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BROAD LEFT CONFERENCE

The statement issued by sponsors of the Broad Left Conference nominates two strategic issues for discussion. First, the emergence of a more extreme and ideologically confident right wing and, second, the challenge of winning reforms and farreaching changes in a period of Labor governments. It is sometimes hard for politically committed people of the left to admit that their opponents are making gains, but this is what is happening now, despite Labor holding office in four states and federally.

Some on the left believe that the defeat of the Liberals in the recent South Australian and West Australian elections, and the lukewarm media response to John Howard are conclusive evidence that the New Right is of little consequence. Yet a close look at the WA elections shows the deeper processes at work which have given the right ascendancy

In WA, the issue of land rights is a touchstone for progressive and reactionary attitudes because the mining companies, business, and the Liberal Party have effectively mobilised latent racism into a powerful force, before which the Burke government has bowed. This, while Labor won re-election, it has done so on the terms of the right, and this process is being replicated in all Labor governments.

It's true that Labor should be careful if it has to make policy against the drift of public opinion, although this is usually an excuse for inaction. But what is hardly ever discussed is the notion that Labor and the whole labour movement should play a continuous and active role in shaping public opinion. In this, the right has something to teach us.

Similar events concern the imposition in Queensland of some of the harshest anti-union laws Australia has seen in 40 years. In the campaign to roll back the Bjelke-Petersen government, neither the Accord, nor Labor's carefully nurtured relationship with business, nor even the strength of the ACTU, has been of much use.

Yet all three have been part of the chemistry of Labor's electoral success but, meanwhile, the labour movement and the idea of unionism itself have suffered major defeats. Some on the left blame the Keatings, Burkes and Hawkes of the labour movement for the rise of the New Right, and see "misleadership" of the unions, and the Accord, as the root of all evil. But this is absurd. The New Right stems from a crisis of conservatism which has its roots in the social crisis of the 1960s and 1970s, in the economic crisis of the mid-seventies, and further back in the ruling class' historic compromise during World War II. (See Summer '85 issue of ALR for an extended discussion of this.)

Nevertheless, the actions of the new style of Labor leadership skew the political agenda towards conservatism in a way which assists the right to make its message all the more credible.

But if the right of the labour movement and the ALP do little to stop the drift to the right, what does the left offer? Here, the calling of the Broad Left Conference may offer a "shot in the arm" if it results in a new confidence for the left and radical movements. But confidence which is not founded on the realisation that the left faces a long and hard battle to build mass support will be confidence which will crumble. Mass support means support for campaigns, not only within the safe confines of the labour movement or the social movements, but within the wider society.

Mass support emerges not just when the left sets its slogans and policy documents correctly, but when it taps deep feelings within society at large and when it begins to set the political agenda. This has been so in the case of the nuclear disarmament movement and, significantly, this is one of the few issues on which Hawke has been rolled (the MX testing).

Another defeat for Labor's drift to the right occurred at the tax summit when the unions and the social movements in the welfare sector stopped the indirect tax plan.

In the long term, this kind of alliance is crucial and of historic importance. This is so, not simply because "unity is strength" but because, in advanced capitalist societies, the contradiction between labour and capital is intersected, overlain and mediated by other central contradictions such as those concerning patriarchy and the environment.

The meaning of socialism in the West has itself been revitalised and altered by the emergence of these movements (as well as by the experience of "actually existing socialism"). It's no accident that those dogmatists who denigrate "middle class" issues have a shrivelled up authoritarian and colourless vision of socialism.

To talk about such an alliance, and nod in its direction, is easy. Much harder is to develop an attitude among the left that instinctively responds to day-to-day issues in a way which uses the insights of the social movements as well as the experiences of the labour movement.

This approach is needed because the alternative is the enshrining of the differences between the different movements rather than seeing their intersection. To discuss what to do about unemployment now means looking at options about the nature and place of paid work in our lives, its relationship to unpaid, domestic work and child rearing, leisure, consumerism, education, culture, technological change and the environment. In these fields, traditional socialist theory can be useful, but on its own it is inadequate.

Finally, there are problems to be faced by the left about its own strength, its beliefs and practices.

The left in Australia is now weaker and more fragmented than it has been for fifty years. The working class itself is also more divided, and even the term "working class" as denoting certain characteristics is less and less useful as the differences between sub-sections of the working class grow. Still less can the political and social attitudes be deduced from someone's status as a worker.

The New Right has probed a number of weak points of the left, for example, the "statist" version of
socialism held by some on the left and the tendency to be uncritical of existing forms of state ownership, reinforcing popular conceptions of socialism representing bureaucracy, not liberation.

Another weakness is the lack of a popular broad left party or movement which is independent of the ALP while avoiding fringe politics and anti-Labor sectarianism. Such an organisation is needed to project in theory, and develop in practice, a vision of socialism which unites the different strands emerging from the experiences of the left over the last 20 years.

While some of the above issues will appear at the Broad Left Conference, the conference itself cannot pronounce definitively on these questions. It can, however, improve the networks among the left, thus co-ordinating it better as well as providing a forum for discussing the multitude of questions facing the left. If it is very successful, elementary priorities for fighting conservatism and pressuring Labor may emerge.

In any event, what results from this unique conference will be an indication of the maturity, strength and vision of the left and radical movements.

David McKnight.

