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Aboriginal Rights and the ALP Uranium Decision

Vince Forrester, Northern Territory Chairperson of the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC), has called on the ALP to ensure that the rights and wellbeing of Aboriginal people are considered when the ALP national conference decides on its uranium platform. He spoke at a forum organised by the Darwin Trades and Labor Council, on behalf of the NAC, to coincide with the NT ALP conference.

Mr. Forrester said that the NT branch of the NAC was drafting a policy on uranium mining and the nuclear fuel cycle which would be considered by National Aboriginal bodies for presentation to the ALP national conference in July.

Below we reprint excerpts from Vince Forrester's speech.

I follow the culture of my people. We belong to the land, we are the caretakers of the land. Our lifetime on this earth is only a blink in time, so our lifetime is spent protecting and caring for this land for future generations.

It is our land which Australia rips apart to extract the poisonous yellowcake, and it is on our land where you dump the polluted tailings.

It is on Aboriginal land that the British, with support from the Australian government of the time, exploded deadly nuclear weapons, with no regard for our people, their land or their future. And it is on Aboriginal land that the present Labor government is examining the possibility of dumping deadly radioactive waste in untried synthetic rock.

Our people in Arnhem Land, and right throughout Australia are not sufficiently informed about the extent of damages occurring from uranium mining. Nor do we know the extent to which they are being exposed to radiation in the atmosphere.

Nor do we know the extent of contamination already present in the food chain.

The monitoring scientists in the West Arnhem uranium province have made no attempt to interpret their findings to affected Aboriginal people.

The Fox Report into the Ranger Inquiry said that a certain amount of environmental impact into the area was to be expected. The impact is now being fully realised. There are scores of scientists monitoring and making recommendations of what is the best way of dealing with the problem of the Ranger tailings.

Fox also recommended that all contaminated waters should be kept on the site. Both Ranger and Narbalek are looking at ways to get rid of the waste waters.

The problem the mining companies have now is to find an acceptable impact. The local Aboriginal community has no involvement in this and must depend on the government or on statutory bodies dependent on royalties from uranium mining. This dependency, I believe, is a form of ransom.

White Australia says to the underserviced, fledgling outstation movement “You can have money for Toyotas, for bores, to help you set up” but if mining stops, the money stops too. We must break this dependency on mining activity for money for essential services.

It is morally bankrupt and no Aboriginal community should be put in the position of deciding on development that is tied to the uranium industry. Until all Aboriginal service needs are met by direct grants, from federal Treasury, our people have little choice in this matter.

No real substantial study has been done on the radiation levels in Aboriginal people’s diets in the uranium regions. We can only guess what amount of radiation they have in their bodies or in the food chain.

Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land and in Aboriginal Australia are concerned about radioactivity safeguards. Aboriginal anxiety has been growing ever since the spillage at Narbalek which was not reported immediately to the community or with factual details.

Without this information, how are we to make a proper decision. It is not correct to say that any Aboriginal community has made a real decision on uranium mining until all the facts are presented to all of our people affected, and they must be presented in Aboriginal languages in a manner that has meaning to our people.

We, the Aboriginal people of Central and South Australia have had the frightening experience as recently as 20 years ago of the Dreamtime Snake awakening and shaking his tail. This brought destruction to the land and its caretakers.

The Pitjantjatjara Council has called for a Royal Commission into the circumstances surrounding the nuclear tests in South Australia in the 1950s and 60s. Representatives of the council will be leaving for London next week to lobby Margaret Thatcher over the issue. Leading the delegation is Yami Lester who lost his sight after the fallout cloud from the first Emu test descended on him and his people.

The Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjara people believe that many of the deaths around this time were related to the fallout from the bombs. Clouds of fallout passed over and around them. No one told them about the tests at the time, and only now, after a barrage of leaks and statements is the Australian government considering holding a full inquiry into the matter. But the full extent of cancers and other illnesses being suffered by my people may never be known.

The health of our people throughout Aboriginal Australia is already so poor that it cannot take any more damage. The continuing 200 years of exploitation of our lands and our existence must stop.

We wish to remind the Australian Labor Party of its election policy commitment to Aboriginal people on uranium mining. This policy stated that: “The provision of Australian uranium to the world nuclear fuel cycle creates problems relevant to Australian sovereignty, the environment, the economic welfare of our people, and the rights and wellbeing of the Aboriginal people.”

We demand that our rights and wellbeing are recognised. All of our people need to be fully and equally informed of the problems of mining uranium on our lands. Only then will we be in a position to exercise our right of veto over mining of any kind.

Finally, I would like to say that some of the ideas I’ve touched on tonight are being drafted into a policy on uranium mining and the
whole nuclear cycle by the Northern Territory branch of the National Aboriginal Conference. This policy will be considered by national Aboriginal bodies for presentation to the Labor Party at its national conference in Canberra next month.

I hope that ALP delegates here tonight are genuine in their commitment to self-determination for our people. If you are, you have a responsibility to consider our concerns when you decide on your uranium platform over the weekend.

Industry Development Policy

Union leaders of the left and right have set out to mobilise Australia’s 350,000 metal workers in a campaign to change the Hawke government’s industry policy.

All 13 metal unions will call on their members to attend stopwork rallies to support a plan aimed at rescuing the country’s engineering base.

The metal unions’ chief spokesperson, Laurie Carmichael of the Amalgamated Metals, Foundry and Shipwrights Union (AMFSU) says the influence of unions and employers on tripartite advisory councils has been undermined by “theorising free traders in the bureaucracy and academia”.

seeks a five percent cut in imports to be a chived through a combination of the many non-tariff protection devices in common use overseas.

This would create 84,000 factory jobs in three years and a further 270,000 jobs indirectly, according to a computer study commissioned by the unions.

Linked to the protection scheme are proposals to modernise industry and promote exports. These would involve the use of “key policy instruments available to the government” including:

- investment incentives and depreciation allowances;
- development finance, plus assistance to research and develop technology;
- new government purchasing practices and new foreign aid arrangements;
- full use of “offset” credits;
- marketing assistance and removal of franchise restrictions on exports.

The unions suggest that such initiatives be tied to investment agreements to bring unions, employers and the government into a process aimed at modernising manufacturing industry.

The alternative, they say, is a continuing loss of jobs and eventual destruction of heavy engineering. About 80 percent of Australia’s imports are manufactured goods. If this imbalance is not corrected the worsening trade deficit will further restrict the government’s ability to pay for the social welfare measures promised under the prices and incomes accord.

The extent of the crisis has produced rare unanimity among the metal unions. All have committed themselves to the industry plan which has won broad support from the ACTU and employers under the Metal Trades Industries Association.

The government has yet to respond to the plan which won’t be fully released until it is presented to the Prime Minister. Sections of the government — in particular the Department of Trade — are likely to support it. But the Department of Industry and Commerce under Senator John Button is almost certain to strongly oppose any move toward greater protection for manufacturing.

Many unions hold Senator Button and his advisers responsible for the government’s over-reliance on “market forces” to sort out the mess manufacturing is in. They believe the minister is deliberately holding them and employers at arm’s length when deciding policy affecting manufacturing.

Senator Button seems reluctant to debate the merits of the union proposals. His only response to the release of the plan was to label it a ploy by AMFSU officials to assist their chances of re-election. For this the minister was roundly condemned by rightwing leaders of the Federated Ironworkers Association who stressed they were at one with the AMFSU in wanting to change the government’s attitude to the depressed metal industry.

Correction

The front cover of the last edition of Australian Left Review featured a painting by Noel Counihan, titled Self portrait. Unfortunately the painting was reversed in the reproduction so that what you saw was a mirror image of the original. We apologise to Noel for this misrepresentation of his work. The painting is reprinted below, the right way around.

Policing

The Alternative Criminology Journal, Faculty of Law, University of NSW, PO Box 1, Kensington, NSW 2033. In the next edition of ALR we will publish a full review of the book.
This paper is based on a paper presented at the Combined Unions’ Conference at La Trobe University in February this year by Peter Robson. In it, he evaluates the ACTU/ALP Prices and Incomes Accord with reference to its social welfare aspects and suggests ways in which the labour movement can move forward on the basis of the Accord.

Over a year ago, the Labor Party and the ACTU reached agreement on the Statement of Accord. Very shortly thereafter in March 1983 the Labor Party swept to a significant electoral victory. It is customary to review the achievements of political parties at approximately this stage of their administration. This article will evaluate the ACTU/ALP Prices and Incomes Accord with reference to its social welfare aspects and attempt to suggest ways in which the labour movement can move forward on the basis of that Accord.

The Prices and Incomes Accord was presented to the labour movement as a document which “sets out the details of policies which will be implemented when a Labor Government is in office” (Statement of Accord, page 3). This is an important base measure in any evaluation.

Turning to the specific elements of the Prices and Incomes Accord I note on page 4 of the document that it has the following features:

1. The policies should aim to ensure that living standards of wage and salary earners and non-income earning sectors of the population requiring protection are maintained and through time increased with movements in national productivity.

2. Government policy should be applied to prices and all incomes groups, rather than, as has often been the case, to wages alone.

3. The policies should be designed to bring about an equitable and clearly discernible redistribution of income. There must be continuous consultation and co-operation between the parties involved. Government policy at all levels should be accommodating and supporting.

(All these features are quoted directly from the Prices and Incomes Accord document.)

Over and above these general features of policy, the following policy details were agreed. First, a pricing authority was to be established. The existing tax legislation was to be applied directly to reduce speculation and tax avoidance and to provide a disincentive to such activities. Government powers were to be considerably extended through the Financial Corporations Act with a view to regulating the financial sector to prevent it acting as a constraint on the Labor government’s policies. A health insurance scheme was to be introduced. The taxation system was to be reformed and restructured to ease the tax burden on low and middle income earners, to ensure that companies pay their fair share of tax on income earned in Australia and overseas and generally to achieve a better system to the benefit of low income earners and those below the poverty line.

Over and above these specific proposals, the Accord document contained suggestions on industrial relations policy, industry development policy and technical change, planning processes, protection and a host of other important areas of policy. If this is what the trade unions bargained for, what has been achieved so far, and how do the unions.go about achieving the outstanding objectives?

In this paper I have concentrated mainly on social welfare elements in my evaluation of what we have got so far from the Accord. It is worth indicating from the outset that far too many people at the
moment are conveniently overlooking the fact that the best form of social welfare in the vast majority of cases is the provision of a job! The provision of many social welfare benefits to people who are out of work or who have, as yet, been unable to find a job, is like addressing the symptoms of an illness. It is much more important that we attack the cause of that illness and eliminate it. Many of us here accepted the limiting aspects of the Accord on the basis that it would be the vehicle for reducing unemployment. Unemployment must be our major target and the creation of jobs our principal and uncompromising goal.

In the following, I list the principal promises of the social welfare aspects of the Prices and Incomes Accord and comment on the government’s performance so far. In this specific area, the checklist of what we bargained for and what we have actually got makes fairly impressive reading.

Taking the “social welfare” aspects of the Prices and Incomes Accord. I examine the agreed reforms and compare them with the actual government performance. I begin with migration. Importantly, the employment nomination and working holiday schemes have been approximately halved and total migration is being held to a ceiling of between 80,000 and 90,000 individuals per year. Skilled labour intake has also been significantly reduced. In the main, the government has lived up to its commitments.

On the much more important issue of social security, the Accord promised increased unemployment benefits, the restoration of pensions to 25 percent of average male earnings, and improvement in child care, family income supplements, and the rent subsidy. Unemployment benefits have been increased and pensions have been indexed. Total government spending on social security programs has been increased, although it should be borne in mind that these increases are from the relatively low base of the Fraser years.

On occupational health and safety, the commitment in the Accord to the establishment of a National Health and Safety Commission, with an associated enforcement agency, has been honoured. The National Occupational Health and Safety Commission, and its enforcement division, have been announced (the environmental contaminants authority has also been announced). However, establishing such bodies does not constitute a fulfilment of the commitments in the Accord. While accepting the notion that the establishment of bureaucratic mechanisms for policing occupational health and safety, or other social welfare provisions for that matter, takes time, the government’s performance in this area will require monitoring and enforcing. In the Australian government sector a number of occupational health and safety agreements have been established consistent with the provisions of the Accord. Similar demands have been placed on Telecom, Australia’s largest employer. Union action has brought about these changes.

In education, the government has moved some way towards the undertaking of the Prices and Incomes Accord.

Medicare has been established and is now operating. This is, by any measure, one of the most outstanding achievements of the government. The forces opposing its continued operation are great. The task ahead for the trade union movement is to:

- link together Medicare and the Accord;
- ensure that our members understand that linkage and that Medicare was introduced as a result of trade union demand;
- ensure that it is understood that universal health care insurance is now the right of workers; and
- that the forces opposing its retention are great and there may be a need for future action to maintain a universal health insurance system.

Before moving on to a consideration of the other more direct areas of the Prices and Incomes Accord, and a review of the government’s performance in these areas, it is important to point out that, whereas the issues addressed above appear to be central to the question of social welfare, the other aspects of the Accord, namely prices, wages, non-wage incomes, taxation, have all social welfare dimensions. The good performances in the areas of
The best form of social welfare is the provision of a job! Right to Work Campaign at May Day, Sydney, 1977.

migration, social security, and health should not be considered to be the sole criteria on which we measure the fulfilment of the "social welfare aspects of the Accord".

Taking the other aspects of the Accord in turn, on prices we were promised a pricing authority (the Prices Surveillance Authority) which would ensure that large corporations and public authorities did not make profits "beyond levels necessary for the maintenance and expansion of the enterprises". Although the Prices Surveillance Authority has been established, it is still to be tested. Almost one year after the government assumed office, notwithstanding the establishment of the authority, there is no price control currently operating.

The test of the government's commitment to the wages elements of the Accord for many Australian public service unions will be the government's support for establishing an "equitable base" from which indexation can proceed. Wages of Australian public sector workers were depressed and they were significantly disadvantaged in terms of their positions in the white collar wage "league table" by the successive actions of the Fraser government. While this government has acted admirably to repeal the Fraser government's repressive industrial legislation, Australian government workers will most test the Accord by the government fulfilling its commitment to wage justice for its employees.

Finally, the Advisory Committee on Prices and Incomes (ACPI) has been set up as a vehicle through which the trade union movement can contribute to the monitoring and assessment of the operation of the Accord. However, to date, the ACPI secretariat has the resources of two people in Canberra, on a full-time basis. Its ability to provide the trade union movement with an appropriate vehicle for monitoring the Accord is virtually non-existent. I will return to this point later.

On the non-wages incomes front, the Accord promised us an effective authority to influence the level of these incomes, and promised that "a substantial array of indirect measures is available, the use of which could considerably influence the level of these incomes and ensure that they receive consistent treatment with other workers". To date, it appears that the so-called "substantial array of indirect measures" has amounted to exhortations to exercise restraint in the area of non-wages incomes. In the absence of suitable monitoring of these professional groups and corporations (and the ACPI secretariat is currently unable to provide this service) the union movement will remain unaware of the extent to which companies and professional groups are adhering to the wage guidelines.

If the doctors are anything to go by, one can only conclude that the non-wage incomes aspect of the Accord, like the Prices Surveillance Authority, exists on paper only and, from the point of view of Australian workers, the impact of restraint on non-wage income groups has been negligible or non-existent. (It is interesting to note that the recent increase in conveyancing fees by the NSW legal profession was a massive 41 percent. They calculated this increase on the basis of average weekly earnings movement since 1977. In effect, they became judge, jury and prosecution on their own "anomalies hearing" and obviously awarded themselves the maximum increases.)
On the taxation front, the reduction in income tax scales to reduce the burden on lower and middle income earners and the redistributive elements of tax reform promised in the Accord have so far not materialised. Income tax scales are so far unchanged, sales and excise taxes have been increased, and the tax avoidance legislation has been blocked by the Senate.

Notwithstanding the progressive implementation of many of the social welfare aspects of the Accord, the general conclusion one would reach is that although the trade union movement has been required by the government and by the conciliation and arbitration courts to stick to the letter of the Accord, the same cannot be said of other significant groups in the economy, such as the capitalists and the professions. While many of us have had to appear in the commission to swear an oath of allegiance to the Accord at the first National Wage Case and, in some cases, were required to give our commitment to indexation and no further claims for two years, in writing, these other significant groups who are benefiting from our restraint are going about their business in their usual self-interested manner. The only contribution so far to the improvement of the Australian economy and to the up-hill struggle to restore full employment in Australia has come from wage and salary earners.

What, then, are the major issues requiring renegotiation to provide the basis for a realistic co-operative effort between the union movement and a Labor government which will create jobs and revitalise the economy?

1. Monitoring the Provisions of the Accord

It is completely unacceptable that the process of monitoring the Accord should be undertaken on our behalf by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (see SMH, February 20, 1984). The ACTU policy calls on the executive to independently assess the achievements in respect to each element of the Accord. It also requires that the ACTU be afforded access to "independent research and assessment monitoring".

Given the imbalance in commitment to the Accord from various parts of the community and the lack of clear independent measures to assess the Accord, the trade union movement and the tertiary or service sector of the economy is at present badly misunderstood. It is a common fallacy, and a widely held one, that the public sector and the service sector are in some sense unproductive and that only by improving and restructuring the manufacturing sectors of Australian industry can the economy be "got back on its feet".

It is important to point out that I do believe that a significant restructuring and revitalisation of the manufacturing sector of the economy is a critically important component in our overall attempt to revitalise the Australian economy.

However, a simple look at the number of jobs which we require to generate over the next five to ten years, combined with an analysis of the development of modern manufacturing industries in the successful capitalist economies, indicates that even a fully refurbished manufacturing sector will not provide the number of jobs which the Australian economy requires. In a paper entitled "The Economy, the Accord and the Public Sector Unions", Nixon Apple indicated (in July 1983) that, even with a three percent average annual increase in aggregate demand over the period June 1984 to June 1988, we could not expect unemployment to fall at all. Indeed, given the projected growth in the labour force, a three

Restructuring of manufacturing is not the only way to get the economy "back on its feet". Expansion of the education sector, for example, can also create jobs.

percent average annual increase 1984 to 1988 in aggregate demand would still leave us with over 14 percent of the working population unemployed, that is, over 1,100,000 people on the dole. For the same time period, even a five percent average increase in aggregate demand would still leave us with a 7.2 percent unemployment rate in June 1988, or over 500,000 Australians without jobs. As Nixon Apple points out, these projections (using the econometric model of the Melbourne Institute) underestimate the size of the labour force and tend to underestimate the growth in employment required to reduce unemployment.
The proportion of households below the poverty line has increased over the last 15 years from 23% to 29%. Yet their share of household income has fallen. The "well-off" have increased from 12% of the total to 20%. Their share of total income has nearly doubled over the period, having moved from 25% of the total to 48%.
Using Nixon Apple's figures again, it can be shown, on the basis of the current distribution of employment between the public sector and the private sector, that in order to keep the number of unemployed in Australia from rising over the next five years, the private sector would need to create around 84,000 to 85,000 new jobs each year between May '83 and May '88. The total number of jobs required simply to keep unemployment from rising is thus substantial. The ability of the manufacturing sector to create this number of jobs is clearly open to question. Restructuring of the manufacturing industry and the introduction of new improved technology has tended to reduce the labour demands of industry rather than increase them. Even accepting the notion that new industries will be created, on a significant scale in some cases, it is clear that the ability of the manufacturing sector on its own to tackle the unemployment problem in Australia is severely limited.

The fact that the public sector and the tertiary or service sectors of the economy will be required to bear a very large proportion of the burden of job creation over the next ten years should come as no surprise. Even a casual examination of the successful capitalist economies in our major OECD competitors indicates that a large and thriving public and tertiary employment sector is a feature of advanced capitalist economies. The point which appears to be overlooked in the Australian debate so far is that public sector jobs and tertiary and service sector jobs are no less productive than manufacturing jobs. It is important to realise that these jobs can do as much to regenerate the economy, to reduce imports and expand exports and to increase the size of the "economic pie" in Australia as can manufacturing sector jobs.

The expansion of the education sector, for example, offers significant overseas earnings, as technicians, scientists, engineers, doctors and other professionals are trained in Australia from overseas countries. The flow-on from these projects, in terms of Australian products which are demanded by technicians, scientists and professionals trained in Australia, on the return to their own nations, is significant.

The public sector can enter the restructuring of industry as a successful participant. For example, the role which Telecom plays in maintaining an Australian electronics industry. However, on the whole, the purchasing power of the public sector is not aggressively used as a vehicle for restructuring or expanding the manufacturing sector. To this end, a second issue for inclusion into trade union demands when renegotiating the Accord is the requirement for growth of intervention of the public sector.

3. Increasing the Size of the "Economic Pie" Redistribution of Income

The principal problem which seems to arise regarding the growth of the public sector and the tertiary sector as the major source of new employment in the Australian economy is the notion that there is a fixed "cake" and that any expansion of the public sector will necessarily reduce the funds available for the restructuring of the important manufacturing sector of the economy. This simplistic and erroneous conception of the operation of the economy should be laid to rest once and for all. To begin with, we can look at where the money could come from to expand the public sector and restructure industry. Within the terms of the Prices and Incomes Accord as it already stands there is significant scope for improving our performance in these areas. Let us begin by considering the problem of tax reform.

