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Trade Unions:
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Thailand's Trade Unions
The British Miners' Strike
The Challenge of Technology

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2 • Briefings
The Hancock Report, East Timor

4 • Discussion and Reply

6 • Just Add Women and Stir
Excerpts from Darelie Duncan’s talk to the N.S.W. Teachers Federation on the U.N. End of the Decade for Women non-government forum, held in Nairobi, Kenya, this year.

7 • Post-Mortem on the Taxation Summit
Two perspectives on the summit from Peter Groenewegen and Warwick Neilley.

10 • The British Miners’ Strike: Mike Donaldson
An assessment of the lessons of the recent miners’ strike

18 • Socialism Next Time: Roger Coates
A review of socialism in the 1890s, with an eye to the future

24 • Rethinking the Housing Crisis: Colin Jones
A critical plea for new directions in our housing policies

26 • Technology: The Challenge for Trade Unions: John Mathews
Will trade unions respond creatively to the impact of technology on the nature of work?

32 • Which Way the ABC?: Marius Webb
The defence of the ABC needs to rethink the issues of ratings and popular culture

34 • Troubled Times: Sherill Berkovitch
The development of genuine trade unions in Thailand faces increasing repression

40 • Reviews
Australia’s First Cold War, edited by Ann Curthoys and John Merritt
In Our Time by Verity Burgmann
The Limits of Soviet Power by Jonathan Steel
In the Tracks of Historical Materialism by Perry Anderson
Letters from Spain by Lloyd Edmonds.

48 • Browsing
The Hancock Report

Addressing the 1983 ACTU Congress, Prime Minister Bob Hawke made the point that because Australian industry (capitalism) is undergoing considerable structural change, it is appropriate that trade union structure should adjust to that change.

In practice, this view was expressed by the establishment of the Committee of Review into the Industrial Relations Law and Systems (the Hancock Committee) by the federal government. Over 150 separate submissions were made to the committee on subjects including industrial relations, new technology, powers of the commission, federal and state systems, separation of arbitral and judicial powers, and law relating to organisations.

The committee rejected the free market approach to industrial relations advocated by some major corporations, the Liberal Party dries like John Howard, and former Treasury chief John Stone. Certainly, adoption of those views would have spelled the defeat-knell to the ALP—ACTU Accord. The less privileged sections of the community would have been further disadvantaged.

Instead, they endorsed the maintenance of centralised wage-fixing, a decision which carries the endorsement of the trade union movement.

The report also comes down on the side of substantial integration of the federal and state industrial relations systems, citing uniformity in decision making and closure of the gap between the general level of benefits enjoyed by state and federal award workers, as some of the reasons in support.

Integration of the federal and state systems would entail regular meetings between the heads of all tribunals, dual appointments for some judges/commissioners, joint sittings on major cases (e.g. national wage cases) with consequent application to both state and federal award workers of the benefits.

The ACTU has endorsed this general proposal. In NSW there was opposition from the Labor Council and the state branch of the ALP, both of whom argued the superiority of some state awards over federal awards as a principal reason. This is opposed to the popular argument that workers who are fortunate enough to enjoy conditions which are better than others' should assist those less fortunate.

The Hancock Committee also recommended:

- The federal tribunal should be empowered to order compensation and/or reinstatement of workers who have been unfairly dismissed from their employment
- Sub-contractors should be eligible for union membership and to have the terms and conditions of their contracts subject to the authority of the commission. This is based on the overwhelming evidence of sub-contractors working for less than award conditions. (For instance, the current meatworkers' dispute in the NT.)
- Existing restrictions which prevent occupations such as fire fighters, school teachers, social workers, being covered by federal awards should be removed.
- The Act should be amended to make it more difficult for new unions to be registered where they are to be based on the craft/occupation of the membership. There is a clear intention to encourage the formation and development of industry unions (this would have the effect of increasing the problem for craft unions facing deregistration).
- Existing unions who have less than 1,000 members must show cause why they should not be deregistered.
- Amalgamation of unions should be made easier through a decision by consenting unions based on a simple majority of those voting in the ballot, thus doing away with the existing requirement that more than 50 percent of the members must vote in order for the ballot to be valid.
- The ACTU should play a greater role in resolving demarcation disputes. Disputes would be first referred to the ACTU for resolution and only in the event of this process being unsuccessful would the commission entertain an application.
- The current legislation with respect to fines for organisations, penalties and/or imprisonment for individuals, be repealed. However, the committee has urged the widening of existing powers to enforce compliance by unions and individuals through a system of:
  a) stricter undertakings in respect of future conduct
  b) imposing conditions of conduct on the organisation
  c) altering the constitution of the union to change the area/s of work it covers
  d) suspending the registration of the union on such terms and for such period as it sees fit.
  e) cancelling the registration of the union.

The trade union movement is opposed to such sanctions. The effect would be to increase the dependence of the union movement on the courts, robbing it of its independence and the ability to determine its own affairs.

While the government has yet to express the Hancock recommendations in law, there is ample evidence that if it is given the opportunity, the government will move to introduce substantial change.

There is a recognition that some structures are buried deeply in tradition and it will not be easy for the government to effect some changes at least in the short term. Some unions which could be affected by such changes are included among the government's closest supporters.

Changes which are designed to improve the efficient operation of unions based on the criteria of rendering maximum assistance to the membership will be supported by many.

Jack Cambourn, federal secretary, FEDFA
December 7 will mark the tenth anniversary of the full scale Indonesian invasion of East Timor. Ten years of genocide and of resistance. Ten years of betrayal by successive Australian governments and silence on the world stage. Ten years in which between 100,000 and 200,000 people out of a population of 650,000 in 1974 have perished.

The genocide perpetuated against the East Timorese people by the Jakarta generals has exceeded, proportionately, that carried out in Kampuchea or Biafra.

And yet, the East Timorese people led by Fretilin still resist the invaders. The re-establishment of radio contact on January 6 this year, between Darwin and Fretilin leaders in the mountains of East Timor, confirms the capabilities of the Fretilin guerrillas.

Fretilin's achievement in smuggling a radio transceiver into their liberated areas can be measured against the following facts: unlike the liberation struggles in Africa, East Timor has no friendly border, indeed no border at all, except with Indonesia. The blockade imposed by Jakarta has prevented any weapons or other material reaching Fretilin.

Unlike the New People's Army in the Philippines (which also lacks land borders), no tourists can enter East Timor. There is very little trade and what there is, is controlled by the generals.

And yet, because it has the near total support of the East Timorese people inside and outside the country, Fretilin was able to smuggle a radio transceiver into its liberated areas. And because of the support of the East Timorese people, and despite the genocide, and the fact that they are forced into concentration camps and face starvation daily, the Fretilin guerrillas have survived wave after wave of large-scale offensives launched by Jakarta. Nothing seems to be able to destroy their will to win victory.

Yet Fretilin, under the leadership of Xanana, was able to rebuild, spreading their guerrilla units again from east to west, throughout the whole country. In March 1983, the Indonesian forces in East Timor were obliged to agree to a ceasefire and negotiations with Fretilin. after they had failed in successive operations to crush the guerrillas.

While many Indonesian commanders in East Timor wanted peace, Suharto and Murdani in Jakarta rejected it and, after a series of provocations, Fretilin relaunched the war with a generalised armed uprisings in August 1983. The Indonesian troops stepped up their horrifying atrocities and continuously swept the country searching for guerrillas, but with little success. In 1984 alone 600 Indonesian troops were killed, as against 70 Fretilin losses. Of course, many hundred civilians were killed by Jakarta's troops.

The re-establishment of radio contact, which was announced publicly on May 26, has severely embarrassed both Jakarta and Canberra. Despite all the bluster, the fundamental problem for Jakarta is that there is a radio in the East Timoros mountains, not that there is one in Darwin. Bill Hayden pressured the cabinet to refuse a radio licence to the Australian Coalition for East Timor (ACET) to operate the radio link. Hayden, like Peacock before him, is only concerned about pleasing the Jakarta generals, and not about the genocide East Timor suffers.

Indeed, Hayden and other apologists for Jakarta's genocide, seek to blame the victims for the actions of their persecutors: if the East Timorese people stopped fighting for independence, and if people such as ACET stopped supporting them, they say, then the East Timorese people would suffer no longer. This is nonsense: the East Timorese know their fate if they stop fighting — to die, more slowly perhaps, as slaves to the greed of the Jakarta generals.

Whatever threats Hayden makes, the radio contact will operate from Darwin as long as it operates from East Timor.

Hayden has surrendered any respect he may have had from progressive forces. He aggressively seeks to defend Jakarta on every occasion, even condemning the recent Amnesty International report, sight unseen, as "grossly exaggerated". With a cynicism and opportunism that puts Peacock to shame, Hayden has forfeited any right to expect any support for any future leadership challenge. His reputation as "Honest Bill" has been replaced by one of a cringing "drover's dog" jumping whenever Jakarta barks...

Denis Frenney

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BATHURST BIKE RACES: a Riotous Assembly

Phil Shannon

For a left analysis of crime, law and order, Chris Cunneen’s article on the biker/policeman confrontation at Bathurst (“A Riotous Assembly”, ALR 92, Winter 1985) is limited by his tendency to treat the conflict as a battle between Good and Evil. Understandably keen to oppose both capitalist media attacks on a proletarian outgroup and a strengthening of the police as a repressive agent of the state, Cunneen lapses into an idealisation of the bikers and a demonisation of the police. Unfortunately, Cunneen is not alone in resorting to the language of romanticised stereotypes in order to demonstrate the left’s proletarian credentials — Brave Bikers versus Callous Cops is a morality play on similar lines to the Pure Prisoners versus Wicked Warders of some left writing on prisons.

Certainly, the mass media making a “folk devil” of the violent bike serves the capitalist class in selling papers and upping the ratings, denigrating all working class dissent and upping the ratings, denigrating the police. But how widespread or justified is it? Which and how many sections of the working class dislike what police functions? It is at least equally possible to assert that more working class people (not just the property-owning middle class) are more concerned with the policing of crime which hits the working class people hardest and most often than with the crimes of policing (that so preoccupies the academic left). Cunneen’s celebration of bikers might be dampened somewhat if bikers were to frequent in large numbers the halls of academe and not just working class suburbs and towns.

Few on the left would disagree that we must be interested in “the fate of marginalised groups” but some groups (Red Brigades, the National Front, Bikers) may deserve to be marginalised from other groups, the rest of the working class and socialists.

It is not to accept the language of the headlines to say that socialism riding in a biker pack will not look all that attractive to a working class with deep and legitimate concerns about crime, law and order.

Chris Cunneen

I would like to reply very briefly to some of Shannon’s criticisms of my article on the Bathurst Motorcycle Riots (ALR 92). I find it particularly alarming, given Shannon’s obvious ignorance of the crowd who visit Bathurst, that he should support the dominant capitalist/state interpretation of events. I say ignorance because, as I stated in the article, there have been no “gangs” at Bathurst at least for the last six years, that is, during the period when the largest “riots” have
policing methods that the TRG represent have made no dent in the solution frequency. However, the TRG has been effective in controlling various forms of working class activity. Secondly, given the connections between heroin addiction, property theft and the involvement of some police in the organisation and distribution of drug sales, it may be more accurate to see the police as part of the problem of crime rather than its solution.

Shannon's bottom line is that "the police have feelings", that they are "not academic abstractions". Perhaps he should talk to the friends of the 21-year-old youth who "accidentally" blew his brains out with a police revolver at Penrith Police Station recently. But, then again, he was only a junkie, hardly a cut above a bikie.

Correction

We apologise for errors in "Psychiatry: Making Criminals Mad" by Denise Russell (ALR 92).

On p. 21, the omitted first line of paragraph 4 should be "In the DSM-II, there is a category entitled .... ".

On p. 32, the paragraph beginning "Burning out parts .... " is misplaced and should be in the next column after the paragraph ending " ..... irreversible brain damage".

Apology

Dear Comrades,

I refer to your treatment of my article in ALR No. 92 — you called it "The Technology Test". My title as submitted was "Research and Policy Development".

I was distressed at the degree of success you had in destroying some aspects of the article and its overall appearance. My complaints are:

1. You gave the article a false title.
2. The text was transposed in such a manner as to destroy the flow and distort the argument.
3. You used sub-headings in a distorting way.

3.1 The first sub-heading, "Intelligent Computers", should have had a question mark after it.
3.2 The second sub-heading, "A Way to Go?" should not have had a question mark.

Note re 3: The sub-headings were yours and, with the above corrections and minus the transposing, would have been useful.

M. Bound.

We apologise for the errors made in the layout of Max Bound’s article in ALR 92. The text was accidentally transposed in such a major extent that it is not possible to correct it without reprinting the entire article. We apologise to the author and to our readers.
1985 marks the end of the UN designated decade for women. In forthcoming issues, ALR intends to publish more on the issues and proceedings arising from the Nairobi Conference held to mark the end of the decade for women.

Below are some excerpts, trains of thought, from Darelle Duncan's talk to the NSW Teachers' Federation.

I want to make clear right at the beginning that I didn't go to the Official Government Conference which was to evaluate the Decade for Women. I went to the Non Government Forum. At the Official Conference, they discussed a document "Looking to the Future 2000", a document which I've still to see, because I was unable to get one from the Offices of the Status of Women before I went. The Forum, however, was open to non-government organisations, and to that Forum came some 13,000 women from all over the world, and some men.

What I'd like to say is that I believe, and I think it has been borne out from my involvement in the Forum, that the single biggest development we have had over the last ten years is the development of feminist theory, feminist theory with a practical element involved.

One workshop that I went to at the Forum, "What is Feminism", opened by Charlotte Bunch, discussed what feminism wasn't. Charlotte said that feminism wasn't a laundry list of women's issues which you could tack onto the end of everything; it wasn't just add women and stir, as she put it. It was the development of a perspective, a way of looking at issues, ... by looking at the situation and working out why it is that women are in a certain position, developing a theoretical analysis and then working out practical ways and strategies to overcome that. Since I've come back and looked through my notes, I've thought, well, that's what has happened. Over the last ten years, it has led to the legitimising of what women want, it has given us ways to articulate that. Bearing that in mind, I thought I would go through and mention some of the issues raised, looking at the issues in another way.

The Conference was held in Kenya, a third world country. In Kenya, as in most third world countries, women do two-thirds of the food production and two-thirds of the agriculture. Yet, when our experts go over there on development projects, they don't talk to the women, they talk to the men. So they develop projects which are quite inappropriate for the African scene. And, over the last ten years, food production has actually gone down in Africa because our aid and the way we have been doing things, looking at things, has completely excluded women.

At the "Tech and Tools" Forum there was a poster saying "If it's not appropriate for women, it's not appropriate". I think that says it all. For example, in terms of agriculture, women have to go and collect the water, and it takes them six hours, even where they have put in irrigation. Instead of asking the women what they needed and putting in pipes to pump water, the women are still walking miles.

Wherever you find famine, it was said, you will find that women and children are the majority of the victims. Women and children make up 80% of the refugees in Ethiopia. Yet at the camps, women play no role in decision-making, it is still the men who make the decisions, it is the men who decide where the food goes. The women who were working in that area felt that it was vital to get women into decision making.

The women from Kenya conducted a workshop on the education of women and girls. They looked at textbooks to see what roles men and women play and found all the men doing everything! In one book on agriculture, there was one woman and all the rest were men.

A female circumcision and infibulation workshop was run by African women. They estimated that 75 million women and girls have been subjected to this cultural practice. The African women stressed that they didn't want the women in the West to do anything except to give money for their campaigns because they have very good organisations throughout Africa. In the last five years, in every single country in Africa, they have established committees which work against the continuation of this cultural practice which continues to really discriminate against women.

The most important development has been the development of a feminist perspective in looking at these issues and organising around them. I think that the impact of the women's movement on the third world has been tremendous. So, when they talk about feminists being white and middle class, I don't think that is true any more. The spread of ideas has been enormous, and with that sort of development, I believe we can change the world.

Australian Left Review 93
Post-mortem on the Taxation Summit

There are no simple answers for the left on the problem of taxation, says Peter Groenewegen, who argues a controversial stance in his review of the Tax Summit. It's possible, he suggests, that since Option C and its compensation package have been ditched, we may end up with an even less satisfactory situation.

The much heralded and much maligned tax summit is long over. After a week of talking and debate, was anything achieved? Most readers of the daily press and watchers of the electronic media can be excused for thinking that the summit ended in disaster for the government, in particular for the Prime Minister and Treasurer, and that the cause of tax reform has had a massive setback.

Likewise, those associated with welfare and community services groups may have celebrated the victory over Option C, with its broad-based consumption tax on goods and services without exempting the necessities of life but with considerable compensation for the disadvantaged and low income groups.

Many such judgements at this stage must be premature. In the sense that, as yet, no legislation has come out of the summit process of consultation and debate, little can be said about its actual outcome.

However, those claiming that the summit ended, and had to end, in failure, have failed to understand both its nature and the almost irresistible forces inherent in the current tax situation which drove the government to an attempt to tackle tax restructuring and tax reform through the risky expedient of summitry.

The origin of the tax summit cannot be seen, as some journalists had it, in a concession squeezed from the Prime Minister during a talk-back radio show on the hustings. Its origins are far more deep seated.

In the first place the need for a tax summit arises from the severe political constraints on tax reform built in to Australia's political system: the short electoral cycle in the federal sphere, aggravated by the superimposition of state elections which the government needs to take into consideration; the built-in opposition in the Senate which, barring enormous landslides at double dissolutions, is now an institutionalised feature of the federal system and the high degree of opportunism on tax matters, (everything must be opposed) from politicians in opposition.