SUPERANNUATION

Superannuation is now a major industrial and political issue. The Accord between the ACTU and the ALP government has made it possible for the union movement to push successfully for an extension and improvement of superannuation benefits available to workers.

Traditional superannuation arrangements have been highly inequitable. The interests of employers have ruled rather than the objective of securing genuine retirement benefits for employees. Currently, only around 40 percent of the workforce is in receipt of superannuation.

While most low-paid workers have received no superannuation benefits whatsoever, they have been contributing to the tax subsidies of the superannuation schemes of high-income earners. Women in particular have been disadvantaged. vast differentials between social groups in terms of wealth and income have been further reinforced by the patchy, unjust and inefficient system of superannuation. As highlighted in a headline in The Age: "Super campaign should have begun years ago" (16.12.85).

In the longer term, one national superannuation system for all workers must be the objective of the labour movement. Against the background of a union movement divided by craft and sectional interest, this is hardly attainable in the foreseeable future. However, industry-based superannuation, providing a measure of real economic security in old age for all workers, is now within reach.

The employers are divided in their response to the ACTU campaign. The overwhelming strength of the arguments favouring reform, coupled with the unity between the ACTU and the government on this issue, have led some employer groups to accept these changes as inevitable. From other employer quarters, as well as from rightwing forces, including The Australian, superannuation is depicted as a grab for economic power by unions.

The sums accumulated in superannuation funds within a few years become very significant, making up a major source of investment capital. In the guidelines issued by the federal government in December, it is made clear that industry funds should be under the joint control of employers and employees. Current economic practices are not to be upset or endangered. Various restrictions are to prevent a superannuation fund from becoming too influential in any one company. As such, unions are unlikely to gain a major influence on investment criteria or decisions in the short term.

Notwithstanding the pathetic quality of much of the rightwing rhetoric, there is a grain of truth in their accusation that union-influenced superannuation funds could affect relations of power in the economy. Through directing investment in, and restructuring, of the Australian economy, workers and unions could create a sound basis for employment and welfare.

On the other hand, the parasitic "entrepreneurs" worshipped in the conservative media, engaged as they are in non-productive take-overs and speculation, have no such "objective" interest in the strengthening of the foundations of the Australian economy. A high level of employment, not to mention "full" employment, cannot be achieved with a reliance on private investors.

At a fairly high level of abstraction, it can be shown that union intervention in the form of influence on investment decisions is likely to have a favourable impact on the health of the economy. Unions would have to take a long-term view of investments, as distinct from private investors, who are more sensitive to temporary ups and downs in various markets. Private capital has no preference for productive investments; it goes to wherever the highest profits are, which leads to financial manipulations, real estate speculation and other forms of non-productive, wasteful use of social resources.

Investment/superannuation funds influenced or controlled by unions would have to guarantee a reasonable level of real return, but, once such a level of return has been attained, potentially other objectives than profitability could be taken into account. It may, for example, be in the interest of unions to accept a higher level of risk in some major investment decisions in order to bring about a restructuring of the economy in the interest of workers.

Reform of the superannuation system resulting in a degree of union influence on the use of investment capital does not have to form part of a radical project. In certain forms, and
in certain favourable circumstances, investment funds of one kind or another can be part of a strategy for economic democracy and social change, but this is not necessarily the case. In the current Australian context, the radical edge of superannuation reform is an extremely mild one. All sections of the labour and union movement, including the right wing, are able to support the ACTU campaign.

Superannuation funds, with an employee influence on their operations mean the addition to the capital market of another group of big shareholders, alongside such entities as insurance and investment companies. It has nothing to do with increased state planning or control. The market economy would not be weakened, it may even be invigorated. Other advanced capitalist countries have long ago embarked much further on the course of collective capital formation and union participation in economic policy and investment matters.

Nevertheless, the benefits to workers of superannuation reform are considerable. And it is not a matter of indifference to unions — and should not be to the left — in which direction the capitalist system is evolving. Relatively less power to the Bonds and Holmes a'Courts and relatively more power to the unions would be a good thing.

Rightwing forces always seek to detract from the public image of the union movement. The superannuation issue is one which may present unions in a more positive and constructive context than is commonly the case. The twin objectives of improving security in old age for all workers, and making the economy operate somewhat less irrationally, should make it possible to mobilise widespread popular support for the ACTU campaign.

Hans Lofgren.

REPORTING FROM MARVELLOUS MELBOURNE

In October 1985, ALR and Chain Reaction sponsored a discussion day on the ideas put forward by the Socialist Alternative Melbourne Collective in their draft program Make Melbourne Marvellous.

Workshops held on socialist industry, socialist metropolis and coalition for socialist change. The day was organised to get feedback on the document, and to explore further issues and problems.

Some of the issues discussed included the macroeconomic policies needed to ensure the success of the aims of the program, such as the creation and expansion of ecologically viable and socially desirable industries; the restructuring and democratisation and expansion of the public sector needed to implement progressive policy; the relationship between trade unions, public sector and community groups; the difficulty in mobilising the trade union movement around the issues of industry development and urban planning.

Socialist metropolis groups took as their underlying philosophy (which is also that of the draft program) that urban planners currently do not take enough account of social issues in physical planning exercises; they plan for the market and they plan for the car industry. It was argued that campaigns for the restructuring of urban development would sharpen the conflict between restructuring costs and the current economic system. However, in the long run the social and ecological benefits, and even economic benefits such as savings in energy production and distribution, would outweigh the initial costs.