The significant redistribution of income is an important plank in the Accord. So far it has not been addressed.

According to the Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at Melbourne University, a couple with two children now need a weekly income of $205 to live above the poverty line. For a single parent with one child, the figure is $140, and for a single person $110 (SMH, 14/12/83).

In December, it was reported that the poor in Australia are getting poorer and more numerous, and the rich are increasing and getting richer. This report, by IBIS Corporate Services of Melbourne, shows that "Australian households over the past fifteen years, have become increasingly polarised into rich and poor categories, at the expense of the middle ground". (Anne Lampe in SMH, 13/12/83).

The poverty line in this report is set at a similar level, and the proportion of households on or below has increased over the last 15 years from 23 percent to 29 percent. Yet, despite more poor, their share of total household income fell slightly.

The "well-off", defined in the IBIS report as those receiving the equivalent of $32,000 or more in current money values, have increased from 12 percent of the total, to 20 percent. And their share of total income increased.
income has nearly doubled over the period, having moved from 25 percent of the total to 48 percent. So, in broad terms, we now have the top twenty percent of the population receiving almost half the total income, and the bottom thirty percent living in poverty as they scratch for less than ten percent. These figures are before income tax, but Mr Ruthven of IBIS pointed out that, although income tax reduced the inequality, it was not by very much because of the prevalence of devices to minimise tax.

These findings are in line with previous studies. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows a similar trend of increasing polarisation over the last few years in particular, in relation to personal income, as distinct from household income. (ABS Income of Individuals, Table 2, 16/9/83)

It also shows the increase in the proportion of people whose main source of income is some form of welfare — usually government cash benefits. Over the last fifteen years this has grown from about a quarter to not quite a third. (ABS Income of Individuals 1981-2, 16/9/83 and Income Distribution 1968-9, 24.10.75.) The proportion of people in business for themselves has tripled; the proportion relying on property income — interest, rent, dividends, etc. — as a main source, has almost doubled; and the proportion on wages or salary is now less than half.

The gains in government revenue which could arise from the simple implementation of the elements of the Accord as it already stands should not be overlooked. The introduction of a wealth tax and capital gains tax, the proper administration of current income generating legislation and the immediate instigation of the foreshadowed wealth inquiry with trade union participation.

4. Other Economic Issues to be Raised

There are many other economic issues which would reduce the extent to which the burden of restructuring the Australian economy, and creating jobs, must be borne by the workers. For example, the control of finance and financial markets by the government has not yet been given serious consideration. All the planning agreements and industry councils in the world can be destabilised by the rapid and substantial movements of capital which free financial markets permit. For example, as recently pointed out by Professor E.L. Wheelwright (see A.I.R. 87, Autumn '84), the impending potential demise of Hong Kong as a major financial sector could lead to a flight of capital from Hong Kong on a scale which has scarcely ever been seen before. The significant holdings which Hong Kong based capitalists already have in Australia suggest that Australia would be a recipient of large amounts of this mobile finance capital, in the event of the demise of Hong Kong. The massive destabilisation in the Australian economy which would result from an inflow of such amounts of capital is quite frightening. The extent to which the dollar would revalue would completely destroy any chances of reducing import penetration and allowing our existing industries, and any new industries which we create, to grow and establish themselves internationally. This is but an example. The principal question which the government needs to address is the regulation of finance markets by the government in order to promote its principal objective which is the creation of jobs in Australia.

The fourth issue to be raised is the imposition of controls for the Australian finance market in order to promote a stable environment for the restructuring of Australian manufacturing industry.

5. Labor Market Planning

As part of the Accord the Labor government has established the Community Employment Program with an objective to create some 70,000 jobs in its first full year of operation. CEP follows on from the hastily conceived Wage Pause Program of the Fraser government, a program that suffered from significant administrative deficiencies and had insufficient regard as to whom the program was directed.

In considering CEP, my union has recognised the worthy attributes of the program — that its criteria were set to specifically "target" long-term unemployed, migrants, women and Aborigines, that projects were to be labour-intensive, and that the community and unions would have a greater role in its administration. We have also identified deficiencies in regard to the inability of projects to roll over for more than 12 months; little consideration being given to the training of persons employed; the lack of regional flexibility to assist geographic areas of greatest need; and the lack of shop floor union consultation.

The other, and more important, question about the CEP is, however, where it fits in regard to the government's labour force policy. At present, the government has retained the plethora of schemes that the Liberal government previously had in place, although a review of these is currently under way. This review, even though it excludes CEP, is an important one for the union movement as it is likely to set the direction for future labour force policy and programs. To this end it is
essential that the review recognises that labour force programs need to be tailored to meet the objectives of general industry policies that are developed by government in consultation with unions.

It is now more than 10 years since the Cochrane Committee recommendations were transformed into the first coherent labour force programs — the National Employment and Training System. Since the adoption of NEATS, successive governments have destroyed its coherency by developing an array of poorly co-ordinated programs. The result has been contradictory programs that are generally misunderstood by the community and which have contributed little to employment or skill acquisition within the labour force.

A new policy is required that is predicated on general industry/economic strategy and directs its programs to:

- restructuring of manufacturing industry,
- worthwhile training opportunities
- equal employment opportunity,
- migration,
- labour force mobility,
- job creation.

Proposition five is the formation of a Labor Planning Commission to be a statutory authority. Commission members will include members from trade unions, the community, employees and government.

6. Rights and Facilities for Workers' Representatives

A COA has always believed that the Accord is a document which allows for many gains to be made by workers in the Australian community. We believe that these gains will not be won (or indeed maintained) in many instances without struggle. For example, I have already indicated that the trade union movement should prepare itself to fight for Medicare.

The Accord, in either the current version, or in a renegotiated form, will require debate in formulation, commitments to, and struggle for its implementation from rank and file members and officials of all levels of the union movement. It also requires that the resources available to governments and employees be matched by the union movement. To this end, it will be essential that a claim on government for legislation providing for facilities and rights for job delegates become part of the Accord.

The sixth issue for inclusion in trade union demands when renegotiating the Accord is the introduction of industrial legislation giving facilities to workplace delegates/shop stewards and other part-time officials.

The process of adhering to the Prices and Incomes Accord, in which the trade union movement has led the way can only make sense for the future of the Australian labour movement if it produces the increases in jobs, the restructuring, and the regeneration of the Australian economy. A failure at this stage to provide the Australian worker with a range of benefits in the short, medium and long term, as a return for her/his restraint during the currency of the Accord, will completely undermine the ability of this and subsequent Labor governments to convince the trade union movement that co-operation and restraint is in its own best interest.

A general industry/economic strategy should direct its programs to equal employment opportunity, training schemes, restructuring manufacturing, job creation, etc. Above: Demonstration supporting Deborah Wardley's right to work as a pilot with Ansett. Melbourne, August 1979. Inset: ACTU poster.

The author acknowledges the assistance given in writing this paper by Leslie Fallick, David Bunn and Sue Mountford.
Affordable child care is an industrial issue which needs to be taken up more actively by the trade union movement, along with issues such as parental leave and protective legislation for pregnant and breastfeeding women workers.

In this article, Carol O’Donnell discusses the issues and outlines the debates about how these objectives could be best implemented.

In most countries for which we have recent information, over 50 percent of women responsible for one child are now economically active. (In Australia this is the case if the child has reached school age.) In Sweden, which represents the extreme case, a large majority of women with children are working, even if they care for three or more. Labour force participation rates for women with children under seven, whether currently married or not, almost doubled between 1963 and 1978, increasing particularly in the younger age groups.

Trends in Employment and Unemployment of Women in OECD Countries.

Whereas measures providing income guarantees and financial compensation during the suspension of the employment contract come within the province of social security, those relating to protection of employment, working conditions and maternity leave come under labour law. It is clear, however, that as more women with children enter the workforce, the distinction between industrial issues and family support issues become less clear cut. The fact that the typical family is no longer one with a husband in paid work supporting a dependent wife and children forces us to redefine our ideas about what should be major industrial issues addressed by unions and what should be major issues addressed by our social security system. The need for the provision of high quality, affordable child care is clearly an industrial issue for working parents and it is one which the trade union movement is increasingly taking up.

The advent of a Labor government in 1983 meant a change of direction in Australian politics with the implementation of the ALP/ACTU Prices and Incomes Accord. The Accord is, to some extent, an outcome of the end of a sustained period of economic growth and the beginning of a period of economic downturn in manufacturing and high unemployment. The aim of the Accord is to hold down wages and prices, providing an environment where economic restructuring can be done in a planned way. The objective is to reduce unemployment, and this requires a sustained rate of growth. The Accord is designed to create a predictable environment for government economic policy and development. In return for wage restraint, workers are supposed to receive a better deal, especially for the low paid, through the taxation structure and welfare system, and they are guaranteed wage indexation. The Accord involves the setting up of tripartite planning structures in a wide variety of economic and social planning areas.

Many European countries have a long post-war history of planning bodies representing the interests of capital, labour and the government. Sweden is a good example of the success of direct trade union involvement in government planning and its progressive policies regarding families and workers can, to some extent, be put down to a political system where labour organisations have concerned themselves much more centrally with issues of industry planning, social wage policy and taxation than is traditionally the case.
The gains that can be made by workers, and particularly women, during the era of the Accord will depend upon their strength and ability to organise effectively to ensure that the trade union leadership and government take account of their demands. Within the climate created by the Accord, however, welfare policies have a greater than usual potential to be put forward by the trade union movement and to be accepted by the government. This is because unions have to look for benefits other than wage increases which will also be attractive to a government concerned about maintaining wide electoral popularity. In the context of an Accord, the broader the social appeal of particular policies, the more likely they are to be implemented by Labor. Medicare, tax cuts for middle and low income earners, and a national superannuation scheme are examples of this, and it is in this environment that the active efforts of women to emphasise the importance of policies which support families have a good chance of being successful.

Women were understandably angered that their interests were taken so little account of at the Summit deliberations after the election of the Hawke government. However, because so many members of the workforce, whether male or female, are responsible for children, it is a good time to try to get family policies, traditionally a concern of the welfare sector, more centrally onto the agenda of the trade union movement. Women are usually concentrated in low wage jobs with little potential for building industrial militancy and power. The advent of the Accord provides a potential avenue for having industrial demands met which does not exist for the low paid in the open marketplace where industrial muscle largely determines the size of the wage packet.

Whether we can make family policy an important trade union issue, with the same high profile that issues such as superannuation have, is, however, another question.

Australia still lags far behind many similar Western countries in its provision of services for families with young children. For example, our expenditure on pre-school education, measured on a per capita basis, is lower than that of all the OECD countries except Spain, Portugal and Turkey. In Australia, only 5.5 percent of the 1.8 million children below school age have access to day care centres or family day care schemes, yet half the mothers of these children are in the workforce.

The 1983 ACTU Congress endorsed the view put forward in the ACTU Working Women’s Charter that children’s services are a central trade union concern. The policy states that:

Trade unions should be involved in the establishment of a range of child care facilities located at or near workplaces and within local communities. Particular attention should also be given to before and after school care, school holiday care and extended hours care to meet the needs of all workers and people undertaking studies.

The Trade Union movement should promote the right of parents and union committees elected by the workers concerned, to be involved in the planning, development and management of all child care facilities and for workers in children’s services to participate at all levels of decision making.

At the beginning of 1981, in line with its policy, the ACTU itself began operating a child care centre at Moorabbin, Victoria, as a model of service provision to which all workers are entitled.

Community Child Care or Work-Based Child Care?

Within the child care movement there has been some debate over whether child care centres should be in the general community, in workplaces, or in both areas. It is clear that many people have work-related care as their highest priority. Such centres give parents and children more time together while they travel to work, and also enable parents to visit during their work breaks. The hours of work-related child care centres can be geared to suit the needs of people in the area, such as shift workers.

Migrant workers in particular have expressed the desire to make use of work-related child care. One Victorian study of female factory workers found that about three-quarters of the mothers surveyed stated that they would use a child care centre located at work. In 1982, a research study into the child care needs of migrants living in inner Sydney suburbs found that 57.2 percent would like child care near their workplace. The report of the
Two major objections have been raised against work-related child care. The first is the concern that it could be used by employers to manipulate their workforce and to depress wages and conditions. The second is the argument that children should be cared for in their residential neighbourhood and should not have to travel to and from work with their parents. Let us consider each of these objections in turn.

Those who advocate the development of work-related children's centres have in mind publicly funded and user/worker controlled services - there is no lobby to encourage employers to run their own private centres at the workplace. If an employer or developer contributed to the cost of construction of a centre, the recurrent costs (i.e. staff wages, equipment, subsidies, etc.) would be the responsibility of the federal government and, in no sense, would the centre "belong" to the employer. The possibilities for manipulation in these circumstances are minimal. Likewise, the fear that a child would lose his or her place at the centre should the parent resign or be dismissed can be overcome by an appropriate clause in the centre's constitution. An employer is in no position to determine which children may or may not use a publicly funded centre. Also, under guidelines laid down by the Commonwealth, centres must be open to children from the local area and not just the children of employees.

What of the objection that children should be cared for in the area in which they live and not where their parents work? Surely this is a decision which parents themselves should be able to make. Some people do not feel any particular ties to their neighbourhood and may not wish to be "integrated" into a "community". They may, instead, have formed close relationships with their co-workers and feel that the bonds of commonality are stronger for them at the workplace than in their local area. For such people, having their children cared for near their work may be far more desirable than leaving them all day in a dormitory suburb with which they have few links.

Recognition that child care is an industrial issue may lead an individual union to petition the employer or government, or both, for funding for a centre. In Argentina, Austria, Bolivia, Burma, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan and the Philippines, Seguret cites cases of government requiring certain employers to provide child care facilities. Nevertheless, this raises the cost of employing women, a point which is unlikely to be lost on employers. In Colombia and Mexico the employers' obligation to provide creches has been replaced by the introduction of a uniform levy on employers whether or not they employ women workers, paid to public bodies responsible for setting up and administering child care facilities.

In Australia, many unions have lobbied the government to provide more services within the community generally. Others have added the demand for child care to logs of claims served on employers. Very few private employers in Australia have provided child care facilities for their employees unless it was in their direct interests to do so because of labour shortages. There are, however, a few exceptions, for example at Eden Park and Warrickwood in NSW. The developers of industrial complexes in these areas provided child care centres which the federal government provides recurrent funding for, and Marquise Knitwear in Melbourne subsidises a child care facility for its employees which is also open to broader community and operates along commercial lines. More attention needs to be given by government and unions to the problem of encouraging private sector employers to subsidise child care. The Women's Trade Union Commission, a government funded organisation aimed at helping to establish such centres, has shown that many employers are willing to provide capital funding for facilities as a goodwill gesture, but are daunted by the bureaucratic red tape and complex funding and licencing requirements necessary for such services.

Public sector unions have been more successful in gaining child care funding from the federal government. With a grant of $250,000 from the federal government, workers in North Coburg, Victoria, won a four year battle to establish a child care centre near their workplace. This was initiated by a group of migrant families from FILEF (Federation of Italian Migrant Workers and their Families) who organised the support of unions, local council and working women. In Sydney, the combined transport unions, the Labor Council of NSW, the Women's Trade Union Commission and employee representatives from the State Rail Authority and the Urban Transit Authority have, after many years of lobbying, received funding to establish a 24-hour child care facility for shift workers near the Tempe Bus Depot. The ABC Staff Association in Sydney also spearheaded a successful campaign for a centre suitable for shift workers. Another centre on the drawing board has resulted from the joint organising efforts of the Public Service Association of South Australia and the Australian Bank Employees Union. In West Australia, four public service unions have cooperated in a submission for funding for a child care centre to be built in the near future. Once again, a central aim of the proposal is to meet the needs of shift workers, and it is hoped that funding will be available to open the centre from 5.30 am to 11.30 pm.

**Affordable Child Care**

At present, union-initiated child care services are few and far between, but it is certain that, with the involvement of an increasing number of women in their unions, the number will expand rapidly. However, the cost of services to users is an equally important issue for working parents and the unions which support them. ACTU policy states:

"Unions should seek to substantially reduce the cost of child care services to parents and in the longer term unions should strive for free child care services available on the same basis as public education."

Currently, fees in government-sponsored child care services are very high. The charge for having a preschool child cared for during normal working hours is $40 to $60 per week, higher than the fees charged by elite private schools. While some parents pay reduced fees because they are considered needy on criteria established by the government, most do not. To be eligible for a subsidy, a family must have an assessed income
Below: Munitions worker, 1943. Right: Brunswick School Centre, 1943. School meals, after school and holiday programs were subsidised by the federal government.

Home matchbox maker, East End, London, early 1890s. Matchbox making was done in appalling and dangerous conditions for next to nothing.
of less than $250 per week after deductions for housing costs (up to $100 per week) and dependent children ($30 per child). This assessed income is assessed before tax has been taken out.

Which members of the community should have their child care fees subsidised by the public purse? The Family and Children’s Services Agency (a policy unit responsible to the New South Wales Minister for Youth and Community Services) has demonstrated that a household consisting of two adults and two children, with a combined income equivalent to male average weekly earnings, would have no surplus income above basic minimum living requirements. The budget on which this assessment was made is austere. It makes no allowance for child care, household insurance, hire purchase instalments, furniture, crockery, TV, radio, floor coverings, gifts, toys, alcohol, tobacco or recreation. For a family on such an income, the agency has argued, “paid child care except on a very occasional basis would be an unattainable luxury.”

Child care costs are incurred by families at a stage in the life cycle when they are under considerable financial pressure. Many parents of young children are spending a high proportion of their income on mortgage payments or rent. The costs of children themselves are also high. Rather than setting severe income tests and charging high fees to such families, it would be more reasonable if child care services were financed by taxation revenue. This would still mean that the “user pays” (most parents contribute a significant amount of their personal incomes in taxes), but the cost would be spread over the taxpayer’s lifetime and would also be shared by those who do not have children.

This policy has already been adopted by several countries which are comparable to Australia. In Sweden, parents pay an average of 10 percent of the full costs of care, in Hungary and West Germany the rate is about 15 percent, and even in the United States the maximum parent fee in a government sponsored service is about 70 percent of the full cost. Subsidising parents for at least part of the cost of child care is a recognition of the fact that all members of society share responsibility for the next generation and will benefit from its productivity in their later years.

The Case Against Tax Deductions for Child Care

The ACTU is increasingly interesting itself in taxation matters, arguing strongly, for example, for taxation cuts for lower and middle income earners as a redistributive measure. ACTU policy also favours tax deductions for child care, based on the argument that child care expenses are incurred by the parents of young children in the course of earning a living and should hence be deductible. However, whether such deductions were in the form of concessional deductions or rebates they would be regressive and should hence not be supported by a labour movement concerned about reducing inequality. As an example of the regressive nature of such deductions, consider three women in the paid workforce, each paying $50 per week for child care; one is a salaried business executive, one a teacher and one a part-time sales assistant. After claiming a deduction at the rate of 46 cents in the dollar, the business woman will finally pay $27 per week for child care; the teacher, whose marginal tax rate is 35 cents in the dollar, will outlay $32.50 per week in the end; while the sales assistant (who, in this hypothetical example works part-time but needs full-time care because of the length of her journey to work) has an income below the tax threshold, is ineligible for any deductions and will have to pay the full $50. Sixteen percent of women workers (two percent of full-time and 44 percent of part-time workers) have earnings below the tax threshold and would thus not benefit from a system of tax deductions. Those women who are not in the workforce but need child care for other reasons would not benefit either.

At present, two-thirds of all child care arrangements in Australia are informal, and few people providing this type of care declare their earnings as income. They would, however, be obliged to do so if the people whose children they care for were to claim the cost of that care as a deductible expense, and as a consequence may lose income in the form of income-tested pensions, related benefits, and dependent spouse rebates. It is not unreasonable to suppose that many caregivers would increase the cost of their service to make up for income foregone. In this case, the users would be in no better situation than perviously, since tax deductions would be accompanied by higher initial costs. It is also important to note that even with a system of deductions, families would still have to find the $50 each week to pay for the service at the time it is used, and low income earners would still be unable to do this.

In regard to child care expenses, it would be more equitable to reduce the weekly cost of child care to all users and to address the problem of equity through changing the tax scales. Both of these matters, which discriminate against the low income earner, are long overdue for attention.

While many unions have been active in regard to child care provision and its cost, many others still operate on the outdated assumption that families are predominantly supported by a male wage and that most women remain dependent at home looking after children. Also, it is difficult for the trade union movement to make child care a central issue for its membership, although it is the key to women workers’ equality in the long run, and is often the difference between two or one family incomes being available. Many women have to drop out of work during the early years of child-rearing, many others are too overwhelmed with their dual role to force the union to be active on their behalf regarding child care provision.

Because, at any particular time, only a small proportion of trade union members are affected acutely by child care problems (though all of them are affected by wage matters), it is difficult to get the issue to the top of the agenda, even if we take the most generous view of the male-dominated trade union leadership. There is a tendency for unions with female members to take up the child care issue. If trade unions with an overwhelmingly male membership took it up, it would be an important step towards changing assumptions about the appropriate sexual division of labour and domestic responsibility. The task of membership education towards this end is a long and difficult one, but it is not impossible as is shown by changing attitudes in European countries such as Sweden.
Part-time Work?