Secondly, the government was forced into basic tax reform because the easy options were no longer available. (The last free tax lunch was the revenue bonanza for the Fraser government from import parity pricing of domestically produced oil.)

This was disclosed to the government by experience in its first term of office: the political backlash to its reform initiatives in May 1983 with respect to lump sum superannuation and the assets test, and the 1984 restructuring of the income tax rate scale which failed to prevent those on average earnings entering the 46 percent bracket and created anomalies for social security recipients solved only on a temporary basis.

The fact that the process started in EPAC in December 1983 and that EPAC received well over 500 submissions on tax reform showed that, in the minds of the public, tax reform was long overdue.

What appears to have come out of the process? Contrary to press reports, a surprising degree of unanimity on a number of important issues. Two surprising results stand out to my mind.

First, the unanimous support for a crackdown on tax evasion, if need be with the support of a national identity card: a strategy which should not be destroyed by spurious civil liberties considerations. More importantly, consensus was reached on the need to broaden the indirect tax base, to which the ACTU, through its secretary, gave assent insofar as broadening the existing wholesale sales tax base and retail taxation of services is concerned.

Inflexible revenue is the reason for the recognition of this necessity. Even with implementation of the income base broadening of option A
through taxing fringe benefits, introducing capital gains tax, removing some tax concessions and cracking down on other areas of avoidance, the tax system will not be able to yield the required revenue in a fair manner without moving more efficiently — and more equitably — into the taxation of consumption spending.

There are few revenue bonanzas and no cargo culs either from tapping the multinationals (much of that is wishful thinking), or business in general (despite the relative decline of company tax which has been much misunderstood) or the elimination of the threshold which sections of the right and left see as an unexploited tax quarry.

Effective taxation of the first raises complex issues of international taxation, made even more complex by removal of the foreign exchange restrictions, part of the floating of the dollar in 1983.

In addition, real aspects of disincentives to invest are inherent in raising effective rates of business taxation in general.

It may be noted, in the matter of dealing with tax havens, the White Paper itself expressed a substantial degree of impotence.

Those who seek a major role for the public sector in this country or who have the more limited desire to see it hold its own, need to grasp that this requires a rising tax share of GDP because of the small productivity growth potential in supplying community services.

In that sense, the welfare groups' victory over the broad-based consumption tax may have been a pyrrhic one: a fair proposal in a comprehensive package was rejected because of opposition to one of its components without full realisation of the implications of that choice.

This "fairness" can only be appreciated when the White Paper's compensation package is compared with other compensation offers accompanying structural change in the past, and when the revenue consequences of not having broad-based consumption taxation are fully realised.

The success of working class and community groups in opposing the government's tax reform proposals has implications for the future, says Warwick Neilly, which extend far beyond achieving an equitable tax package.

The defeat of the Hawke government's reform proposals for the Australian taxation system was a victory for the majority of people in Australia.

It was also an historic victory in that, through what will no doubt prove to have been an aberration in government policy formulation, the full weight of working class and community groups' opinion was effective in rolling back an essentially conservative proposition structured around a new, universal consumption tax.

The character and potential effects of the government's preferred option for reform needs no extensive analysis at this point. It is probably sufficient to state that the final assessment by a wide range of organisations was that it would have resulted in the poor and low to middle income earners paying more tax, not less, in the short and the long term. It would have disrupted economically and socially important industries such as housing, driven down consumption in many other areas, and generally reversed the expansion in the Australian economy which has been experienced in the last two years.

So, even within the context of orthodox social democratic economic thinking and policy formulation, the preferred option of the government was beyond the pale.

The political logic of the right wing of the government was also extraordinary. The ALP's traditional working class base was brought to the brink of complete dissatisfaction, and the blame for this must be directed, not at other factions, but at the right wing.

It is important, post-summit, to understand how the government's proposals were defeated, the implications of this for future progressive political activity and, at another level, to make an assessment of the package of reform which the government will finally introduce.

The Final Package?

Politically, the government is obliged to come forward with a package which benefits the poor and low to middle income...
earners. It was to the organisations representing these people that the government had to finally concede. A package which does not do this will be rejected by these same organisations, and the gross inequities of the tax system will not be redressed.

For those with least capacity to pay, this means significant reductions in PAYE marginal tax rates for low to middle income earners, changes to the spouse rebate as proposed by Jennie George on behalf of the ACTU at the Summit, no extension of wholesale taxes to essential goods and services and further reforms in the social security area, beyond the 1985 Budget, to deal with "poverty traps".

For the wealthy and those with the capacity to pay, it means an extensive and revenue raising fringe benefits tax extending to the self-employed, maintenance of the higher income marginal PAYE tax rates and further action against tax avoidance and minimisation, including areas such as the cash economy in a wide range of industries.

We can safely predict, though, that the issues of making the rich pay in full, or even in part, will not be taken up by the government. It is almost trite to consider otherwise, given the tenor of the government's presentation of the 1985 Budget, and its projected revenue figures which clearly demonstrate that PAYE earners as a whole are being called on to pay more.

Already, less than two months after the Summit, the government is being dominated by the right wing forces which were routed on the tax issue, and we can justifiably fear that the final package will offer mere crumbs to those most in need of tax reform.

Who Defeated the Government's Main Proposal?

Principal emphasis has been given in the capitalist media to the trade union movement as being responsible for achieving the result at the Summit.

There are strong elements of truth in this, but it is really only part of the story.

In fact, if the trade union response had not been consolidated by the stirrings of rank-and-file trade unionists and the activities of progressive, as well as some conservative, union leaders, it may very well be that the ACTU leadership would have had neither the will nor the inclination to defeat the government's plan.

Unqualified credit should be given to sections of the ACTU leadership, such as secretary Kelty and president Dolan, who demonstrated a capacity to carry through the opposition of the vast majority of affiliates to the government's preferred option.

The ACTU negotiating team worked as a collective throughout the summit and in the build-up to it, and its work was pivotal to the ACTU's role in the debate over reforms.

Little has been said, though, in the capitalist press, about the role of community, women's and welfare organisations. Of all the groups participating in the summit, they assessed, very early in the piece, the deficiencies of the government's proposals.

Extensive co-ordination prior to the Summit among progressive activists in these organisations and trade unions ensured an effective exchange of views and agreement on alternative demands. The ALP left played an important role in this process, as did independent marxists and socialists and members of the CPA and the Association for Communist Unity. The work carried out at this level ensured that the people's voice on tax reform was heard.

Keating provided the progressive movement with an opportunity to truly represent the vast majority in Australia, and it succeeded. Much of this was not readily discernible to the community at large, but it was decisive at the Summit.

The Centre-Left of the ALP also played a role in the defeat of the plan, as it also carried out consultative and co-ordination work in the community.

The wide range of community meetings, petitions and rallies which took place around Australia also demonstrated the community's clear opposition to the government's plan.

But the central co-ordination of progressive forces, through key organisations, was the principal reason that the opposition succeeded.

Implications for the Future

If the government does not come up with a package acceptable to working class and community organisations, taxation will continue to be a significant focus of struggle.

The range of forces which rolled back the consumption tax will have to assess its future work in this area, but following the success on taxation, the opportunity and the will exist to work around other issues as well.

Unemployment is one of those issues. Despite the glowing picture continually painted by Treasurer Keating, many of us are not confident that capitalism in Australia is able or willing to provide full employment.

In fact, the current hype over the economy and its growth is ideologically disorienting, disguising many undesirable trends — increased monopoly (Coles/Myer, Woolworths/Safeways), deregulation of finance and increasing interest rates, permanently high unemployment in specific regions, difficulties in the rural economy, increased imports over local manufacture, to name some important areas.

Attempts to discount wage rises, youth wage levels, private rental issues and public housing, disarmament and the ANZUS treaty — these are all important areas in which active co-ordination can ensure that the left continues to advance as the collective representative of the majority in Australia.

The environment exists for the growth of a new political movement to displace the rightwing domination of the labour movement and to effect genuine social and economic reforms in Australia.

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Mike Donaldson

The British Miners' Strike:

An Assessment

The British miners’ strike had elements of a classic confrontation between the New Right and a well-organised and militant union. While no simple lessons can be transported from Britain to Australia, questions must be asked about the role of the Labour Party, the lack of support from the rest of the union movement and about the tactics of the miners themselves. Mike Donaldson asks some of the questions and discusses the issues.

A special issue of The Miner, the journal of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), published on 7 March, carried the banner headline, "Victory? What Victory? The Fight Goes On". In it, the NUM stated, "The (National Coal) Board wanted to close 20 pits and axe 20,000 jobs .... They have not been able to do so. They wanted to close five pits immediately .... They have not been able to do so. They wanted to commit the union to signing an agreement closing pits on economic grounds. We have not and will never do so. The Board did not want any independent appeal body introduced into the colliery review procedure. They have been forced to accept such a body" (italics in the original).

Surprisingly, given that all mass media coverage has been to the contrary, most mineworkers appeared to agree with The Miner’s statement. A poll conducted for Granada TV’s Union World found that less than one in four miners believed that they had suffered defeat, and 68 percent said they were ready to take industrial action against pit closures in their districts.

And yet the miners clearly did not win. The NUM did not achieve its objectives, the closure program has not been withdrawn, and the mineworkers went back without a negotiated settlement. Over twelve months of intense struggle, 9,000 were arrested, 600 sacked, 300 imprisoned, some for up to five years, and two killed, and the union was badly divided internally.

But the NUM was not smashed, as the Thatcher government intended. As Peter Carter, a National Industrial organiser with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), put it, the government’s strategy was to isolate and destroy the best organised and most militant sections of the labour movement, and for this the Thatcher government had prepared meticulously.
The Thatcher Government’s Preparations

The Conservative Party was deeply affected by the victories of the miners in 1972 and 1974, and the Energy Minister under Conservative Prime Minister Heath was directed by the new Conservative leadership to provide a detailed report on the lessons that could be drawn from the government’s defeats of those years.

According to Beynon and McMyler, the resulting report, based on highly confidential discussions with business people and former public servants, “was a deeply sobering one for senior Conservatives”. It pointed to the potential power of well organised unions in key industries, and drew attention to the concentration of industrial power caused by advanced technology, the economy’s dependence on electricity and the central role of coal. The report said that the increasing complexity of electricity generation meant that the state could no longer use the armed forces to take over the running of the coal and oil-fired power stations.

It was against this background that Thatcher directed Nicholas Ridley, currently the Minister for Transport, to produce a more detailed and strategic document. This report was widely leaked in 1978, and made quite clear the intentions of the Conservative Party before it even became the government. The report, as it was outlined in The Economist, said, in part:

*Every precaution should be taken against a challenge in electricity or gas. Anyway, redundancies in those industries are unlikely to be required. The group believes that the most likely battleground will be the coal industry. They would like a Thatcher government to: a) build up maximum coal stocks particularly in the power stations; b) make contingency plans for the import of coal; c) encourage the recruitment of non-union lorry drivers by haulage companies to help move coal where necessary; d) introduce dual coal/oil firing in all power stations as quickly as possible.*

In addition, the report recommended that the greatest deterrent to any strike was “to cut off the money supply to the workers and make the union finance them”. It also suggested that there should be a large, mobile squad of police equipped and prepared to handle pickets and protect non-union drivers to cross picket lines.

"The government’s strategy was to isolate and destroy the best organised and most militant sections of the labour movement, and for this the Thatcher government had prepared meticulously .... "

The National Coal Board, with tripartite consultation, had trade union representatives on its decision making bodies and subscribed to the tripartite formulation, the Plan for Coal, re-signed as recently as 1980. In case senior management had been injected by this proximity to trade unionists, the Thatcher government moved quickly to install American import, Ian MacGregor, who had been responsible for managing the butchering of British Steel, Britain’s government-owned steel corporation, and before that, British Leyland.

In 1981, British coal stocks stood at 37 million tonnes; three years later they had risen 35 percent to 57 million. In 1982, the head of the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB), the wealthiest body in England, with assets of 40 thousand million pounds, was replaced. He had been instructed to substitute oil for coal in the power stations and to accumulate coal stocks. He was reported to have thought that this view was “hysterical”. In the year that he left the CEGB, oil imports increased by 33 percent.

In 1983, coal fuelled 76 percent of electricity generation, but during the strike oil became the major fuel including the main fuel for electricity generated for industry. During the third week in January 1985, with most of the country snow-covered and some parts experiencing the lowest temperatures for 20 years, the power stations produced an all-time record 46,125 megawatts of electricity. It was the third night that month that power supply had reached record levels. The new chairman of the CEGB, formerly head of the atomic Energy Authority, privately boasted of his role in defeating the miners. The cost was astronomical. Early in September 1984 it was revealed that the extra costs were of the order of 20 million pounds per week.

Michael Crick commented, “During the early part of the 1984-85 dispute the government persistently refused to intervene: most of its work had already been carried out". Coal stocks had been built up and alternative energy sources found for the power stations. Legislation was enacted reducing social security benefits for strikers’ families. Employers were armed with sanctions under the civil law and the police had in place co-ordinating mechanisms to minimise the effects of flying pickets.

On the other hand, according to Hywel Francis, chair of the Wales Congress in Support of Mining Communities, and chair of the Welsh Communist Party’s Energy and Mining Advisory Committee, the miners were “exceptionally ill-prepared”.

The Miners’ Response

With that remarkable clarity of vision allowed by hindsight, most commentators within the labour movement and the NUM itself now suggest that the failure to hold a national ballot of NUM miners was a tactical mistake. It was a mistake because, as one miner put it “it was like a monkey on our back” throughout the year, enabling Tory propagandists to sling at the trade union movement yet again that old, old favourite — that trade unions are anti-democratic.

The decision not to hold a national ballot was a mistake because it cut across the NUM’s long established principle of national unity, national decisions and national action. The NUM general secretary, Peter Heathfield, put a convincing argument against the holding of the ballot thus,
It cannot be right for one man to vote another man out of a job; ... a ballot on wages is a ballot which everyone enters on an equal basis and everyone is affected equally; on jobs it is a different matter, especially when jobs are at risk in some areas and not others.

But, nonetheless, the absence of a national ballot allowed those pits which continued to work to justify their action by saying that, because no ballot had been held, they could legitimately continue producing. Beynon suggests that this, in turn, meant that many other workers refused solidarity action because "the miners can't get their own members out". Mass picketing of working pits was also a direct consequence of the absence of a ballot. The struggle to convince the vast majority of the Nottinghamshire miners and the other Midlands pits that they should engage in a national struggle was not assisted by what they saw as their disenfranchisement. The strike became, in part, and was projected by the media as being almost entirely, a moral, political and physical struggle within the working class movement.

Finally, failure to hold a ballot was a mistake because it now appears almost certain that had a national ballot been held at the opportune time, it would have been won. Seasoned communist militants like George Bolton, vice-president of the Scottish Area of the NUM and Alan Baker, a Lodge secretary from Wales, said that the NUM could have won a ballot "hands down" in April or May.

According to Beynon, where opinion polls had been carried out among the miners, as they had been on at least five separate occasions in different parts of the country between March and July, the results showed "support for the strike which was deeply set and surprisingly strong" — in two MORI polls, 62 percent in March and 68 percent in April, supported the strike. The Guardian too, suggested that, even in the closing weeks, 55 percent of the miners still backed the strike.

It is easy enough to appreciate why the rank and file miners did not want a ballot — Thatcher wanted one, MacGregor wanted one and the media wanted one.

A scab union had existed in Nottinghamshire between 1926 and 1937, and in the 1979 and 1983 general elections, several traditional mining constituencies had fallen to the Conservatives. The Labour Party was losing ground even before the strike and, according to some within it, continued to do so with increasing rapidity as the strike developed.

The Labour Party Assesses Itself

The position of what is called, for reasons I don't understand, the "hard" left of the Labour Party was predictable and probably accurate — the leadership of the Labour Party "sold out" the miners. Indeed, Labour's parliamentary leader, Neil Kinnock, was widely derided by strikers as "Ramsay McKinnock", after Ramsay MacDonald, Labour's leader during the 1926 General Strike and the Labour Party failed to raise vigorously questions of unemployment and energy policy, or to question the workings of the police and the legal system.

The Labour Party's "soft" (?) left grouping, the Labour Co-ordinating Committee published its own analysis After the Strike, which was also critical of the Party's leadership. The fact that the strike was inevitable from day one of Thatcher's second term, and that the stakes being played for were so high never seemed to be fully grasped by the Labour leadership. From the outset they acted as though the strike was an embarrassing diversion from "real politics" in Parliament and the electoral arena. They appeared to wait impatiently for the strike to end.

The Labour Co-ordinating Committee said that the Labour Party passed its time stating what it did not support and was able to produce only one leaflet during the
British Miners' Strike

12 months. The analysis concludes, "If the strike shows anything it is that centre politics and the new realism are not adequate weapons to take on Thatcherism".13

The Trade Union Response

Kinnoch spoke, it is true, in the autumn at the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and at the Labour Party national conference in support of the miners (but, says Beynon, by implication criticising them)14 and there were resolutions passed of solidarity and support at both conferences, even though the NUM had waited five months on into the strike before approaching the TUC for support.

