position is beginning to have on political parties and unions. It is in fact only through alliances with other progressive groups that the anti-nuclear movement will have a chance of affecting the future. Neither Jungk nor Breach discuss the possibility for such united action, but their books do contribute to the widening of the debate around nuclear power and uranium mining. Those who think that the nuclear issue is just about the danger of radioactive pollution should be especially encouraged to read these books.

Janna L. Thompson.

The relationship between health and work has only recently become a focus of concern and organisation for some sections of the labour movement. Over the past 10 years there have been numerous books written for public consideration on this relationship.

However, the vast majority have been written by investigative journalists who have focused on one industrial hazard, and shown the industry cover-ups and the state complacency.

*Death on the Job* is different. It is an historical analysis of workplace health and safety. It analyses past experiences in the labor movement and discusses possible strategies for the future.

**Why Work Kills**

Understanding the historical development of a 'system' of dealing with labor demands is essential in the process of forming worker strategies to change that 'system'.

Monopoly capital in the US was instrumental in developing the present US Workers Compensation system, as well as the Industrial Medical apparatus, in response to labor demands earlier this century.

As such, the institutions set up continue to serve the interests of the industrialists. *Death on the Job* details this development and shows how the politico-economic conditions of the time determined this development.

Daniel Berman discusses the inadequacies of the US Compensation system, some of the key worker struggles of the day, the attitudes of unions and workers, and how all these influenced the development of the present system which continues to allow workers to be killed and incapacitated.

It wasn't till 1969 that a new social movement focusing on occupational health and safety, developed. This political movement resulted in the Occupational Safety and Health Act being passed. Berman discusses the inadequacies, and the more general problem of workers relying on capitalist laws to protect their interests and produce social change.

**The Official Body Count**

Statistics offer some guide to the extent of a problem. Official casualty figures of industry cannot be trusted to be accurate, any more than US Viet Nam War casualty figures could be.

*Death on the Job* details the inadequacies of the present mechanism for counting work-related deaths and injuries. The collection of such statistics rests with management and a reporting system which is not enforced. Statistics of occupational disease are even more inadequate, and to a great extent, not even collected. The passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act in the early 1970s has improved the situation, but rates are still grossly understated.

**How Cheap is Life?**

Daniel Berman looks at the public and private input into worker health and safety, both from the viewpoint of compensation payments and of preventive programs. It is no surprise that industry has put more time and money into opposing government regulations for a safe workplace (not to mention countering unionisation of workers), than they have put into attempts to reduce the toll, by cleaning up the workplace.

The real burden of work-related injury and disease is borne by the injured workers and their families, and the community; not by the unsafe industry. Their profits are protected. More than this, injured workers are harassed by insurance company agents until the stress of making a claim becomes intolerable. The resultant 'compensation neurosis' is then used by the insurance companies to argue that the worker is 'imagining' the incapacity or, worse, malingering.

Occupational disease, as opposed to injury, is, at times, impossible to get any compensation for. It is largely unrecognised, if not medically, then certainly by the existing compo apparatus.

The reality, of course, is that compensation premiums do very little in preventing disease and injury by providing an incentive to improve working conditions. The historical reality is that this has just not happened, even after more than 70 years.

**The Compensation-Safety Apparatus**

The role of industry-funded safety organisations is, of course, one of protecting industry, whilst appearing to be a neutral party. Organisations like the National Safety Council have a long history of opposing any compulsion in legislative controls. They have argued that this area is one of apolitical humanitarianism, and problems should be solved by mutual co-operation between workers and management.

The resources of these industry-backed organisations are extensive. They are powerful lobbyists for industry. Recently some of these bodies have sought to have representatives of labor on committees, etc. It has been admitted that
this is to increase the legitimacy of the organisation as a neutral body.

Health and safety standards, until the Occupational Safety and Health Act, were set by the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH). These standards had consistently been set at a level which will continue to harm exposed workers. Standards, before the Occupational Safety and Health Act, were only voluntary and very few factories actually complied. This situation still persists in Australia.

Industry has had an influence on these standards, arguing that they could not afford to implement more stringent standards. They have also influenced it through industry-sponsored research. Some of this research has had blatant flaws in methodology, and their conclusions have frequently denied a major problem.