A number of groups in Australia have tended to argue that part-time work for both sexes is the answer to society’s child care needs. The problem is that many people are not able to choose whether they do part or full-time work, but have their labour market status thrust upon them. We must be cautious about favouring part-time work because, in many cases, the implementation of increased part-time employment has meant the replacement of full-time workers with casualised part-time workers who have few industrial rights and no job security. The casualisation of retail employment is a good example of this. The jobs which employers are usually only too willing to make part-time are unskilled, dead-end, low paid jobs normally undertaken by women. They are more resistant to creating skilled managerial level jobs on a part-time basis and these are the jobs commonly undertaken by men. There is a danger that the call for part-time work will be used to erode the situation of full-time workers, and to avoid the responsibility to provide adequate child care, reinforcing instead a low-paid and insecure ghetto of female employment. These dangers must be avoided by people struggling through their unions to get part-time work as an option for those workers who want it. As unions such as the NSW Teachers Federation has found, a part-time work scheme which genuinely protects workers’ rights is not generally taken up with much enthusiasm by employers.

An important principle in negotiations over part-time work is to protect the employee’s right to full-time employment when she, he desires. It is equally important to ensure when a full-time employee opts to become a part-timer, that the full-time position is retained so that an employment opportunity exists for somebody who needs it and that other employees do not get an increased work load. Similarly, it is important to ensure that two people sharing a job are not being made to do a plethora of extra tasks outside of their working hours. There is a tendency to forget that half-time workers are also on half pay. Though the phrase “permanent part-time work” is bandied around a lot, it is vital to ensure that part-timers really
do have the same rights to job security as full-timers. This is usually not the case and the part-timer is often more vulnerable to retrenchment than the full-time worker is. Part-time work tends to be associated with casual and temporary status and this is probably the greatest danger. The attainment of good part-time employment schemes is fraught with difficulty, but because of the unequal burden imposed by the domestic division of labour, many women want part-time jobs and it is better to fight for good schemes rather than to oppose part-time work and allow many women to be forced out of paid work altogether because of the strain of a double day of work and domestic duties. It is true, also, that unless we fight for the possibility of part-time work in male-dominated areas, the unequal sexual division of labour in the family is more easily reproduced.

**Maternity Leave and Other Forms of Parental Leave**

The Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission in 1979 recognised the rights of women in the workforce to unpaid maternity leave of up to 12 months, and the right to return to their jobs or to similar jobs at the end of the leave period. Though government employees are entitled to paid maternity leave for three months and up to 52 weeks’ unpaid leave for “maternity purposes”, hardly any private sector employees operate under awards where they gain such benefits. The maternity leave initiative was brought in by the federal labor government in 1974 and it was followed by state government initiatives in the area. The federal Labor government also introduced paternity leave, but this was withdrawn by the coalition government which followed Labor in office. Paternity leave is essential if the existing sexual division of labour, around child-rearing is to be seriously challenged.

Australia lags behind many European countries in its maternity leave provisions. The paid leave from work following childbirth in Europe varies from three months to three years. In most countries, six months is typical, with growing discussions about extending the leave to nine months or a maximum of one year. At present, many European countries permit additional unpaid, but job-protected leave of somewhere between six months and two years. France offers two year unpaid post-childbirth leave for either parent under certain circumstances. Norway provides a parental leave of up to one year. Sweden’s Parent Insurance Scheme allows either parent to take leave from work for the birth or adoption of a baby, for nine months on 90 percent of pay. After this, either parent is entitled to an unpaid leave until the child is 18 months old, and the parent’s right to work part-time (a six-hour day) is guaranteed until the child is eight.

When children are sick or when there are other family emergencies to attend to, it is usually women workers who bear the brunt of such problems. ACTU policy refers to employees being:

entitled to paid leave for the purposes of caring for dependants or next of kin in the event of illness or other personal emergencies and that a person caring for children be entitled to paid leave when required to visit each child’s school or child care centre.

The policy is light years ahead of workforce practice. At present, parents in the paid workforce are faced with the problem of using up their own sick leave or taking time off without pay to care for their sick children. Child care centres do not have facilities to care for those who are ill, and most cannot take children with illness which could infect other children. Family day carers are probably less strict about taking sick children, but the problem of infection still exists, and they are provided with no back-up services or compensation. Parents with sick children are, as a consequence, often faced with the prospect of intolerable financial burdens through loss of income while caring for their offspring, or they may even lose their jobs. Even if children are hospitalised there is good reason to believe that the parents’ presence is desirable and those parents who are unable to leave work when their children need them face an enormous burden of anxiety and guilt about it. Forbath cites a study conducted in the Melbourne suburb of Collingwood during June/July 1970 where 101 primary and pre-school children attending schools, child care centres and kindergartens in the area were surveyed in relation to their care arrangements when they were sick. The study found:

- there were 253 instances on which a mother missed work to care for a sick child (this involved 100 children)
- there were 17 instances on which a father missed work to care for a sick child (9 children were involved)
- there were 42 instances on which a sick child was left alone (22 children were involved)

Unions are slowly beginning to collect such information from their members as a basis for making claims for additional leave provisions to cover this problem.

Many European countries already have paid parental leave, and attempts are being made to introduce it in all member countries of the European Economic Community. Under the European Economic Commission’s Equality Action Programme, proposals have been formulated for a Community-level Directive to entitle workers to parental leave and leave for family reasons under broadly similar conditions in each of the member states. These proposals have already been adopted in principle by the European Commission and involve rights for workers in both private and public sectors to claim allowances from public funds for parental leave periods after maternity leave of at least three months. There is also widespread acceptance in Europe, reflected in the EEC’s Equality Action Programme of paid parental leave granted to enable working parents to attend emergency or exceptional situations arising in the home, such as sickness of children, settling children into new schools, etc. Such leave for family reasons is already granted in most member states. For example, in Sweden, awards in the public and private sector allow parents paid leave to care for sick children and, in some parts of the country, the government employs special child care workers to look after sick children in their own homes if this becomes necessary. The Directive to member states of the EEC will apply to all wage earners, i.e. male and female workers in full or part-time employment (with part-timers’ rights pro-rated accordingly) and employed either in the public or private sectors. The payment during leave periods will be made out of public funds.
to avoid any need for direct payment by employers which might have a negative influence on the employment of young, temporary replacement workers, etc.23

One of the major reasons for the expectation of the acceptance of the proposals for parental leave across all member states is the recognition that such leave is a form of absence from work which can contribute to greater flexibility in the organisation of working time, and can also provide a valuable means of work experience for unemployed school-leavers and other young people who may be taken on as temporary replacements for those on leave. Paid leave available to members of either sex is vital in changing the unequal sexual division of labour in the home which disadvantages women in the workforce and also prevents men who wish to do so from taking time off to be with their children.

**Protective Legislation**

The question of the necessity for protective legislation for women based on their biological difference from men is a difficult one, since this form of legislation has usually been used to keep women out of highly paid jobs normally occupied by men. ACTU policy states:

*All pseudo-protective laws related to women's employment should be urgently reviewed by unions. Discriminatory clauses, which restrict entry, should be deleted from awards so that the range of occupations open to female workers is expanded.*24

One can understand the concern that such legislation should not be a covert means of discriminating against women workers. However, some form of protection for pregnant women workers seems necessary if women are not simply to be forced to give up their jobs. In the Federal Republic of Germany, for example, it is forbidden to employ pregnant women and nursing mothers on physically arduous work, jobs exposing them to the effects of harmful substances or radiation, dusts, gases or vapours, heat, cold and humidity, vibrations or noise, or on assembly line work or piecework. The employer must organise the work and equip the premises taking into account necessary precautions and protective measures for such working women. In Belgium and Italy, similar legislation
exists, and women workers who are pregnant or breast-feeding have the right to be transferred to another post and work compatible with their condition without loss of wages. The national legislations also grant pregnant women the right to transfer for individual reasons, on presentation of a medical certificate.

The legislation of the Scandinavian countries regulates the same conditions of work for men and women, and does not provide for any specific ban on the employment of women in some jobs. In Sweden, however, women have recently won the right to be transferred to less arduous work when pregnant. If transfer is impossible, the woman usually has to apply for sickness insurance benefit and then receives compensation for the corresponding loss of wages. In Austria, Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland, overtime for pregnant women and nursing mothers is prohibited. Time off for medical visits and care during pregnancy and following confinement has recently been introduced into the legislation of the Federal Republic of Germany, Ireland and the United Kingdom. In many countries, young mothers also benefit from nursing breaks which constitute a reduction in their daily hours of work. The length of such breaks and the period of time over which they are granted varies from country to country. In Spain they are granted until the child is nine months old; in France and Italy until the child is one year old. In Austria, East Germany and Italy, such breaks may not involve any loss of pay. A mother, working eight hours a day, is entitled to two breaks of 45 minutes each in Austria and the Federal Republic of Germany. In Italy, she is given two one-hour breaks (in France and Spain two half-hour breaks). In Spain, young mothers who so desire may have their normal hours of work reduced by half an hour each day instead of taking these breaks. Norwegian, Swedish and Swiss law also provides time off for nursing mothers, but does not specify its duration.

Nursing breaks often go hand in hand with the employers' obligation to provide special rooms for working women, which frequently means a financial contribution to creches or nurseries. In Australia, many migrant women workers are astonished by the lack of child care in factories. As one Turkish clothing worker commented:

*When I went for a job in this clothing factory and I got it, I asked the boss where the creche was. He said to me: "You are a stupid woman — there are no creches here". In my country, which is supposed to be a backward one, the factories have creches and we could go there and breastfeed our babies.*

Australia does not have an impressive record in its provision of benefits to working parents. The assumption that women are dependent on a male wage and remain at home looking after children is an outdated one which has enabled some employers to pursue discriminatory practices and has meant that some unions have not thought to fight for the most pressing needs of some of their members. As mothers enter the workforce in increasing numbers, the traditional division between industrial issues and family policy issues becomes increasingly irrelevant. Outdated assumptions about the nature of the family and the needs of the workforce can only lead to the further entrenchment of socio-economic and sexual inequality.

**References**

9. Ibid.
10. Examples which follow are taken from Horbath, B., op.cit.
18. Paoli C., op.cit.
19. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid, p. 7.
Who's still holding the baby?

"This image was entirely constructed. The wall was graffitied by us, then photographed; another photograph was taken of the mother and children, then a print laid underneath the whole which we cut in the print of the wall. Thus the link could be made between the WHY of the struggles for childcare facilities, and the HOW." Hackney Flashers collective.
In February and March this year, Will Silk was in Nicaragua, studying, acting as a representative of Resource and Action Committee for Latin America (RACLA), and as a correspondent for Tribune. He covered the election debates, and the festivities commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Sandino's death. His article in Tribune on 14 March was the first in Australia to break the news of CIA involvement in the mining of Nicaraguan ports and foreshadowed the subsequent military escalation.

While in Nicaragua, Will travelled extensively, making two trips into the northern border combat zones, and talked with Nicaraguans from every walk of life.

He would like to dedicate this article to those Nicaraguans, but especially to Ligia Vigil, and to Mario, who "took him inside the Revolution and showed him its heart".

Will Silk

"ONE DAY THE FIELDS WILL STAY GREEN"*

A Journey Into Nicaragua's Northern War Zone

Managua, Nicaragua. Late February 1984. The morning heat is intense. I am sitting in the outer office of FACS (The Augusto Cesar Sandino Foundation). The foundation operates out of a large modern suburban bungalow just off the Plaza D'Espagna in what was, during Somoza’s time, a middle class quarter of the city. The owners of the bungalow had fled with Somoza. The clerical and administrative staff seem all to be women.

I have an appointment to see Ligia Vigil, the FACS co-ordinator responsible for the American, Canadian and Pacific areas. She is a small, energetic woman with cropped dark hair. Lines of exhaustion and overwork run through her smile of welcome. In the course of our conversations she speaks little of her personal story but I piece together the following: She is in her early forties, and she has already had three lives. From a middle class background, she trained as a primary teacher and received part of her education in the US (she speaks excellent English). For a short time she taught in schools servicing her class, marking time in the marriage market. Following marriage came the confines of middle class motherhood: two sons and a closed domestic world. That world was cracked open by separation and a return to teaching as a single parent. Already opposed to Somoza — as were many liberal bourgeois and intellectuals — she was further radicalised by her new situation, by the contradictions exposed by her concern for full and equal educational opportunities, by the poverty and exploitation of the urban working class among whom she now lived and worked, and by the political activism of her sons as they reached their early teens. She joined the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in the making of the revolution.

My original aim had been to find out as much as possible about the rural child-care and pre-school centre in one of the northern provinces to which funds from Australian solidarity groups like RACLA were being directed, and to get permission to visit, if possible. The news Ligia gave me was bad: the centre had been destroyed by Contras (counter-revolutionaries) barely a month after it had been built; the local area was at the moment, yet again, under attack and too dangerous to visit. However, FACS was trying to organise a new SIR (Rural Infant Service) project involving reconstruction of the destroyed centre and of others in the same area. The cost was estimated at SUS$20,000 and it was into this project that Australian money might go. If there was a lull in the fighting Ligia promised to get me into the area to see conditions for myself.

Over strong, black Nicaraguan coffee, I ask Ligia to tell me more about FACS and its activities.

"FACS is a private, non-government institution for humanitarian work. It's not linked with the FSLN. Rumours in the US press have done us much damage internationally. We are Sandinistas, but we welcome all private support groups involved in our grass-roots organisations. It's February 1984 and, already, we have approved ten projects (costed at SUS$300,000) mostly from Canadian groups. But we desperately need things we can't get in Nicaragua: clothing, shoes, medicine and medical equipment for our beloved health program — at least SUS$1 million worth, this year.”

I suggest that the supply of some of

* from the poem "Song of Hope by Daisy Zamora, Nicaraguan Vice-Minister for Culture"
or home-made
• signifying the
North American adventurer William Walker invades Nicaragua, imposes slavery, and proclaims himself president. He is overthrown two years later.

President Zelaya refuses to grant canal rights to the United States, The US State Department supports a revolt by the Conservative Party which, in turn, agrees to a permanent US military presence. US banks take control of Nicaragua's finances, railroads and communications.

The health programs, especially those where masses of people are involved, are our success of successes. By us, I mean women, women who helped plan them and carry them through, women in AMIAE3 and CDS4 throughout the country, who took the initiative in setting up services we need so much.

"How much is the blockade affecting Nicaragua?" I ask.

"It affects all our work. Peace is a determining element. We need peace in order to reconstruct our country. The blockade affects all of Nicaraguan life but, at the same time, we're determined to live, even if it means living under threat. The threat won't stop our willingness to work or our will to defend all that we've been able to achieve — all our gains.

"It specifically affects us because our government is forced to spend money on defence - money we could use in social programs. There is a general feeling: defend the revolution to the last consciousness. That's how I feel; that's how my children feel about it."

As I stand to leave, Ligia winks and says, "Remember. 'As long as Nicaragua has children who love her, she will be free'."

I wonder about the wink until, outside, I look down at the FACS letterhead on a piece of paper on which she had written her telephone number. The farewell sentence was the foundation motto and was a quote from Sandino. Significantly, Ligia had substituted the word "children" for "sons" in the original.

It is 4.30 am. I'm walking across town in Managua from my barrio to the FACS office. I have been a lull in the fighting in Jinotega province and Ligia has been able to organise a jeep. She wants to pay a visit to three villages where FACS SIR projects are under way. It will be risky, her message warned — gringos and project workers are prime targets for contra assassins — but if I wanted to take the chance, she'd be leaving at 6 am.

On the long drive north, there was time for me to get to know Ligia better and, through her, the revolution and the people who were making it.

One of the many qualities in Ligia which I found striking, a quality I had seen bubbling in so many Nicaraguans during my stay, was that of hope: hope for the best even while preparing for the worst; hope that pushed her through impossible hours of work, over so many setbacks; hope in the potential of the revolutionary alternative for Nicaragua, that gave her and others the freedom to admit, discuss and even, ruefully, laugh over past mistakes as they developed that alternative in practice. It was a quality I'd often missed in Australian radical politics. I asked Ligia about it, in what was it anchored, how did she manage to sustain it?

"Yes, of course I have hope," she said, and paused... and it is sustained by surprises. Time and again, the rapidly developing consciousness of

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History of Nicaragua

1524

Spanish conquistadors defeat the Indians and call the newly conquered land "Nicaragua" after the Indian chief Nicarao.

1521

Nicaragua becomes independent.

1855

North American adventurer William Walker invades Nicaragua, imposes slavery, and proclaims himself president. He is overthrown two years later.

1909

President Zelaya refuses to grant canal rights to the United States. The US State Department supports a revolt by the Conservative Party which, in turn, agrees to a permanent US military presence. US banks take control of Nicaragua's finances, railroads and communications.

1912-1926

US marines remain in the country to support conservative governments.
the masses takes me by surprise. It is one of my fears that we in the bureaucracy will lag behind that consciousness and let it down."

I explained to her that very probably readers in Australia would baulk at the expression "rapidly developing consciousness of the masses". They might be puzzled, or even put off, by the linking of strong personal feelings to the phrase usually encountered as a vague theoretical term or an empty cliche of sectarian rhetoric. Could she give me an example? There was a pause and, in the moment it gave for self-reflection, I realised an old, cautionary paradox: I had imported the problem. It was not necessarily one which resided in the term itself: if the Australian context had emptied it of meaning, the Nicaraguan context had filled it.

"Well, I'll give you an example," she said. "The issue of the vote for sixteen-year-olds. You were up front at the Plaza de Revolucion during the Sandino Anniversary Rally when Ortega announced the junta's support lor their right to vote. So was I. I was interpreting for a delegation of foreign guests. We could see the response — such enthusiasm. The delegation's surprise was important to me — they got the message: these thousands of youngsters knew now what they wanted, they showed their joy in getting it. And that delegation will have to tell their people back home that the revolution in Nicaragua is a truly popular one, one that lives in its youth. Their surprise reminded me of my own surprise, of how the commitment of the muchachos had changed me, as I was telling you earlier."

Nearlby four hours and 140 kilometres later, we're having breakfast in Jinotega, waiting for two community nurses who are going to make their rounds with us. We've left Lake Managua and the hot cotton plains well below us to the south. Jinotega, at 1,000 metres, is a small, high country town in provincial Spanish style beside an artificial lake delivering to a hydro-electric scheme. We are well into the southern mountains, in country where Sandino had his strongholds in the '30s — and Jinotega is a stronghold now. A truckload of militia — muchachos from Managua barrios — rumbles past. Farmworkers saunter by, their market delivery finished, with rifles slung over their shoulders.

The community nurses, two eighteen-year-old village women, arrive and we're off.

W ith Ligia as interpreter, I ask the two community nurses about their training.

They had learned to read and write through the literacy campaign. Later, with others, they had done a six-week crash course in community medicine. and still go to Jinotega one day a month for refreshers. This year, the course will run for twelve weeks.

The conversation is interrupted when the nurses visibly tense and point to a burnt-out utility beside the track. We are a few kilometres outside La Colonia, the first village on our schedule. They explain that, six weeks before, the "colectivo", packed with campesinos returning from outlying coffee fields, was ambushed by infiltrating contras as part of their rural terrorism stratgy. Everyone on board had been machine-gunned and a message left saying "This is what happens if you support the Sandinistas". I asked one of the nurses if the strategy worked. "No, the opposite," she said.

"Then why do they persist?" "You're talking about people who, for 60 years, held power through terror, torture and exploitation. That's their tradition. They can't think outside of it."

A s we come into La Colonia, every field, every stream crossing, every crossroads is guarded.

The village sits on one side of a stream, hemmed closely by densely planted hills. In April last year, it had a brand-new SIR built by local voluntary labour and funded by Canadian solidarity organisations. It had stood proudly in the centre of the village beside the coffee mill.

But, in late April, an elderly campesino, head of the village defence committee, tells me, a band of contras surrounded La Colonia and lobbed rockets into it from the hills.

"They attacked us as though we were a military base," he says, leaning on his rifle. "But we held them off for an hour till the militia arrived, me and my little friends." He points to some thirteen and fourteen-year-olds sitting in the group listening to us in the village square.

"Us — and those kids down there guarding the lord now. But the SIR was next to the coffee mill, and that was their main objective. The lot went up." He makes an explosive gesture with lips and hands, then spits and walks me through the wreckage.

After, Ligia takes me into the makeshift SIR, housed in a gloomy old converted coffee storage shed, and we talk to the SIR workers. There are 46 kids in the centre. Their parents are out coffee picking and they're all inside because there's an alert that contras are in the area. The shed has been divided into nursery, pre-school and infant play areas, and a primitive kitchen. Bottles are being heated and there is a smell of nappies being dried over a wood-fired oven.

The staff numbers nine, with one person in charge of each section. The workers tell me their most urgent needs and priorities at the moment: the kitchen has to be renewed, a nursery and infants' section built. During winter it's very cold and wet: a new roof is needed. The whole place has to be expanded to give more light and space.