But the "piling up of leftwing block votes" at both conferences did not mean that there was a general, concerted or dynamic lead given for industrial action or even to honour the picket lines.15 With the exception of the rail unions who had supported the NUM from the beginning and some sections of the Transport and General Workers' Union, the official trade union movement was either unwilling (as were the power workers and electricians) or unable (left unions) to deliver the goods in any sustained and systematic way with industrial action at the point of production. As Francis bitterly commented, trade union solidarity has at best been reduced to 75 turkeys from Llanwern steelworkers. At its worst, it's the army of well-paid faceless scab lorry drivers trundling along the M4 to supply foreign coke to the Llanwern "brothers" who supplied the turkeys.16

Although every one of the hard-coal pits struck and no coking coal was produced at all, the steelworkers, whose industry depends on coke, were unable to take solidarity action. Not only did the divisions among the miners and the absence of a ballot impair the legitimacy of the strike in the eyes of steel and power workers, and become the pretext or excuse for non-existent industrial support, but the steelworkers, in particular, had been devastated by a closure program under the very MacGregor who was now attempting a similar job on the coal industry. As one miner put it, "The steel workers are shell-shocked after what has happened to them, it's like asking for a blood transfusion from a corpse".17

The British Steel Corporation came to the assistance of the Coal Board by not discouraging the widely circulated rumours that of the five steel "super mills" that remained open, one or even two, might "have to close". In South Wales, steelworkers in the giant strip mills on the coast co-operated in the limitation of supplies of coal and coke under the close supervision of rail unionists and NUM delegates. Steel production was cut back as coal and coke deliveries were reduced to 10 thousand tonnes a week during the first few months of the strike, until the NUM declared that a complete blockage would be placed on fuel deliveries to steelworks. By October, South Wales steelworks were receiving over 20 thousand tonnes a week, twice as much as they were receiving before the blockade was imposed.

Miners, their wives and strike supporters massed day and night at the gates to prevent the deliveries, as trucks from the same haulage firms that had been used to break the steelworkers' strike four years earlier, broke through, travelling in heavily protected convoys. Despite twenty-four hour mass picketing, and hundreds of arrests, the supplies were never halted for more than a day or two.18

The mass-picketing tactic failed, generally, perhaps because the economic situation had changed so dramatically since 1972 and 1974, when it had been employed with considerable success. As George Bolton commented,

"When you were addressing factory gate meetings .... you got support in terms of money and of food. But you got a strong feeling of "we can't come out on strike with you because our factory isn't very secure, there are 4 million (unemployed) out there, and please give us coal, because if we can't get coal, and we can't keep producing, then we lose the market for our factory's product and our factory will close".19

"A national movement grew which found women not only behind 'their' men but also beside and in front of them .... "

Alan Baker added that there are "certain ideas common to wide sections of the British working class, including the power and steel workers and some of the miners who went on strike, that if you keep your head down and battle on and make your industry profitable, it will survive, that somehow the government is trying to make British industry competitive in order to live in the modern world".20

Defending and Transforming the Communities

"When you close a pit, you kill a community" was a common slogan in the pit villages, one shortly adopted by pit communities in parts of N.S.W. It stated succinctly what the strike was about, and what the miners and those with whom they lived had always claimed it was about, the preservation of communities, households and jobs. Along with the Lodge organisation, the local committee of the Women Against Pit Closures movement became central to working class resistance.
In Derbyshire alone, 40 miners' wives groups were formed, initially out of the material need to provide food, but from this a national movement grew which found women not only behind "their" men but also beside and in front of them. "South Wales women threw off all that garbage about being 'behind' their men, and began occupying coal board offices, blocking steelworks gates and touring Europe putting the case for the defence of their communities."21 As a spokeswoman from the Bently Women's Action Group declared, "We've done everything the men have, we've done more, we've done kitchens, speaking, rallying, picketing, the only thing we haven't done is go down the pit and we intend to do that when the strike is over."22

"The failure to hold a national ballot of NUM miners was a tactical mistake ...."

The involvement of working class women in political organising and campaigning has had a profound effect on gender relations within the communities. A woman from Bently commented, "At one time I didn't care about coal. I (was) a wife, those things didn't concern me".23 Women's involvement in broader political issues has been accompanied by a marked change in domestic social relations. Lorraine Bowler from Barnsley Women's Action Group told hundreds of women gathered for a Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC) rally, "I am sure that for some or most of the women here today it is the same in their homes as it has been in mine over the weeks. There are arguments now as to whose turn it is to go on a demonstration or picket, and whose turn it is to babysit. Talk about job sharing! We've seen it at its best over the past eight or nine weeks."24

Or, in the words of another miner's wife radicalised in the struggle,

The Women Against Pit Closures movement has had, and will continue to have, a dramatic effect on the working class's understanding of itself. Betty Heathfield of WAPC told a rally on International Women's Day, shortly after the strike was over, "Now when we're in (the) pub we sit with the men and join in instead of chatting about kids and home and things. We can sit with (them) and talk about (the) pit. We want to know about things, about what's happening in the union. Some mornings I've been picketing before him and I come home and he's done the housework. I've always thought well, men do the thinking. But I speak my mind now more than I've ever done."25

We have defended our union against the most dastardly government ever known in this country. We are stronger today than ever. There is a strong body of women in every pit. We can't look backwards.

Many had seen the NUM and its members as overwhelmingly male and hence conservative in social values. This view is being challenged as men's lives are being changed. As Arthur Scargill said, the struggle "not only transformed the lives of women who, until that time, had had a narrow vision of what their role was and should be. It transformed our lives in the union."

Creating a Resistance Movement

The most compelling feature of the thousands of miners' support groups which sprang up throughout Britain during that year was their incredible diversity and breadth. Trade unionists, ethnic organisations, women's groups, gay and lesbian organisations, individual Labour Party branches, all parties to the left of the Labour Party (though the SWP was a latecomer to the support groups) forged what the industrial editor of the Financial Times called a "network of new alliances" which provided "vigorouos, efficient and national support".

The women from Greenham Common were quick to come "home" to the Welsh valleys whose women had initiated the Greenham protest, and food continued to arrive in West Wales from the Greenham women throughout the strike.

In Liverpool, 14 separate support groups raised one million pounds with contributions coming from most factories. The body plant at Ford Halewood give 1,000 pounds every fortnight and another Ford plant between 300 pounds and 1,300 pounds every week. Impressive support came from those areas already suffering the blight of de-industrialisation. Toxeth was one of the first places to develop a support group. The support group in Kirkby, another Liverpool suburb shattered by economic collapse, achieved a 50 percent response to its door-to-door collections. The slogan of the London Dockland Miners' Support Group was "Don't let the mines go the way as the docks". The secretary of the Docklands Group said, "We know from the experience of what happened to us what will happen to them."26

Unemployed people were prominent in the work of the support groups and, in some places, such as the Merseyside, the unemployed staffed the centre which coordinated the work of the various support groups.

In Southampton, Cardiff, Manchester, York, Glasgow and Edinburgh "Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners" groups were established. In London, 3,000 pounds had been raised by December through regular collections at gay and lesbian clubs. In October, a large contingent of lesbians and gays were guests in the households of the Dulais Valley in Wales because of their outstanding financial support for the valley.

Afro-Caribbean groups, Cypriot groups, the Asian community and Turkish people contributed and organised support. When the South Wales Striking Miners' Choir entertained an entirely black audience in Walsall, one of the choristers thanked the "ethnic minorities" who had been outstanding in their support. A black spokesperson...
British Miners' Strike

replied. "The Welsh are an ethnic minority in Walsall,"27 A Nottingham miner commented "I've never been racist, I don't think, but I'd never really understood it before."

Peace groups, too, have contributed to the miners' support and the slogan "Mines not Missiles" became common at CND rallies. The Enfield women's peace group in London wrote, 

We were inspired by the women, We wanted to show them that then weren't alone, that we need each other. Our links with the women in Cannock have helped overcome our isolation and sense of powerlessness.28

A conference convened in December was attended by representatives from 1500 support groups. This was an organisational expression of what one commentator has termed "a network of unexpected alliances"29 constituting overall what Hywel Francis has called a resistance movement which sustained about half a million people for nearly a year. He commented, "even more perceptive and revealing was the simple ceremony in Italy during the strike when women activists from Coelbren and Hirwaun were made honorary members of the Italian resistance".30

Wales: Building a State Within the State

The South Wales coalfield with over 20,000 miners remained solid and, after 10 months, only one percent had broken the strike, despite the initial reluctance of most South Wales lodges to strike. In the 14 central valleys, only 14 had returned to work by mid-January. In the two pits of the North Wales field, support was patchy and collapsed in November when most of the 2,000 mineworkers went back.

In July 1984, the Welsh miners became the first victims of the new anti-union legislation brought down by the Thatcher government. Sequestrators not only froze union funds but also money raised for food right across the coalfields. The response of the Welsh communities was overwhelming. Welsh women and men addressed hundreds of meetings each week, "twinned" pit villages with factories and working class suburbs, and organised large co-ordinating centres in Liverpool, Birmingham, Oxford, Bristol, Southampton, Swindon, Reading and London.31

The task of feeding up to 20,000 households meant the development of an alternative welfare state within Wales. Howells commented, 

Our defences were found badly wanting. The citadel was falling apart. The people of the coalfields had no choice but to create new defences and in building them they discovered old socialist and collectivist truths. They realised that by uniting and sharing all that they had, they could survive and overcome the worst that the present state apparatus could throw at them.32

With the failure of Labour's parliamentary representatives to provide an effective national support structure for the movement of resistance, support groups throughout Wales "got on with the job" and organised an alternative welfare system, a system of distribution according to need.

The Wales Congress in Support of Mining Communities is the Welsh national political expression of the multitude of tangible, cross-cutting and overlapping alliances, expressing the links with the women's and peace movements, local authorities fighting funding cuts, the unemployed, the Communist Party, Labour Party branches, Plaid Cymru (nationalist), cultural organisations, gay and lesbian groups, environmental groups and the churches.

Congress delegates continued to meet weekly to set priorities and guidelines for the development and maintenance of the new welfare system and to discuss strategy and tactics. When the strike ended, the Congress met again on 17 March and decided to continue the struggle in defence of the communities.

"That the strike was inevitable from day one of Thatcher's second term and that the stakes being played for were so high never seemed to be fully grasped by the Labour leadership ...."

Support for the miners' struggle transcended national boundaries. Scargill was very aware of the significance of international support and was deeply appreciative of the efforts of Australian workers. On 9 March, he told 9,000 people attending an International Women's Day rally, 

The Australian government contacted the Seamen's Union of Australia and said: "Now the strike is over, will you release the coal and let it be transported overseas?" The Seamen's Union cabled the NUM and said they would only release coal when the NUM told them the strike was at an end. That's internationalism, that's trade unionism.

Can We Draw Lessons?

Thatcher is not Hawke, the NUM is not the Miners Federation, Women Against Pit Closures is not the Miners Women's Auxiliaries, the National Coal Board is not the Joint Coal Board, CRA, BHP, Shell and British Petroleum, the Dulais Valley is not the Burragorang Valley, the TUC is not the ACTU, the British Labour Party is not the ALP and the CPGB is not the CPA.

The lessons that can be drawn, given these and other major differences, are limited. If inferences can be made
they probably apply to specific tactical instances or to the more general level — the identification of tendencies and sets of issues, rather than to the perhaps more useful area of strategies.

In the first case, I am puzzled by a number of things. Why did the Yorkshire NUM not tread carefully and gently, instead of crossing rapidly and vehemently into Nottinghamshire and so driving the Notts miners into a position from which they could not shift? Why were the pits in which a majority struck not occupied to keep the minority out, thus keeping the focus on coal and jobs rather than on picketing? Why didn’t the lodges put non-production care and maintenance crews into the struck pits to prevent the sterilisation that sometimes occurred, in so doing making the point that the coal was not MacGregor’s but the people’s, and would be conserved for them by the miners? Given the intensity and significance of the struggle, why didn’t the NUM leadership heed the opinion polls, or, given wall-to-wall academics and social scientists supporting the struggle, why didn’t they conduct one of their own membership? Does the isolation of the NUM within the trade union movement suggest that industry specific unions may be structurally less able to generate union support than general unions whose members are spread across industries?

More broadly, it has been fashionable of late to take the rather useful insights that the state itself is sometimes conflicted, that it does not always and everywhere necessarily act in the interests of the capitalist class, that genuine though partial victories can be won from it, and to draw from these insights an extreme position that says that the state does not represent, articulate, advance and defend the interests of the capitalist class overall.

If there is one fashionable myth that cannot survive the strike, it is that. The British miners faced a sustained militant, carefully planned campaign organised by the parliamentary executive of the state and carried through by its agencies.

That the NUM survived at all is remarkable. That the NUM was not destroyed is attributable to the massive and sustained support that it received; that it did not win is attributable to the support it did not receive, from within itself and from other trade unions.

The principle lesson of the strike must be that no section of the trade union movement can face a mobilised and confrontationist state and win without the active support of other sections of the union movement. It was this support that was largely absent, with the consequence that, while the struggle could be, and was, sustained, it was not, and could not be, won.

The failure of large sections of the trade union movement to support the miners at the point of production, the only place where people’s power can be unambiguously decisive, is, as I have suggested, largely a function of depressed economic circumstances which rob workers of the resources and confidence to struggle in that way.

But the lack of such support must also be laid squarely at the doors of other actors within the trade union movement, the political parties, who failed during the last decade to help trade union activists understand the class nature of union politics, and to forge relations based on that understanding across trade union organisations.

The lefts of the British Labour Party continue the thankless job of stacking and restacking branches only to find, when they finally make some ground, that the rules are changed. They continue to fail to organise around workplaces and industries and continue to encourage some of their more able members into the pleasant wilderness of parliamentary backbenchism.

"Many people new to political involvement have become experienced and effective speakers, expert organisers and confident socialists, their confidence based on a growing understanding that the a priori equation of revolutionary politics with the margins is as unnecessary as it is destructive."

The Communist Party, with a fixed and deliberate intent, continues to shoot its toes off, and both parties have failed to provide the political education which would help trade union activists look beyond their immediate concerns to the equally vital concerns of the class as a whole. Such schooling, said Eric Hobsbawn, “the Communist Party (of Great Britain) provided for generations of workers and intellectuals, men and women”.33 But it does so no longer. Nonetheless, as Massey and Wainwright stressed, a lot has been learned.

Many people new to political involvement have become experienced and effective speakers, expert organisers and confident socialists, their confidence based on a growing understanding that the a priori equation of revolutionary politics with the margins is as unnecessary as it is
destructive. There has also been the learning of other new skills — how to manage thousands of pounds on behalf of hundreds of people, how to confront and overcome the real problems of building an alternative welfare system. Massey and Wainwright concluded in much of their work, many of the support groups illustrate in practice the kind of movement we need to build in order to achieve socialism. A commitment to change through building up democratic power at the base, in the factories and communities; a breaking down of the traditional, inhibiting boundary between trade unionism and politics; a sense of local strength and identity which at the same time is not parochial; a commitment to a non-sectarian but principled form of unity, in which different political tendencies are respected and work together; an emphasis on reaching out, a confidence that radical demands can be popular if they are argued for.

Loretta Loach, a member of the Spare Rib collective, has commented, "through the links that have been established a learning process has taken place, one which has been mutually beneficial to working class women and middle class feminists". The women’s organisations continue in the communities, with the full support of the NUM, as does the Welsh Congress in Support of Mining Communities. There is not, and never was, an inherent exclusivity between class politics and the social movements, nor is it just a matter of adding them together. What is important is the recognition and fostering of their mutual interdependence and influence. As Hobsbawn points out, the broad alliance is a necessary complement to class politics, not an alternative to it. While support groups were, in important ways, prefigurative of the sorts of organisations which socialists seek to build in a new world, and were necessary for victory to be won, they were not sufficient to attain it without the decisive support of workers organised at the point of production.

FOOTNOTES

15. Huw Beynon, "Introduction" in Digging Deeper.
22. Loretta Louch, "We’ll be Here Right to the End ... And After: Women in the Miners’ Strike", in Digging Deeper, p. 175.
24. Loretta Louch, p. 171.
32. Kim Howells, p. 147.
34. Doreen Massey and Hilary Wainwright, "Beyond the Coalfields", in Digging Deeper, pp. 166-167.
35. Loretta Louch, "We’ll be Here", in Digging Deeper, p. 169.
Socialism Next Time

In this timely review article, Roger Coates looks at the early development of Australian socialism, with particular reference to Verity Burgmann's recently published book *In Our Time: Socialism and the Rise of Labor 1885-1905.*
In her recently published book *In Our Time: Socialism and the Rise of Labor 1885-1905*, Verity Burgmann takes us back a hundred years to a much simpler time. In the 1880s, the immigrant people of a large southern hemisphere island, fairly recently seized bit by bit from its Aboriginal inhabitants, in six quite disparate colonial settlements, parts of greater Britain, were struggling towards an ambiguous nationality and a degree of independence.

This very important book deals with the early development of a socialist sentiment in these British colonies. It is a fairly straightforward account of first wave Australian socialism, written largely by colony, with the emphasis on New South Wales. One of its strengths is the forceful narrative, and there are some very useful political biographical vignettes of some of the less well-known radicals and agitators of the time, as well as better known figures such as William Lane, William Morris Hughes and William Holman. (These of course all ratted. One of Burgmann's sub-themes is the whys and wherefores of socialist rattering, but I think her analysis is a bit superficial.)

The book as a whole is a much more thorough treatment than any previous account, filling many gaps and enabling us to get a much clearer idea of what happened and of some of the connections and interactions. Unfortunately, however, despite the subtitle, it tends to focus too narrowly on its own period and the socialists as such. It sometimes ignores or minimises the wider context, thus tending to leave important points un- or under-developed. For this reason it needs to be read in conjunction with other texts, particularly those of Gollan, Nairn, Turner and McQueen, and the economic histories of Fitzpatrick.1

Socialist thinking, propaganda and agitation appeared on the eastern seaboard of Australia in the mid-1880s, first, because it reflected contemporary intellectual trends in the major anglophone centres of the world, especially London, New York, Chicago and San Francisco. British and American publications and news arrived and circulated in Australia six to twelve months after publication, and directly and indirectly the ideas they brought were taken up, printed and talked about. Returning colonists, new immigrants or visitors were other sources of new ideas.2

The Australian colonies were a British base in the South Pacific, and the Australian economy and society reflected this state of affairs. The evolution of Australian political culture was the result of the continuing struggle between various conservative and opposing reforming currents. The colonial economy, apart from the exploitation of the large, accessible gold deposits, operated largely as a supplier of raw materials to the metropolitan industries and markets. By the 1880s, the principal colonies had become very valuable British assets with important cities whose town halls and other principal public buildings reminded visitors of the great Victorian structures found in Manchester and Birmingham.