The Occupational Safety and Health Act has proved ineffective in setting safer standards — particularly in regard to carcinogens (cancer-causing substance), teratogens (foetus-damaging substances) and mutagens (mutation-causing substances). This is partly due to the Occupational Health and Safety Act's reluctance to take on industry, and partly due to industry opposition. Legal battles have ensued over many standards that the Occupational Safety and Health Act has set. Organised labor is now pushing the Occupational Safety and Health Act and mounting their own legal challenges.

Daniel Berman uses the asbestos industry as an example of how industry can hide information, through poor research, documenting false information, and continuing to expose workers to great risks.

He illustrates how the asbestos industry is not an isolated example by looking at Berylium, Diatomaceous Earth, PCBs, and Cotton Dust, where similar cover ups have occurred.

The role of the professionals has been one of conservatism and often siding directly with industry. Work as a factor in causing ill-health is not discussed in medical school, and occupational physicians are almost exclusively employed by industry and government agencies. They have done little in pushing for preventive practices, and have shown little understanding of working conditions when confronted with injured or ill workers.

Industrial hygienists work predominantly for government agencies. They are subjected to politico-economic pressures when making judgements about unsafe workplaces. They have little independence when carrying out their functions.

Similarly, other professional groupings have served the interests of industry, if not actively, then through inaction and conservatism.

Unions and workers have few rights in regard to work-related ill-health. Industry keeps medical records secret, even from the worker, whose record it is. Until the Occupational Safety and Health Act, workers had no right to accompany inspectors around the workplace, or to receive factory inspectors' reports.

Workers still do not have the right to know exactly what they work with, and what hazards there may be.

Since 1969 campaigns have been developed by a coalition of workers and technically trained activists around legislation issues, the right to know, and worker education and organisation.

The Workers and the Unions

Berman discusses the development of worker action, and union involvement in health and safety questions.

Some unions, such as the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW), have developed strong and active health and safety departments. The best of these work very closely with rank and file committees and technical activists in different regions.

Others have done surprisingly little in developing any rank and file organisation or in attacking the health and safety problems of their members.

A number of unions, such as OCAW, have attacked the problem on a number of different levels — from shopfloor organisation to lobbying and challenging the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

The Building and Construction Trades, on the other hand, have discouraged workers from using the Occupational Safety and Health Act regulations or inspectors, except as a last resort. Union officials encourage workers to tolerate unsafe conditions whilst sometimes lengthy negotiations take place.

Unfortunately, only a relatively small percentage of US workers are unionised at all.

The Future Politics of Working Conditions

Berman points out the increasing independence of monopoly capital from government intervention or worker pressure, by their ability to transfer the production process to countries with lower standards and poor organisation of workers.
IF IT WASN'T FOR YOUR HEALTH AND WELFARE I COULD MAKE A MUCH BIGGER PROFIT.

maybe there is a health hazard in this plant...
This international organisation of monopoly capital can only be effectively countered by international co-operation and co-ordination of workers' organisation and action.

New technologies have brought new hazards, and particularly heightened the hazards of alienation.

Health and safety questions are often attacked by focussing on specific hazards like noise or asbestos. This can tend to imply that if all machines were guarded and muffled, and all poisons eliminated, then workers would be healthy. This, of course, is quite untrue. The mere stress of working in a workplace designed to maximise profit, where decisions are made by the few beneficiaries of this profit, produces ill-health. Insecurity about employment with the introduction of new labor-saving technologies; speed-ups to increase productivity; and harassment by an unfriendly boss, all add up to ill-health through stress, and produce tension in relationships outside the workplace.

The roots of stress are embedded in the capitalist mode of production, and the elimination of the more obvious hazards will not solve the problem.

Tasks of the Future

Berman discusses the need for a constructive health and safety movement to work with unions and rank and file workers. He suggests a number of strategies requiring action in the short term:

1. Workers on the shopfloor need their own health and safety committees, elected from and responsible to the shopfloor.
2. The development of regional occupational safety and health committees.
3. Developing the campaign around the workers' 'right to know' chemical names and hazards of the substances they work with.
4. Fight to end the 'ghettoization' of occupational medicine. Health facilities need to be controlled by workers and the community in co-operation with health workers.
5. Call for international standards in health and safety to head off monopoly capital's attempts to move to less regulated areas.
6. Demand for more funds for direct training of workers.
7. Workers need to be involved with the planning of new industry so that health and safety is considered at an early stage.