With the discussion of the consequences of the technological change, where greater productivity is accompanied by technological unemployment, the campaign for a social wage and the empowerment of non-waged labour was considered an important long-term goal. An alternative set of values and vision were needed to combat the increasingly popular arguments of the right.

Other short term problems discussed included the way in which the community co-ops tend not to perceive themselves fitting into an overall plan and, hence, are often ad hoc in challenging overall urban planning and industry development of the government. But these issues are especially relevant when public transport, location of services and industry policies directly affect the functions of neighbourhood centres.

The dominance of car-based transport, and urban planning reinforcing that dominance, along with the run down of public transport, has serious social and environmental consequences. The conference felt that there was room for campaigns linking ecologists, community workers, socialists and public transport workers around these issues and that Make Melbourne Marvellous provided a starting point for an alternative strategy to car-based urban planning.

The Socialist Alternative Melbourne Collective’s housing policy was heavily debated and the SAM Collective is in the process of redrafting the housing section of the program to avoid some of the problems and confusion in the original suggested strategy of shelter titles.
The problems are, given the strong popularity of home ownership among the Australian working class, are: how does one ensure equality of occupancy, provide security of tenure for tenants and, at the same time, and the exchange value of housing and land dealing with the problem of inheritance, to provide the most democratic and equitable system for "ownership" of land and housing?

The themes that came out of the groups discussing coalitions for socialist change were the problems encountered in attempting to form coalitions in the context of both profound ideological differences between movements, yet with a shared radical culture and interaction creating a convergence of opinion. One of the key points of difference within and across movements was the varying approaches to the state in their strategies.

Alliances between movements, it was suggested, must inevitably form primarily out of pragmatic and sometimes even defensive political motivation. However, broad principles or values outlining an alternative vision were seen as essential in forging longer-term, more challenging political unity.

Three different forms of political struggle were discussed, most immediate being decentralised alliances of people around local issues, spontaneous and possibly transitory, based on direct experience of solidarity, which are normally defensive and crisis oriented. Secondly, the development of a more permanent, organised coalition of movements which would be able to challenge the centres of social power, in particular the state and transnationals. Thirdly, a more tightly integrated party which would participate in the parliamentary sphere. It was felt that the movements should be autonomous and independent of any party, allowing ongoing political interaction between the party and associated movements.

Problems were seen with the difficulty of linking macro-level political-economic analysis and strategy, with community concerns and actions, building links between community based movements and the labour movement, all seen as essential in both assisting and supporting each other.

It was felt that the movements had a lot to offer each other, and that it was desirable to draw more on the experiences and practices within key movements linking political, personal and cultural transformations such as with the women's and community control movements.

Rather than over-emphasising organisational forms it was suggested that ongoing communication was needed between the respective movements to explore common ground and develop a mutual understanding of concerns. This was considered a major priority, and that Make Melbourne Marvellous had been an enjoyable part of this process.

Derek Payne.

If you have any comments on Make Melbourne Marvellous, please send them to SAM Collective, c/- 12 Exploration Lane, Melbourne 3000. You can buy a copy by sending $5 ($3 unwaged), plus $1 postage, to the same address.

ALR is interested in articles on any of the issues raised, e.g. industry policy, coalitions for change, socialist cities, etc. Please contact the Sydney or Melbourne ALR collective if you are interested in writing on any of these.

WHICH WAY THE LEFT?
Debate at the Marxist Summer School

One of the final forums of the Ninth Marxist Summer School, entitled "Which Way the Left?", attempted to look at a range of questions together under the general headings of the crisis of the Left, the role of the forthcoming Broad Left Conference, and the possibility of a new broadly-based Left party. The speakers were Joyce Stevens, lately of the Communist Party's national office, and now with the Women's Employment Action Centre; Chris Warren, NSW president of the journalists' union and a member of the staff of Social Security Minister Brian Howe, and ALP member; and Claudio Crollini, from the Associazione Progressista Repubblicana and FILEF, the Italian workers' group.

Joyce Stevens began by noting that the crisis of the left was both a social and an organisational crisis. The basic challenge lay in the "range of new movements that have developed in the last twenty years, which have both created new areas of political concern, and are redefining old areas of political concern". Among other things, she suggested that the Left and progressive movements required new organisational forms, she said. "It also raises the question of whether the Left, as a whole, can renew its program, its politics, its theory, and take account of the questions these new movements have raised and are pursuing."

In this light, the Broad Left Conference could play a germinal role. In fact, the basic function of the conference — to establish some sort of programmatic unity for the immediate future — was not, in itself, a very fundamental or far-reaching one, although it was a necessary first step on the road to renewal. It was impossible to establish common sets of priorities "unless we engage in debate as to why people choose particular sets of political priorities. In engaging in that sort of theoretical debate, we will change one another's attitudes to what our immediate priorities or immediate program should be."

Such a conference would not have been possible ten years ago, she added. "Certainly, very few women would have gone to it, and those women who went to it would have had very little feminist analysis. It would have been totally dominated by the traditional left, by the labour
movement, and by ideas which did not incorporate many of women's concerns. Indeed, it is that very struggle of women which has made it possible for a different sort of Left conference to take place in Australia today."