"What's the medical situation?" I ask. The community nurses coordinate with a mobile health unit. There is a health centre for the villages in the area, an average of 35-50 kilometres away (about half a day's travel). The mobile unit calls once a month, contras permitting, and it is always unsafe to travel after dark. There is a hospital at Jinotega.

Education? There's an adult education program operating in each village after work. Those that know, teach; those that don't, learn. The village has a one-teacher primary school for children to the age of ten.

Ligia looks at her watch and the sun. She's concerned about the alert. La Sorpresa, the next village we are to visit, is over an hour away, further up into the hills, and the workers say things are happening up there.

As I'm climbing into the landcruiser, the old campesino comes over and grabs my hand.

"Hey, look at this," he says, grinning and shaking my hand with both of his.

"Years ago I'd never been further than the next village. I was afraid to talk to a man from Jinotega. What would I say? Now, I'm holding the hand of a man from the other side of the world. I'm talking, you're listening. You tell them where you come from that that's
the revolution for me. If they come here, I'll tell them myself!

La Sorpresa, ("the surprise"), sits like a fan on the skirt of an olive-coloured hillside. We look down on it as we emerge from a cutting and edge down a shoulder in four-wheel drive. We pass through forward defence perimeter positions — rifle pits covered by cut tree branches for shade. Each has a crew of two sub-teensagers. Their smiles of recognition are nervous. White puffs of smoke mist up from slopes a kilometre or so away on the other side of the village, and the occasional distant round of small arms fire drifts over to us.

This is the village that Ligia would like Australian solidarity groups to support. It has a population of 50 families — approximately 370 people with 80 kids to be serviced by the SIR. The village is now the hub of a state farm which grows coffee and caraway. Previous to the Triumph, the same workers provided the workforce for an estate owned by one of Somoza’s henchmen. When he (led they went on working the estate successfully and requested through their union, the ATC (the Farmworkers’ Association), that the land be given to them by the state under provisions of the Agrarian Reform Laws.

Ligia points out that the dwellings rented to them by the estate owner had been shanties or barracks, but that now a new housing project is under way. The government provides prefabricated materials and the workers the labour power, when they have time to spare from harvest and defence work.

We visit the SIR. It is in a small barracks once used by harvest workers. There is little light, huge gaps between the unsanded rough plank floors. It is getting colder, draughtier and damper as the afternoon progresses. Plastic gives a makeshift roof cover. Through Ligia, the workers tell me the building won’t make it through the wet season. They will have to make a new building true to Ministry of Welfare standards, but they need everything — except labour and enthusiasm.

As I talk with them about the centre’s needs, the sound of intermittent small arms and light machine-gun fire intensifies. Everyone seems less concerned that I am. A major problem, Ligia explains is Nicaragua’s shortage of US dollars previously earned from the sale of exports now curtailed by the economic blockade. Another is Nicaragua’s lack of secondary industries.

“Even nails and corrugated iron have to be imported, and with the blockade we can’t get enough export dollars. That’s why, at this stage of the revolution, contributions of dollars and materials from international solidarity organisations are crucial to us.”

As we walk up through the village towards the coffee drying plant and the old estate offices, now a community centre and regional militia command post, I think what a
practical way of showing solidarity such a contribution would be for Australian building and metal working unions. Ligia tells me how some unions in Europe had taken up projects like this in other areas, even sending work brigades with their money and materials to help in the construction. Similar projects could be organised through FACS to provide basic child care and preschool aids, materials and medical supplies — all of which are also unobtainable in Nicaragua.

On the verandah of the estate offices, we talk to the commandante of the regional militia about the military situation. Dressed in an anorak several sizes too big for him, he is quiet, serious, and eighteen years old.

"We are in the middle of an operation," he tells us. "Three days ago, contras moved into the district in force. They burnt out one of our nearby warehouses full of coffee and a medium producer's plantation which hadn't yet been harvested. On their way in, they destroyed an outlying farmhouse. The co-operatives immediately formed a circular defence and their units went into action two hours later.

"But two days ago the contras managed to kidnap two girls from the village on their way home from the fields. We've had a series of running combats as we are trying to track them down. Yesterday there was a major combat near here. We buried ten dead contras. We have had no casualties so far, but everyone is very upset for the girls."

A short time later as we bid farewell to the SIR staff in the village, the young commandante swings by on a truck which has just come in. It is crammed with militia, boys and girls mobilised from towns to the south. He jumps off to say goodbye.

"I'm just directing them up to the combat area," he says. "The contras only get as far as this when they are part of a major offensive aimed at destroying production yields and military targets. They've not been very successful. They won't get stronger. They've shown their main strength these last weeks and they're getting weaker every day." He jumps onto the truck's running board and slaps the cabin roof. The truck moves off; the boys and girls wave. We exchange clench fist salutes. "Venceremos, buenos fuertes," we call to each other — good luck, we shall triumph. I hope that the commandante is right.

The land cruiser lurches along a muddy track bordering a small lake and into the large village of Escambray. An orderly collection of new pre-fabricated houses stands on a rise in a sheltered valley. This is a village with a difference: it is comprised entirely of a resettled Miskito Indian community.

There are 1,200 people here, evacuated by the Sandinistas from Rio Coco, a large river running onto and along the Honduran border. I had asked many questions about 'the Miskito Problem' and the Nicaraguan government's resettlement plans. The international press had been carrying reports of Nicaraguan oppression of Indian minorities on the Atlantic coast, of genocide, concentration camps and massacres. That is why Ligia had brought me here: this project is part of the larger resettlement plans and FACS is involved.

"The original development plan was to have taken place in the area where this community lived," Ligia tells me.

"In order to introduce the plan the government first had to gain the trust of the people. The FSLN moved 80 women and men to live with the community for a year on the Rio Coco. The children were in bad shape and in some parts of the area 100 percent of the population had TB. Nutrition and community health programs were begun and our people began to earn the Indians' confidence and to teach them about the revolution. But, owing to an escalation of counter-revolutionary activity along the river, they were forced to come here to a safer place.

"They moved here a year ago. They were all living under pieces of plastic in July '83 — and now it's a town. It's not yet a self-supporting community. They've been given land and are cultivating rice. They are already self-supporting with beans and corn. Here, at present, there are no fish, but the lagoon and river are being prepared for a fish hatchery."

We say hello to some women who take us over the communal kitchen, dining hall and food storage area. There is not much in the latter's larder. Over a meal of frijoles, I ask about the organisation of food production.

We take a stroll through the village. It has the new, raw feel of a building site about it. A utility has arrived and construction materials are being unloaded outside a half-finished house. A Miskito squats amid the roof trees with cradled rifle.

"Talk to anyone you like," Ligia encourages, and I stop outside a house at random. On the steps a woman is combing a child's hair. Ligia chats a little with her about conditions and supplies. Amid mutual shyness — I am a man and a foreigner — I am introduced. "May I ask her a few questions?" She looks down and says, "Yes."

(I am aware of potential dangers of biased reporting here. Ligia is a dedicated Sandinista and a Hispanic. However, I've noticed that the villagers talk freely and easily with her, and I have just enough understanding of Spanish to keep a rough check on the translations. As we talk, the major
The FSLN carries out its first guerrilla actions.

The FSLN sets up a rural base at Pancasan. Luis Somoza’s brother, Anastasio, becomes president.

An earthquake destroys the capital, Managua, killing 15,000 people and leaving 170,000 homeless. The Somoza family ruthlessly exploits the situation and appropriates most of the international aid.

The FSLN intensifies its military actions. It is joined by many townspeople eager to end the dictatorship.

The Sandinistas capture the National Palace and force the government to release fifty-nine political prisoners including Tomas Borge and Doris Tijerino.

Somoza is overthrown, ending a war that left 40,000 dead, 40,000 orphans, 200,000 families homeless, 750,000 persons dependent on food assistance, crops unplanted, 33% of all industrial property destroyed, US$1.5 billion worth of physical damage and an external debt of US$1.6 billion.
"How do you like the idea of the co-op?"
"If I think about it, it's good. But there are some people: they don't understand it."
"What do they feel?"
"They're like me: they don't understand. My companiono does; he understands. It's not a matter for women." She looks down to smile and returns to an earlier time. "Me, I'm used to the river. Half my body was always in the river. That was good."

"How do the children feel?"
"I've three kids, and I'm twenty-six. The kids like it here. They're getting big and fat." She beams proudly. "The oldest one — his three — is going to school here as soon as I'm strong enough to throw him in."

As Ligia and I walk back down the broad stretch of turf that was the village main street, I think over the elements of "the Miskito Problem" that the conversation has pointed up:
- the conflict between the advancement of the revolution's program for emancipation of women and the role of women in "traditional" societies where sexism is a structural element. The conflict appears part of a larger difficulty involving respect for cultural identity while having to confront the effects of that culture's conservatism;
- the specific historical conditions in which the much criticised relocation of Indian communities away from their "traditional" habitat is taking place;
- the conflict between "traditional" and revolutionary structures of production relations;
- the conflict between the movement to incorporate Miskito and other Indian minorities into the Nicaraguan revolution and the differentiation of their cultures, the conservatism of their religion and the effects of their long isolation from the "Pacific coasters".

When a thin man in a ragged, sweat-stained T-shirt and faded baseball cap is introduced as Reinerin Zeledon, president of the co-operative, I'm keen to put him to some of the same questions as a cross-reference.
"Why had they left the Rio Coco?"
"We had to come because the Contras were attacking from the Honduran side. Another village had evacuated, so we decided too."
"Who decided?"

"The companero from the FSLN called a meeting. He asked what we wanted to do as the area was likely to be under attack for a long period. We could stay or leave. The community decided to go."
"Oppression by the FSLN?"
"We were never pressured. We saw what was happening. We were living in a combat area. It was getting worse. The main source of transportation is the river, especially for food. The contras kept taking the food."
"Massacres?"
"No. I've never heard of any by the FSLN, but I heard on the radio that the Hondurans have killed 200 Miskito down river."
"Have the Hondurans had any direct contact with your people, tried to influence you?"
"No; but the day we left, eleven of our community decided to go to the Hondurans instead of with us."
"Could you tell me a bit about yourself?"
"I'm 37. I've got six kids. I was born here in Jinotega province. I went to the river when I was very young because there were no jobs here. The river population, you know, used to own this area. Yes, right here where the settlement is. But they were driven off by the latifundists from late last century till the 1920s."

(I am surprised at this piece of information. Part of the strength of the woman's nostalgia for the river had seemed to come from a notion that the river life was how it had always been before. Later, I think about the fickleness of oral traditions and of the dangers attendant in uncritically accepting them or romanticising them. The oral tradition, which holds some members of this community tightly in its grasp, had selected and silenced, rendering comparatively recent communal experiences timeless by dehistoricising and mythologising the sojourn by the river. Part of the woman's separation trauma had seemed more than a personal loss and break, a loss of and break with an old, timeless, hence secure, way of life felt by a certain sector of the community. The actual historical period had been three generations.)

"So, in a way, you're coming home?"
"Yes. I feel fine. I feel happy here with my family. I can even work. Some miss the river because the tradition is to be in the water all day. They get sad thinking about it. It'll be with them a long time."
"Do you think you all made the right decision?"
"Well, I'm happy. Fish is the main thing they miss. But once in awhile we buy fish and bring it here. We also used to hunt a lot with the blow-gun. There's no hunting here. But there wasn't any on the river any more, with contra activity."
"How did you use lands by the river — everyone privately?"
"There was a lot of workable land without owners. All we had to do was move in, clear it and work it. We got on the river, chose land and settled, each on his own spot. When the land was impoverished, we'd move on. We'd only cultivate three-quarters of an acre each. Corn, beans — just enough to survive. That's different from here. You've got one area of land to work permanently. And you work it collectively."
"How do you feel about that?"
"I feel stronger to work collectively. There's a lot of work to do. But it's a new experience. We all feel we'll get ahead."
"How does your wife feel about all this?"
"She's happy. The kids are healthy and play around — they have a happy life. The older people and some of the women are the main ones who feel sad. The youngsters are in the hills looking after the contras. When they come back they feel good." He pauses. "I want to send a message to your people. We've planted 100 acres of corn already here. We're still waiting for the new tractor's parts, so we did it all with an iron stick — making a hole, dropping the seed. With the tractor it'll be different. We Nicaraguans," he deliberately emphasises the word, "not just Miskitos, or this community — need petrol, medicine and agricultural implements. We need the help of all friendly people. With that you watch us get ahead."

We shake hands and I promise to pass his message on. It seems obvious from what he has said that within this Miskito community there is also another awareness in play, a different perspective of reality which has broken through the effects of isolation and gone beyond the merely local.
"The contradictions and tensions are far more intense on the Atlantic coast itself, where the Miskitos are only the largest of many ethnic groups, each with its own special characteristics, but all with a history of oppression. British colonialism and US exploitation robbed them of their identity, broke down their cultural frameworks — left a space. There's the drama. The counter-revolution entered the picture, contesting that space, which the revolution had politicised. On the Atlantic Coast there has been no Nicaraguan identity. Our challenge has been to develop one. The contras, on the other hand, urge opposition to the Nicaraguan government and hold out the carrot of a return to a golden age of hunting and fishing through the establishment of an autonomous Miskito nation."

"What does she think of the proposal?"

"It's totally impractical. The zone lacks resources to maintain itself as a nation. It lacks the basic products, the means of production, the human resources. Dependence on the government in Nicaragua would be exchanged for dependence on the government in Washington."

"What can be done?"

"We have made many mistakes. At first, the revolutionary government neither knew nor understood the elements of the problem. It wanted to establish the same organisational structures on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. We have changed as we have learned by our mistakes. Increased participation of the Miskitos and other groups in Nicaraguan national life is essential. Their viewpoints expand when they go to study on the Pacific coast and in other countries. An important goal is to train local officials, health and education workers in all the areas so that administrative dependence on the Pacific coast can be overcome. We have previously had the dilemma of having to import 'specialists' and then finding they don't share the mentality of the local people."

"It's vital to stress, however, that the behaviour of the government is not paternalistic. We seek to respond to the people's own participation, further it and strengthen it. This aspect of initiative, participation and ongoing, deepening awareness is the key."

I ask Ligia how she and the Sandinistas took the charge of "bourgeois accommodationism" which had been laid against them at times by the Communist Party of Nicaragua. Specifically, I expressed my doubts about neo-parliamentary representative democracy being better than the present participatory and consultative arrangements. One form

Nicaragua reorients its economy according to the principle that the living standards of poorer sectors of the population must be improved. A land reform program is put into operation. Co-operatives are formed. Peasants and small farmers are guaranteed higher prices for essential food items. A literacy program is carried through. Schools are built. Total enrolment in the educational system increases by 69.7%. A national health care system is begun. Polio is eradicated and malnutrition dramatically decreased. Mass immunization campaigns are carried out. The number of workers unionised increases from 27,000 to 91,384. There is a 97% increase in the number of workers covered by social insurance. Progress is made in diversifying the economy and in finding new markets for Nicaraguan products. The foreign debt is renegotiated and payments are made on time. 9,000 houses are built. Potable water is supplied to 280,709 people. Communications are improved. Important infrastructural works such as harbours, roads, and a geothermic power plant are begun. Elections are scheduled for November 1984. US destabilisation of the Nicaraguan revolution proceeds apace, especially under Ronald Reagan. Foreign credits and loans are blocked. Pressure is put on other nations to isolate Nicaragua. 7,000 US troops are placed in neighbouring Honduras. US naval ships patrol Nicaraguan waters. The CIA trains and finances the counter-revolutionaries in Honduras and Costa Rica. The CIA mines Nicaragua's ports.
of government was going to be exchanged for another — and the form of the latter seemed, in may ways, dictated by the expectations imposed by the critical world outside. For the last five years there had been a provisional government with two ruling bodies: the Junta (nine persons) and executive made up from the Sandinistas, the leading revolutionary party; and the Council of State consisting of delegates of the major organisational groups and mass movements in Nicaragua (the clergy, the women's movement, trade unions, private producers and employers, youth groups, all other political parties, farmers' organisations, etc.). Was it force of external political circumstances which seemed to have pushed the revolution into the conclusion that a representative system utilising solely a plurality of parties was the best way to improve Nicaragua's image?

"The elections — in one sense we don't need them," Ligia answered. "They are very much an imposition from outside. We must maintain the good will and solidarity of international socialism. There has been much manipulation to alienate that solidarity. Possibly it will be defused by the election announcement. In another way, we Sandinistas feel confident that this is an exercise to show how popular our support is. That is why all parties are running individually and why the National Front won't go to the elections in coalition.

"The support we have is so clear from the anniversary events in the Plaza. The night before, all those people along the Northern Highway when I was taking my delegates back to the hotel — anyone could see it. Old people out beside the bonfires, young people chanting, talking everything over so excitedly. And one could hear it in the Moment of Clamour — all over the city. How was it in your barrio?"

I tell her how it was in the Barrio Senor Lescano where I was staying. It was a poor working class ghetto, the scene of much street-to-street fighting during 1977-79.

I'd come home around 10 pm on anniversary night to find my friends Mario, Walter, Carmen and the neighbours out in the street collecting cans, rattles, whistles, guitars, flutes — anything that could make a noise. The Junta had suggested to the CDSs, who planned the anniversary celebrations, that a moment of silence be observed for the murder of Sandino. The CDSs had replied, "Silence? No way; Sandino died in the struggle for us to be heard. We'll have a Moment of Clamour instead." And so it was.

On the moment, synchronised by everyone listening to their radios, the barrio had emptied: car horns, tracer shell bursts, people banging with tools on steel lamp posts, young militia and Sandinista groups firing off blank rounds of rifle and revolver ammunition as they raced from block to block, fireworks, shouting and singing.

At the end of a very long moment we had all looked at each other and listened to the receding rounds in adjoining barrios. Then, from the radios had burst forth a pop version of the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, The Ode to Joy, in Spanish. Revolutionary kitsch? Maybe, but here in Nicaragua Libre, I had been deeply moved.

"Yes, so good. so good," said Ligia. "And so important that all the people who couldn't go to the Plaza could participate too. The revolutionary process is a genuinely popular one — it's a truly working class revolution.

"There are times when I feel so badly about having to compromise, to go slowly, not to say to people's demands: 'Yes, do it now!' I understand the communists' critical position. There are many of us who are sympathetic to that position — and the communists will do well enough to have a place in government after November 4. But that responsibility I was talking about: we must not fail the trust, not only of Nicaragua, but of Central America and of socialists all over the world.

"Yet, when I talk to my son (he's 22, he works so hard; he's in everything: cotton brigades, the militia, Sandinista organisations) and when I talk to my friends, I feel confident. I have great hope."

Footnotes

1. The SIR projects which provide a combination of infant and maternal health care, village child care, infant nutrition programs and pre-school education — have had a crucial significance in rural Nicaragua of a kind surpassed only by that of the literacy campaigns. Before the Triumph, parents had to take their infants into the cotton or coffee fields where they worked. Field conditions were abysmal: children had to be left unattended at the edge of fields; heat, insects, absence of shelter and basic facilities like water, and the strain placed on breast-feeding mothers forced to work non-stop for long hours of back-breaking labour resulted in very high infant mortality rates. The organisation of rural child care, along with the national literacy campaign, was a first priority of the incoming Revolutionary Provisional Government in 1979. Since then, SIRs have become prime targets for the contras, as part of their strategy to hinder agricultural production and to terrorise rural workers.

2. AM LAE: The Luisa Amanda Espinoza Nicaraguan Women's Association, named after the first woman member of the FSLN to die fighting, has successfully mobilised women throughout the country around issues of particular concern to women, and is organising and providing leadership in the difficult task of breaking down the barriers to women's full and equal integration into Nicaraguan society. For a full account of its development, and of the role women have played in the revolution, see Randall M. Sandino's Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle. (New Star Books, 1981).

3. CDS: Sandinista Defence Committees, or neighbourhood committees, are the grassroots local self-government organisations of the people. Created as organs of urban struggle against Somoza, they are the basic administrative and representative units of a government of "popular power". They send delegates to regional councils of the decision-making network of "national consultation"; they also function as forums for the dissemination and critical discussion of all aspects of government planning, often playing an initiating or correcting role.

4. Participation which meets monthly to coordinate, set guidelines and for work out priorities for the various projects. The council comprises representatives of all Nicaraguan associations, grassroots and labour union organisations on a national level.

5. Barrio: working class suburban ghetto.

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AUSTRALIAN SOLIDARITY WITH CENTRAL AMERICA

By Peter Ross

Solidarity work with the Nicaraguan revolution was first organised in Australia as a response to the success of the Sandinistas in taking power in July 1979. Early efforts concentrated on raising funds for the reconstruction of the country which had been devastated by the civil war, and on informing Australians about Nicaragua and the aims and progress of the revolution. Latin Americans living in Australia were particularly prominent in this early stage.

Other events in the region led the solidarity movement to broaden its perspectives and objectives. While Nicaragua remained a priority, support was also advanced to the revolutionary government of Grenada, and the revolutionary movements in El Salvador and Guatemala. Less money was raised, but important work was done in disseminating information about the Nicaraguan situation, particularly the destabilising role being played by the government of the United States.