**British Influence**

Paralleling the British influence in the economy and institutions, from at least the 1820s, a simplified form of political and cultural debate and action spread outward from the centre, permeating colonial life. As great movements of ideas were generated, mainly at the imperial centre, they echoed in the Australian colonies, even if somewhat muted. Often, because of the truncated, incomplete form of the transported society, these ideas took on a different shape and tone and an Australian, but still recognisably British style, emerged. While the forging of the Australian colonies promoted the growth of imperial Britain, an increasing conflict of interests led to an Australian sentiment, the precondition for an emerging nation.3

'Australian socialism was certainly pluralistic if not, at times, ill-defined and fuzzy.'

By the middle of the 1880s, an identifiable Australian class structure had taken shape, with workers and owners of capital as the two principal social forces. Conservatism remained the dominant ideology, but a rival liberal-radical praxis gave the conservatists little peace. Through the 1870s and '80s, the active workers, principally through the growing trade union movement, forged trade and inter-colonial links to the point where, in one major heavily capitalised industry — mining (both metalliferous and coal) — a genuine if simple industrial union ideology emerged and bits of this ideology quickly spread to the pastoral industry (the other major productive capitalised industry) and to the crucially important maritime transport industry.4

In this context, then, socialist ideology appeared in the Australian colonies although, in fact, the socialisms from Britain and the United States were not first in the field. While, after 1878, the dominant Australian society and culture was largely Anglo-Saxon with a Celtic admixture, leaving aside the interaction with Aboriginal life and culture, there were always other ethnic and cultural components of the social mix.

Burgmann forcefully demonstrates that the German and, to a lesser extent, other communities, especially the Italian, provided a leavening of continental socialism. It affected, not always marginally, the majority anglophone communities in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales.

The *Allegemeiner Deutscher Verein* (ADV) (General German Association) in South Australia, the site of a German community since the 1850s, actually predated the Melbourne Anarchist Club (1886) by a few weeks. Although the *ADV* fulfilled a very important general cultural and social role for the German-speaking people, its political orientation lay very definitely towards the Social Democratic Party of Germany. The *ADV* participated in many activities of a general political character including affiliation to the Labor Party in 1891.

**Continental Socialism**

German socialists and radicals were very important in Melbourne (1887) and Sydney (1890) too, and influenced such important native Australians as William (Dr.) Maloney and Harry (H.E.) Holland. The latter, one of Australia's and New Zealand's most
important international socialists, was strongly influenced
by the emigre Sicilian architecture student, Francis
Sceusa. Sceusa had been forced into exile in the 1870s after
being active in the Italian section of the First International.
In 1893 he represented both the Social Democratic
Federation of Australasia, an ASL breakaway, and the
ASL (Australian Socialist League) at the Zurich Congress
of the Second International. On his return to Australia,
after a triumphant visit to Sicily, he continued his activity
in the very important, anti-racist International Socialist
Club (ISC). In 1907 the ISC was one of the important
centres of the socialist second wave. From its bar profits it
financed the publication of the *International Socialist
Review (ISR)* modelled on the American *ISR*, with
Holland as its increasingly influential editor.

The continental influence aside, it must be
acknowledged that the socialism and socialist models
followed in Australia were predominantly British and, to a
lesser extent, American. The three main British socialist
organisations in the 1880s were the SDF (Social
Democratic Federation), the Socialist League and the
Fabian Society and all these were replicated to some
degree in name at least in Australia. Just as the naming of
organisations followed British models, the Australian sort
of socialism that they propagated predominantly followed
British and American schools of socialist thought.

What sort of socialism took root in the Australian
colonies?

First-wave Australian socialism was not uniquely
ecclectic. Socialism in most countries was heterogeneous,
but British socialism from which the Australian brand
largely derived was particularly unsystematic with many
cross-currents. Australian socialism was certainly
pluralistic if not, at times, ill-defined and fuzzy. Burgmann
lays greater stress on Marx’s influence on first-wave
Australian socialism than is usually the case. Before
examining this claim in a little more detail, it may be worth
considering the various schools of socialist thought that
became part of Australian socialism in the 1880s and ‘90s.

Four or five more-or-less distinct schools or trends
emerge from Burgmann’s account. She distinguishes four
main schools, apart from Marxism: state socialism,
municipal socialism, Bush socialism and Christian
socialism, although she identifies another school, referred
to as Modern socialism, a form of small-scale, self-helping,
coop-erative socialism. This school shared its anti-
authoritarianism with the libertarian socialists and
anarcho-communists, who formed a possible sixth school.

It would be wrong to suggest that the early socialists and
socialist organisations operated solely within a particular
school or that there were mutually exclusive trends, with
no cross-currents or individual shifts of opinion.

The first groups in both Melbourne and Sydney were
William Lane in 1892

extremely heterogeneous, without any well-defined
predominant tendency. In Melbourne, essentially the same
group of people formed or belonged to the Anarchist Club
(1886), the Melbourne branch of the ASL (1889) and the
Social Democratic League (1889). In like manner there
were anarchists and libertarian, state and so-called
Modern socialists in the ASL in Sydney and Newcastle
before 1890.

State socialism meant a society in which, through the
state, the public or community owned, controlled and
operated the means of production, distribution and
exchange as the way of eliminating private capitalist
ownership and control and the consequent hardships and
evils. In practical terms, it meant getting control of the
parliamentary state through elections and legislating for
socialism. State socialism undoubtedly became the dominant trend
by 1890, and its influence was strongly felt in every centre
and colony up to 1905, as the first wave of socialism spread
throughout Australia.

Many readers would be surprised by the extent of the
influence of municipal socialism in Australia, particularly
in Queensland, where the concept of Greater Brisbane
grew out of the impact made by the existence of the
London County Council and the development of Greater
London. Foreshadowing Fred Paterson’s work fifty years
later, Ned (E.Y.) Lowry, casual labourer and Townsville
wharfie and militant libertarian, for three years before his
sudden death in 1898, waged a brilliant campaign for
municipal reforms in the far northern city (pp. 170-180).

It was the English Fabian socialists who advocated and pushed so-called municipal socialism as part of their tactic of "permeation", initially regarding it as a preferable approach to strict state socialism, which was more the domain of the British Social Democratic Federation under H.M. Hyndman's leadership.

Karl Marx

Although so-called scientific socialists insist that their argument is not ethically but scientifically based, Karl Marx was clearly a great moralist, and one of the appeals of Marxism has been its underlying ethical force. But in the development of socialist thought, especially perhaps in England, a concern for ethical and liberal values became divorced from the economistic and deterministic values that most early English Marxists emphasised. (The outstanding exception, of course, was William Morris).

British socialism tended to draw quite heavily on both an evangelical, dissenting and non-conformist Christianity and a secular rationalism for its social and personal ethics. Within English socialism, dating back at least to Robert Owen, there is a strong ethical strain. Burgmann, I think, fails to fully pick this up. If she had, it would have been analytically reasonable to subsume a lot of Bush socialism and Christian socialism into a more comprehensive school of ethical or idealistic socialism. Moreover, such an analytical point makes it possible to approach William Lane with greater balance.

As part of the heterogeneity of early Australian socialism, there were strong libertarian and anti-authoritarian strands from the start. The Melbourne Anarchist Club and the early ASL both had marked libertarian leanings. Because of William Lane's proclivities and attachment to the American socialist writer, Edward Bellamy, in Brisbane the libertarian influence seems to have been weaker. However, Lane's younger brother, Ernie (E.H.) was quite at ease with all manner of rebels and radicals. Long after the older Lane had abandoned his socialist beliefs and ideals, Ernie Lane, throughout a very long life, remained in the forefront of the work of building socialism from below.

The broad aims of the libertarians were essentially the same as the state socialists', but they differed radically about detail and method. They believed in a socialism that was at once more individualistic and more concerned with the self-action of the workers themselves. They favoured a self-helping socialism rooted in self-managed co-operative enterprises. They sought to prepare the working class for a socialist strategy in Australia is dependent on this realisation.

The most important of the purely libertarian organisations was the Active Service Brigade (ASB), formed in Sydney in 1893 as the 1890s depression hit home. It prefigured much of the style, philosophy and tactics adopted by the Chicago direct-actionist IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) in Sydney twenty years later. In fact, one of the ASB's principal figures, John Dwyer, took part in launching the Sydney IWW local in 1911.

Marxism

Which bring us to Marxism and one of the major points of Burgmann's argument. In the early development of Australian socialism, just how important was Marx's influence? Were Marxists thick on the ground?

When W.G. Higgs, asked at the 1891 Royal Commission on Strikes to name a well known socialist writer, said "I think Karl Marx, who believes in State Co-operation, would be the nearest", he seemed to suggest they were. On the other hand, Robin Gollan does not list Marx in the index of either of his books on the period and observes that "Perhaps Marx's theory of value was not widely known ...."

Burgmann disagrees, stating in her introduction that "labour historians have underestimated the impact of Marxism in this period" and arguing "if any single idea could be isolated and designated as the driving force of the socialist movement in this period, it would be the notion of surplus value". Even Burgmann herself, in at least one very important case — that of William Lane — has failed to recognise the impact Marx made in a specific conjuncture. Her second point, however, is very dubious.

If Burgmann is right about the underestimation of Marxian influence, what was this Marxism like? Especially at the beginning of the period, there were probably few of Marx's works readily available. Capital I was translated into English only in 1887, although there may have been copies of the German or French versions around for those who could read those languages. Those Marxist ideas that were propounded tended to be economistic and deterministic in the spirit of Orthodox Marxism (pp. 58, 122-3, 168, 176, 180, 194). Burgmann does draw attention to one or two reasonable accurate discussions of surplus value, particularly in the early pamphlets of the important Victorian socialist pamphleteer Tom Turnercliff, but to say, as she does, that the socialist movement aimed at "the reconquest of surplus value" is overstating the point. Moreover, it appears that she believes that the frequent references to the right of labour to its full product confirms this claim.

"There is no way round the state, conceding all the limitations and sources of weakness in state action. Any viable socialist strategy in Australia is dependent on this realisation."

Loosely, very loosely, this demand could notionally be linked to Marxist economic and social analysis, but it is not really Marxist. That labourers are entitled to and should demand the full product of their labour is decidedly pre-Marxist. It is, in fact, the principal economic point which arose from the Ricardian anti-capitalist school of economic thought that flourished in the 1820s and '30s. With Owen, it provided the theoretical basis of the first phase of English socialism. Thus, first-wave Australian socialism can be linked to the earliest developments of the
English school, but to seem to attribute it to Marx is misleading.

A Marxist socialist would have raised the demand for the abolition of classes or at the very least the abolition of the system of wage-labour. Of the most significant theoretical analyses Burgmann quotes, one of the clearest is the 1894 ASL’s Manifesto to the People of Australia (p.58). This has quite a sharp edge, referring to “class antagonisms”, “capitalist class”, “wage-earning class”, “class supremacy” and “robbery” but it finally merely calls for “the mode of production for profit” to be superseded by “national or collective production for use” (p.58).

William Lane

As Michael Wilding has rightly pointed out, there is at least one place in the contemporary literature where elements of a stronger marxist analysis can be found, namely in the much maligned William Lane’s remarkable socialist novel The Workingman’s Paradise, but Burgmann ignores these aspects of Lane’s thinking (pp.20-24).

For the last fifteen or twenty years, especially, it has been fashionable to denigrate Lane, largely because of his terrible racist sentiments, which were not confined to the Chinese and blacks, but were anti-semitic, too. My intervention is not an attempt to whitewash this ghastly weakness, but to bring the debate closer to Robin Gollan’s reasonably balanced judgment of twenty-five years ago, although Gollan did not recognise adequately the “Marxist” tendency in Lane.

Lane was not a Marxist but an eclectic thinker and writer with a complicated socialist outlook. Only twenty-four years old on his arrival in 1885, and in Australia for only eight years, he was more of a regional than a national influence. Nevertheless, Lane made a major impact on the Australian scene. Initially a devotee of Henry George, but probably influenced by an interest in labour questions in Canada and the United States, including the activity of the radical Knights of Labor, in 1887-8 he moved from a basically radical nationalist viewpoint to a well formulated socialism. At rock bottom, his views put him in the ethical/idealistic school but, for several years, he incorporated other tendencies - state socialist, communitarian, co-operative and Marxist.

There are two key points here that make this emphasis on Lane so important. Lane was not only a self-taught talented thinker and writer who embraced significant elements of Marxism. He was, for three or four crucial years, an organiser and leading force of the vanguard of the Queensland labour movement. With Albert Hinchcliffe, Charles Seymour, Matt Reid and others, he laid out the plan and form of the Australian Labour Federation, a scheme for a radical national trade union organisation with political goals which, in 1889-90, brought Queensland Labor to a new degree of perfection. That they failed in the short term is not very surprising. What is striking is that the attempt was made.

The Marxist quality in Lane’s thinking became strongest in the particular conjuncture of the bitter defeats of the 1890 Maritime Strike and the Shearers’ Strike of the first half of 1891, the same conjuncture that tipped the balance towards organised Labor parties. Between about the middle of 1891 and 1892, Lane’s analyses have more of a Marxist flavour, although still mixed inescapably with his more basic views — views which, for a variety of reasons, got the upper hand in 1892-3, as Lane became disillusioned with his vision of Australia as a potentially ideal society.

Other Features

There are plenty of other features and qualities of first-wave Australian socialism which deserve a full examination, but that is hardly feasible. Some will say that I have not addressed the feminist issue and I regret that. Burgmann gives more prominence to active female socialists and the place of women in the socialist movement than any previous author on the topic but, for reasons I can only guess at, does not address the socialism/feminism issue head on.

Her study emphasises once again the special importance of the eastern seaboard but, within this broad geographical division, there were and are very important regional differences, something evident in the contemporary socialist scene. Although Burgmann does not bring it into really sharp focus, there is plenty of evidence of the importance of popular socialist culture, a subject that warrants separate study.

In the ten years before 1905, Victorian socialists sowed the seeds of the mass socialist party Tom Mann helped form in 1905-6. Between the socialist co-operative society behind the newspaper Tocsin and the Tocsin clubs, the Victorian Labour Federation, the Victorian Socialists’ League and the Social Democratic Party of Victoria, there were important connections and the creation of a definite, characteristic political and cultural milieu which makes the VSP (Victorian Socialist Party) a much more intelligible phenomenon.

For two or three years before 1905-6, Tom Mann had conducted his unique political and industrial campaigns which were to last until his departure for England in 1909.

The ultimate issue raised by Burgmann and not, in my opinion, really dealt with adequately, is the part first-wave socialism played in crystallising the idea of independent
labour political representation and the emergence of Labor parties in each colony. Burgmann's book gives a much more solid factual basis to those who argue that experience of the social and political crisis of 1890-1 tipped the balance towards electoral and parliamentary struggle. Labor had to enter parliament as a united and disciplined political party if Labor's wrongs were to be righted. Labor had to mobilise to put pressure on within the parliamentary state.

Burgmann attributes the failure of first-wave socialism to the dominance of the state socialist school of thought. It was the influence of state socialist thinking, she argues, that led to the formation of the Labor parties, and this, she believes was a monumental error. The socialists got enveloped in parliamentary state activity and sucked into a morass from which they could not extricate themselves. But there is an alternative explanation which Burgmann does not seriously consider. From about 1884, the most tried and tested in the intercolonial trade union movement had begun to ponder deeply the establishment of a distinct political party of labour. The condition of this possibility was the existence of a popular parliamentary consciousness that went back more than two centuries in English-speaking societies. The growth and spread of this consciousness, especially in the 1890-1 crisis, determined the relative success of state socialist thinking among the more active workers. The trade unionists who were in the forefront in 1890-1 came to believe that independent action to pressure the parliamentary state directly through political campaigns, election and parliamentary struggle was the way to go. Nor were they entirely wrong.

Because of the problems that followed from this course of action, and still follow, Burgmann cannot concede the truthful part of state socialist thinking. Indubitably, no truly viable solutions to the problems yet exist. But side-stepping or evasion will do no good. There is no way round the state, conceding all the limitations and sources of weakness in state action. Any viable socialist strategy in Australia is dependent on this realisation. Not ignoring any other avenue for campaigns, movement and pressure, modern socialist strategy needs to acknowledge that the majority of first-wave pioneer socialists and trade union militants grasped an important truth, despite their imperfect understanding.