At the same time, while there was a new openness around specific programmatic questions, there had been no corresponding growth in ideas in most parties of the Left about the nature of political parties and political formations, or about "what sort of political parties or organisations best serve the interests of the Left". Here the field was still wide open. There had been valuable discussion among feminists on the question of organisation, but "that debate has virtually run its course, and I do not think it has arrived at a point that suggests overall solutions to the problem".

She believed there was a necessity for a new form of political organisation which she called a party, "not because I'm wedded to all the notions of what a party might be, but because I think you need something more than loosely connected groups of people". Not only would such a party have to acknowledge the range of different perspectives present in the Left today, but it would also have to accept that "no single party can encompass the whole of the Left in Australia today". And, at the centre of this new conception of Left politics would have to be the recognition that "there are more than class oppressions in this society. There are also race and sex oppressions, and very great contradictions between technological development and the environment".

Such a party could not hope to take the place of mass movements, "but it has to build strong links with these mass movements, and it has to try to learn how to integrate their various and often contradictory interests". It would be an attempt to bring together all the various strands of the Left in a new way, with a sense of common activity and united purpose. Without such an organisation today it was not possible "even to begin to formulate strategies which take account of all the forms of oppression, all of the obstacles there are to building a radically different sort of society". The goal was "a party of a new kind", taking up the best in socialist and feminist theory; providing links with past traditions, but also recognising the radically new political situation. "And I believe that enough of us are convinced that such a party is necessary that we have the building blocks," she concluded.

For Chris Warren, the crisis of the Left stemmed from a quite different basis in which the cornerstone was the failure of the Left to develop a clear understanding of the centrality of Labor governments to any idea of constructing a socialist hegemony. This was not to suggest, he stressed, that "you have to give up any idea of struggle, and concentrate on being a cheer-squad for the Labor governments". But it required the recognition for the need for a fundamentally different strategy for the Left in a period of Labor governments to that of a period of conservative rule.

Historically, he argued, Labor governments had been "among the most radical social-democratic governments in the world". The Chifley government had used a basis of full employment to try to move a social-democratic consensus towards more radical solutions, building upon "an implicit accord between the ALP and the ACTU. By contrast, the Whitlam government was the Left's inability to "think through a strategy which would enable them to work through a Labor government". This had become obvious in the 1970s, when the Left had failed to face up to a new historic situation — a failure which had allowed the right, both inside and outside the labour movement, to come back on the offensive.

The Left had the potential to have "a profound influence" upon the political direction of the Hawke government, as the tax summit had shown. What was needed, he argued, was the ability to turn the social-democratic consensus — "notwithstanding the New Right, which I believe has run its race and is on the way out" — into a strategy for socialist hegemony. And a central part of this was the need for the "constituency for change", which included forces far broader than the labour movement, to have "a sense of its own identity" that it did not currently possess.

On the whole, though, he was not pessimistic about the future. Historically, the Left and Labor governments had had their ups and downs. And the existence of a federal, and four state, Labor governments gave the Left an "unequalled chance to move to a socialist consensus".

Claudio Crollini was not so sanguine about the Left's position. It was, he suggested, useful to view the contemporary Left as three distinct schools of thought. The first was the Left which believed that "there is the consultation, while the ACTU under Hawke had refused to play a role in shoring up the beleaguered government.

In his opinion, the Hawke government was much more a social-democratic government in the Chifley mould. In fact, in comparison with social-democratic governments around the world — from the Wilson and Callaghan governments in Britain to the present Mitterrand government in France — it was important to remember "just how radical it is. And the reason I say it's more radical is that it has a sense of itself as a party and its base, and an understanding of the need for unity — as reflected in the Accord. At the same time, one of the chief reasons for the marked philosophical conservatism of the Hawke government was the Left's inability to"
need for a new political instrument which is capable of transforming Australia into a democratic progressive republic and which is capable of leading Australia into the twenty-first century”.

His own organisation, along with others, belonged to that Left, he said. Then there was the Left which — like Chris Warren — believed that the way forward lay in “a new, reformed Labor Party”. Finally, there was the quite heterogeneous Left which believed that “their particular organisation is the organisation which will be capable of leading the Australian working people to the final victory”. When he talked about the future of the Left, it was of the first of these three Lefts that he was thinking, he said.

He saw several fundamental tasks facing the Left today: a program of immediate unity was one; the building of a new party, a further, more profound one. His organisation saw the key to this first objective being the development of elements of programmatic unity. The question here, as Joyce Stevens had noted, was not the immediate formation of a new group or party, but rather “how to begin the political process necessary for working together, which will eventually blossom into a new party”. The initial stage of this process was to meet the need for the development of common programs on key issues — an economic program, a program for foreign policy issues, and so on. This would require long and open discussions and public meetings — and also joint meetings and joint seminars embracing different parts of the organised and non-organised Left.

The ultimate aim was the creation of a political instrument sufficient to the task of displacing the hegemony of the ruling block. What was needed was a “modern, mass, progressive party” — “modern” and “mass” because Australia was, despite its limitations, an open and democratic society. “We do not believe,” he concluded, that a vanguard party can operate successfully in these conditions. It is an open society: the party must be open and public”. It also had to be a mass, activist party — something the ALP demonstrably was not.

The debate, and the discussion which followed, was open and self-critical. It augured well for the success of the Broad Left Conference in Sydney over Easter weekend, where the same issues are sure to be of paramount importance.