Many Australians travelled to Nicaragua and links were built up between that country and the Australian solidarity movement. The Resource and Action Committee for Latin America (RACLA) undertook an aid project to fund a pre-school on a state coffee farm in the northern Nicaraguan province of Jinotega. In Melbourne, on the initiatives of members of the Latin American Information Centre (LAIC), Northcote Council established sister city ties with a town in Nicaragua. Community Aid Abroad took on a project to fund a women’s co-operative in the Atlantic Coast region.

It was not until 1984, however, that the revolutionary government sent representatives to Australia. In March, the Australian government invited a Nicaraguan trade delegation to Australia. Headed by the Minister for Trade, the team had wide ranging talks with Australian officials concerning the possibilities of developing closer trading links. This invitation reflects a change of policy on the part of the Australian government towards Nicaragua, since the ALP’s coming to power. Diplomatic relations between the two countries have also been upgraded.

In May, RACLA hosted the tour to Australia of Comandante Doris Tijerino and two officials from the Department of International Relations, Orlando Gomez and Daniel Ortega. In their lightning visit of five days, which included Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, the trio were able to meet a wide range of people involved in solidarity work, as well as representatives from unions, churches, aid organisations, the media, and political parties.

Comandante emphasised that now, more than ever, Nicaragua needs strong support. CIA-funded counter-revolutionary raids, including air attacks and the mining of Nicaragua’s harbours, have taken their toll of the economy. The RACLA pre-school, to give an example that strikes a chord at home, has already been destroyed once by the contras. It is now being rebuilt. The threat of a full-scale US invasion remains.

A feature of Doris Tijerino’s visit was the warmth of the welcome extended by many Australians. Not only did capacity crowds attend the public meetings, but organisations and individuals generously helped in organising and funding the tour.

After covering expenses, over $1,000 remains to be sent to the RACLA pre-school project. On top of this, a number of direct contributions were made to Nicaragua via the visitors. Notable among these were $2,500 from the Communist Party of Australia from voluntary levy on its members, $1,000 from a member of the gay peace group, Enola Gay, and $100 from the Blue Mountains Marxist Discussion Group.

Such amounts, small as they may be by Australian terms, are significant for Nicaragua. They enable the revolution to build the infrastructure of the new Nicaragua. They are also a palpable sign to all Nicaraguans that even countries as remote as Australia have people who realise the importance of the revolution and are willing to support it in every way they can.

Further information on solidarity work in Australia can be obtained from:

- Resource and Action Committee for Latin America (RACLA), PO Box 265, Broadway 2007.
- Latin American Information Centre (LAIC), 183 Gertrude St, Fitzroy 3065.
- Central American Support committee (CASC), PO Box 17, Rundle Mall, Adelaide 5000.
- Committee in Solidarity with Central America Campaigna (CISCAC), PO Box A431, Sydney South 2000.

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Of Nicaragua's population of 2.9 million, 54% live in cities, 48% are under fifteen years old and 68% are under 24 years old. The majority of Nicaraguans have known no life other than that of natural disasters, the savage military repression of the National Guard, and the revolutionary struggle against Somoza's dictatorship. In Nicaraguan poetry, earthquake and revolution are interchangeable images of inevitable upheaval and transformation. It is within this imagery that "los muchachos" (the kids) learn to define themselves, their accomplishments and their responsibility as Nicaraguans for developing their own potentiality.

* earthquake, violent upheaval
Above: Two orphans living in the ruins of a Managuan theatre. The stage provides a space for their lean-to shelter and for games rehearsing the roles their older sisters and brothers already play in the militia. Below: In Managua the housing shortage is endemic. While housing projects are beginning to take shape in this lakeside barrio, it remains one of the poorest in Managua. The drum is the block's only water supply.

Top: The detritus of earthquake and the trophies of street fighting — adventure playgrounds and artifacts of revolutionary culture for Managuan children. Below: Veteran Sandinista and grandson at Commemoration Rally. Images of children and guns, anathema in our eyes, have different significations in a country which sees itself as the product of its history of rebellion and which is totally mobilised in defence of its revolution.
US POLICY IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Why does the United States government pursue the policy it does in Central America? What is this policy? In this article James Levy argues that it is ideology which informs present United States government policy in Central America, dominating 'objective' considerations such as U.S. economic investment in the area.

In this brief article, two questions are addressed: why does the United States government pursue the policy it does in Central America? What is the policy? If this seems to put the cart before the horse, I acknowledge the point. But behind my reasoning lies a central premise: that the fundamental sources of the US government's foreign policy reside within domestic economic, social and political conditions and not primarily in what other countries might do. This is not a novel position; in fact, it is the premise of an excellent article on US policy by Laurence Whitehead.1

The US society and its government have been profoundly shaped by the acquisition and protection of an overseas empire, a process which, in historical terms, has been relatively short, dating from roughly the turn of the twentieth century. It is possible, of course, to argue that imperialism has been the central fact of American history form the moment when the first settlers began to wrest land from the native populations. Indeed, not only the Indians, but also the French, the Spanish and the Mexicans retreated from the irrepressible "Manifest Destiny" of westward expansion to the Pacific Ocean. As a result of its victory over Spain in 1898, the United States actually acquired overseas territories including Puerto Rico and the Philippines while, simultaneously, it began to wrest an informal empire through the export of capital and the dominance of markets. Unwilling to acknowledge possession of its overseas empire, and refusing outright to accept responsibility for its territorial administration except in a very few areas, the US government and its citizens nevertheless adjusted to the imperatives of empire: not only did they formulate appropriate institutions (an army, navy and airforce; the Department of State, etc.), but also they forged an ideology of imperialism which enabled them to believe that their government's foreign policy conformed to the ideals of political democracy, social equality and economic progress.

The history of US expansion reveals a complex process in which such diverse interests as plantation owners, gold prospectors, impoverished dirt farmers, traders, financiers, and industrialists played a part. It was not a conspiracy planned on Wall street or in Washington, although both capital and its political servants contributed decisively to the process. And lest we forget that this expansion reflected domestic pressures, let us remember, for example, that the US experienced a "Red Scare" in 1919 every bit as hysterical as that of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The requirements of social order and imperial responsibility during the early stages of expansion did much to cause what William Appleman Williams called "The Great Evasion"— the refusal of the people of the US to confront Marx (and to acknowledge possession of an empire).2 But the acquisition itself of Empire was a result of powerful domestic sectors including agricultural interests which played a particularly prominent role in the process.

Far more obvious are the sources of...
US expansion and adjustments to it in the period since 1945. Within the brief period of just forty years, the US developed and consolidated the necessary structures for the imperial society: a highly centralised bureaucracy, a vast military establishment, an enormously productive but badly distorted economy, and an ideology which does not merely legitimise imperialism among the masses of US citizens, but also justifies further expansion and mobilises the people for its many arduous tasks. The "Cold War" acted as the catalyst for these processes and to list some of the main events is to recall the enormous impact it has had on all of us: the redemption of Greece, George Kennan's containment of the USSR (1946), the loss of China in 1949, the Korean War, McCarthyism, and more directly related to our present concern, the liberation of Guatemala in 1954 and the loss of Cuba in 1959. Although the Cold War and US expansion were planned, directed, and conducted by representatives predominantly of monopoly and finance capital located on the eastern seaboard of the United States, soon new interests developed in other parts of the country in direct response to these policies, particularly in the south, south-west and far west.

Perhaps the most dramatic economic consequence of the Cold War has been the growth of the "defence" budget and with it, the industries directly and indirectly related to the military. From $US50 billion at the time of the Korean War to a proposed $US305 billion this year, the "defence" budget of the US has now dominated all other priorities save "health, education and welfare". The Reagan Administration, on coming to power, planned a six-year program to increase the military budget by 67 percent before inflation. The economic consequences of all this defy meaning — numbers simply will not do to explain. But lest we attempt to divorce the heavy rhetoric of national security from hard business imperatives, in this expansion of military spending, let Newsweek set us straight: the top managers of the Pentagon "must find ways to reinvigorate the nation's defence industry, whose productive capacity has dwindled dangerously during the post-Vietnam era's uncertain budgeting". Apparently, more than 2,000 aerospace contractors left the field between 1968 and 1976; some 240 forging foundries closed; the recession in the defence industries caused layoffs to the extent that Los Angeles alone is now short 30,000 aerospace and electrical engineers, nor are there enough welders and pipe fitters for the shipbuilders. Despite warnings that spending on this scale will cause inflation, increase budget deficits, keep interest rates high and thus threaten the world's precarious economic order, Reagan and the Pentagon press on in the style of true grit. Why? Because this economic recovery — and there is one — will be defence-led and deficit financed (Keynes would appreciate the irony).

In effect, Reagan is responding to his constituency — broadly the states of the south, south-west and far west where, since the second world war, the US military-industrial resides and, with it, increasing numbers of people. The two facts are closely related. Between 1960 and 1967 the top ten military contractors were Lockheed Aircraft, General Dynamics, McDonnell-Douglas, Boeing, General Electric, North American-Rockwell, United Aircraft, American Telephone and Telegraph, Martin-Marietta and Sperry-Rand. Overwhelmingly, these corporations are located within what is now the Reagan constituency. The strong economic and political link between the military-industrial complex and its geographical base is clear in the Department of Defense where many of the top managers come from California where they worked for defence contractors. Capital and people flow liquid-like towards the southern and western periphery of the United States. Now, Los Angeles has replaced Chicago as the nation's second largest city; Houston pushed Philadelphia from fourth to fifth place; Baltimore dropped from tenth to twelfth place as San Antonio and Honolulu grew. Death in the northeast (Brazilianists will appreciate the irony) is widely acknowledged while politicians as diverse in their views as Ronald Reagan and Jesse Jackson apply a "southern strategy". Indeed, the locus of United States domestic political influence and economic
power is shifting with the result that the last four elected presidents represented California (Nixon and Reagan), Texas (Johnson) and Georgia (Carter).

This fundamental change in the location of power and influence is occurring in areas — especially the south and south-west — known for racism, religious fundamentalism, populism, patriotism and distrust of the city. The old Democratic “solid south” has been remarkably receptive to Reagan’s “new right”. Indeed, the importance of ideology, combined with the economic and political changes, cannot be underestimated. I will go further: it is an ideology which informs present Central American policy dominating “objective” considerations such as US economic investment in the area.

Within the US as a whole, there is a profound and generalised fear of communism, the legacy of the Cold War and McCarthy. It pervades thinking at all social levels and results in such sloppy (not to say dangerous) concepts as the national interest, the efficacy of free enterprise, domino theories, and the Kremlin as capitalism’s equivalent to Rome’s thesis of original sin. The ideology of anti-communism faced profound challenge during the Viet Nam War and it is this hegemony which Reagan and his constituency seek to restore. I am tempted to hypothesise that it was precisely the depth and effectiveness of the challenge to the ideological hegemony of the anti-communists which prompted the withdrawal from Viet Nam. It was possibly as threatening as the economic consequences of the war. Those areas most intimately related to the military-industrial are also those areas which, for historical reasons, are fertile soil for the culture of anti-communism. Thus, a reciprocal relationship exists between the development of the military-industrial, the increasing political and economic influence of the southern and western states, and the strident rhetoric of the Reagan administration.

Two examples of this relationship are fundamentalist Protestantism and, for lack of a better term, “the new Federalism” which contribute in important ways to the Reagan view of the world. Although such groups as the Moral Majority are not exclusively based in the south, they depend
heavily on that area for funds and membership and have devoted great missionary effort to areas in Central America. These groups have supported conservative causes within the United States for a long time and are closely identified with anticommunism, the virtues of free enterprise and the evils of the big city. Significantly, ex-president of Guatemala, Efrain Rios-Montt, adhered to one of these fundamentalist sects located in California.9

Another example is that of the "new federalism". To be sure, its proponents do not reside solely in the south, southwest and far west, but it is these areas which, in recent years, have produced the most strident rhetoric. The idea is to weaken "big government" and by extension to allow more choice in American society. "Big government" is, of course, located in Washington, and not far beneath the surface of the "new federalism" is deep and strong antagonism towards both the northeast and the city. Students of US history will recognise easily these themes.

Although I have concentrated on the growing power and influence of the so-called "sunset" in domestic US affairs, it must be recognised that this power and influence is extending southwards. Ever since the mid-nineteenth century New Orleans has played an important role in Central American politics and economics, while the role of Texas in Mexican affairs is notorious. In recent years, much of the capital investment in Guatemala originated in the sun belt.8 The number of Central American refugees now in the southwestern United States is very substantial and, because of their illegal presence, their welfare and futures present serious difficulties for private and public authorities.

I have argued to this point that an understanding of Washington's Central American policies should develop from an understanding of their domestic sources. Those sources are located in the continuing shift of economic and political influence from the eastern and mid-western states to the south, south-west and far west. Major forces behind the economic transition are the growth of the military-industrial complex and the growth of population: behind the

other countries will fall; and that the opposition must be defeated forcibly. It is this last argument that has increasingly dominated Washington's actions, economic aid notwithstanding. Both in word and deed, the Reagan administration has forsaken diplomacy and negotiation for the use of force. While such emphasis may be mistaken, it is, in fact, consistent with the views and interests of those groups which dominate the Reagan constituency.

It is not my intention here to review in detail the development of Washington's foreign policy. I assume that most of us, by simply watching television or listening to the radio, are familiar with the growing militarisation of the region. It is important, therefore, to recognise a substantial change in US policy from the Carter to the Reagan administration in the willingness to apply force. Two examples should suffice: Carter's enunciation of the government's concern for human rights led to the suspension of military aid to Guatemala and, for brief moments, to El Salvador and to Somoza's Nicaragua. More important, he refused to send US troops to Nicaragua and even offered economic aid to the new government in Managua. This is not to say that Carter actively supported the forces of reform in Latin America — I suspect that what happened in Nicaragua resulted more from ignorance and indecision than from conscious planning. Nevertheless, as soon as the Reagan administration came to power, guided by such moral philosophers as Jeanne Kirkpatrick and Al Haig, human rights were subordinated to the struggle for freedom, and any thoughts of aid to the Sandinista government were quickly forgotten.

"This fundamental change in the location of power and influence is occurring in areas — especially the south and south-west — known for racism, religious fundamentalism, popularism, patriotism and distrust of the city. The old Democratic 'solid south' has been remarkably receptive to Reagan's 'new right'. Indeed the importance of ideology, combined with economic and political changes, cannot be underestimated."

It would be remiss, however, to ignore the role that economic aid plays in US policy in Central America, or not to analyse Washington's policies with each nation and with the region as a whole. Although time will not permit much detail here, it should be recognised that economic aid has been massive, and, if the recommendations of the Kissinger Commission are accepted, will become indigestible. El Salvador, the largest recipient of US economic aid in 1983, received S$292,000,000 — of which S$222,000,000 went to economic stabilisation.10 The United States allocated Honduras S$102,000,000 in 1983 and S$169,000,000 is proposed for 1984. Guatemala was loaned S$128,500,000 by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank between November 1983 and February 1984. The Kissinger Commission proposes to invest a massive S$8,000,000,000 in the region over the next five years. Much of this aid will merely compensate for capital outflow as the regional bourgeoisie hedges its bets. In
addition, these funds will shore up what is a rapidly deteriorating economy in every country except Nicaragua. Unfortunately there is little indication that the source of Washington's woes in Central America - the people themselves - will ever benefit substantially from this aid. The principal strategy in both the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) and the Kissinger Commission recommendations is to strengthen as much as possible the private sector. The latter report urges the Central American republics to look closely at the development processes of Hong Kong and Singapore where cheap labour uses advanced technology to assemble and export manufactures. Although it is true that United States business interests are not heavily involved in Central America - a little over $US3,000,000,000 in investments outside Panama - the regional market does represent sales of more than $US2,000,000,000 a year, and foreign aid on the scale indicated above will certainly augment that figure. Thus, the economic aid program to Central America does represent a significant element of the Reagan administration's regional policy, and the emphasis on private enterprise in the area's economic development is entirely consistent with its ideology and constituency.

In the collective mind of the present administration, however, what is at stake in Central America is the United States. In a recent speech to the National Hispanic Leadership Conference, President Reagan argued that in Central America, "the strategic balance of the world is at stake .... If Central America is lost, then our own borders will be threatened". This is doomsday stuff. It leaves no doubt that the United States will have to be seen, as a minimum, to have gained victory. But what does victory mean in Central America? And how is it to be achieved? The answer is, perhaps, not so simple as it seems: one of the basic problems is Washington's desire to regionalise conflict which is primarily (but not exclusively) national in scope. Five separate republics have to be homogenised and the Contadora peace initiative ignored. Honduras and El Salvador must forget that they fought a war in 1969; Costa Rica's civil guard must be upgraded; Guatemala...
must cease it claims on Belize and so on.

At the very least, victory means the toppling of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and the destruction of the opposition movement, at least in their guerrilla phases, in El Salvador and Guatemala. No serious observer believes that the Reagan administration desires a negotiated solution to either conflict. When the Sandinistas met one series of US demands, Reagan simply increased the ante. In El Salvador, neither the official government, nor Washington, has indicated that they want to talk about the FDR/FMLN minimum points. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, Contadora remains on the margin — and they have voiced their frustration. Said the Kissinger Commission.

To be sure, the interests and attitudes of these four countries are not identical, nor do they always comport with our own. Reagan's choice of the military solution is overwhelmingly obvious: fortress Honduras now boasts five new airstrips, two barracks and office complexes, a field hospital, thirteen miles of anti-tank trenches, the Regional Military Training Center and there is more to come, including a permanent naval base — all courtesy of Washington. The CIA mines Nicaraguan waters, and arms many thousands of contras to invade that country from Honduras and Costa Rica; Washington is working hard to revive the moribund Central American Defense Council (CONDECA) and to build an "iron triangle" among Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador; US pilots fly reconnaissance missions over El Salvador and Nicaragua; the US navy is to conduct coastal surveillance in the Gulf of Fonseca; and according to reports published in the International Herald Tribune, the Pentagon is now capable of fighting a war in Central America without having to rely on its Southern Command base in Panama. Military "assistance" to Central America is to increase from about $US8,800,000,000 in 1980 to a requested $US259,000,000,000 in 1984. It is unnecessary to press the point, but the Kissinger Commission clearly dramatised the Reagan administration's view when, in discussing the things the US shared with Latin America, it stated:

The transcontinental sweep of the southern United States that stretches from Miami to Los Angeles, and which is home to many of our fastest growing urban areas and high technology industries, regards as a natural element of life its shared Gulf and Caribbean sea routes as well as a 2,000 mile land border facing south.

The brevity of this article and its focus on the domestic sources of Washington's Central American policies leads easily to charges of reductionism — which I acknowledge. I am aware of the Pentagon's repeated statements of reluctance to fight another war without the support of the United States' people: Carter, although a southerner, was more "dove-ish" in his Central American policies than Reagan; imperialism and the use of force have many proponents among representatives of northeastern finance capital; some of Reagan's most vocal critics come from the Pentagon itself; others, such as the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, are excluded from Reagan's Central American policy (is) comprehensible: an insistence that the opposition movements in Central America are exclusively marxist-leninist; that they are guided from, and aided by, the Kremlin via Havana and Managua; that unless the opposition can be stopped in El Salvador, the other countries will fall; and that the opposition must be defeated forcibly ... Both in word and deed the Reagan administration has forsaken diplomacy and negotiation for the use of force.

Footnotes

4. ibid., p. 20.
14. Report of the National Bipartisan Commission, op.cit., p. 120.

James Levy teaches at the University of NSW in the School of Spanish and Latin American Studies, and is a member of Resources and Action Committee for Latin America.
Workers' struggle to win safe and healthy work places is a struggle as long as industrialisation itself. For example, underground miners earlier this century went through many strikes often in response to deaths on the job. Safety issues have tended to predominate in the pre-seventies period, mainly because of the immediate, and often horrific, effects of accidents.

However, over the past decade, health issues have become of more concern for a number of reasons, not the least being the increased incidence of cancer in workers exposed to carcinogens such as asbestos in the boom years of the '50s and '60s.

In this article, Ben Bartlett looks at the development of the workers' health movement over the past decade, mainly focussing on the movement in Sydney.

Ben Bartlett

The development of the workers' health movement in the mid to late '70s occurred because of a variety of factors operating at the time.

Technological change. The rapid growth of new technology led to changes in the workplace which were often against the interests of workers. White collar workers were being displaced, and promotion opportunities were being reduced. The new technology brought with it new and poorly understood hazards.

Manufacturing industry was also going through changes often involving new technology and, again, new and poorly understood hazards. New chemicals have been introduced into industry at a frightening rate with little knowledge about their hazards, particularly the long term effects of low level exposures over a period of time.

Economic Recession. Particularly since 1974, economic difficulties of capital, coupled with worker redundancy due to new technology, has produced increasingly high levels of unemployment. Poorly organised workers have responded to this with acceptance of speedups, increased work loads, poor equipment, etc. because of fear of losing their jobs. Productivity bargaining has resulted in increased work loads on fewer workers. This has resulted in an increased injury rate, particularly over-use syndrome, such as tenosynovitis.