Footnotes
2. William Lane, born in Bristol in 1861, arrived in Brisbane in 1885 after eight years in North America, bringing with him, allegedly, Henry George's Progress and Poverty; between 1885 and 1890, S.A. (Sam) Rosa, A.G. Yewen, Matthew Reid, all members of the SDF, arrived or returned to Australia. The radical doctor and early socialist, W.D. (Dr.) Maloney also returned to Melbourne in this period. He became the MP for West Melbourne in 1889.
3. This sentiment was, of course, often radical, anti-imperialist white chauvinist and anti-semitic, at the same time. See C.J.H. Clark (ed.) Select Documents in Australian History 1851-1906 (Sydney, 1955), pp. 564-5.
5. The Australian Socialist League (1887), Social Democratic League (1889), South Australian Fabian Society (1891), Social Democratic Federation of Australasia (1892), Queensland Social Democratic Federation (1892), Queensland Socialist League (1896), Victorian Socialists' League (1897) and the Victorian Social Democratic Party (1902) and so on. The odd cases were the Brisbane Bellamy Society formed by William Lane in 1887 and the Socialist Labor Party (1900).
6. William Lane's socialism was a fairly typical mixture, with the ethical/idealistic strand tending to become uppermost, but he did not rule out state socialism. "An Act of Parliament may prevent wage-slaves from being worked sixteen hours a day. An Act of Parliament, granted that Parliament represented the dominant thought of the people could even enforce a change of the entire social system". John Miller (William Lane), The Workingman's Paradise (Brisbane, 1892).
9. Higgs was editor of the official trade union paper Australian Worker, formerly secretary of the New South Wales Typographical Association (the printers' union), he was an early member of the ASL. Later he was editor of the Queensland Worker, a Senator, Minister of the Crown and a Labor rat.
12. Later Victorian parliamentary leader of the ALP and a Wren man on whom a character in Frank Hardy's novel Power Without Glory is based.
17. See Ebbels, Labour Movement, pp. 163-6 for a strongly stated state socialist view.
18. Wilding, "Introduction", pp. [41-8].
19. Ebbels, Labour Movement, pp. 139-40. Lane, Workingman's Paradise, pp. 107-8. Another possible factor in this process may have been the presence of marxist militant A.G. Yewen who worked in Brisbane on the Worker in 1891-2 before returning to Sydney to work with Holman and Hughes on the New Order in 1894.
Colin Jones

Rethinking the Housing Crisis

Most housing theories are concerned with housing finance. Few propose changes in social relationships. Colin Jones puts forward arguments for the development of a revolutionary housing theory.

The purpose of this article is to introduce a number of housing theories, to examine the various problems they raise, and to put forward arguments for the development of a revolutionary housing theory. Obviously, an article of this nature can be only a sketchy outline. Its main function is to be a catalyst for debate and for the development among the left of an understanding of socialist housing theory. This is important for two main reasons. Firstly, if the Accord is to continue or is renegotiated, it will be important that we have a well developed housing theory, so that the "social wage" can be applied in a socialist context to housing. Secondly, "Shelter" (Australia), a coalition of housing groups, has not yet developed a truly comprehensive housing theory nor does it even officially support any existing theory.

Housing theory can be divided into two main groups, those concerned with housing finance and those proposing changes in social relationships. Most housing theories belong in the first group although there are great differences in the conclusions reached. Three main theories are those by Jim Kemeny, Kilroy and McIntosh, and Hugh Stretton. Jim Kemeny's and Hugh Stretton's views both draw on the Australian experience. Kilroy and McIntosh's arguments are based on British experience, and have been implicitly endorsed by "Shelter" (Britain).

Jim Kemeny's views are based on the premise of creating "Tenure Neutrality". This means that the different tenures, i.e. owner occupation, public tenants, private tenants and rental housing cooperatives, should be treated equally, so that no one tenure obtains financial benefit, either through capital gains, explicit public subsidy, or imputed income (estimated rental values on owner occupied properties).

Hugh Stretton has, over a long period of time, published a large amount of material on housing and social theory, but his main thrust has been to encourage home ownership. This has been based on the view that a housing proposal must be designed which achieves equity in three key aspects — between institutional and domestic capital, between the three main housing tenures (private ownership, private rental and public rental), and between classes. His line has been to encourage housing equality between classes, by which he means that all classes of society should have the opportunity to be home owners. This implies that a system has to be developed to enable people on low incomes to purchase houses.

Kilroy and McIntosh see the housing problem in terms of the distribution of a scarce resource. They argue that this scarce resource should be distributed as equitably as possible, but they totally ignore the problems of how to ensure that there is an adequate supply of housing. They advocate such policies as taxing imputed income and national pooling of public housing rents.

The alternative theory is advocated by Michael Ball, who argues that there needs to be a change in social relationships. He envisages that this would take the form of nationalisation of the building industry, land, real estate agents and building societies, as well as an agreed price system for properties. He does foresee that home ownership would exist, but the houses would be sold on long leases (a practice long accepted in Britain).

The problems with theories based on housing finance are that they are purely reformist in approach and could easily be disbanded when governments change, or be used to implement rightwing housing policy, for example, by changing the emphasis of subsidies that may be granted. These theories, therefore, make only minor adjustments and fail to address the real problems. These
problems are the inability of the house building industry to provide sufficient housing of good quality at low cost either for rent or sale. This can be achieved only by changes in social relationships, allowing motives other than profit or financial viability to be taken into account when looking at the housing problem. Social factors must be taken into account when assessing the true costs and benefits of providing housing. It may be that, presented with a housing theory based on the need for social change, people will decide that such a housing policy should be implemented, even in a pluralistic democracy. However, even if this were not possible, a revolutionary policy can be used as a tool to measure the effectiveness of other policies, although the revolutionary policy should always be seen as an achievable goal.

So, in advocating a policy which requires social change, the consequences should be shown. The first effect is the nationalisation of building companies. This raises the question of who will be nationalised and how this nationalised industry could be organised. It should be noted that most profit made by the building companies emanates from their large land holdings and from commercial property holdings. The companies do not have large amounts of capital invested in plant and machinery due to the fact that most of it is hired, and because of the intensive use of sub-contractors. The skills of these companies are in management of the building process and in competitive tendering. It can be argued, therefore, that, should land be nationalised, there should be no compensation if the building companies were nationalised. The most appropriate way of organising the nationalised building industry would be to set up a series of local enterprises with a high degree of worker control. Exceptions would include those national companies which specialise in building freeways, etc.

The main argument for the nationalisation of land is that the value of land is created by the community, either through the demand for new buildings, or through its value being based on its zoning under planning laws (and, of course, planning should be democratic). Land, unlike most goods, does not have a cost of production, nor does using the land destroy it. Land can always be redeveloped. Once land is nationalised, it should not be sold, except by long lease.

At the moment, land and property are sold or leased through private real estate agents. However, if houses are sold at some controlled or regulated price, then there would be a need for a centralised agency system. This could be locally based to allow for uniformity in the implementation of policy and the standardisation of language in advertisements and descriptions of houses for sale, e.g. replacing estate agent phrases with accurate descriptions — "renovator's dream" would become "in poor condition"; "ideal first home" would become "very cheap". The market could be used to set the price, with a tax levied on any surplus over the set price. Nationalisation could also allow the use of modern technology so that people moving interstate, for example, could be helped by their local agency.

Extensive analysis of housing theory is not within the scope of this article, but it is hoped that it will provoke discussion and debate around this important issue.

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**Recommended Reading:**

Strategy for a democratic socialism must begin with democracy and control in the workplace, argues John Mathews. Confronting technological change means dealing with more than the externals of jobs won or lost — it means looking at the labour process itself and the workers' ability to enhance their skills and increase their control of their labour.

Enter a typical workplace today and you find alienation, frustration and anger. Work is fragmented into meaningless, repetitive and boring tasks. The worker feels a victim of a giant technological machine, whose workplace appearance is simply the most concentrated expression of a wider social phenomenon.

We hear much of the wonders of microelectronics of the information society, of an end to dirty, dangerous and demeaning tasks, of a life of leisure for all — and yet in reality we see workers being robbed of their few remaining skills, work being subjected to further "speed up" and paced by electronic monitoring, and a society which is based on work for the few and unemployment for the many being created before our eyes.

It is easy enough to identify this multi-faceted malaise but what is to be done about it?

"Unions should oppose an excessive fragmentation of work into jobs which become devoid of skill or interest."

Is the organisation of work dictated by the technology employed? Is alienating work the price that we pay for material prosperity? The conventional answer to this is yes. Our levels of productivity, we understand, depend on division of labour, mechanisation and increasingly on automation. Hierarchies of authority, we understand, are built into the very process of production. It is seen as absurd to question these truths; it is tantamount to wishing to return to a mythical golden age of craft production, but without the amenities of modern life.

This idea, that there is a logic to technological development which determines the social form of work and its productivity, is possibly the single biggest obstacle to the achievement of a just and equitable society. The idea is known variously as "technological determinism" or as "autonomous technology".

It is as widely subscribed to on the left as it is on the right; indeed, in "vulgar marxist" terms the "forces of production" are held to be the determining influence on all social development.

The notion of a technological imperative operating through machines, processes, and equipment subject only to considerations of technical efficiency, is pure ideology.

It obscures and, indeed, is meant to obscure, the fact that technology is a social construct, the summation of innumerable choices made in the past, and all reflecting the interests of the developers and promoters of technological innovations.

Modern scholarship has now revealed the social choices involved in the development of hierarchy, division of labour and the technical form for the production apparatus. We know now that non-hierarchical, non-fragmented, skill-enhancing rather than skill-degrading technical options were available, but not developed.

Therefore it remains at least an open question whether the present demeaning organisation of work can be changed — without incurring massive productivity and efficiency losses, and leaving us all freezing in the dark. If this is the case, in what directions do we want to see changes, and what should be the strategy for securing them?

Ultimately, we seek a humane and democratic work organisation as the foundation of a humane and democratic society. We seek a situation where workers are dignified, proud of their skills and contributing them to society. How do we move from our present to our desired state?

I believe that workers themselves, organised through their unions, must be the prime vehicle of this transition. The transition must be a process, rather than a simple-
It is at the point of change that workers may agree to cooperate with a certain type of innovation, but to oppose another type. Through such agreement they are best able to secure satisfactory working facilities, and a measure of control over the new technology. This is not a Luddite position, but one which discriminates between socially progressive and regressive technologies.

Hence the importance of a trade union policy on technological change, and on the labour process (i.e. the content and organisation of work). We are clearly living in a period of dynamic adjustment to the Australian and world economy. There will be more, rather than less, technological change in the future. In place of merely opposing change because of the absence of adequate social security and retraining facilities provided for those affected by change, the unions should be insisting on these “safety net” provisions as a minimum and then formulating positive proposals regarding the direction of change and the technical options to be selected.

Of course, the unions and their members have suffered grievously from the effects of technological change in the past. Unplanned and unregulated technical innovation has thrown thousands of workers out of a job, with only the dubious consolation that a dynamic economy might offer some of them alternative work at some time in the future.

Technical innovation, particularly mechanisation, has frequently been used as a weapon to curb the militancy of key groups of skilled workers. And unregulated technological change has set union against unions as occurred in 1983 when the introduction of scissor lifts in the construction industry threw builders’ labourers out of work and set their union against the other building trades unions (resulting in the expulsion for a time of the Builders Labourers Federation from the Victorian Trades Hall Council).

These have all been bitter lessons, and bought dearly. They have resulted in unions throughout industry confronting employers, when technical changes are proposed, with demands for job security and protection, and for retraining of displaced workers. These demands force a degree of social responsibility on the employers and restrict their ability to discard an unwanted workforce at will. In Australia, employment protection standards have lagged behind those secured in many other countries.

The long-awaited decision of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission in the Termination, Change and Redundancy case, handed down in two instalments in 1984, moves some way to consolidate the position achieved by some unions, and brings Australian employers more into line with their overseas competitors.

In line with ACTU policy, some unions have been able to move beyond mere job protection, and have negotiated Technological Change Agreements with employers. These are now common in the Scandinavian countries, in northern Europe and the UK, and they have been won in Australia as well, notably within Telecom in 1980.

This agreement flowed from a celebrated dispute between Telecom and the telecommunications engineers over the introduction of computer-controlled switching apparatus, with the engineers insisting that the new
technology not be introduced in such a way that an elite corps of maintenance stall be created and the majority slowly lose their skills. They successfully imposed their own job design proposals to accompany the new technology, thus preserving skills and career structure.

In line with the formal agreement, changes in technology within Telecom are carried through now only after specific written agreement on job specifications, skill levels, training and promotion matters has been obtained. Similar agreements now operate within sectors of the railways, and of the Commonwealth and states' public services.

Again, the year 1984 saw a substantial consolidation of these gains in the decision of the High Court of Australia upholding the validity of procedures requiring an employer to consult with a union over proposed technological changes. The entire trade union movement had been waiting for this case to work its way through the courts from the Victorian industrial tribunal where the Federated Clerks first tried to vary their award and insert a clause on consultation over technological change.

The High Court decision opens the way for unions in every jurisdiction to seek to insert similar consultation clauses in their awards and thereby impose legal requirements on employers. (The requirements are modest compared with those enacted in legislation in the Scandinavian countries.)

It is now widely recognised that dealing with technological change requires the unions to attend to more than the external features of the proposed change (numbers of workers, training details, work value considerations). It is now seen as essential that the unions negotiate a framework of participation and consultation — indeed, of joint determination — in which the internal details of any proposed technical change may be hammered out before the change is carried through.

"We hear much of the wonders of microelectronics — of the information society, of an end to dirty, dangerous and demeaning tasks, of a life of leisure for all — and yet in reality we see workers being robbed of their few remaining skills, work being subjected to further 'speed-up' and paced by electronic monitoring, and a society which is based on work for the few and unemployment for the many being created before our eyes."

These details will include the precise technical specifications of the proposed change; the manner of organising work; the job content and skill structure of the work; the different technical options available, and other factors.

Not so long ago, and certainly into the early years of the 20th century, these matters were normally the province of the worker and not of the employer (except in high technology process industries like the chemical industry). Yet that time seems so far away!

Following the inspiration of Frederick Winslow Taylor and his system of "scientific management" ("taylorism"), the employers staged a coup in the early 20th century and expropriated the workers' control over the labour process, putting in its place an immense management apparatus whose role was to issue precise work instructions and monitor every aspect of the production process with a chain of paper moving from desk to desk, and now from computer to computer.

It is this control over the internal details of the labour process, over the content of work, that must engage the unions now. They will be claiming back no more than was lost a few decades ago — but this will set them on a course with far-reaching implications. They will not be attempting to roll back the workplace and technology to the turn of the century — but to claim the latest technical advances and propose new technical advances which place a premium on workers' skills, which provide a flow of current information allowing workers to take meaningful decisions, and which put an end to the slavish, authoritarian hierarchies of work processes modelled on the assembly line.

This demand is not as radical as it may sound. It is stated quite explicitly by Robert Reich in his influential book, *The Next American Frontier*, published in 1983, where he says: "The industries that will sustain the next stage of America's economic evolution will necessarily be based on a skilled, adaptable and innovative labor force and on a more flexible, less hierarchical organisation of work."
If this is what is being demanded by a liberal US economist, then the unions should be demanding no less. In particular, in connection with each proposed case of technological change, the following issues should be taken up.

- Unions should oppose an excessive fragmentation of work into jobs which become devoid of skill or interest. They should impose a conception of jobs in which workers are enabled to comprehend the entire process of production, and exercise some control over the process leading to a finished product or activity.
- To this end, all job classifications categorising workers as "operators" of a particular machine or piece of equipment, should be opposed. Such designations as "press operator" or "VDU operator" reduce workers to appendages of machines, and deny their skills as workers. Unions should impose job titles which reflect the goal of the job or the end-product produced (e.g. "metal parts fabricator" or "text editor and processor").

"Technical innovation, particularly mechanisation, has frequently been used as a weapon to curb the militancy of key groups of skilled workers."

- Unions should insist that each job carrying a specific job title should contain a variety of tasks requiring a diversity of skills. As a general criterion, jobs should encompass aspects of conception as well as execution, thereby overcoming the catastrophic division between mental and manual labour enforced by "scientific management".
- Unions should state openly that the fundamental "property" of workers is their skill (otherwise known by management theorists as "human capital"). The central object of trade unions should be the protection of workers' skills and their enhancement via a process of lifetime training and career development. Unions should seek to have employers recognise the fundamental nature of skill, by making skills the centrepiece of negotiations over wage systems, job classifications and work organisation accompanying any proposed technical change. There is nothing in common between a union-imposed gradation of skills, and a management-imposed job hierarchy.
- Unions should oppose all "time and motion" type work study and in particular oppose the electronic monitoring of individual workers, and impose instead group performance targets.
- Unions should root out once and for all divisive wage systems based on individual incentives, premiums and bonuses, which isolate the performance of individual workers, and set workers in competition against each other. These systems were introduced in the last two decades of the 19th century with the sole purpose of breaking the "internal contract" system and boosting productivity via inter-worker competition. The ACTU stated its opposition to such incentive payments systems in 1947, 1949 and again in 1953 — but unions have failed to follow through and obtain their removal, nor have they adequately explained the basis of ACTU opposition to the membership.
- Unions should oppose any proposed work organisation based on a military model of a technical hierarchy. Work should be co-ordinated by "work co-ordinators" elected from the workforce, rather than by supervisors appointed unilaterally by management. (This is not to say that supervisors are incompetent, but only that they are not accountable for their actions to the workers of their shop.) The office of elected "work co-ordinator" greatly enlarges the scope and functions of existing job delegates.
- Unions should insist that work co-ordinators be supplied with all relevant, up-to-date information on current production or activities, to enable them to comprehend the role of their work group in the totality of operations, and to be able to take meaningful decisions. Computerised data systems under workers' control should be demanded.
- Unions should insist that employers allow work co-ordinators to meet together frequently, on their own as well as with management, and that such a works council form the germ of any industrial democracy initiatives.
- Unions should insist on collective ownership of knowledge of the labour process. Workers can only exercise a degree of control over work to the extent that they understand the process — and so it should be a fundamental demand of unions that employers provide the requisite information. In some cases, this will mean refusing to recognise the legitimacy of employers' claims of "commercial confidentiality".
- Unions should develop their own set of criteria by which to judge whether a proposed technological change is likely to be beneficial or harmful. Such criteria might include the following:
1. The technology should require specified skills which, in aggregate, are superior to existing skill requirements.
2. The technology should provide a well-defined career path for workers involved with it.
3. The technology should be such that displaced workers may be retrained to operate it.
4. The technology should create a minimum of job classifications with a uniform skill gradation between them.
5. The technology should not involve excessively repetitive action. Any cycle or task should take at least 10 minutes to perform.
6. The technology should encourage unity of conception and execution by an individual worker, e.g. self-programming of computer-controlled machine tools.
7. The technology should provide adequate stimulus and variety.
8. The technology should favour group work targets, and not depend on monitoring of individuals nor on a hierarchy of control.
9. The technology should generate current data on its state or performance that is available to the work-group and in particular to the elected work co-ordinator.
10. The technology should be comprehensible, in principle, to all workers involved with it.
11. The technology should not expose workers to uncontrollable risks to health or safety.
12. The technology should be socially useful.