Clearly, workers' health will only be given its deserved priority when workers have won control of the workplace. Many of the above strategies are steps towards this.

The Australian Situation

In Australia we suffer under a system very similar to the pre-Occupational Safety and Health Act situation in the US.

There are very few regulations protecting workers, and those there are, are not enforced.

The occupational medicine area is a backwater of conservatism.

Injured workers are torn between insurance companies, doctors and lawyers in their attempt to gain inadequate compensation payments.

However, it would be useful to look at the situation in Australia, with some historical perspective, in a similar way that Berman has done for the US.

I believe that much of what Berman describes is quite applicable to the Australian situation, if not to specifics, then in principle.

In Australia, the Occupational Health and Safety Movement is very embryonic and small. We have not yet appreciated all the details of how the system works. Until we have more experience of this, we need to be very cautious in accepting any of the 'conventional wisdom' regarding workers' health.

— Ben Bartlett
The China Syndrome. Director: James Bridges; Producer: Michael Douglas.

China Syndrome arrives much ballyhooed, as an enthralling political thriller, overflowing with gripping action, desperate circumstances, and stunning performances. The publicity for the picture emphasizes its entertainment value, and in the United States, the stars — Jane Fonda, Jack Lemmon, and Michael Rogers — carefully downplayed the film's highly political theme. ALR readers who heard Dale Bridenbaugh, the ex-General Electric employee, on his lecture tour of Australia some time ago, will be familiar with the film's focus: an accident at a nuclear reactor, the discovery of wholesale breaches of the safety regulation procedures, and a ruthless attempt at cover-up by the nuclear energy company.

During the film's initial release in America, the nuclear energy industry campaigned vigorously against it — until the events at the Three Mile Island reactor near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, gave it some concrete, rather than fictional, bad publicity to deal with. So as China Syndrome comes to us, it has not only a prophetic quality, but also a militant quality, as a film under siege from Big Business, under attack by corporate interests keen to quash the film's "truth". Given this context, it is not surprising that the China Syndrome has been hailed by anti-uranium, and anti-nuclear energy groups, environmentalists, and those with a comprehensive critique of corporate strategies which put profit before people. You will almost certainly regard the China Syndrome as a weapon in the struggle against the Forces of Darkness.

In this review, I want to sound a note of caution. It is true that the film graphically portrays Big Business baddies, and the ruthlessness of corporate strategies which put profit before people. It is true that it also graphically illustrates the flaws in nuclear technology, flaws inescapably linked to the political economics of the industry. And it is the case that it is heavily critical of governmental regulatory and licensing agencies, portraying them as perfunctorily ineffective and/or compromised. You will almost certainly walk out of this movie uneasy about the safety of nuclear reactors. You will almost certainly regard any claims by the nuclear energy industry to self-regulation as a sick joke, and you will view with scepticism the claim of the technology to be foolproof and "fail-safe".

Now, given the film's hey-hold-on-there input into a debate which has been dominated by the nuclear energy "realists" who proclaim the safety of this energy source, why have any reservations, especially when Three Mile Island gives credence to the film's "message."

Well, the film's message, in many ways, is less about the need to scrutinise the capitalist context of the nuclear energy industry than about the strength of the democratic system to expose the baddies and, implicitly to rectify any errors which might have crept in. The film celebrates the capacity of ordinary people, no matter how squeezed and trapped in corporate structures, to let their consciences be their guide, to feel civic responsibility and, when the crunch comes, to manifest that responsibility and to tell the truth. Most particularly, China Syndrome is about the capacity of the media — in this case, television — despite its own monopoly corporate nature, to be the voice of the people, to be the guardians of fair play, democracy, truth and liberty. The "hero" of China Syndrome turns out to be The Power of the Media, and the film explicitly devalues citizens' organisations, the anti-uranium lobby, etc., portraying their public protests as weird and irrelevant.

Some of you may remember Watergate, that mammoth indictment of American democracy which, over the intervening years, has undergone an amazing transformation in people's minds. Watergate is no longer seen as the product of an economic distortion which is systemic, but is rather viewed as an aberration, attributable in large measure to the particularly paranoid nature of Richard Nixon's personality, and his personal abuse of presidential power. And the proof that nothing is actually amiss with American democracy — despite Watergate's wholesale involvement of elected officials, agencies of repression, etc., etc., — lies in the capacity of two unknown and inexperienced journalists (Woodward and Bernstein) to tell the truth, to expose the whole maggotty mess. Out of the ruins, out of the incontrovertible evidence that American democracy is systematically distorted by economic power and privilege rises, new and shining, American Democracy cleansed by freedom of the press.