David Burchell.

Is the Left relevant to Australian society in the 1980s?

* Does the Left have a future within the Labor Party? What about a Green party — or a new socialist party — or perhaps none at all?

* Are the trade unions still the foundation of socialist activity? Have they been superseded by the women’s movement, the ecologists and the peace movement?

* Is the Accord the first step towards social transformation — or is it a dead end?

* Can the traditional sexual division of labour be altered to ensure that men assume equal responsibility for children?

These are just some of the crucial questions facing the Left which are discussed here by nine of Australia’s leading radicals. Moving Left is a highly provocative collection of essays, as well as a significant contribution to current debate about the socialist future in Australia.

The contributors — who represent a broad spectrum of Left opinion are — Eric Aarons, Patricia Caswell, Bob Connell, Jim Falk, Brian Howe, Marilyn Lake, John Mathews, Belinda Probert and Joyce Stevens. Edited by David McKnight.

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Money, Men and the Motor Car: The Grand Prix comes to Town

The first Formula One Grand Prix motor race to be held in Australia took place in Adelaide on Sunday, 3 November, 1985. In this article, John Wishart looks at how the race was successfully marketed, the values being promoted, and the significance of the Grand Prix in the re-election of the Bannon Labor government.

"KEKE IS KING. BUT ADELAIDE YOU ARE THE NUMBER ONE" — So screamed the banner headline on the day after the big race.

Keke Rosberg, a tough-looking 36-year-old Finn, had just outdriven 24 other kamikaze he-men to become the winner of the Australian Formula One Mitsubishi Grand Prix for 1985. Grand Prix razzamatazz showered on Adelaide. A new set of daring heroes had been created overnight. A glamorous international motoring elite of enormous wealth blew in and out of town in the space of five days. Over 107,000 people rimmed the track to be bombarded by noise and fumes. Adelaide came alive, as we were endlessly told, and Premier Bannon pulled off a remarkable political coup.

The Grand Prix was a celebration of commercialism elitism and wealth, a long weekend of homage to money, the male and the motor car. Big time sport had once again become a powerful instrument of mass integration and identification — in this case, playing on the parochialism of Adelaide and South Australians, and reasserting a particular form of materialist values.

How did it happen? What was the role of the Bannon government? And how important was the race to the ALP's convincing electoral victory one month later.

Background to the Race

The Formula One Grand Prix originated as a high class West European sporting contest among the manufacturers and designers of prestige cars. In recent years, race organisers have been keen to turn the event into a truly world-wide phenomenon, adding to the existing circuits in Europe, the Americas and South Africa, and delivering new audiences to the advertising industry. Various business people and motor enthusiasts in Australia had been interested in the idea of an Australian Grand Prix for five years or so, with Canberra and Sydney as possible venues.

In early 1983, on the recommendation of the Jubilee 150 Board, established to commemorate 150 years of (white) settlement in South Australia, negotiations for staging the event in Adelaide commenced. Kim Bonython of the establishment Bonython family, and Bill O'Gorman, another Adelaide businessman fond of fast cars, were very active lobbyists at this stage. So, too, was Wendy Chapman, Adelaide City Council's Mayor and tourist businesswoman.

The Jubilee 150 Board was primarily interested in introducing the race in 1986, the Jubilee Year, but the Formula One Constructors' Association (FOCA) was looking for a new venue commencing in 1985. Perceiving the political and economic advantages of securing the event in late 1985, close to the end of his first three-year term. Labor Premier John Bannon threw his weight behind the bid to get the race. This culminated in a trip to London in October 1984 where he hammered out a deal with the chief of FOCA, Bernie Ecclestone.

"The Grand Prix was a celebration of commercialism, elitism and wealth, a long weekend of homage to money, the male and the motor car."

Without inside knowledge, it is difficult to say exactly what clinched the race for Adelaide, but the preparedness of the South Australian Premier to involve himself personally in the negotiations impressed FOCA. Another factor was the proposed race circuit and surrounds — a route through the eastern sector of Adelaide's broad streets, taking in the Victoria Park racecourse, against the backdrop of the attractive and spacious Adelaide parklands. From a race promoter's point of view it offered a first-class street circuit with plenty of room for ancillary facilities.

The deal awarded the race to Adelaide for a minimum of three years commencing in October 1985, with a probable extension to seven years. It was to be sponsored and organised by the South Australian government; FOCA
Money, Men and the Motor Car

The SA government had just 12 months to prepare the circuit — and the people. No time was wasted.

Marketing and Managing the Event

The SA government, while financially underwriting the race and assisting, along with the Adelaide City Council, to provide the infrastructure, allowed the private sector to play a big role in promoting and organising the event. A Grand Prix Board was established immediately to oversee preparations, and this board, in turn, awarded contracts for work and services and concluded sponsorship deals with various private companies. Legislation was pushed through the state parliament very quickly, giving the Grand Prix Board wide powers to act, and exempting it from six Acts of Parliament which normally place controls on the use of public lands where noise, traffic and planning matters are concerned.