More organised workers have responded with increased militancy and, as wage demands have become more elusive, some have directed this militancy towards demands for a healthier workplace.

Speedups and retrenchments have increased the accident and injury rate and have led many unions to become more active in health and safety problems.

Viet Nam and the Draft. The late '60s also saw increased militancy of students mobilised around the Viet Nam war and the draft. This inevitably resulted in the politicisation of many students who were ultimately to become scientists, doctors, teachers, etc. with an interest in politics and the working class.

Environmental Movement. Environmental concerns became mass issues particularly among students, but also among workers. The BLF Green Bans are a notable example of workers taking up environmental issues.

Immigration. Immigration was at a high level during the boom years, and was an asset to capital in times of fairly full employment and, in the late '60s, of rising worker militancy. It was convenient for many industries to employ recently arrived migrant labour, often at low rates of pay and in sweat-shop conditions. These workers mostly spoke very little English and did not understand their rights in this country. They were easily exploited and would accept highly dangerous conditions of work. In some workplaces, migrant labour would be sacked after 12 months and replaced with more recently arrived workers. This ensured a continual supply of poorly informed and docile workers until the immigration program began to decline.

This had the effect of creating an unorganised section of labour where poor and dangerous conditions
operated relative to the organised work force, thus increasing the injury rate emanating from these workplaces. Clearly, the immigration program provided Australian industry with a cheap and docile source of labour.

Medibank and Community Health. The advent of the Whitlam Labor government saw much reform in the area of health. A compulsory health insurance scheme, Medibank, was introduced. A community health program was also initiated. These measures involved much public debate, as well as debate among health workers. The community health movement challenged orthodox health delivery and the appropriateness of medical dominance and medical models.

The trade union movement became seriously involved in the defence of Medibank when the Fraser government began dismantling it, culminating in a one-day national strike in 1978.

Women's Health. The women's movement had identified health as a major issue for women and set up two women's health centres (Leichhardt and Liverpool). At the Liverpool Women's Health Centre, health workers there became concerned at the number of women factory workers, mainly migrant women, who suffered from over-use syndromes, such as tenosynovitis.

A campaign was organised to publicise this and to bring it to the attention of the trade unions. This campaign took a number of years to develop into a major force.

Leaflets produced by the Workers Health Centre.

Occupational Health Establishment. While all this had been going on, little change had penetrated the established occupational health facilities. The private sector employed a few doctors in the larger enterprises such as CSR. They also employ occupational health nurses who are often the meat in the sandwich, caught between their own ideals and the concerns of the workers, and the priorities and dictates of management.

The state apparatus, the Department of Industrial Relations and the Division of Occupational Health, were clearly both inadequate and conservative and did not know how to relate to the changing circumstances. The DIR had a reputation as corrupt and worked through management almost exclusively. Workers had little faith in the DIR. The Division of Occupational Health was not much better. It was seen as inaccessible to workers, and as interpreting information about hazards conservatively. There was even the leaking of documents which showed that the division had knowingly suppressed information about radiation hazards at Hunters Hill.

The lack of research in universities and hospitals into the work relatedness of workers’ ill health, and the lack of information available to workers on work hazards, led a group of health workers and trade unionists to discuss the possibility of doing something about it. Some of these people had already assisted workers with information about job hazards in a casual fashion. Some had had experience in women's health centres and community health. It was decided, in late 1975, to work to establish a workers' health centre which would consist of a resource and information centre and a clinic. 1976 was spent soliciting support from trade unions, organised rank-and-file groups such as shop committees, and collecting information resources from overseas and locally. The centre opened in early 1977 with six staff members and part-time interpreters.

It was not long before the centre was flooded with requests for information about work hazards from all types of workers (artists, printers, railway workers, construction workers, clerks, metal workers, etc.) and from all parts of Australia. The centre has had difficulty in coping with the demand ever since. This was not helped by the suspicion and hostility of the occupational health establishment, and the far right of the trade union movement and the ALP.

The centre has been involved with a wide range of occupational health struggles on the job. Asbestos, fibre glass, mica, VDUs, tenosynovitis, air conditioning, shift work, lead, other heavy metals, many chemicals, etc. have all been issues taken up by the centre with affected workers. Leaflets
have been produced, in various languages, on many hazards and how to prevent them. They have been distributed widely through trade unions, shop committees, migrant organisations, women's and community health centres, etc.

The centre has assisted some trade unions and the Trade Union Training Association (TUTA) in conducting health and safety schools for workers. It has encouraged the idea of workers forming health and safety committees on the job, and the election of a health and safety representative to coordinate efforts to improve things.

The clinic assisted workers with compensation claims and gave information to injured or sick workers about their health which is often denied them elsewhere. The two issues which have developed out of the clinic, as opposed to the resource centre, were the tenosynovitis campaign which affected a high proportion of migrant women workers who were not adequately represented by trade unions, and the Alpha Chemicals scandal. Here, non-unionised workers were being exposed to dangerous levels of mercury, arsenic, and other toxic chemicals, and a number of workers had clear evidence of chronic mercury poisoning which results in permanent brain damage. The centre encouraged these workers to join the Miscellaneous Workers Union, and assisted them in documenting the situation to expose it to a press conference. Part of this documentation included how the high levels of exposure to toxic substances had been measured by the state health authorities without any action being taken against the company.

In 1980, as a response to the chronic misery and despair caused by tenosynovitis and the protracted compensation hassles, the Tenosynovitis Association was formed to assist workers affected by over-use problems and to develop ongoing campaigns around over-use problems. This organisation has become stronger and stronger in its relatively short life.

In the late '70s, a number of workers' struggles erupted in NSW involving many thousands of workers around health and safety demands. One of the largest and most disturbing struggles occurred in the Port Kembla steelworks around the issue of exposure to coke oven emissions and cancer. Studies from overseas have shown a strong link between coke oven emissions and lung, stomach, and a number of other types of cancer.

In 1977, reports of some of these studies almost accidentally came into the hands of the Port Kembla branch of the Ironworkers Union. What followed was a disgraceful saga of suppression of information by BHP.
and government agencies, bitter resistance from BHP to even the most superficial measures to reduce exposure, and protection of company interests by the Industrial Commission of NSW. This dispute, which is still being fought in Port Kembla involved:

- a strike by about one thousand workers to obtain results of a government testing program on the Port Kembla coke ovens;
- a claim by the then Minister of Health that he had 'misaid' the report for six months;
- a four-week strike in Port Kembla among oven and by-product workers over the very minimal measures recommended in the government report covering by-product workers;
- a decision by the Industrial Commission of NSW in 1981 which basically excluded those by-product workers from many of the minimal protection measures;
- a claim by the extreme rightwing national secretary of the Ironworkers Union that the company had done everything possible to protect workers on the coke ovens, and an attack on the local unions for being 'alarmist and frightening workers'.

A number of basic issues are raised in the struggle and others like it. Coke oven workers were not informed of coke oven hazards in the early '70s by government agencies, or BHP, despite this research being known to them. The only material (multilingual) explaining these hazards was produced by the local union with the assistance of the only independent worker-oriented health agency in existence at the time, the Workers' Health Centre. Emission levels still tolerated in Australia are many times higher than those tolerated overseas. No legislation or regulation has been introduced to control a known cancer-causing workplace hazard.

Without the research and resources of the Workers' Health Centre, the struggle around coke oven hazards would probably not have got to the stage it has. Today, emissions are still high, and Port Kembla unions are beginning to see cancers among coke oven workers who are often denied compensation.

A federal parliamentary committee report in 1983 strongly criticised BHP and state government agencies for their inactivity, and concluded that the consequences of this inactivity could well be a national disaster. The struggle continues.

The pressure on the Workers' Health Centre was very great, and an attempt to set up a Workers' Health Action Group was made by trade unionists in 1977. This group functioned for a fairly short period before folding. In May 1980, the first major TUTA health and safety school was held in Albury-Wodonga, and participants from Sydney decided to form the Occupational Safety and Health Action Group (OSHAG). This group consists of trade unionists, trade union officials, occupational health workers, lawyers, etc. and meets regularly. OSHAG played a major role in the Williams Inquiry in NSW, and in the campaign around the NSW legislation. It continues to provide an important forum for the discussion of worker health issues and the development of campaigns.

As a result of the decision by the Industrial Commission of NSW in 1978, quite a large number of unions have become involved in this clinic. They have been increasingly concerned about workers' health issues. Likewise, in Wollongong, a trade union clinic was set up in 1980. Circulates accurate and detailed information about various hazards to trade unions.

In 1982, the NSW Labor Council set up an Occupational Health and Safety Unit. These initiatives have been in response to increasing rank-and-file concern and action around health and safety problems in the workplace.

Women sacked over tenosynovitis meet at the Lidcombe Workers Health Centre in April 1982.
In October 1979, the NSW government announced that an inquiry into occupational health and safety would be conducted, and the Williams Inquiry was set up. Initially, the inquiry was to be all over by February 1980. Only after fairly widespread protests from trade unions, ALP branches, OSHAG and the Workers’ Health Centre was the time schedule changed to allow more adequate time for proper submissions and hearings.

Ultimately, hearings took place from April 1980 until June 1981. Legislation based on this inquiry came into effect in May 1983. This legislation is far from adequate and it is difficult not to see the whole exercise as a whitewash of the issue and an attempt to control worker unrest about work hazards.

The legislation does give workers the right to form health and safety committees in workplaces with more than 20 workers providing more than 50 percent want one. The recommended make-up of the committee is four appointed by management and four elected by the workers. Workers thus elected have a limited right to inspect the workplace and carry out functions of the committee without loss of pay. Workers have the right to be informed about what hazards they face, and any change in the workplace which may involve new hazards. However, there is no provision, as yet, for training.

Under the legislation, all government agencies, such as the Division of Occupational Health and the Mines Inspectors are brought under the umbrella of the Department of Industrial Relations. However, workers’ compensation remains with the Attorney-General.

It is also planned to establish an Occupational Health Unit at Sydney Hospital. This unit is virtually using the Workers’ Health Centre as a model and will attempt to perform all the functions the centre has been carrying out, including production of multilingual leaflets, etc.

The Hawke Labor government has set up an Interim National Occupational Health and Safety Commission to take submissions and to formulate recommendations about federal government policy and legislation. It is unclear what these recommendations will be, and it should be recognised that the federal government has little control over what happens in the states.

However, the federal government could play a significant role in developing uniform national standards and regulations, and in assisting existing and proposed
workers' health centres and action groups.

In the Accord, the federal government has agreed, among other things, to give some priority to occupational health questions. In exchange for this, and other things like tax relief, workers are expected to show some restraint by keeping wage demands within the framework of arbitration and indexation. So far, workers' restraint has kept their wage increases down to 8.4 percent since the lifting of the wage freeze, while doctors have been granted 11.3 percent. So far, there is little that workers can see as tangible in the area of occupational health for their efforts. Hopefully, there will be increased pressure applied to the Hawke government to fulfill their part of the bargain.

This article has largely concentrated on what has happened in Sydney. However, it should be recognised that simultaneously and independently, the workers' health movement has developed in Newcastle and Wollongong, as well as in every state in Australia.

From the beginning, this movement has maintained links with similar groups in the USA, Canada, the UK, Sweden, etc.

In February 1984, a meeting was held to form a national organisation which could discuss co-operation and policy questions. This meeting developed a policy submission to the federal government's interim commission, and agreed on the formation of an ongoing national organisation, and criteria for membership.

Hopefully, this organisation will assist groups who are just starting, as well as maximising our limited resources by sharing information, etc.

The workers' health movement has demonstrated a number of important points in considering occupational health. The old view that it was the states' responsibility to ensure safe working conditions is untenable. The state cannot realistically inspect all workplaces regularly enough, even if all inspectors were hard-working and genuinely concerned about workers' health. Any number of professionals employed in this area will not necessarily change

the situation. It is crucial that workers develop their own organisations around health and safety, and their own knowledge about hazards and how to prevent them. It is clear that experts who have little understanding of the realities of the workplace and the priority of profits that operate, cannot be relied upon.

In the end, workers' health is a question of power. If workers are organised industrially, and have their own health and safety committees as part of their industrial organisation, they will have the means to win a healthy work environment.

The demands of the workers' health movement need to be around the right to form health and safety committees as part of trade union organisation on the job; the right to know what substances, etc. are involved in the work process, what the hazards are, and what preventive measures are available; the right to obtain and use independent scientific information about hazards; the right of those exposed to decide what risks are acceptable to them, particularly where there is incomplete or conflicting scientific evidence available; and, most importantly, the right to stop work when a hazard is suspected.

Ben Bartlett was involved in the setting up of the Workers Health Centre.

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Table: Historical Overview of Workers' Health Movement and Trade Union Initiatives and Government Responses.
One of the central issues raised at the recent Association of Women’s Health Services Conference was that of racism toward Aboriginal and migrant women. The conference, which was held at the Illawarra Aboriginal Community Centre on 26-27 May, looked at problems such as the lack of representation of Aboriginal and migrant women on health centre collectives; their exclusion from important areas such as finance and submission writing; and the failure to share skills, information and resources within collectives.

Margaret Whelan interviewed several women at the conference for ALR. The interviews emphasised the difficulties facing the collectives and the need for review, both internally and externally of women’s health services.

Interview with Jean Carter who works at the Shoalhaven Women’s Resource Centre.

Margaret: What do you see as the greatest need for Aboriginal women’s health services?
Jean: I see the importance of Aboriginal women’s health services being separate. We need to maintain our identity, to see to our needs as we interpret them. Migrant women would do the same for the community they represent. I’d like to see that, even though we are separate, we are together — all women — that we support one another. Aboriginal collectives would be a much stronger body — a more effective body.

I’ve found that being employed under the Community Employment Program has given me the opportunity to reach out into the Aboriginal community and draw in Aboriginal women from La Perouse down to Wreck Bay (an Aboriginal community near Nowra). Developing that link-up has taken time. It’s really just getting established now. CEP funding does not really cater for the fact that that relationship, with that build-up of trust takes time. You just can’t do it within six or twelve months. With each case you establish trust, and are able to establish more clearly the areas of need.

Margaret: So perhaps triennial funding would help?
Jean: Yes. What we need is to be able to make long-term plans for Aboriginal collectives with Aboriginal control of those collectives. You see, you don’t just walk into an Aboriginal home, find out what’s needed, take that information, and walk out again. We don’t live that way. You sit around and share whatever problems families have. You can’t leave without trying to resolve all aspects of a problem — you can’t divorce your thoughts away from a particular problem.

My connections are right along the coast. Being known for the sort of work I do can become a real drain at times. You do it ... because it has to be done. A lot of community workers are like that.

I’m really enthusiastic about the idea of women’s centres. From the experience gained in the last six months, I feel that I’ve learnt a lot. That experience, and being able to work with a person like Jill (Jill Meikle who also works at the Shoalhaven Resource Centre) has been very informative — we’ve worked really well together. The concept of sharing knowledge and resources is very constructive. I think that it’s important to continue and build on that base.

The women at the centre recognise my Aboriginality, and that some things need to be separate. They understand that, and it’s that understanding that is important. We have our own areas and capabilities and are more effective in those areas. I’m more than willing to put a lot of work onto them in some cases but, in other cases, particularly concerning Aboriginal women, I’m quite forceful in seeing that either the other Aboriginal worker or myself deals with that.

That’s fine, it works really well. I can’t see why other centres couldn’t come up with a similar solution. It’s just an understanding of one another, and a respect for each other’s abilities, a sensitivity as to who we represent.

Margaret: This has been a unique conference in many ways. What’s your response to it?
Jean: I’ve really enjoyed it. I’ve always looked at migrant women and thought “They’re different”. And there was ... not hostility towards them ... but sometimes I thought that they were
talking about me, because they spoke in their own language. But when you get to know people, you realise they have their own worries, their own concerns, and are far too busy to be talking to you at all! This meeting between women breaks down all that sort of misunderstanding. Actually, in Wreck Bay we haven’t really moved out of a very small community — and the first thing I was greeted with by those Aboriginal women from Wreck Bay who were here yesterday was “You should have been here, it was really good .... they’re just the same as us”. Their concern about the future, their children. The good feeling I’ve got is that these feelings have been reciprocated. It’s the beginning.

I hope that with the information that’s been exchanged today, when we go back to our communities we’ll be able to look at the many problems that face us with a broader perspective.

**Interview with Jacki Widin and Kim Back, both workers at Liverpool Women’s Health Centre.**

**Margaret:** Would you give me some information on the current situation of women’s health services?

**Jacki:** Women’s health centres were first set up in 1974 in Sydney. At that time they were funded by the federal government. In 1981, the Fraser government handed over all responsibility for women’s health services to the state governments, and this led to inequality between states in funding to the centres, and also meant we had very little chance of receiving any increase in our funding because we were competing against all health services in the state.

Women’s health services are grossly underfunded, and there’s been no expansion in their funding to keep up with inflation. We’ve never been able to expand the health services to meet what we identify as the needs of women in the community. Most centres operate on virtually no funding at all, and it’s very hard in the present economic climate for services to get funding if they identify the need for a women’s health centre in a particular area.

**Margaret:** When you say they operate on little or no funding, that means that there is a lot of volunteer work as well?

**Jacki:** Yes, lots and lots of volunteer work. In NSW, there’s only two centres that are funded in any way nearly adequately — the Leichhardt Women’s Health Centre and the Liverpool Centre and they’re funded to employ between 10 and 13 women. The problem with those centres which do get funding is that most of those workers are not on award wages — there is no award wage and that’s why the government has been able to get away with not providing adequate funding for proper wages. The centres which are only partially funded ... there are usually only one or two wages given to those centres, like Bankstown, Gosford, Newcastle, Wollongong and Wugga. They’ve only recently got a bit of money. Those centres get money to cover one or two people and a little for administration — and that means all other women active in a centre often have to pay their own expenses to get to the centre, pay for child care, etc., so they can work in the centre on a volunteer basis. So, it’s obviously under-funded. It has been clearly established across Australia that these types of services — centres run by women for women — are the best model for a community health program. That’s been acknowledged in many government policy reports.

**Kim:** In NSW at the moment there’s only one funded Rape Crisis Centre. They’re grossly under-funded. They are supposed to be funded as a 24-hour counselling and assistance service. Those workers are currently working for $2.50 per hour for a 50-hour week. This is a particularly urgent situation, especially in country areas where there’s no other resource for women who have been raped.

**Margaret:** Has most of the funding been from Wage Pause and the Community Employment Program?

**Kim:** A lot of the funding over the last few years has been through the Health Department. But with the new job creation schemes, a lot of services that don’t get much, if any, funding have had to apply for Wage Pause and CEP to try to get at least one or two workers
because they're so under-funded they have to try any source to get money. A lot of women's services are getting some money right now to run parts of their program or set up particular projects or to employ one or two workers. But this is usually only for six months and so not in any way adequate to keep a service going. It's a stop-gap measure, really.

**Margaret:** What came out of the National Women's Services Conference in Canberra in March?

**Kim:** In March this year we held the first national meeting of women's health services. At that conference, we identified what areas women's services were working in, and also we identified the gaps in the services nationally. One of the main ones was that most services want to go back to federal funding. We see this as a way to have equitable services throughout Australia. At the moment, there is a lot of discrimination between the states. In Queensland and Tasmania, for example, virtually no funding goes to women's health centres. Also, we saw that there were lots of areas of women's health and welfare that weren't being met. Particularly for migrant women and Aboriginal women, the services are very inadequate so that these women's needs are not met. The services have to direct themselves to those groups of women.

The national conference provided a great forum for women in those services to get together and to look at these problems.

One of the main recommendations from the national conference was about the need for a national review of all funding arrangements. The government was giving a range of suggestions about how they want to fund and administer us, and we are very unhappy about how they place some of us under Housing, some under Health, etc. when, in fact, our services are usually multipurpose services. We decided that we need a national review into all funding arrangements which would include who we are and what we do, who should fund us, who wants to run us, and that we want to be funded by the federal government. We are still negotiating for some money to carry out that review and the government is very reluctant to fund us so that we can even investigate what would be the best way for the services to be administered.

On the NSW level, in the last couple of years we've set up an Association of Women's Health, Information and Rape Crisis Centres and we've been getting our funding campaign more organised. We have three-monthly meetings with the Health Department. We've been calling on them to develop a policy on women's health for quite a long time now and they've just started setting up a review into women's health services here. There have been a lot of problems with that because we are having to fight to get some workers' representation on the committee to run that review. So, at this stage, our history is that we haven't been very well organised as women's health services. They're stalling us in lots of ways in that they can't or won't tell us who is on the committee or what they are doing. They say they'll consult with broader women's groups, but not us. So we are having quite a fight to gain legitimacy within the Health Department.

**Jacki:** The main development with the Health Department is that they are not committing themselves to funding women's health services on an ongoing basis. Every year we have to fight with the state government to ensure that those funded centres will receive funding for the next year. We have no security in our existence as women's health services, let alone expanding the identified needs for services. Our basic need is that we get triennial funding so that we can plan the way our services will be delivered and that we have an award wage.