China Syndrome is simply a nuclear Watergate, and the plot essentially the same as in All the President's Men. Jane Fonda is a reporter for a Los Angeles television station and normally covers those way-out stories with which LA is wonderfully replete: the doctor who makes house calls to ailing fish, tiger's birthday parties, and the like. She wants to break onto "hard" news, but the sexist station manager wants to keep her in her human interest, female role.

While doing a series on energy sources in Southern California, she and her cameraman are present and surreptitiously film an accident at a nuclear energy plant. They rush back with their scoop to the TV station, which cautiously refuses to run it on the 6:00 news, preferring to check with the energy company first. The company's PR man, a plausible cross between Jimmy Carter and Uriah Heep, denies the "accident" and the station refuses to run the film. Fonda's free-lance cameraman, narked at this insult to his professional competence and at the station's gutless kowtowing to corporate power, shows the film to ex-nuclear industry experts. These experts, now part
of the anti-nuke lobby, confirm that an “accident” happened, although meltdown was avoided.

Meanwhile, although the incident is examined by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the energy company gets a clean bill of health — vital for its application for the licensing of a new reactor — the company’s professional expert on-duty at the time of the accident/incident (Jack Lemmon) has nagging doubts. He discovers that the company which built the plant falsified its safety inspection reports. There may be serious faults in vital welds; the crucial water coolant might be lost; lose the coolant and...melt-down. The incredibly hot core could melt through to China — the China Syndrome — although the most likely result, once the core struck the earth’s water table, would be the emission of great clouds of radioactivity which would spread over hundreds of miles. Lemmon shows the falsified inspection documents to his plant supervisor but the latter, under heavy pressure from the energy company’s Board to get the plant economically viable again, orders Lemmon to disregard his suspicions and to bring the plant “on-line” after its temporary shutdown.

Lemmon’s conscience, his duty as a professional, leads him to contact Fonda. They try to get the documents to the Licensing hearing, as evidence against the opening of the new plant, but industry heavies in a Mafia-style operation “rub out” the evidence. Recognising both the irresponsible corporate conspiracy of silence and the dangers in the plant, Lemmon takes over the control room to prevent the overloading of the plant’s system. He also wants to go on television to proclaim his findings and their implications. The corporate management want to prevent this at all costs and call in a police SWAT squad to break into the control room and also attempt to engineer a “fault” so that Lemmon will be too busy to tell his tale.

The finish is thrilling. Can the TV cameras get to the plant in time to interview this rebel who puts his professional competence and public responsibility before company loyalty? Well, they do — and Lemmon’s anxieties about the plant’s safety have been more than vindicated: there is almost a second meltdown. But there also has been a shoot-out. Lemmon is dead, and the film footage taken of him, nervous and distraught in the control room, make him look like a fanatic, a madman. Our hearts sink — the “image” is all wrong, the truth will not be believed. Already the smooth energy company PR man is rewriting the event as a personnel problem — an employee having a nervous breakdown rather than a nuclear plant almost having a meltdown. But Fonda, the crusading journalist, doesn’t give up. She finds a 25-year company man and friend of Lemmon who throws company loyalty to the winds and, inspired by loyalty to his dead friend, backs up Lemmon’s story and tells the Truth, captured “live” on TV. Phew! Wasn’t that a close one?

Yup, a narrow squeak. But the ordinary, common man can’t be beaten for sheer pluck. Nor can professionalism, in industry or in journalism. Friendship, conscience, individual professionalism and a free media comprise a democratic team which can confound the most malevolent and accomplished of big business corporate strategies.

So the new Hollywood, unafraid of tackling sensitive political issues, looks a lot like the old Hollywood. Admittedly in China Syndrome nuclear energy corporatism certainly looks dangerous and irresponsible. But don’t worry, the democratic virtues of the common man and investigative reporting will protect us. What need have we of organised resistance? After all, Hollywood would never let the bad guys win, would they?

— Kathie Boehringer

* Jane Fonda as television reporter

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