"In other words, this is a strategy of gradual achievement of industrial democracy, starting with workers' most concrete and pressing concerns; such as their health and safety, and immediate control over the content of work."

Such a set of criteria could then be used by unions in negotiations over the design of new technologies. They can be used by systems designers in exactly the same way that more conventional specifications are used to guide and frame choices.

These points add up to what may be described as a trade union "labour process policy" which may be used to guide unions' negotiations with employers over the introduction of new technology.

What if the unions refuse to adopt these proposals, and continue to confine their activities to matters concerned with the externals of work — pay levels, hours, and working conditions? In this case, the efforts of socialists to establish an equitable, open and democratic society must be hampered by the fact that workers have no experience of these concepts when at work. The process of change needs to start at the most basic level, which is that of the workplace. If democracy is denied there, it cannot flourish anywhere else.

In 1964, the French socialist Andre Gorz published a short manifesto, *Strategy for Labor*, in which he called on the unions to develop a policy of workers' control over the specific content of work. Twenty-one years on, his text still resonates with relevance. He insisted that: "Formal recognition of the union organisation and of civil liberties on the job remains an abstract demand, incapable of mobilising the workers as long as it is not organically linked to the demand for concrete workers' powers over the conditions of work." This is still the major challenge facing the unions. It is a challenge that can best be accepted at the point of technological change, for it is at this point that competing conceptions of social utility, the purpose of work, work organisation and skills, can come into conflict with each other. It is through such clashes that the future shape of our social order is decided.

The perspective of this article, then, is that the point, or moment, of technological change is a key, strategic point of intervention where socialist values can contest the mechanical-financial values of the employers and prevail. The perspective is one of a strategy for achieving socialism, as a value system and process, at the perpetually moving point of change (or at the "cutting edge", or "at the margin" to use the terminology of both engineering and economics).

This is a strategy that is radically opposed to the notion that socialism is a social system that can be achieved overnight, as a result of a transfer of political power — for such a strategy, apart from being simple-minded and non-
achievable through democratic means, is responsible for the fetishisation of politics by socialists in the past, and the terrible neglect of the real and pressing workplace issues that should have been taken up but were not, for fear of becoming "contaminated" by the capitalist system. It was this attitude that Andre Gorz railed against in 1964, and which appears now to be, at long last, in decline.

Certain things have to be done. Before workers and unions can drop their hostile and defensive attitude to technological change (an attitude wholly justified by the terrible costs that workers have borne as a result of 200 years of unregulated technical change) an adequate social security net needs to be established to compensate those who are most directly affected by changes. Such a security net was recommended by the Myers Committee (Committee of Inquiry on Technological Change in Australia — CITCA) in 1980\textsuperscript{10}, and supported in ACTU policy — but it does not seem to be part of the ALP social security platform, and there are no current steps being taken to establish it.

Some of the long-standing demands of the unions, for a measure of job security, for severance payments when workers are made redundant, and for prior consultation before change takes place, have been met by the recent termination, Change and Redundancy case decision of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. These are steps in the right direction. But, until there is a humane and generous community response to the victims of technological change, it is unrealistic to expect the unions to markedly change their role as defenders of the status quo. But once such a security net is established, then the unions can become instigators and proponents of technological change on their terms — and that is where socialist values can begin to contest the hierarchical, authoritarian and inhuman values we see all around us today.

John Mathews worked for some years on occupational health and safety questions for the ACTU. His paper Technology, trade unions and the labour process, from which this article was extracted, was prepared while the author was on a visiting fellowship in the Department of Humanities at Deakin University, Victoria. Copies of the full paper can be obtained from the Department of Humanities, Deakin University, Victoria 3217.

NOTES AND REFERENCES
1. On the notion of "autonomous technology" and its critique, see Langdon Winner, "Do artifacts have politics?" Daedalus, 109 (Winter 1980), pp 121-136. This text discusses the social shaping of technology as well as the more familiar theme of technologies having social effects. Winner likens technologies to laws, in that they exercise ongoing restraints over people's behaviour. These themes are dealt with more discursively in Langdon Winner, Autonomous Technology: Technics-out-of-control as a theme in political thought, Cambridge, M.I.T. Press, 1977. In this text, Winner adopts a somewhat bemused stance in relation to some of the more extreme statements that "technology is out of control", e.g. Jacques Ellul, The Technological System, New York, Continuum, 1980.
2. For an interesting medieval example, see Marc Bloch, "Advent and triumph of the water mill", in Land and Work in Mediaeval Europe, London, 1967. For examples in the modern industrial era, see the sources cited in section 2, the Labour Process, below.
3. On the Luddites and their rehabilitation from stupid machine breakers to intelligent workers opposing a particular type of technological change because they were expected to bear all the costs of transition, see E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, London, Penguin, 1968.
5. Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, Decision: Termination, Change and Redundancy Case, Melbourne, 2 August 1984, Print F6230; Supplementary Decision, Sydney, 14 December 1984, Print F7262.
6. See Decision of High Court re Commercial Clerks Award, Canberra, 1984. This case stemmed from a Decision of the Industrial Relations Commission of Victoria, granting a variation of the Commercial Clerks Award (no 3 of 1982) to provide for consultation over technological change. This decision was appealed by the employers, and the appeal upheld by the Supreme Court of Victoria. Judgment re Commercial Clerks Award, 12 May 1983 (case M16405 of 1982). The Federated Clerks Union then appealed this decision to the High Court.
10. Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Technological Change in Australia, Technological Change in Australia, Canberra, AGPS, 1980. The committee was established by Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser on 1 December 1978, and consisted of Professor Rupert Myers (chairman), Mr. A Coogan, and Mr. W. Mansfield (federal secretary of the Australian Telecommunications Employees Association).
The ABC is now suffering one of the most savage attacks in the last ten years, ironically from a Labor government. We must defend the ABC, yet we also need to do some rethinking about why we should defend it, whether ratings are important and what we mean by 'culture', argues Marius Webb, in a paper presented at the recent conference on Culture, Arts, Media and Radical Politics.

I suppose that I would like to pose the question first. What is the ABC?

The ABC is an unfortunate conglomeration of many people's beliefs about radio and television programs that they like best. Rarely is it a comprehensive understanding of a confusion of often competing cultural influences. Using the word "cultural" immediately leads me to an effort to define what we mean by that word.

"Culture" is one of those ingenuous words that slips easily into the subconscious and gives most of us a feeling of middle class ease. But what does it really mean?

It often means High Art and everything which that entails but, then again, it has a lot more going for it than that. For instance, culture is something in which your friendly biochemist grows germs, and if I'm pressed, I think that I prefer the latter definition because it really conveys what I think culture is all about.

Culture is what we do. Culture is about what we live in, and develop in, and, in the end, culture is really how we develop.

But back to the ABC. The ABC is also part of what we call the mass media. The concept of mass media doesn't need too much analysis except to say that I think far too many people who talk about it tend to forget the word "mass". The concept of "mass" in relation to electronic media is very important, and is, in a strange way, underestimated. In relation to the ABC, it is often quaintly reduced to the rather tiresome argument about ratings. But if we are going to talk about mass media then we have to talk about ratings. We have to understand them and we have to be prepared to argue for, and against, them. I am not a subscriber to the argument that ratings do not matter. They are inherent in the concept of the mass media — for what is it, if it
does not appeal to a mass (and that means a lot of people).

The mass media have understandably got something of a bad name, and I’m not here to argue their worth, but their importance relates to the fact that they have a mass audience.

There are very few suburban newspapers which have influenced social change in a large sense, as readers of the Murdoch press in 1975 would probably realise. However, this is not to say that small media do not have an effect (as long-time readers of The Glebe would know).

I do not think that we, that is workers in the media, can afford to ignore what is often disregarded as merely popular. I don’t want to overemphasise the point, but the reality is that if the medium does not have a major audience, then it does not have impact and it therefore does not have social importance.

To translate what I’m saying to another sphere, Shakespeare, Mozart and the Beatles have all been “popular” but not dismissed as “mass”. Of course, I’m not arguing that anything that is “mass” is of the same value and importance, but that you have to take the concept of “mass” into account when you are talking about things like the ABC. This is not simply because of the impact of numbers but also because electronic media, like many other performance arts, exist only while they are going on.

In other words, you can’t afford to miss the bus — which explains a lot about the neuroses of the people who program major television channels, but also something about people who make valuable and interesting radio programs which get buried in some bureaucrat’s conception of a program layout.

The concept of “massness” may not seem an important consideration in relation to the future of the ABC but I think the ABC does have an important mass type of audience, and that the future is going to be dictated by the way we react and cope with our audience from now on.

To return to my original concern, we probably think about culture in rather limited terms. We do not think of sport as culture because we think in typically anti-Australo-working-class terms, but if we ignore sport, then I don’t think we know much about our culture.

If we are to look to the future of the ABC, then we have to look to the almost recent past and, given what I’ve already said, the point at which radical change really started to happen occurred when Packer took over cricket in the late 1970s. At that point, one of the key elements of the ABC’s hold on the Australian public suddenly disappeared.

There were, of course, other effects but, suddenly, a great deal had changed. Couple this with the buying of the ABC’s current affairs resources and you can see that there was more than a subtle share raid going on. I don’t need to comment on the situation today, except to point out that at 2-MMM, Sydney’s top-rating commercial FM station, 12 hours of the radio day are currently handled by people who used to work for the ABC.

There is a great danger in defending an institution like the ABC or, in fact, any institution. Defence is likely to throw one into a reactionary mode.

Why? Two years ago we all celebrated 50 years of the ABC — which was probably not a bad thing — but what worried me at the time was an implicit assumption that 50 years was only halfway to 100, and here we all were, intact in an organisation that was going to last forever.

Now, 100 years is a long time in anyone’s language. Some empires (more famous than the ABC!) have not lasted that long. I just think we should be wary of defending for the sake of defence alone. And maybe the ABC, if it’s not meeting the needs of its audience, does need to change.

The future holds many challenges for the ABC, one of the most significant being the introduction of the satellite which will, among other things, continue to erode the ABC’s role.

Because of the satellite, the ABC may no longer have one of the key elements which made it worth having, that is, the ability to be a national broadcaster.

The biggest questions facing the ABC, I believe, are some of the dilemmas and problems I have outlined. We have to do better in certain areas than the commercials, and that does mean just doing the stuff that they do. It means creating new forms and having the courage to follow them through, such as the ABC’s present involvement in Aboriginal broadcasting.

The present financial restrictions are perhaps worse than they have ever been, because we have not developed the appropriate reflexes to defend the ABC against a vindictive Labor government. In many ways, this aspect is perhaps one of the most understated elements in the present debate on how to defend the ABC.

Marius Webb has worked for the ABC for over a decade, including as a coordinator of Sydney’s 2JJ (now 2JJJ-FM), and as a staff-elected member of the Commission. He now works in the Human Resources section of the ABC.
Sheril Berkovitch

Troubled Times:
Thailand's Trade Unions

Despite enormous difficulties and opposition, a genuine trade union movement has emerged in Thailand in recent years. In this article, Sheril Berkovitch looks at the background leading up to the current situation and recent moves towards trade unionism in Thailand.

Since 1975, trade union organising in Thailand has been enormously difficult. The majority of trade unions are "yellow", or pro-management and workers face severe repression if they attempt to organise unions. Despite this, over the past few years, workers in Thailand have been sticking their necks out and attempting to form genuine trade unions that take workers' needs into account.

Historical Background

Prior to 1932, the political system in Thailand was an absolute monarchy. Within a feudal system, Thai people were generally serfs, working for a landlord, and could not work for anyone else without the landlord's permission. Buddhism, the major Thai religion, was used by the monarchy as an instrument of control - complete control by the King who was considered an "untouchable" person. Bureaucrats, or servants of the King, were considered superior and only men could become bureaucrats.

With the beginnings of the industrialisation of Thailand in the second half of the nineteenth century, the western capitalists, notably the British, began importing Chinese workers for industrial labour because the Thais themselves were restricted to serfdom. These Chinese workers became the first generation of the working class. They were considered "free" people by the King (on payment of an annual 'tax'), and had the freedom to buy and sell their labour and goods. They gradually became the small traders, petty bourgeois, and capitalists, and as they became upwardly mobile they were replaced in the working class by Thais.

In 1932 the absolute monarchy was overthrown by a coup, instigated by a group of intellectuals educated in Europe, who were supported by military officers. Since that time, Thailand has had a constitutional monarchy, with a parliament. However, Thailand has effectively been under military rule since 1976 and real power lies with the military forces.

There have been numerous military coups in the last 50 years, and "democratic" rule has only existed during the three years between 1973 and 1976, when a student-led "revolution" occurred. Even during this period, however, dictatorial practices continued, with police, armed men, security forces and military seeking to control and destroy popular movements. Although Thailand had general elections in 1976, the members of the Upper House were appointed by the Thai elite, almost all of them military and bureaucrats.

Thailand's government is an obstacle to popular movements, such as the trade union movement. In 1952, an anti-communist act was passed which implied that anyone opposing the rulers could be accused of communism, and, indeed, large numbers of people have been arrested and killed. Anti-communism has been consistently used as a tool against the labour movement.

Despite the involvement of international capitalists in Thailand, it has never been colonised. Some commentators have claimed that this has been one of the major problems for the progressive movements in Thailand. They feel that the Thai people have not had a tangible force to struggle against. Nevertheless, the Thais were successful in ridding the country of US military bases which were used as staging posts in the Viet Nam war. Using militant tactics and mass mobilisation of the people, the bases were removed in 1975, and US activity stepped up in the bases in the Philippines (such as Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base).
Economics

Thailand is primarily an agricultural country, with the major products being rice, fish and wood. However, between 1961 and 1981, the growth rate of the industrial sector in Thailand averaged 9.4 percent, compared with 4.1 percent for agriculture. The textile industry has grown particularly quickly. There has been a shift away from food processing as the major export item, to a broader range of exports including clothing and textiles. Few high technology products are manufactured in Thailand as yet, although there is a growing electronics goods that the Thai people neither want nor need.

With industrial expansion, people from other sectors, such as farmers, have increasingly become workers. In 1982, the Thai Civil Liberties Union (TCLU) found that 80 percent of Bangkok workers came from the rural sector. The working class has rapidly expanded, although it is still only about one third the size of the agricultural sector.

The Labour Force

There are 25 million people in the Thai labour force, about one half of the total population. Sixteen million work in the agricultural sector, and nine million in the non-agricultural sector (TCLU, 1982).

The industrial sector is divided into two areas — "formal" and "informal". The formal sector covers the middle- and large-scale productions, and is dominated by foreign-owned companies. The informal sector comprises small scale production, small businesses and workshops which produce for the local market and supply the larger multinational companies as sub-contractors. Small-scale industry employs approximately 52 percent of the workforce.

Forty-seven percent of the total Thai labour force are women although, in the formal sector, this reaches around 80 percent. The total figure excludes workers in illegal (unlicensed) factories, and prostitutes, of which more later. Their wages are considerably lower than men's and there are no benefits such as maternity leave.

In 1980 there were nearly six thousand unlicensed factories in only four provinces in Thailand, which the workers themselves have labelled "Hell Factories". Many of them employ women and children, forcing them to work.
at least 12 hours a day with meals provided, and low wages. Some workers receive no wages at all. These factories often buy teenage girls and children from poor rural families who cannot afford to feed them. These young workers often find that there is no job waiting for them and many are forced into prostitution as a means of survival. Often a young girl will arrive at her place of work to find that she is expected to work in a brothel. As well as this, many young women workers find it necessary to work as prostitutes at night, while working in factories during the day, simply to earn enough money to survive, and perhaps send some money back to their families in the provinces.

"Organisers have used methods such as English classes for the workers, or cultural or sporting activity, to get the workers together on a regular or semi-regular basis."

Child labour is another serious problem. There are minimal laws existing to control the use of child labour. For example, it is forbidden to employ children below the age of 12, and only with Ministry permission for those between 12 and 15, but these regulations are rarely enforced.

While the majority of women workers are in the multinational companies with larger workforces, child labour is mainly confined to the informal sector where the workforce in a single factory may only be 20 to 50 workers. This makes it far more difficult for them to be organised. According to a Thai labour activist who visited Australia recently, men are also mainly confined to the informal sector. Others tend to work in heavy industry or become monks in their late teens, thereby achieving a high status.

**Working conditions**

The following case study amply illustrates typical working conditions in the Thai industrial sector.

Napha was born in a rural village in Thailand. At 14, her family sold her, through an "employment recruitment agency", to a family-owned company in Bangkok which produces batteries for the local market: Peang Teng Ltd. (PTL). The factory employs 40 people.

Napha's working day is around 12 hours, with no extra payment for overtime. Her take-home pay is 40 baht (A$2), the "newcomers" rate, which is less than two-thirds of the legal minimum of 70 baht (A$3.50). Only long-serving employees of over two yeas receive the minimum wage. Because of unsafe working conditions and subsequent poor health, many workers leave before the two-year probationary period is complete.