The composition of the Grand Prix Board helped seal the "partnership" of big business, government and the public service. It comprises: Chairman - Tim Marcus Clark, managing director of the State Bank of SA; Deputy Chairman - Ian Cocks, managing director of Direct Mix Holdings; Executive Director - Max Hemmerling, former director of Cabinet Office. SA Premier's Office; and the following ordinary Grand Prix Board members: Jim Jarvis, present Lord Mayor of Adelaide; John Hadaway, city engineer. Adelaide Council; Wendy Chapman, director of Sandford Travel and former Lord Mayor of Adelaide; John Large, chairman of the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport; Bill O'Gorman, National Development Manager, Elders IXL; and Geoff Whitbread, city manager of the Kensington and Norwood Council.

This alliance of state government, local government and business people set to work, ably assisted, as the event drew near, by the large motor companies and the other transnationals which use the Grand Prix races for product promotion. It was a formidable machine which smoothly quelled the initial fears and scepticism of many of the locals, and stroked the egos of Adelaideans until this foreign motoring extravaganza became their very own carnival on wheels.

There were some doubting Thomases, nonetheless. The idea of turbo-charged racing cars roaring through the sedate parklands at speeds of up to 300 kms per hour did not appeal to all. The race was to pass some of the inner city's most exclusive residences, as well as a few hospitals and commercial properties. To some, it was, initially, a somewhat ludicrous combination, an ill-fitting addition to the image of Adelaide as the city of churches. Others wondered how they would get to work in their own cars, given that major streets were to be sealed off for a week and surrounded by grandstands, wire mesh and concrete safety barriers.

Public Relations Gloss

Race organisers stressed the commercial benefits of the race, the fame it would bring to Adelaide, and the careful steps that would be taken to minimise disruption and inconvenience. In a letter of reply to one critic, Premier Bannon gave an assurance that "every effort will be made to minimise the impact of the Grand Prix on the environment". No well-established trees would be removed, not permanent structures would be erected in the parklands. Residents were to be given special consideration with parking and access to their homes. They would be fully compensated for any damage to property caused by errant racing cars. Before the SA Parliamentary Committee on Public Works, Dr Mal

Autumn 1986
Hemmerling toyed with the idea of following the Los Angeles Grand Prix model where residents were bussed out of the area on the day. "We could consider doing a similar thing here," he said, "perhaps a trip to Victor Harbor with lunch supplied for these people as a little consideration."

"... what more fitting place for this to occur than in Adelaide, heavily dependent on GMH and Mitsubishi car plants...." 

The Grand Prix Board established a Community Liaison Committee which its chairperson, Wendy Chapmen, described as "The human element of the Grand Prix organisation". The committee worked tirelessly getting information out to residents, traders and schools. Thousands of Grand Prix community information kits were distributed voluntarily by the Boy Scouts in affected areas and, closer to the event, a special information office was set up to handle inquiries.

The major public relations emphasis, however, was not defensive, but positive. Extensive media publicity accompanied the race build-up, trumpeting the latest construction achievements and developing a sense of excitement. Adelaide would be put on the international map. One glossy brochure from the Grand Prix office noted that "Formula One Grand Prix races are seen by more people than any other sport except the Olympics and soccer's World Cup". In 1984, it boasted, the race was shown in 47 countries reaching 650 million viewers. This huge, world-wide audience could now be reached by a single commercial.

"... the race became, on TV footage, a set of dodgem cars weaving in and out between a panoply of brand names."

Teams tour with their own chefs and hundres of support staff. The phrase Grand Prix Glitterati was coined by the media to describe the travelling circus of famous people accompanying the teams. Ringo Starr was sighted; Paul Newman was rumoured to be in town; would Frank Sinatra make a visit; and so it went on. The emphasis on personal wealth intruded into the race commentary itself with the TV presenter excitedly shouting comments in the following vein: "An here's Keke Rosberg who lives in Boffa. drives his own private plane and is immensely wealthy — a great wheeler-dealer — coming up to challenge Johansson for the lead."

Above all, it was a great field day for the advertisers. We are accustomed to seeing Australian footballers and cricketers with product names on caps and clothes, but this is small beer in comparison to the Grand Prix. with drivers and vehicles moving, walking, talking billboards almost completely covered by multinational corporate sponsors — Marlboro, Cannon, ICI, Mobil, Goodyear, Shell, Pirelli, Simod, Dow, Olivetti and the car companies to boot. Add to this the billboards lining the track and the race became, on the TV footage, a set of dodgem cars weaving in and out between a panoply of brand names.

Media Enthusiasm

The day following the race, Adelaide journalists put the final touches on the cultural message the race promoters had been trying to construct. Nigel Hopkins, in
Grand Prix circus had just come fresh from a race in jack-booted South Africa. No hard-nosed analyses about alternative productive uses of the enormous amounts of money spent on the race. The promise of a dollar to be turned and a job to be found, however transitory, received the emphasis.

The Grand Prix project reinforced a number of key values which are widely held in the society — rampant materialism, adulation of money and what it can buy in lifestyle, the excitement of fast cars, unquestioning support for new whizz-bang technologies, the necessity for star people and the notion that big is beautiful. Playing on parochial attitudes, the race promoters suggested that everyone could benefit from life in the fast lane, however vicariously. The hype further legitimised conspicuous consumption by the well-off at a time of growing poverty and persistently high unemployment. It pushed aside concern about the expenditure of public money on froth and bubble economic projects while funds for basic social services remained in short supply.

It was in this atmosphere that the state elections took place.

The part of the Grand Prix in Labor’s re-election

On Sunday, 10 November, a week after the race, Premier Bannon announced 7 December as the state election date. This date had been one of the ALP’s favoured options, coming just three years after they defeated the Tonkin Liberal government in 1982.