**Interview with Noria Gonzalez and Monica Valenzuela who both work at The Factory Project — Women's Health in the Workplace.**

**Margaret:** What has to be done to ensure that collectives operate as collectives?

**Noria:** I think that reviewing the aims and objectives of the collectives is the only way that women in the collective
will be able to work together effectively. Because everybody is from different areas, it is very difficult to come to an agreement. If your aims and objectives are quite clear, and you employ people to meet those aims and objectives, then things could be worked out.

We need structures which can allow an equal participation of migrant and Aboriginal women in setting up these aims and objectives. Otherwise, the objectives are going to be set up, as usual, by the women who are stronger, and who have the power anyway. So it's not just a question of how we solve the problems in the collectives, but also how we form a mechanism by which those aims and objectives are established with equal participation of migrant women and Aboriginal women.

Monica: Without the participation of migrant women and Aboriginal women to get a true picture of what's really needed, what will happen is that people will be blind to the needs of the community.

Margaret: Is there the need for research to establish those needs, or are they already established but they're not being met?

Monica: Both. At the moment there is a review of all women's services and I think that review should include a review of migrant and Aboriginal services, specifically, to emphasise their particular problems. And yes, their needs are not being met.

Noria: This has been the struggle of all migrant women in the collectives, and of the Aboriginal women who have recently started to be employed in the centres — again and again we are faced with the problem of not being listened to in collectives. We know very well what the needs are. The needs are obvious. It's just that, again, we are not being heard.

Monica: I really feel that, if there was any intention of meeting those needs, by now the services would know them. This isn't a one-day occurrence. This has been going on for years, and nobody has wanted to acknowledge it in some centres. Others have actually retaliated. You know, "you're too emotional, aggressive", etc.

Noria: Also, if we actually want any changes for migrant and Aboriginal women, it's always one task more that we have to take on. I think that the problems of migrant women, the problems of Aboriginal women, the problems of Australian women, are all problems of the women's movement. If the women's movement is serious about tackling the problems of women, then it's all women, without any distinction. If the problems of women which are addressed are only the problems of Australian women, and not even the problems of working class women, you know, leaving aside the problems of migrant women and Aboriginal women, then the women's movement, and women's services are not serious about the task of broadening the women's movement to all women in Australia.

Margaret: So it's part of the class struggle?

Noria: Yes. Again, it is this vicious circle. Those women who have privileges, who have access to services, are dominating women's health services, are dominating the women's movement. There is a need to look at the issues which are relevant to all Australian women, and not to the chosen few. I mean such things as childcare, or all those other areas which haven't been met — these needs must be reviewed within the services.

Monica: So, basically, the question is "Who are we servicing, and who do we want those services to be for?" — and at the moment, no two ways about it all, those services are for a particular, an elite group.

Margaret: Yesterday there was discussion on the difficulties of language within collectives. What can be done to overcome this?

Monica: I think the question of language has two sides. One is, yes, if you have trouble speaking English, and we all have problems — it just means that people will have to spend a little more time in listening, which is quite all right — we're not there to put out a fire or anything, so we should have enough time to spend. On the other hand, we believe that even the most vocal migrant women get put down, which is not only a question of language. It is a question of attitude. I know a lot of very vocal migrant women. But no matter how vocal you are, if twenty people in the room are against two of you, you've just got to shut up because they just don't listen.
Hester Eisenstein is the author of the new book Contemporary Feminist Thought (Unwin 1984). She has taught at Yale and Barnard College, Columbia University, where she helped establish the women's studies program. In 1980 she co-edited The Future of Difference. She now works as senior equal employment adviser to the NSW government.

This interview with her, by Fiona Moore, is reprinted from Tribune. It includes discussion which, for space reasons, was edited out of the Tribune article.

Interview by Fiona Moore

How did you come to write the book?
It was originally a course in feminist theory which I taught at Barnard College for five years, from 1975 to 1980. It became clear to me that I had the material for a much larger study. It's based on the reading I've been doing since 1970, so it's about ten years' worth of reflection.

In that time you've moved from America to Australia. Has that affected the book?
Yes. I've been very affected by the Australian feminist milieu, which is very broad in its range — it's very aware of French, English, American and everybody's stuff. In a sense, it's much more cosmopolitan here than in America.

For instance, the English only speak to the English, and the French to the French ... but the Australians speak to everybody, and really have quite a clear idea of the difference between different feminist positions.

I was also influenced by the Australian political climate which is much further left than in America.

Do we have a creative input into that debate, or are we merely absorbing all these different strands?
I think the creative input is possibly not in straight feminist theory. It's more in the application of feminist theory and practice. I think the feminist writing on labour history puts together the psychological understanding of American feminists' work and the more traditional labour history approach of Australia and England. It's quite a creative mix.

I think Australian feminism is really intervening in structures — in trade unions, in government bureaucracies and so on, in a way I haven't seen previously, particularly in the US.

Could you briefly outline the structure of the book?
It's organised into three parts. Part 1 is an assessment of the people whom I take to be elaborating the position of Simone de Beauvoir. That's Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone and several feminist anthropologists like Sherry Ortner and Rosaldo. Then I took Susan Brownmiller. All those people, in different ways, are saying that it's basically difference from men that's the source of women's oppression.

In the last chapter I look at consciousness-raising which I see as a pivotal movement. It shifted that focus on difference as a form of oppression to difference as a possible source of strength.

In Part 2 I look at those writers who are saying that female differences should, in fact, be celebrated.

They ask what it is that women specialise in and shouldn't we put that into our politics? Particularly the capacity to nurture and many of the traditional women's values. That's people like Jean Baker-Milner, the psychologist, Adrienne Rich, the poet, and a whole strand of lesbian feminist writing from the early '70s.

The last part — Part 3 — covers the people I really part company with — Mary Daly, Susan Griffin, Andrea Dworkin. They're talking about an essential femaleness which is superior.

So, in the debate on pornography, Griffin and Dworkin are saying "Somehow our sexuality is divorced from issues of power — it's pure. Women loving women don't encounter that kind of masochism ..."
I really think that's off the wall! I wind up saying we really have to build a new synthesis. We have to transpose our women-centred vision and values into the political arena.

I've been accused of not saying how — which is fair enough! But I figure that'll have to be a different book. What I was trying to do was open up the debate.

Why don't you consider, or do you, the way in which marxism or socialist feminism has been enriched by the challenges of radical feminism as a political contribution?

That's not what I'm writing about. Partly, I think, because a lot of people have been writing about it, and that's not my particular expertise. So I thought I'd like to write this book about the American radical feminist tradition, informed by my socialist-feminism, but not taking on that other debate.

You're critical of radical feminism for “its consistent emphasis on the psychological at the expense of the economic factors”. What do you see as the proper role of psychology in the construction of feminist theory?

I'm not throwing psychology out. I think it's been absolutely crucial. But the point I'm making — and it's probably clearer in the American context — is that there's a tendency to psychologise problems as a quite deliberate manoeuvre, to take them off the agenda of economic and political action.

On the one hand, we've had this absolutely brilliant dissection of the psychology of femininity and so on. Everyone has to develop that and think about that. But the structure's still there, and it reproduces itself.

If you look at recent issues of Ms. magazine, you have to sieve the pages to find anything new about struggles over equal pay or safety in the workplace.

What you find, again and again, is that what one has to change is one's psychology. If only you have your head straight, all things will follow. Anyone who is a feminist and has been in the workplace knows that this is just not dealing with the issues that arise.

I don't mean to say it isn't crucial for women to change. The beginning is with changing yourself and strengthening yourself, defining what goals you set yourself and what kinds of reactions you have that you'd like to fix to find your full strength.

But there are people in society besides us, and other structures besides individual psychology.

Does this emphasis on psychology come from the consciousness-raising process?

I think, in part, it does, although if you look at the stuff about CR there were some very good articles in the early days which said “This is not therapy. It has therapeutic value, but the intention is to strengthen us and to create little cells from which we will grow out to make social change”.

What's more to blame is the official reception of feminism. Publishers are delighted to produce book after book on subjects like dealing with anger. That goes right into the mainstream of American individualism, the power of positive thinking, right back to the 1920s. Think right and you'll be rich and famous! That's a very strong tradition in American capitalism; self-improvement.

Feminism, in a way, has gone right into that stream, and if you're not careful you're saying the same things with the same religious fervour! And we're not saying we don't need to change, but that other things need changing, too — like laws, distribution of resources, education ....

Why did you look exclusively at American feminist use of psychology when there are French and British feminists who are discussing similar points about difference in a more sophisticated way?

They are arguing that specific biological differences, and the different significant events of being a woman must mean that women will develop a different subjectivity. They're not talking about a specific essence. They do take account of historical and cultural variables. In a way, by analysing American radical feminism exclusively, you've chosen an easy target.

It was just an arbitrary thing, which was that the shape of the book was to look at a particular set of developments in American feminist theory.

What I was trying to say is that, within this American tradition, there are more similarities than you realise. There is a set of assumptions which grow right out of Firestone and Millett and into Mary Daly.
I made a decision not to take on the world. So I really haven't dealt with the French feminist strand. I think that is worthy of much more detailed study. That whole problem of difference needs to be developed.

With the change from the androgynous ideal to the celebration of difference has come a concomitant change in the way motherhood is dealt with....

In the first wave, Firestone said (and a lot of people agreed with her) that there is no way to recuperate motherhood for women. If you’re going to be a feminist, the whole weight of the ideology of motherhood, the expectations of nurturing and self-sacrifice is too heavy baggage. Even if you didn’t give away heterosexual sex, you gave away reproducing.

I think that’s shifted. A lot of people said, “Hey, isn’t that too much of a sacrifice? Isn’t there some way of looking at mothering in a feminist way?”

I think Adrienne Rich was saying that you could separate motherhood as an institution with the cultural trappings, from what mothering as a female experience might be, without all that other shit.

She argues that motherhood should be as freely chosen as any other work like writing or becoming an airline pilot. We shouldn’t accept those dichotomies which are thrust upon us .... like, if you’re a real woman, you’re a mother, and if you’re a feminist, you’re not a real woman.

So now we say, “Well, hang on, who’s in charge of saying who the real women are?”

Let’s look at pornography which, with proposed legislative changes, has again become a contentious issue for feminists here.

I think it’s a very confusing issue. All I’m doing is looking at the writings of Griffin and Dworkin, which I think are very interesting, and I do try to give them credit for the points they make. Everybody argues about free speech, and puts the issue of pornography in the light of civil liberties and free speech versus censorship.

They say “Yes, but look at what pornography is — it is, in fact, a device to silence women”. They have quite an elaborate cultural argument about how pornography operates as part of a cultural ideology, which essentially enforces the notion of women as sexual objects and, by definition therefore, as subjects.
socialist feminism, radical feminism, bourgeois feminism. Why is this?

What I'm trying to say is that the terms have shifted. I wanted to look at radical feminism and what had become of it.

In the early 'seventies, feminists said they were more left than marxists and the SDSniks (Students for Democratic Socialism). Robyn Morgan asserted that feminism was the true left. Now we have Mary Daly claiming the term radical feminism for what I would call metaphysical feminism. That's a very personal, interior, private quest.

She's very elitist. She says she's only interested in the women who understand her.

This is very different from saying we want to build a mass political movement, we want to reach all women, which was how we started out. I really wanted to focus on the degeneration of the term radical.

I'm trying to make the point that it's not so obvious any more what is, or isn't bourgeois feminism. The political spectrum keeps on shifting to the right, particularly in the US. The Equal Rights Amendment seemed a very tokenist, reformist thing which a lot of people turned their noses up at. Then they discovered it had been defeated, and now they are saying "We'll take it. Give us a little bourgeois feminism!"

I think we need to be more sophisticated about our use of these terms. It's a fluid situation.

Zilla Eisenstein, in her book The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism, says "Instead of walking around as socialist feminists and being holier than thou about liberal feminists, let's try for some liberal goals and see how far we can get. And see if we can't radicalise people on the way."

You're very critical of radical feminism's universalism. But hasn't feminism moved away from marxism because of its own universalism?

I think the anger of feminism with marxism has to do more with marxism's refusal to encounter gender as a significant category of analysis, except in a very token way. They then come back to class and say that it is the main event.

In terms of universalism, though, I would argue that both marxism and feminism are guilty. They both come from a western philosophical position. In the current situation this has a kind of neo-imperialist effect because feminism is now being shoved down the throats of women in various third world countries in a way that denies difference.

The women there are put in an impossible position. They're having to say, "No, we're not interested in that western stuff. We're loyal to our traditional culture." They can't very well be proper nationalists and buy into this very western theoretical system. It's universalising in the sense of feminists saying: "Let's you do it like we do it."

I heard the editor of the Indian feminist journal Manushi talking on radio the other day about the necessity for third world women to define their own priorities. These women may well pose a challenge to the universalising of the western feminist experience.

Yes, it's very nice the way third world women are coming out and saying "When you talk about all women, you're also talking about us, and this is what we think."

You say we need to "reclaim the revolutionary potential of feminism". Do you identify priorities in terms of sites for feminist intervention?

I don't presume to tell other people where to put their energy. But I would say that one of the things that is interesting about the Australian scene is that women are, in fact, quietly intervening in many areas. They're attempting to have power in trade unions, both at the grassroots level and executive level. There is some legislation now, and it's starting to have some small impact.

Women are refusing to be marginalised, refusing to say "We'll do the women's issues, that'll be Point 94 .... " Somebody made the point recently that, in the old days of trade unions, the women's issues would always be negotiable. Like you'd say "This is the log of claims .... Point 92 child care and 93 English language classes for migrants."

And that was the first thing you'd negotiate away. And we're saying we do not want to be point 92. We want to be point No. 1. We want to be at the centre, we want feminist issues and feminist concerns to be on your priority list.

Fiona Moore is a journalist and works on Tribune.
Eschewing the "grand theory" of radical intellectuals, Windschuttle gets empirical. He examines the actual content and values of TV programs, radio, magazines, newspapers, music, etc. This focus on the evidence is a refreshing approach, redressing the theoretical waffle of many critics of popular culture so lost in the stratosphere of their jargon that one wonders whether they ever watch the box or go to the oval. He dispenses the fog of those incomprehensible academic parlour games (you know the type—pick a buy/word between semiotics and deconstructionism, take away functionalism, and—wacko! you get post-Althusserian structuralism).

Many marxists have been blind to the contradictions within popular culture and, to be fair, Windschuttle's empiricism does make visible the links between manufactured mass culture and truly popular culture. While Windschuttle is right, however, to reject theory without empiricism, the strength of his attack carries him over into a workerist/populist position which holds that whatever the workers/people get, do, read or watch is what they want, need, in their interests and largely beyond criticism.

In his eagerness to attack the cultural sausage theories of the Frankfurters, Windschuttle's populism runs into its own snags (sorry!). His interpretation of cultural reality is open to query. It is true, for example, that some elements of soap opera do "perform popular culture's traditional functions of moral support and the confirmation of community values" such as ingenuity, courage, loyalty, persistence, justice. Soaps, however, also support reactionary values such as women's "proper" nature and role, and sexual difference as deviance. Soaps do show there is a "social dimension to problems such as drugs, domestic violence, divorce, etc." but they do not suggest social solutions; the problem may be social, the solution is private. Political change is written off the script of the soap.
Sport, too, is interpreted by Windschuttle to fit the demands of his populism. Competitive sport "preserves values... essential for struggle within a class-divided society". Sport, however, also preserves values such as competition, masculinity, aggression, the work ethic and the primacy of winning, all integral to a successful capitalism and a divided working class. Windschuttle scorns "non-competitive participatory sports", especially jogging, "whose only product is... an individual sense of well-being" and which thus produce a passive working class. So much for integral to a successful capitalism and society. Sport, however, also preserves values such as competition, non-violent social interaction, fun and health.

Windschuttle's attempt to defend his populism by an objective empiricism breaks down when some evidence won't fit his theory. Packer/TV-created one-day cricket, which draws huge audiences, must, for Windschuttle, "eventually die" because it is "an inferior quality generic brand of a supermarket product", it is not "the real thing", it is "merely spectacle", "inherently unsatisfying". Windschuttle undoes his own thesis here. He dismisses the massive support for "circus" cricket as false and believes that "real" cricket will re-emerge to satisfy the "real" needs of the cricket public. His theory does not address the fact that not all popular culture is necessarily good and that the mass media can selectively promote or repress certain values.

In general, Windschuttle's overzealous desire to avoid "blanket condemnation" of the media, a stance which he falsely attributes to the whole left, leads him to his own blanket condemnation of all socialist critiques of mass culture. He tends to see what he wants to in the evidence. He accepts too much mass culture uncritically. He underplays the power of capitalist-controlled media to influence people's beliefs and lives. People do falsely believe that strikes, for example, cause unemployment, push up prices and hurt the nation despite the counter-evidence that industrial accidents are far more costly and that strikes hurt profits far more than people. These facts, of course, are rarely to be found in the media. He replaces the old orthodoxy of "false consciousness" with a new orthodoxy of the mass media as reflecting genuine popular consciousness.

Thus, while he rightly sees the Soviet press as a tool of totalitarian control and manipulation, he allows himself the luxury of believing that a more democratic capitalism allows a press more open to working class influence. There is some validity to this but, while the capitalist press are not (always) successful in telling us what to think, they set a tight agenda on what we can think about. Uranium, for example, gets reasonable coverage (if opportunistically to play up the splits in the ALP rather than on the merits of the issue itself) but alternative, renewable energy is ignored to oblivion. Similarly, issues of law and justice are (over)exposed in the sensationalist Chamberlain case, but the institutionalised use of law and justice against Aborigines is relegated to the margins (although a hard-line populist could argue that this is a reflection of Australian racism - a popular ideology and therefore to be supported?). The nature of the capitalist media, in its ability to set the cultural agenda, is, in this sense, as totalitarian as TASS.

Windschuttle is right to show that there must be something in the popularity of the mass media but he is less enthusiastic about showing that there must also be something in the rejection of much mass media by the left.

He notes that there is a correlation between more education and a critical attitude to the mass media, but he uses this as an excuse for sniffing at radical intellectuals rather than arguing for the socialist principle of extending (even capitalist) education to more people to increase their critical awareness of the world and the images through which that world is presented to us by the mass media.

Windschuttle's populism devalues the good grounds why many people, especially socialists (not all of whom are middle class egg-heads), feel uneasy about embracing Paul Hogan as hero, soaps as liberating or "tele-politics" as expressing the "pre-existing" political culture of the working class.

There are good reasons, too, why many of us are driven from the bland stodge of commercial TV and radio, where you can't tell the chat from the news or the music from the ads, into the arms of the ABC, community radio and the leftwing press.

Windschuttle offers us only the narrow choice between a Hogan (whom he approves) and an Edna Everage (whom he disapproves as an elitist "attack on the dumb slobs in suburbia"). There has got to be more of a choice than that.

Let none of this, however, dissuade you from reading the book. There is much to learn from it, including exhaustive (and exhausting) details on the ownership and control of the Australian (state-protected) "free" press, bias in reporting of strikes, how advertising works, etc.

His proposals for reform are worth serious attention although, despite his digs at the elitism of the over-educated left, his call to revive "a quality, consciously elite paper" like the old Nation Review, "retreating to the up-market, highly educated audiences", seems less viable and less democratic than developing Tribune as a mass left newspaper.

The media affects us all (some would say like a flu virus) and we are all media critics. There will always be disagreement. Windschuttle and his readers will enjoy and relish the debate.

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WHICH WAY TO SOCIALISM?

Today's depression marks not one, but two, crises. It marks a crisis for capitalism. It also marks a crisis for the socialist movement. Both Marxist theory and our historical experience tell us that a time of economic depression is a time for socialist advance. Yet, for most people, socialist alternatives are not even on the political agenda, and socialist forces seem divided and ineffective. So what is the way forward? Should socialists join the Labor Party, the Communist Party, or one of the smaller groups which claim to be revolutionary?

There is clearly a need to reassess the various strategies which are proposed by those who claim the title "socialist". Socialist Strategies seeks to do just that. Placing each in the context of depression-bound Britain, a number of different strategies are evaluated. The book consists of a collection of articles by different authors which examine, in turn, the British Labour Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain, revolutionary socialism, feminism, and, finally, community politics and the peace movement. In their conclusion, David Coates and Robert Looker bring down a verdict in favour of revolutionary socialism.

Unfortunately, however, the article by David Bailley which is written in the name of "revolutionary socialism" is probably the worst article in the whole book. The crude and oversimplified premises which form the thrust of the article do a grave injustice to the full complexity of revolutionary politics. For example, great significance is placed on treacherous socialist leaders and their acts of betrayal. This can become obsessive at the best of times, but at times when there are scarcely any "followers" to betray this sort of emphasis on leadership betrayal becomes patently ridiculous.

Bailley's main mistake, however, is to confuse socialist advances with social upheaval. While it is true that social upheaval can be an important prerequisite for revolution, it is equally obvious that upheaval can lead in a number of quite different directions — not least barbarism and even nuclear annihilation.
Furthermore, this confusion has the effect of allowing Bailley to avoid altogether the questions posed by the crisis in socialism by simply postponing them. Thus, he writes that “future attempts to build a socialist society will be made when the next calamity breaks” (my emphasis). Ultimately, Bailley allows revolutionary politics to collapse into a kind of faith. In this vein, he concludes that “whatever the shortcomings of the Far Left, their small forces remain the custodians of a culture whose time must surely return” (my emphasis). The trouble is that no matter how “sure” Bailley is of a socialist second coming, the fact remains that we are in the middle of a “calamity” right now and we are having great difficulty in mobilising support for socialist solutions.