Napha's job is to paint chemicals onto lead sheets and to roll lead sheets. She does this without any protective clothing or safety equipment. Earlier this year, Napha's hands were caught in the lead rolling machine and she could not work for several days. Her hands were swollen and painful. She received no compensation and her complaints were ignored by the factory owner. Napha is not alone. Many other workers in the factory have also suffered injuries and sickness, such as deep cuts from lead sheets, lead poisoning and poor health through the...
inhalation of chemicals. When Napha was injured, she was
told that if she stopped work she would not be paid, so she
had no choice but to return after a few days, despite her
pain.

In other factories, workers have been trying to obtain
the minimum wage, or have asked for safety equipment, an
end to forced overtime, and overtime payments.

The workers at PTL are not yet unionised. When they
attempted to organise themselves in the past, they were
threatened with the sack and, in fact, two leaders were
dismissed. Now, the Industry Minister has served a closure
notice on the factory because of the leakage of toxic
substances into the local residential area. If the factory
closes, the workers will have no income and because they
are not yet unionised, they have been unable to fight back
at management.

However, some progressive workers in Napha's factory
have been attempting to organise a union to fight for better
wages and conditions. So far, the factory owner has
refused to close the factory and has not installed a waste
treatment system or safety equipment because he claims it
is too costly. The workers' struggle at PTL will be long and
hard.

Trade Unions

The Thai government has, for decades, aimed to
to control the labour movement through the outlawing
of organisations, manipulation and domination of
workers' organisations, and through labour legislation. An
Australian who spent eight years working in Thailand said
that, although Thai labour legislation, on paper, looks
very good — the best, perhaps, in South East Asia — in
fact, it is manipulated to work directly against workers'
interests. It is extremely difficult to register a union, and
only single factories can do so. There are very few trade-

based unions (besides the metal workers and the auto
industry).

There are four labour centres in Thailand:

- The Thai Trade Union Congress is the progressive
grouping and is stronger than the government-recognised
congress. The ongoing development of this centre provides
cause for optimism that the genuine union movement will
expand and progress.

- The Labour Congress of Thailand (LCT) which is
  government-recognised and affiliated to the International
  Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), from
  where they receive some money for education. It does not
  adequately represent the interests of workers.

- The National Free Labour Congress (NFLC) which is
  military-backed.

- The National Labour Congress (NLC) which is
  employer-backed. Both the NFLC and the NLC have
  unofficially merged with the LCT, although there are
differences between them and conflicts of interest.

During the period 1972-1982, there was an increase in
struggle for better working conditions, with collective
bargaining and strikes being used by the workers. For
example, one thousand women workers from the Hara
Blue Jeans factory were on strike for seven months from
October 1975 to May 1976, and were supported financially
by other workers and progressive students. They occupied
the factory and produced and distributed goods

Textile workers were at the forefront of labour struggles
during that period. Currently, the rubber workers are
strong and well organised, and are among the few industry-
through rightwing workers' leaders. Government also works in cohorts with management. When women workers from an electronics factory went to register their union earlier this year, government bureaucrats telephoned the management to let them know what was happening.

Other tactics are also used to deter workers from forming genuine unions. When women workers staged a picket on the steps of the Ministry this year to demand the implementation of the legal minimum wage, rather than attack the picket line with military or police, government ignored them, hoping they would get bored. It sounds very simple, but the tactic worked. Employers also use factory closures as an attempt to bust unions. Workers may find that the factory closes down when they go on strike, only to open again with a new, non-unionised workforce at a later date.

"Workers on a building site refused to continue working because several men had been killed on the job. Management then built a "spirit house" on the site, claiming it would protect the workers, who then returned to work, with no improvement in safety conditions.

Religion is also used by management as a means of control. In 1981, male workers on a building site refused to continue working because several men had been killed on the job. Management then built a "spirit house" on the site, claiming it would protect the workers, who then returned to work, with no improvement in safety conditions.

The idea of the spirit house as a system of control has been widely implemented. It is a combination of Buddhism with a Hindu influence and a large number of factories have spirit houses. At the Australian Safcol factory, for example, one and a half hours outside Bangkok, a spirit house has been built at the gate. New workers are told to go to the spirit house and pray, also promising that they will be good workers and not cause trouble for the company. Workers are fearful that, if they attempt to organise, something bad will happen to them. Probably this would mean the loss of their job — nothing at all to do with the power of the spirit house, but rather the power of the employer.

All of this makes it terribly difficult for progressive workers to organise.

Although workers have been given the legal right to organise unions, they face severe harassment and even death if they do so. This repression has been common since the 1976 military coup. Nevertheless, unions have responded with strikes and rallies, demanding an end to plant closures and violation of labour laws. They demand the legal minimum wage, as well as increased wages and better working conditions.

Progressive workers and union organisers face many difficulties because of the repression that takes place in factories. For example, the union organiser at the Safcol factory outside of Bangkok (there is also one in the provinces to the north of Thailand, but little contact has been made there), often has to wait until late at night to meet with the workers. Often they are forced to remain in the factory for overtime and may not get home until ten, eleven or twelve o'clock at night. After working such long hours, workers are too tired to consider union activity. Organisers have used methods such as English classes for the workers, or cultural or sporting activity, to get the workers together on a regular or semi-regular basis. These methods have often proved successful. Labour organisers feel that they must first get together with the workers and form a trusting relationship, often staying overnight with them in their homes, before any genuine educational or organising activity can take place. These activities must be...
carried out “underground” because, if management or government find out about them, workers will be sacked and the organiser may face imprisonment or other more violent forms of harassment.

Nevertheless, labour activists feel that the work they do is necessary to raise workers’ awareness of their situation and to develop strong and progressive trade unions in Thailand. Despite their enormous difficulties, they are struggling on in the face of adversity.

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**australian companies in Thailand**

There are fewer Australian companies in Thailand than in some other countries in S.E. Asia. However, they are there for similar reasons: low wages, bad working conditions, and labour laws which favour the employers. This all adds up to more profit, and less jobs for Australian workers.

Safcol, one of the better-known Australian companies, operates under the name of Safcol Thailand Ltd, and has several factories, including four fish canneries. The Australian Dairy Corporation has an interest which produces dairy products. Australian Consolidated Industries (ACI) has a range of factories producing glass, fibre cartons, adhesives, and industrial detergents. BHP manufactures zinc oxide through Thai Lysaght Co. Ltd. Repco manufacture auto parts.

Dunlop Olympic has just invested A$12 million to contract an Ansell rubber factory to produce for export to world markets. A similar factory was bought in Malaysia in 1978 to replace a factory employing 600 workers in Melbourne.

A variety of other companies have interests in Thailand, although the Australian business names are not known, manufacturing a range of products such as animal feed, gypsum boards, refrigeration compressors, and feather products.
CULTURAL OFFENSIVES OF THE COLD WAR

Reviewed by Drew Cottle


Australia's First Cold War: Volume I will be a disappointment to those eager to understand the political significance of that "scoundrel time", the Cold War. Although its title suggests there is more to come, this reviewer hopes that it is not more of what is offered in this first volume. The various contributors carefully explore those areas noted in the book's title — society, communism and culture. But, oddly, an intellectual timidity pervades most of these writings on such a contentious period. Odd indeed for a book which assumes we are in a second Cold War. Chapters on the Cold War's social context (Alomes, Dober and Hellier), a literary witch-hunt (Ashbolt) and post-war economic policy (McFarlane) are memorable for their detail, argument and commitment. Yet even these fine pieces of writing cannot remedy the book's overall deficiency.

A three-tiered structure, in which the economy, society and culture are rigidly separated, limits the general argument and denies integration. Apart from this structural flaw, the primary weakness of Australia's First Cold War is its insular orientation. Ambiguously, the book's title infers this intent. The Cold War in Australia did have specific indigenous characteristics, but it was not peculiarly Australian. The editors and many of the contributions give scant attention to the global content of the Cold War and its direct bearing on Australia — a major political deficiency.

The shifts in the power balance in world politics must be examined to grasp the meaning of the Cold War in Australia. Come the end of the Second World War, the USA emerged, largely unscathed, as the leading capitalist country. The Soviet Union, which contributed most to the defeat of European fascism, was devastated economically and socially by the war. Vast tracts of Russia, its richest agricultural and industrial regions, lay in ruins. Over twenty million Soviet citizens died defending their country from the Nazi onslaught. During and after the anti-fascist war, liberation movements in the former colonial empires and elsewhere began their long struggle for national independence.

All looked threatening to the imperial powers, particularly the American colossus. To ensure its global supremacy, the White House, the Pentagon, the US State Department and their Wall Street masters unleashed the Cold War. Socialist Russia, the war-time ally, became, by 1946, the Red Anti-Christ. Communism was vilified, denounced and purged, along with its supporters and sympathisers throughout the "Free World".

The unholy crusade against communism found its ready supporters in Australia. As Australia's First Cold War makes abundantly clear, a generation of progressive Australians was hounded by the anti-communist "witch-hunters". Only a terse commentary is offered in the book's "Introduction" on the "manufacture" of the Australian Cold War by the US and its Australian minions. Strong trade unions needed to be smashed, unreliable Labor governments replaced, the public service purged, communists jailed, liberals and radicals silenced and a "spy scare" concocted to preserve Australia as a suitable area for long-term corporate American investment. Having W.C. Wentworth and B.A. Santamaria beat about "communist conspiracies" and "the enemy within" made sound business sense.

In its desire to demonstrate Australian capitalism's "exceptionalism", Australia's First Cold War overlooks the obvious: the Cold War was an ideological smokescreen concealing the corporate US invasion and eventual take-over of key sectors of the Australian economy. Bruce McFarlane's essay delineates this corporate US strategy. Saddled with its rigid structure, however, the book separates the McFarlane contributions from the cultural and social aspects of the Cold War, instead of integrating them.

Too much of the text is given over to Meredith Burgmann's exposition of the government's "response" to the "Communist threat" which officialdom itself had so assiduously created. As well researched as it is, Burgmann's investigation of the Cold War's high politics lacks any thorough consideration of the "secret state" (ASIO, etc.) or Washington's influence over Australia's politics. Burgmann's criticisms of H.V. Evatt are unwarranted. There were imperial forces which quietly undermined Evatt's efforts at reform in the international arena. Evatt vacillated on many questions, but his defence of democratic liberty during the Cold War distinguishes him as an individual of courage and integrity when other "good Labor men" fled...
McKernan, Ashbolt and Docker are more successful. Limiting themselves to the cultural politics of Australian literature, these authors demonstrate the intellectual ferocity of the Cold War. McKernan and Docker illuminate the shifts in these cultural struggles, the Left and Right responses and the Machiavellian manner in which the radical nationalist literary tradition was driven from the universities, to be maintained precariously thereafter by a threatened progressive minority.

Unlike most of the contributions, Allan Ashbolt's essay on the "literary mugging" of Vance Palmer is deeply moving because of its sense of personal outrage and polemical eloquence. Palmer, a great nurturer of the Australian tradition, was denounced as a "fellow traveller" by those literary jackals. Wentworth and Keon, from the vantage of parliamentary privilege. This account of Palmer's victimisation and response is Ashbolt's testimony to a true Australian patriot.

In their chapter on post-war conservatism, Aloyses, Dover and Hellier catalogue the Cold War's effects on many aspects of material life such as immigration, clothes, education, hire-purchase, housing, religious sectarianism or popular literature. Their broad empirical survey offers glimpses of the Cold War's effects, never its causes. Because the authors shy away from any consideration of the political economy of the Cold War, everything appears disparate, fragmented. Aloyses and his fellow writers fail to see the cultural Cold War for what it was: the means to break the confidence and strength of the Australian working people and to offer up a variant of the American dream as the only possible future.

On another cultural level, that of literature, high and low, the essays by McKernan, Ashbolt and Docker are more successful. Limiting themselves to the cultural politics of Australian literature, these authors demonstrate the intellectual ferocity of the Cold War. McKernan and Docker illuminate the shifts in these cultural struggles, the Left and Right responses and the Machiavellian manner in which the radical nationalist literary tradition was driven from the universities, to be maintained precariously thereafter by a threatened progressive minority.

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Worthy as Ashbolt's chapter is, the orientation and structure of Australia's First Cold War makes it a disappointing text. Its front cover Women's Weekly reproduction of a portrait of Joseph Stalin underlines this disappointment. The drawing of Stalin is presented without any political explanation. Though the editors and contributors may find Stalin loathsome, most are aware of the owner of the Women's Weekly's thoughts on the matter. When Stalin died in 1953, Frank Packer's Daily Telegraph celebrated publicly. Packer at the time was president of the Australia-America Association, a spawning ground for Australian compradores.

Moreover, many of the topics printed boldly across the front page — the Victorian Royal Commission on Communism, the 1949 Coal Strike, ASIO's formation, the ANZUS Alliance, the Korean War — all crucial to an understanding of the Cold War in Australia — are barely considered within the body of the book. One can only hope that the dominant role of the USA in Australian affairs will be carefully addressed in the next instalment. Failure to learn the lessons of domination and dependency in the First Cold War bodes ill for any understanding and subsequent political action in the present one. Will we always be "servin' USA"?
Lessons from the Past?

Reviewed by Ken Norling


Verity Burgmann’s book In Our Time: Socialism and the Rise Labor 1885-1905 is deliberately and consciously controversial. It shows how historians of different generations and different political outlooks have sought to draw different lessons from the experience of the 1890s to support their own conceptions of the nature of Australian politics, Australian society and the Australian working class.

In Our Time sets out to rewrite from below this history of the early days of labour politics and to use this perspective to illuminate the development of both socialism and the labour movement.

Its central argument is that those early movements were created by the work of a generation of agitators, socialists or anarchists who "explained society from a working class viewpoint, who offered a critique of that society and suggested that a society should instead be created where workers were not exploited and oppressed". (p.1)

Those agitators were working men and women, largely self-educated, and in a time of massive social upheaval, they found a ready audience among their own class.

Burgmann describes, thoroughly and painstakingly, the contribution made by these agitators, and the organisations they helped build up, to the early growth of the labour movement and to the formation of the Labor Party in each of the states of Australia.

It is an impressive record, one long overdue for recognition, and one which must affect our understanding of the origins and nature of Australian labour. In particular, it is a record of past socialist strength that is largely unknown. Burgmann shows clearly that wherever radical or progressive movements arose, socialist organisations or individual socialists played key roles.

In Our Time is not just an account of the organisations and public figures of the day, however. One of its real achievements is its depiction of so many of the rank and file activists, the agitators on the streets, who did so much to make socialist ideas a part of the everyday life of working men and women.

Burgmann provides numerous sketches of the careers and characters of these people — often eccentric, sometimes pathetic, but always dedicated. She describes people like Harry Holland and Tom Batho and their families, producing the socialist paper, Northern People, on a tiny press in a galvanised iron room in Newcastle, living as often as not on a diet of bananas, home-grown grapes and water, while continually facing police harassment, for the authorities then were just as hysterically hostile to socialist propagandists as at any time in our history.

It should be noted that In Our Time is very much an account of "socialist agitators and their families". Burgmann has made every effort to bring out the role of women in these movements, and the attitudes of the organisations to "The Woman Question", but politics of the day were very much a male domain, and these issues do not really make it to the centre of the stage.

And just to remind us how little some other things have changed, she provides an account of the likely career of a member of the Australian Socialist League:

A typical pattern for a new recruit was to manifest great earnestness at first, then boredom, then disillusionment, then non-attendance, then non-payment of dues until being expelled for being unfinancial. This process took, on average, about six months.

The account is based on minute books of the Waterloo branch which have survived from the late 1890s. (p. 93)

But, as members drifted away, others replaced them, and a good many battled on, year after year. They were sustained not just by a moral commitment, but also by a deeply felt belief that they would see "Socialism in Our Time". Perhaps the most eloquent statement of that conviction came from the Queensland labour journalist, H.E. Boote:

Socialism will come. The very stars in the heaven are on our side. The Future is ours. (p.175)

This certainly about the inevitability of the triumph of socialism was a persistent theme in the propaganda of the period. Burgmann provides a very good account of the different conceptions current in the labour movement at this time of how socialism was to come about. They ranged from the separatist utopianism of William Lane...
and his followers, which carried them to their sad fate in Paraguay (and inspired various efforts to establish rural socialist communities within Australia), through the co-operative movements to the various forms of state socialism which, in one way or another, foresaw the institution of the socialist millennium through legislation passed by the colonial parliaments.

But the real aim of *In Our Time* is to distinguish another current in the social ferment of the 1890s, a current which was consciously committed to the revolutionary transformation of society, and which had widespread support among a working class which was ready for such a transformation, only to have its energies diverted into reformist strategies, and especially into an over-reliance on parliamentary representation by the Labor Party.

A possibly revolutionary situation had not produced revolutionary change because

Laborism won the day.... simply because the socialists who worked so hard to produce these parties (the state Labor Parties) were fundamentally mistaken in their belief that socialism could be reached through the parliamentary process. Though socialism sowed the seed, Laborism reaped the harvest. (p. 195)

The concluding lines of *In Our Time* sum up:

... too many socialists were reformists, enamored in the main of parliamentary strategies, for a mass revolutionary movement to develop. However, revolutionary strategies, unlike reformist strategies, cannot be said to have failed in their application. (p. 198)

It is a bold contention, but how far can it be justified by the experiences of the movements Burgmann describes? There are two obvious difficulties — one is to demonstrate that the basis for a mass revolutionary movement actually existed in the 1890s, the other is to define just what is meant by a revolutionary strategy. For all its achievements, *In Our Time* finally does neither.