The electorate endorsed Bannon’s team resoundingly, giving the new administration a four-year term following amendments to the State Electoral Act in 1983. The average swing to Labor was around three percent in the lower house but, more importantly, it occurred in all the right places — in the crucial metropolitan marginal seats. The final figures for the House of Assembly gave the ALP 27 seats (23 in the old parliament), Liberals 16 (21), Independent Labor 2 (2), Independent Liberal 1 (0), Nationals 1 (1).

“The Grand Prix was a symbol of exciting state development, more apparent than real, but attractive nonetheless ....”

In the upper house, the Legislative Council, the Australian Democrats secured the last seat, giving them two members in the new parliament and the balance of power in the house of review.

It was a big defeat for John Olsen’s Liberals who finished with only five out of 33 metropolitan seats, losing two of their most senior figures and former ministers — Dean Brown and Michael Wilson. The ALP went from being a minority government in the old parliament, dependent on the support of two Independent Labor renegades, to being a government with a comfortable majority in its own right.

How significant was the Grand Prix in securing Labor’s re-election? It is difficult to be precise, and easy to over-estimate, single factors. However, the Grand Prix was

Continued page 40.
Marxism Today could be described as the flagship of the new left. Can you explain how the new left differs from the old and what are the hallmarks of Marxism Today?

Marxism Today has combined three major characteristics. Firstly, it took the Gramscian revolution in Britain in the 1970s to heart. It coupled that with the Eurocommunist debates and treated them as a major point of departure from previous communist traditions. There were lines of continuity, but that was certainly a very important moment.

On that point, what was the major difference between the old and new left?

I would say the major issue is the notion of hegemony: accepting that the political strategy you must develop for your country and society rests on the capacity of the working class to win, through a process of consent, allies throughout society. The processes of political change are therefore no longer apocalyptic or catastrophic, but are of a more prolonged character. A lot of the traditional notions of the nature of a revolution and the difference between capitalism and socialism, a lot of the hard and fast categories, and the simplistic way they were presented previously began to evaporate. This is all obviously leading into a more complex era with all kinds of difficulties as well as possibilities.

The second point of departure for Marxism Today was a preparedness, by the late 'seventies, to come to terms with what was happening in politics both at home and overseas. In practice, this meant confronting Thatcherism and the crisis of the labour movement. These two themes became the hallmarks of the Marxism Today approach to analysing the present political phase. It was that confrontation with reality that set Marxism Today apart from virtually everything else on the left.

No one else was prepared, at that stage, to say that Thatcherism represents a completely new kind of Toryism and the left cannot keep on fighting in the same ways it fought the old Toryism, otherwise it must fail.

No one else was arguing the question of the crisis of the left. The common wisdom on the left was that we were advancing, not retreating. Add to that Marxism Today's willingness to confront the move out of the long boom and into recession, and the profound material and ideological changes which that has engendered .... the move into a completely new environment.

The third characteristic is, in some ways, the most unusual and, in others, the most important. We attempt to analyse what is actually happening by assimilating or dialoguing with more or less anything that is actually going on in society. Most communist magazines sell primarily within the organisation. A language has grown up within the communist movement that's essentially a very internal language.

Marxism Today set about culturally breaking out of the ghetto by tackling the issues everyone else is concerned about. We set about selling in newsagents and not just party bookshops. We went for a cover that looked like another magazine. We changed the relationship between advertising (which was virtually non-existent) and sales revenue. We set about developing an ability to have articles on Madonna as much as on the international capitalist crisis.

Much of the crisis on the left, certainly in this country, has been its isolation from society. One expression of this in Britain is its attitude to the media. The left is completely unable to come to terms with the media, either by successfully intervening and relating to the media as they are, or by establishing its own media. The two are obviously very related. If you can't understand the existing media it's not surprising that you can't produce a successful one of your own.

There was criticism from some on the left for describing Thatcher's policies as something new, as a break with previous capitalist policies. Can you describe what you see as the essential features of Thatcherism which make it different?
I think that the essential characteristic of Thatcherism is its objective of opposing the existing consensus which had governed all policy-making in the post-war period in Britain. The post-war social democratic consensus had been supported by all previous Tory, as well as Labour governments, in terms of support for full employment, the welfare state, recognition of trade unionism and the role of a large public sector.

Thatcher counterposed to that a new model of society in which unemployment now became a virtue and a necessity rather than an unfortunate aberration; in which the market was promoted as the central means by which society should function, the state withdrawing both in the economic and social areas in order to promote individual incentives.

In the course of that, the fundamental contours of the economic and social structure of the country, the welfare state and the public sector were to be reordered and the society in a general way was going to be Americanised. I think that's the hallmark of Thatcher.

Thatcherism represents not just a new political objective but one pursued strategically with a totally different kind of political approach than had been associated with previous Toryism. If you're going to reshape the political agenda, redraw the debate and transform the balance of political forces, you've got to go out there to hegemonise society and the forces you can mobilise for your ends. You've got to redraw the social divisions within society.

Traditionally, Toryism has appealed to certain long-term features of British society. It wasn't that Thatcher stopped appealing to those features but she also tried to appeal to sections of the working class as well on the basis of a strong anti-trade union, anti-corporatist, pro-individualistic, pro-market, pro-patriotic banner. She did that, with some success.