Coutes and Looker also conclude in favour of a revolutionary socialist strategy but manage to avoid many of the crude presuppositions which plague Bailley’s article. Indeed, attempts are made to tackle some of the major problems facing socialists today. Specifically, they consider three points: the disagreement and confusion among socialists about who are the agents of radical social change; the ability of capitalist societies to accommodate, absorb or repress opposition; and the ambivalent character of “existing” socialism. Discussion of these issues is certainly most welcome. Unfortunately, however, their discussion seems to be underpinned by some untenable (albeit largely implicit) assumptions.

There is a tendency, for example, to economic reductionism. Capitalism — as a particular mode of production — is seen as the cause of both class and non-class oppressions and divisions. They talk of capitalism as the “source” of racial, sexual, national and other oppression, and refer to these “complex patterns of oppression” as “generated by capitalism”. It is clear, of course, that racial, sexual and national oppressions are greatly affected by (and, in turn, affect) the way in which production is organised. But this does not mean that we can presuppose that these oppressions are “generated” by that mode of production.

Coutes and Looker also tend to see a “socialist upsurge” as the inevitable consequence of the deprivation brought about by capitalist depression — an upsurge which is only held in check by the ruling classes’ propitious use of ideology. This seems to me to be fundamentally misconstrued. The task of socialists is not simply to remove ruling class obstacles to an otherwise ready-made pool of support. Rather, the task confronting socialists is to build mass support for a socialist alternative in the first place. And while the economic, political and ideological conditions of any capitalist society establish limits which make this task sometimes more and sometimes less viable, it nevertheless remains our task, both struggling within and against these limits, to build support for socialism itself — capitalism will not do it for us.

In fact, the need to build widespread popular support for socialist alternatives provides us with the most basic criterion for comparing different socialist strategies. It points, for example, to a central contradiction facing socialists who work within social democratic (or labour) parties.

We can assume that any radical socialist change in Australia will involve a plurality of political forces — a “coalition of the left”. It is conceivable, I suppose, that such a coalition may even include some residual social democratic groupings. But before socialists could enter such an alliance, they would have to be sure that they were not going to be co-opted to work towards non-socialist ends. In other words, in order to maintain the socialist orientation of such an alliance socialists could only enter it from a position of strength. And, given our basic commitment to democratic socialist change, this strength can only arise out of widespread popular support.

Socialists in the Labor Party, however, have done exactly the opposite. Rather than winning support for socialism first, and then entering an alliance, they have entered an alliance before this support has been obtained. Lacking the strength to ensure a socialist orientation, they are inevitably co-opted for non-socialist ends. Enormous energy is expended to manage capitalism through the control of parliament. Furthermore, the ability to publicly articulate a socialist alternative is severely restricted: for to do so threatens both the unity and, more importantly, the electoral support for their party.

Socialists in the Labor Party are in a position of checkmate. They cannot give their coalition (the Labor Party) a socialist orientation without building mass support. But, since they are unable to publicly articulate a socialist alternative, they are unable to build this mass support.

Of course, none of this seeks to deny the important tactical advantages which can flow from the presence of socialists in the Labor Party. What it does mean, however, is that an independent socialist or communist party has a crucial role in any viable socialist strategy. More fundamentally still, it means that any discussion of democratic socialist strategies must take as its starting point the need to build widespread popular support for socialism.

It is to the credit of communists and socialists in Australia that many of us are now engaged in just such a discussion. It is a discussion which seeks to come to terms with the crisis in socialism in order to better intervene in, and ultimately overcome, the crisis in capitalism. It is a discussion out of which we will need to generate our own versions of books like Socialist Strategies.

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SO WHAT IS MARXISM?

A persistent myth about Marx and marxism currently in vogue again, is that Marx's theory is in some, usually unspecified fashion, "rigid", "fixed", and unnecessarily constraining on those who seek to use it. One of the major accomplishments of Marx's Construction of Social Theory, is that Barbalet shows how Marx himself continually modifies the theoretical building blocks that he uses, and that at various times theoretical construction involved Marx in the task of dismantling and reorganising the theoretical structure itself. At the same time, Barbalet demonstrates that there is significant continuity of interests in Marx's writings, a unity of purpose in his thought, which suggests that he was more interested in attempting to develop an adequate account of social reality than he was in remaining consistent with a position stated early on.

This is scarcely surprising, given Marx's lifelong commitment to the dictum "Omnibus dubitandum"—Doubt Everything. Marx's healthy scepticism and insatiable curiosity are apparent even in his epistemology, that is, in the way that he suggested that the world can be known. In both his youthful and his mature writings, Marx draws distinctions between the appearance of a thing or a process and its reality. Marx begins from the basis that real understanding and knowledge is possible only after surface or superficial phenomena have been penetrated or bypassed. This is not to claim that appearances are necessarily false, but rather that they are partial, that under capitalist relations of production the categories of thought that arise in practical activity will not reveal the reality of which phenomena are but a part.

For example, at the level of commonsense or appearance, profits are made in the marketplace through the activity of the "laws" of supply and demand. It is a central task of Capital to illustrate how this is indeed a partial view, and that profit is created at the point of production, and realised in the marketplace. Thus, the market is indeed real, and does exist, but it does not explain the source of profit. Orthodox economists are not "wrong" to insist on the saliency of the marketplace, but they are "wrong" in suggesting that it can explain more than it is able to, in presenting a part for the whole.

We are all familiar with the origin and nature of profit Marx develops from the labour theory of value and the concomitant theory of surplus value. In summary, these claim firstly, that the value of all commodities, including labour power, is determined by the socially necessary labour time required for their production; secondly, that the worker is paid the full value of her/his labour when it is sold to the capitalist; and thirdly, when the purchased labour power is consumed in production by the capitalist it creates, in addition to its own value, a surplus value which constitutes a nett gain to the capitalist.

In exposing the inner workings of the capitalist system, Marx shows us that it is only by serious study that the "mist through which we perceive the world can be dissipated", and that serious study is a prerequisite of action.
to change the world. On the other hand, while action without study is foolish, study by itself is insufficient, for uncovering the truth changes nothing "just as after the discovery by science of the component gases of air, the atmosphere itself remained unaltered".

Another myth much favoured by those who have "outgrown" Marxism is that Marx's writings have nothing much to say about individual human beings. Ann Curthoys1 forcefully demonstrates in her discussion of Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (ALR 84), that Marx realised very well that to understand history it is necessary to come to terms with individuals in all their complexity and in their location within wider social forces. It is also fairly widely known that Marx split considerable ink on the matter in his early writings, most notably in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, in which he even (rather badly) discussed love.

In Marx's more considered writings, it is not at all the case that individual human beings are absent. To insist that society cannot be reduced to its individual members and that the web of social relationships is greater than the market relationships between individuals, is not to ignore people. Rather does it emphasise that society is both the creation and the community of humans. All relations between individuals which affect a shared end are social relations. The relationships between individuals attempting to satisfy their individual interests and needs are social relations, the stuff of which society is made.

These social relations, however, take certain forms depending upon the nature of the society in which they appear. Individual social relations are dependent upon the structure of social production and thus the atomised, isolated individual of capitalist society is a social being, the expression of whose human-ness is dramatically shaped by the world around. We are human in ways that are given by the nature of the society we inhabit. In seeking to transform that society, we also change what we are, and how we are, what we are. Thus, as Ehrenreich and English2 so cogently argue, the sexual marketplace which has come to be such a dominant feature of human sexuality in our times, does not exist because women or (even) men are essentially depraved, but is rather the effect of the commodification of human relations as the marketplace encroaches more and more on our lives, giving even our most intimate relationships the appearance of supply and demand, marketability and obsolescence. It is a liberating insight of Marxism that social relations are not the product of a fixed and immutable human nature and that our biology is not our destiny.

Another strangely prevalent, but once again hard to pin down, viewpoint is that Marx's work is not relevant because he didn't discuss v.d.u.'s and microchips. As Barbalet indicates, though, technology and its changes was a central theme of Marx's studies. In Capital, Marx characterises developed industrial capitalism as essentially concerned with the measurement of productiveness by the human labour power it replaces. That is to say, as labour becomes more and more productive, it produces more and more of its own opposite. As less and less people are forced to produce more and more, more and more people are forced to produce less and less.

Under capitalism, advances in computer and electronic engineering cause economic dislocation, unemployment and the degradation of work, whereas under different social relations the same forces of production could be used to bring about a socially useful and individually beneficial realignment of labour, learning and leisure. At the very time when the appearances are (perhaps momentarily) becoming quite transparent (BHP at Port Kembla produces the same amount of steel with 10,000 fewer workers whose hours are still the same and whose pay packet is not growing), some on the left say that the very set of theories that Marxism is, is no longer useful. And yet the irrationality of the existing use of technological marvels is increasingly obvious, as is a growing understanding that if we don't change the social relations that determine the nature and direction of technological change, not only may we lose our right to work, to eat, to live recently, but we may lose life itself.
The longest chapter in Marx's Construction of Social Theory is simply entitled "Politics" and, in it, Barbalet devotes considerable space to Marx's understanding of the state, timely exigesis, given another current Marx didn't have much to say about the state or that, if he did, it wasn't particularly useful. The reverse, of course, is the case. In the first instance, Marx writes about the state in his mature works as an institutional form which is quite separate and distinct from economic and social relations, that is as a purely political and national apparatus. In doing this, he is not providing an account which is alternative to his view of the state as a set of institutions which function to safeguard the common and general interests of the economically dominant class in society. To acknowledge that the state is a political reality, separate and distinct from other aspects of the social structure, is not to deny the class function of the state.

In describing the function of the state, Marx is careful to distinguish between the interests of individual capitalists and the general interest of the capitalist class. In the discussion in Capital of the Factory Acts, Marx shows that while, in general terms, the capitalists have good reason to ensure the protection of the working class provided by the legislation limiting the working day, their narrow economic interest compelled them to oppose such legislation. Thus, while the general class interest of industrial capitalists would lead the class as a whole to support the legislation, individual factory owners were opposed to it; in order that capital's general interest be served, individual capitalists must be restrained. The general interest of the capitalist class requires that certain of its particular interests be denied. The state develops a perspective which both transcends the particular interests of capital and orchestrates its general interests.

But such is the sensitivity of Marx's use of historical materialism that he not only relates classes and individuals to the structure and functioning of the state, but also describes the reverse effect, the determinations by the state on the formation of classes themselves. Marx does not suggest that the state is merely an instrument of class rule, for the relations between class and state are much more subtle.

Marx explains that the international trade and commerce of mercantilism, and the colonial system which it developed, involved the emerging nations of Europe in trade wars. The contradictory consequence of this early phase of capitalism was that while the incipient national capitalist class, and through it, the nation, accumulated great wealth, the state, in prosecuting commercial war in defence of the national interest, became impoverished. The state could finance its navy and the advancement of the interests of the nation only by levying taxes and instituting a system of public credit or national debt. This need for state finance set in motion a complicated set of reactions which not only consolidated the capitalist mode of production, but undermined the absolute monarchy which had overseen the mercantile system, replacing it with a more directly capitalist state form. The problems of state finance, consequential upon the growing national wealth of the mercantile period, were resolved in a manner which not only produced the modern systems of taxation, fiscal policy and banking, but which further advanced the development of the capitalist class and enhanced its political power.

The capitalist class not only acquires the state, but is itself significantly restructured through the development of the state. The money lent to the state was converted into national bonds issued to the lender. These continued to circulate as negotiable notes and served the same function as cash in the economy. Thus, a state loan did not deprive the capitalist of spending power, it enriched his money wealth through the interest it earned and gave rise to associations of capitalist financiers who formed themselves into joint-stock companies and forerunners of the modern banks. Thus, the national debt created a fraction of the capitalist class which was essential to the full development of capitalism itself.

During the period of the mercantile system, the production process could hardly be distinguished from that of the pre-capitalist era; it lacked the intense technical division of labour typical of capitalist production proper. The fully capitalist organisation of production requires a financial infrastructure, the appearance of which marks the consolidation of the capitalist mode of production. But this development, as we have seen, was not spontaneous, but was facilitated by an innovation.
Barbalet's Marx knocks on the head, and that is the view that the contradictions which capitalism creates are the most sensible "handles" with which to attempt to grasp and control our own histories. It also suggests that capitalist social relations do not change quite as quickly as those who have moved "beyond Marxism" change their theories and interpretations of those social relations. As Michele Barrett has pointed out, "Marxism provides an unrivalled explanation and analysis of the capitalist society in which we live". Barbalet's book is a scholarly (I am tempted to say profound) illustration of why that is the case.

It is difficult to appreciate the significance of Marx's contribution to our understanding of the world, to realise what Marx's method signifies by way of penetration and grasp, until we recall that virtually all his work was done when the workers' movement was less than embryonic in the world as a whole. Neither class wars aimed at the seizure of power, nor anti-colonial liberation struggles had yet occurred. If, despite the all-pervading gloom and apathy that surrounded him during most of his productive life, Marx was able correctly to assess and foresee in broad outline, the rising, coming revolutionary upheavals, then how can we who have 1917, 1949, 1959 and dozens of other risings behind us, who live in the middle of real, visible, obvious world-historical convulsions, possibly say that Marx and Marxism have nothing to offer us?


**Mike Donaldson is a member of the ALR editorial collective and a lecturer in Sociology at Wollongong University.**
According to *Time* many people "are rediscovering the traditional values of fidelity and marriage" and there is "a psychic return to pre-revolutionary days".

**SUPERTRAMPS AND CASUALTIES**

Over the last two decades, the subject of the sexual revolution has brought much controversial grist to the mill of the popular American press. Today, the latest word from the sexual front is that the "revolution" is in its last death throes, if not already extinct. A recent article in *Time* magazine which traces the statistical rise and fall of the rebellion, records a considerable swing back to conservative values beginning in the late 'seventies.

Many individuals are rediscovering the traditional values of fidelity and marriage. The buzz words these days are 'commitment', 'intimacy' and 'working at relationships'. There is much talk of pendulum swings, matters coming full circle and a psychic return to pre-revolutionary days.

The American public, it seems, is shunning the delights of a liberal sexual smorgasbord in favour of a more staple diet of responsibility and commitment. Moreover, if the latest attitudinal polls are to be believed, the sexual revolution hasn't changed much. Marriage, monogamy and the family, while enjoying a renewed popularity, continue to be founded on the old familiar sexual divisions and antagonisms. So much, then, for the revolution which promised to change our lives. But, before we rush to bury it prematurely, perhaps it is wise to ask ourselves whether that is all there is to it. Could it be that the sexual rebellion was simply a shallow and transitory product of an affluent period, so easily shelved when the economic going gets rough? Did it barely scratch the surface of convention, leaving sexual stereotypes, social expectations and social structures relatively untouched? Or, in the social turmoil of the last two decades, was something lost and something gained — and, if so, by whom? For the walking wounded, who have emerged, somewhat confused, from the fray, these crucial questions remain.

Ehrenreich's latest book, *The Hearts of Men*, represents an important and competent effort to confront some of these questions. However, while readers will appreciate the wit and clarity of Ehrenreich's
The feminist challenge against stereotypical roles gave the ultimate seal of approval to the male "flight from commitment".

The Hearts of Men attempts to tackle these problems, but the solutions it offers are disappointing. Dragging old feminist chestnuts out of the fire, Ehrenreich suggests a program which includes changes in the work structure to accommodate women, extensive social support schemes and adequate child care. This package deal, as we all know, is essential to give women the financial independence they need and, some would add, is a pre-requisite for women's liberation. But we also know, from years of feminist and socialist struggle, that lasting change in these areas requires a fundamental change in a system which thrives on dependence and powerlessness. Unfortunately, Ehrenreich's comments here remain at the level of prescription and suggest no fresh strategies for effecting such change.

Despite this, The Hearts of Men provides a thought-provoking analysis of the dynamics and contradictions of the sexual revolution. For some, it will present a source of acute embarrassment and concern. Feminist consternation will be raised over the fact that feminist arguments supplied the ammunition for the anti-feminist backlash which successfully defeated the Equal Rights Amendment of 1982.

In short, Ehrenreich claims that men's new-found freedom has been gained at the expense of women. This comes as no revelation to those female casualties of the sexual revolution who sustained their first losses in the divorce courts. They know, only too well, how men's "irresponsibility" has made a mockery of child support directives and how it has increased their dependence on an inadequate welfare system. No doubt many of these women will dispute Ehrenreich's account of the rise of men's "irresponsibility", preferring to see it as an intrinsic moral flaw in the male character. Nevertheless, their first-hand experience as single supporting mothers gives credence to the main thrust of her argument: that the sexual revolution which loosened the bonds of commitment and gave men the opportunity to be independent afforded no such parallel for women. Conversely, the profound changes it brought about in women's economic role continue to go ignored by a social structure which is reluctant to recognise such changes.

The playboy resisted marriage. The short-lived apotheosis of the male rebellion, the Beat, rejected both job and marriage. In the Beat, the two strands of male protest — one directed against the white-collar world and the other against the suburbanised family life that work was supposed to support — came together.

No doubt, as Ehrenreich suggests, the spread of popular "self-actualisation" psychologies and the androgynous bent of the counter-culture provided a rationale which hastened the great escape from the suffocating masculine role of "provider". But the final irony must be that the feminist movement itself, in challenging the stereotypical roles within the institution of marriage, gave the ultimate seal of approval to the male "flight from commitment".

Ehrenreich's argument is both persuasive and disconcerting. It implies that the sexual revolution has transformed the erstwhile male breadwinner into an errant supertramp. Released from his sense of family duty and responsibility, he has taken the open road of "moral vagrancy". Predictably, he has left casualties behind him along the way. The collapse of the "breadwinner" ideology tempered the social constraints which obliged men to assume economic responsibility for wives and offspring, allowing them to explore a new measure of independence. At the same time, it shifted the burden of economic responsibility squarely onto the shoulders of women. The result has been a fundamental breakdown in the contemporary structure of the family accompanied by what Ehrenreich terms the "feminisation of poverty".

In 1980 two out of three adults who fit into the federal definition of poverty were women, and more than half the families defined as poor were maintained by single women. In the mid-sixties and until the mid-seventies, the number of poor adult males actually declined, while the number of poor women heading households swelled by 100,000 a year (now 150,000 a year).

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In their shift away from the traditional axis of male strength and activity vs. female weakness and passivity, our modern anti-feminists were no doubt influenced by their own adversaries: Feminism, with its insistence on women's strength and ability to accommodate women, extensive social support schemes and adequate child care. This package deal, as we all know, is essential to give women the financial independence they need and, some would add, is a pre-requisite for women's liberation. But we also know, from years of feminist and socialist struggle, that lasting change in these areas requires a fundamental change in a system which thrives on dependence and powerlessness. Unfortunately, Ehrenreich's comments here remain at the level of prescription and suggest no fresh strategies for effecting such change.

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In the USA in 1980 two out of three adults defined as poor were women, and between the mid-60s and mid-70s the number of poor adult males fell while the number of poor female-headed households swelled by 100,000 a year.

Finally, for many of its readers, The Hearts of Men will come as a sensible account of the social trauma which rent our lives over the last few years and added yet another dimension to the battle of the sexes. For both the men who escaped and the women who were abandoned, it provides a description of their real life experience and the forces which shaped it. In this respect it helps to explain why the hopes we held out for the sexual revolution did not eventuate: why anger, bitterness and distrust, rather than co-operation and trust, continue to dog heterosexual relationships. Ehrenreich, of course, sees the need to end these antagonisms and calls for a renewal of commitment via a rapprochement between the sexes:

Yet I would like to think that a reconciliation between the sexes is still possible. In fact, as long as we have sons as well as daughters, it will have to happen. If we cannot have — and do not want — a binding pact between the sexes, we must still have one between the generations, and that means there must be some renewal of loyalty and trust between adult men and women.

In my opinion, it is at this point that Ehrenreich's otherwise cogent argument becomes feeble, and she begins to sound like a tired feminist suffering battle fatigue. Certainly, most of us will share her dream of a reconciliation based on a feminist ethic which recognises women's needs. Whether the time is right to risk such an experiment is another matter. Clearly, the commitment she advocates requires that both sexes, putting enmity aside, explore the terrain of mutual concern and trust. Given the disparity of power which exists between the sexes, however, it is doubtful that the risks and benefits of such an exploration would come evenly distributed. For men, the restoration of women's concern and trust could only mean a consolidation of the power and trust they already enjoy. For women, it will almost certainly entail the erosion of what power they have managed to accrue during the arduous course of the "battle". Women would do well, therefore, to suspect the timeliness of Ehrenreich's call to offer the olive branch. Conserving their energy for their own struggle, they must resign themselves to the fact that the grounds for enmity between the sexes must, for the moment at least, "go unsweetened by the dream of reconciliation".

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