It certainly makes clear that there were organisations and movements in existence in the 1890s which represented new forms of working class political and industrial activity. (One particularly interesting one was the Active Service Brigade in Sydney, whose tactics in many ways foreshadowed those of the Unemployed Workers’ Movements of the 1930s.) However, to assume from this that the mass of the working class was ready to commit itself to battle for the revolutionary transformation of society, if only it had been provided with the right leadership, requires a leap of faith all too familiar in contemporary politics, and just as unverifiable in the context of the 1890s.

And before it is possible to speak of revolutionary strategies not having failed because they were not applied, it is necessary to show that there were revolutionary strategies to be applied. In fact, what is striking about Burgmann’s description of the socialist organisations of this period is that while they had revolutionary dreams, virtually without exception they lacked any conception of a strategy to achieve those dreams.

They shared this uncertainty about how to achieve their goal with socialists throughout the world at that time. Burgmann devotes considerable attention to the impact of foreign socialists and socialist ideas on the Australian movement, attributing the dominance of reformism, at least in part, to an Australian cultural cringe in the face of reformist trends overseas.

But what happened in Australia was merely the reflection in a very small mirror of dilemmas that will persist as long as there is an organised labour movement within a capitalist society. Australian socialists found it no easier than any others to reconcile the struggle for revolutionary change with everyday activity which showed that the working class could improve its lot within existing society, and could improve it more easily the more democratic reforms it won within that society.

Almost a century later, socialist movements still tend to divide into revolutionary purists and ineffectual reformists, and what constitutes a real revolutionary strategy remains an issue of contention. Perhaps it would do more justice to activists of earlier periods who struggled with the same problems, without the benefit of the experience we have had, to not castigate them for failing to achieve what we cannot.

Despite these disagreements, *In Our Time* is a fine book. It is important that we remain conscious of how long and how hard the working class of this country has struggled for a better world, free of exploitation and oppression, and Verity Burgmann has added considerably to that consciousness.

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SOVIET INFLUENCE LIMITED

Reviewed by Hans Lofgren


Is the Soviet Union as much to blame as the United States for the nuclear arms race? Why are Soviet troops still fighting the war in Afghanistan with no solution in sight? Is the Soviet Union a force for progress in the Third World? These, and other questions are subjected to a sober analysis in Jonathan Steele's The Limits of Soviet Power. It is a book free from the alarmism of the "Soviet threat" propagandists, but also of the apologetics of those who see Soviet foreign policy as based on the principles of "peace and socialism".

Steele's conclusion, which is in sharp contrast to the commonly accepted thesis of a global Soviet "expansionism", is that Soviet influence has declined over the past twenty years. Despite Soviet rhetoric to the effect that the "socialist world system" is becoming ever more powerful, Steele argues, the Soviet Union is, if anything, less influential as a political, ideological and economic model in the world today than in the early 1960s.

Brezhnev presided over a rapid build-up of military power, but this did not correspond to a growing global influence of Soviet-style socialism. The Soviet leaders suffered a number of serious foreign policy setbacks during Brezhnev's eighteen-year reign. In particular, the breakdown of "detente" in the late '70s had very negative effects on the Soviet Union.

In the early '60s, the emergence of China as an independent power weakened Soviet strategic security as well as its credibility as the leading country of socialism. Though since-Soviet relations have improved since the early '80s, Steele agrees with most other writers on the subject that the Soviet Union will continue to plan for a "worst case" scenario in its dealing with China. The possibility of a two-front war will remain as a constant element of Soviet strategic planning.

Vietnam, on the other hand — in the language of most Western observers — is a Soviet "gain". Steele shows, however, that the Vietnamese leadership, which has a long history of independence, today has far more autonomy vis-a-vis Moscow than the East European countries. From the Soviet point of view, there are political and military advantages in its close links with Vietnam, but in economic terms, it is an enormously costly friendship.

Events in a number of countries in the '60s and '70s, discussed by Steele, show that the Soviet Union has had very limited success in its attempts to establish a lasting influence even in states which at one stage were close to Moscow. The military might of the Soviet Union has not been easily translated into political, economic or cultural and ideological influence. Though Soviet diplomatic and political support is acknowledged by many countries striving for independence from the West, and Moscow is a major alternative supplier of arms, the Soviet form of socialism today has little attraction to Third World countries.

On the positive side, a number of countries of "socialist orientation" (Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, South Yemen, and others) emerged in the 1970s and have established close links with the Soviet Union. However, these nations are exceedingly poor, and have had little choice but to continue to depend on the capitalist world for most of their trade. The Soviet Union has not been able to provide large-scale economic assistance. Despite their highly publicised adherence to the "scientific socialism" of the Soviet variety, the countries of "socialist orientation" have not significantly contributed to an increase in Soviet prestige or influence in the developing countries generally. Soviet writers also acknowledge that most of their new Third World allies are in such deep crisis that their further advance towards socialism is by no means assured.

Cuba, Vietnam and Mongolia belong to a different category. As full members of the CMEA (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), they are part of the "world socialist system". Contrary to the notion of "expansionism", it is important to note that the Soviet Union has not been keen to add to the membership of the CMEA. Most of the countries of "socialist orientation" have friendship treaties with Moscow, but have not been offered full membership of the CMEA. Angola and Mozambique, though considered by Soviet theoreticians as having advanced beyond "socialist orientation" towards the building of
"people's democracy" and socialism, have not even been guaranteed security against South African aggression and have had to enter into humiliating agreements with their enemy.

The rise of Islam has further complicated Soviet policy in the areas adjacent to its southern border. The revolution in Iran resulted in the emergence of an anti-communist regime. In the Middle East, the Soviet Union has been largely excluded from exerting any influence on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Soviet relations with Syria, Iraq and Libya, countries often portrayed in the Western media as closely aligned with Moscow, are strained and Soviet influence minimal. In the whole of this region, only South Yemen is a close ally of the Soviet Union.

Far from having pursued an expansionist and adventurous foreign policy, Steele argues that the Soviet leaders have generally been cautious and conservative. In cases such as Ethiopia and Angola, where Soviet involvement has been portrayed by sections of the Western media as aggressive, the Soviet leaders had little to do with the original unfolding of events and only became involved following requests for assistance from internationally recognised regimes. The invasion of Afghanistan is an exception to this pattern but, in Steele's analysis, fits into the picture of a foreign policy based on the overriding objective of national security.

In Steele's view, there is no evidence for the existence of an expansionist dynamic to Soviet policy. Though striving for increased influence, this is something most major powers have in common, and Soviet initiatives are a priori no less legitimate than those of any other nation. There are examples of policies which seem to conform with the ideology of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, but there are also innumerable cases of unprincipled dealings with repressive regimes (Uganda, Turkey, Libya, and so on).

Steele's book covers many other aspects of Soviet policy as well as those referred to here. It is a thorough survey of Soviet policies in all major parts of the world. It's a readable book, devoid of abstractions and academic language. The reader might object to its empirical, matter-of-fact approach to international politics, which tends to underestimate those features of the Soviet system which set Soviet politics apart from those of other big powers. In particular, the importance of marxist-leninist ideology hardly figures at all in Steele's analysis. Nevertheless, The Limits of Soviet Power complements Fred Halliday's more analytical The Coming of the Second Cold War very well for an understanding of the global politics of the present time.

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Review of "In the Tracks of Historical Materialism" continued.

In place of the moral and strategic vacuity of structuralism (not the only example of the retreat of socialist culture), Anderson proposes a new path for marxist discourse. He sees the possibility for a relevant, renewed marxism in a discourse which accommodates elements of both a restored marxist utopianism (a tradition extending from William Morris and Saint-Simon to Herbert Marcuse and E.P. Thompson) and practical social analysis (represented by Raymond Williams). A continuing dialectic between these two streams will yield a strategy of promise and "practical hopes". The result will be closer to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School of Habermas, Marcuse, et al., whose critique evolved primarily at the philosophical level, as such failing to describe the strategic processes Anderson calls for. A key element of Anderson's prescription for marxist renewal lies in the description of a feasible socialist model which is faithful to all hopes for the liberation of society from advanced capitalism, and hence not confused with Russian or Chinese models. For Anderson, the economic considerations of the new society are paramount, and he refers to Alec Nove's Economics of a Feasible Socialism as a basis for developing a functional economic strategy.

Anderson's appeal seeks to unite the causes which challenge advanced capitalism (the feminist and peace movements are crucial), under the common banner of the one hope for a new society: the path of historical materialism. It is a persuasive appeal to which those who feel the need for change should respond enthusiastically. It's a small book, but it may be that the program for fundamental social progress proposed by Anderson recaptures the brightest hope for our time.

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Reviews

"An Obscure Scandal of Consciousness .... "

Reviewed by James Koehne


If the 1960s was a decade which held out the promise of an emergent hope for change, the 'seventies was the decade in which those possibilities were ruthlessly halted, or, more truthfully, overpowered by the forces resistant to change. Midway through the 1980s, we are becoming familiar with cynicism as the mental attitude for our times.

This demise of hope is strongly connected with the decline of Marxism's popular strength as a strategy for building a new and better society. Capitalism has dealt effectively — as ever — with the murmurings of change which rose to the surface around 1968 (in Paris, most notably, but in other places and ways as well). In the face of numerous international failures and remarkably efficient suppressions of socialist revolutions, the response of the intellectual left has been a thorough reinvestigation of Marxist philosophy. One of the strongest philosophical currents to direct its attention to the reconsideration of Marxism has been French structuralism and post-structuralism.

Perry Anderson's critical examination in In the Tracks of Historical Materialism considers the work in critical theory of writers like Foucault, Lacan, Derrida and Levi-Strauss as part of the retreat of socialist culture. At a time when the popularity of these writers and others in the same mould, like Jean Baudrillard, is on the increase in the Antipodes, Anderson's consideration of the structuralist trend in philosophical thought is important for us.

Structuralist analysis — in whichever sphere of interest it may be directed — begins with the distinction between external structures (the real of "signs") and the subjects of those structures (the "signified"), and proceeds to focus attention on the mechanisms and characteristics of "signs" and structures (the realm of "signs") and analyses in this model have been produced, extending widely from the original application of structuralist theory as a method of linguistic study, to applications in music, literature, anthropology and, ultimately, social theory. The structuralist approach is dispassionate and rigorously eschews the influence of historical or personal context. Nothing is relevant but the structure, which seemingly never alters — in fact, it will defy all efforts for change. No wonder so many structuralist writers have ended up celebrating negation (Baudrillard) or become champions of conservatism. Structuralism forgets, says Anderson, the most important element of any critical theory (particularly social theory) — the subject.

Anderson characterises the rise of structuralism as a retreat from commitment and struggle. Structuralism's critique of Marxism — in itself a laudable aim and a philosophical/political/practical necessity — fails because of its single-minded emphasis on the "signs" of capitalism (rather than the "subject", which, after all, is where the oppression lies), and its failure to develop a renewed strategy for change. There is a limit, says Anderson, to the extent to which a language theory model can be applied to society. The result is a retreat from the program of socialism, concomitant with the growth of a broader "scandal of consciousness" which tolerates the status quo and legitimises a lack of commitment. As structuralism belatedly becomes trendy in Australia, the post-modernist, post-political "scandal of consciousness" threatens to establish a prevalence in our way of thinking.

Continued page 45
AN AUSTRALIAN IN SPAIN

Reviewed by
Steve Niblo


Lloyd Edmonds’ visit to the old country developed in directions he never imagined as he sailed out of Melbourne for Britain in July, 1936. He became one of that small band of Australians who volunteered to join the International Brigades and fight in defence of the Spanish Republic during the Civil War.

Letters from Spain, by Lloyd Edmonds, is a compilation of the surviving correspondence from England and Spain back to his family in Australia. Amirah Inglis edited the collection and contributed an introduction and afterword to the volume.

Initially, the trip formed part of that tradition of Australians visiting Britain for reasons which related to curiosity about the family’s origins and also as a part of the process of establishing a separate Australian identity. Edmonds’ introduction to the rise of fascist intervention in Spain was particularly direct — as his ship sailed through the Mediterranean, he saw the military airlift of the Nationalist troops from Africa to Spain. However, his initial interest was in Britain.

The early section of the book is an interesting record of his reaction to daily life in Britain and the comparison of his experiences at work with conditions in Australia. Being an educated man, Edmonds enjoyed surveying the intellectual currents of the day, and it was that process which eventually led him to Spain. However, one of the most interesting aspects of the book is the way it shows how a man of peace eventually decided that events in Europe, associated with the rise of fascism and the expansion of Germany and Italy, were too great a threat to ignore.

In his delightfully understated correspondence, the process emerges by which his concerns grow and become a commitment to militant anti-fascism. Harold Laski, the political scientist at the London School of Economics, was quite influential in convincing Edmonds to take the bold step of volunteering to serve in the armed forces of Republican Spain against the generals’ revolt.

As part of that tradition of internationalism by which attempts were made to bring mass pressure to bear upon the repressive forces of the day, Edmonds joined the 15th International Brigade. Since he knew how to drive, a somewhat rare skill in Spain in 1936, he was assigned to a transport unit. He was involved in keeping open a lifeline to Madrid and also supplied republican troops at such important battles as Brunete, Albacete and, in the later stage of the war, on the front at Catalonia. (As Edmonds remarked, as soon as he started to learn Spanish, they changed languages on him.)

Vignettes abound in the study. Travel to and from Spain showed the poignant support for the volunteers which flew in the face of the official neutrality policies of the governments in Britain and France. It is fascinating to hear him talk about meeting such people as Hemingway, although some of these accounts will have to await the further book on the topic by Amirah Inglis.

The accounts of the hardship of battle and the trying features of military life form an important part of Edmonds’ experience. Late in the war, he fell ill and did not return to Australia with the other Australian veterans to the chorus of congratulations he so deserved. Events quickly overwhelmed that experience. World War II and the cold war made his experience fade from view. For some decades his story was known only to friends in the labour movement. So it is of value to have this record preserved. His was a good struggle in a just war; this recognition is long overdue.

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As usual, Socialist Register is late in arriving in Australia, as usual it is expensive but, unlike many editions its contents have a unified theme — the uses which have been, and are being, made of hysterical anti-communism by rightwing politicians and governments. Some of the articles are historical, including one which compares the domestic politics of the first cold war in America, Britain, Canada and Australia, while others look at contemporary politics, such as the role of the "Red Threat" in U.S. foreign policy, and the nature of the "new philosophers" in France.


For much of Australian history, the ALP and other left organisations (including, at times, the Communist Party) have had the support of rural workers and at least some small farmers. Today, the most popular politician outside our big cities is undoubtedly Joh Bjelke-Petersen. This book may not offer a left analysis of how that conservatism has become entrenched, but in the absence of such an analysis, studies by some of Australia's leading political scientists of the organisation of rural politics—both nationally and on a state-by-state basis, provide some insights into a conservative force currently being mobilised against both state and federal Labor governments.

THE THIRD WORLD WAR — THE PHILIPPINES FRONT, Community Aid Abroad, Melbourne, 1985. $7.50 paperback, 50 pages.

A short, well-produced dossier on the current situation in the Philippines. It documents human rights abuses, examines health services and working environments, the state of the economy with particular attention to the role of transnational corporations, the growth of militarisation, and the emerging forces for change. Of special interest is a chapter on the relationship between Australia and the Philippines, covering Australian aid, the tourist industry, and our government's support for the Marcos regime through trade credits, development aid, and military training.

Available from Community Aid Abroad, 75 Brunswick St., Fitzroy 3065.

LIFELINES: STORIES BY WOMEN IN THE WESTERN SUBURBS OF MELBOURNE, Edited by Robyn Hollander & Margaret Jacobs, published by Melbourne's Living Museum of the West. $5.005 paperback. 68 pages.

Lifelines provides the autobiographies of five working class women, compiled as part of an oral history research project. There are differences in the lives, ethnic origins, and educational backgrounds of these women, but the shared experiences are clear — a procession of jobs which are tedious, physically exhausting and underpaid, with lack of recognition of their skills by male employers and foremen, and a family life of raising children without assistance from the father, or with physical abuse, without child care, and generally in inadequate housing. These are often tales of tribulation, but they also display marvellous tenacity, a rough humour and an indomitable courage.

Available from the Living Museum of the West, 1st floor, 42-44 Ferguson St., Williamstown 3016.


This collection demonstrates how greatly Australian culture has been enriched by the work of writers from non-English-speaking backgrounds, including — and the editor lays great stress on this — Aboriginal poets and story-tellers. It brings together the work of thirty-eight writers, all of whom have struggled both with an unfamiliar language, and with the everyday discrimination that has been the lot of non-Anglo-Saxons in this country. The strength and diversity of their stories and poems show how well they have overcome those barriers and, hopefully, this collection takes us one step closer to the day when such writings, and the experiences they describe, are fully recognised as an integral part of our society, not as something alien.


Whatever reservations one might have about the politics of the editor, The Stalinist Legacy is an interesting reader. It assembles various critiques of Stalinism, from Trotsky and the Left Opposition, through to writings on contemporary Eastern Europe and the USSR, and particularly the Solidarity movement in Poland. While many of the writers are, or have been, part of a political current that identifies itself with Trotsky, Khurshchev's secret speech, various Yugoslav statements, and Josef Smrkovsky's account of the end of the Prague Spring are also reprinted.

Ken Norling.
THE INTERNATIONAL BOOKSHOP CARRIES AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST RANGE OF BOOKS ON POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES. 'BOOKNEWS' - QUARTERLY LIST OF NEW BOOKS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST. MAIL ORDER SERVICE PROVIDED ALSO SECOND HAND LEFT BOOKS, JOURNALS, PAPERS.
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What other socialist quarterly can offer you all this plus photo essays, news briefings and reviews?