Was the left able to gauge Thatcher's appeal?

By and large, no. The left has been moulded by the circumstances of the post-war social democratic consensus. The modern labour movement emerged in its present position in society on the basis of being able to impose its model of politics on society. The social democratic consensus was derived from the '45 Labour government and for thirty to forty years that has been the way of living.

When something else came along which was no longer prepared to take that consensus for granted but, on the contrary, wanted to destroy it and construct something else, the left didn't even recognise what had come along. There were very few people who would face what Thatcherism was about or even ask the questions. Some would say that Thatcherism was a worse kind of Toryism, but it's a quantitative, not a qualitative, change which they have in mind. But there are signs that there are forces on the left which, in some degree or another, recognise that Thatcherism is different, but which embody different responses.

The miners' leader, Arthur Scargill, for example, recognised that Thatcherism was something different but didn't understand the key elements and simply thought that Thatcherism was about fighting a war of manoeuvre. Scargill fought a war of movement thinking that the miners were about to defeat the government which, in practice, would have created a great crisis of political authority.

But that wasn't what Thatcher was on about. He misinterpreted her strong leadership as coinciding with a war of movement. But Thatcher knows when she's going to fight, when she's not, and when to retreat. Thatcher chooses the ground on which to fight from time to time.

Then there are people on the local government side like Ken Livingstone and the Greater London Council, and Sheffield Council's David Blunkett. They have certainly displayed an ability to appeal outside traditional constituencies and mobilise new reserves of support for the left, particularly on the democratic demand of the defence of local government. They have shown a capacity to use new language, new symbols, and there has been a modernism about their campaigns. So, whether or not they completely understand what Thatcherism is all about, there is no question that they have responded successfully to some of the changes that Thatcherism represents.

On issues like state ownership, Thatcher has been able to appeal to people's unfavourable perceptions of the state. How does the left incorporate these into a new strategy?

I should like to make a distinction between Thatcher's success on the issue of nationalisation and public ownership and her problems in handling the welfare state. On the latter issue, the left has managed, to one degree or another, to establish a certain line beyond which it is very difficult for the Tories to advance. That line began to register around the National Health Service in the course of the last general election. Although the Tories would like
to cut much further into the welfare state, they would actually like to restructure it and begin to privatise it in a more profound way. They are finding it extremely difficult.

Public ownership is a different matter. A lot of industry that was publicly owned has now been privatised — sometimes, like British Telecom, with a lot of public support.

Opinion polls on public ownership show that it remains very unpopular. Among conservatives that is to be expected, but it is true of Alliance supporters and it is also true of Labour supporters. There are a number of issues entangled in the public's feelings about nationalisation.

The first is that the tradition of nationalisation has made people feel that they have less control than they have ever had over other forms of industry. The model of nationalisation which has been used here has been very bureaucratic and unresponsive to either the workforce within the firm or to public opinion more generally. This is probably a feature of nationalisation in other countries as well.

Secondly, the other problem is that this form of nationalisation is particularly associated with an ideology of nationalising the "commanding heights". It is associated with a certain technological era in which you tackled the problem of public control by going for the big industries.

It also happened that, by and large, they went for the big industries, apart from the public utilities which were relatively unsuccessful, such as coal, the railways, and so on. It was difficult from the word go because it was difficult by normal cost analysis to make them run at a profit.

In learning the lessons for the future, we are helped by certain material changes. The size of the unit of scale of production in western economies is falling. Economies of scale — the Fordist production model — are no longer so dominant, so other forms of intervention are technically aided as well as politically desirable.

There are certain things, like the electricity and gas utilities, which should essentially remain in public ownership. But it must be a different form of nationalisation in which these institutions are very much more accessible to public pressure and demand. Perhaps they are broken up and each unit in different areas is run differently. I'm sure there are ways along those lines to decentralise.

But, alongside that, many other forms of public ownership, control, or involvement or co-operative production must develop. One of the interesting things to come from municipal governments is the way they have sought to encourage co-operatives and municipal forms of control and involvement.

That leads us on to talking about the crisis of the labour movement because, in many ways, new forms of organising are in conflict with the old corporatist or syndicalist views of power held by sections of the left.

One of the features of the post-war left (communists and social democrats share certain characteristics) is statism — a preoccupation with the role of central government and centrally or nationally controlled institutions, and the need for them to act on behalf of people.

Perhaps a feature of the new left, or the way that the left as a whole needs to renew itself, is that it is much more centrally for civil society, for the growth of voluntary, popular institutions. I'm not just talking about political, or obviously progressive social institutions. We must stand for the growth of people organising themselves in whatever ways they want to improve and enhance cultural and economic activities in society.

The left's new perspective must include the construction of a new relationship and equilibrium between the state and civil society in which part of the role of central government is to enable local institutions and various forms of voluntary organisations to exist by providing funding and so on.

There are various dangers and traps in this idea and we shouldn't be utopian. But this is a way by which we can elaborate on new forms of public control and intervention which are essentially accessible and could be popular.

Surely there is criticism in what you are saying of the way the labour movement organises itself. It is often rigidly organised and very hierarchical. Thatcher has been on the rampage against the unions and she is obviously hitting some chords with members of unions. What do you see as urgent short-term changes for the labour movement in Britain?

It is not only what the labour movement stood for which is out of time, but also its structures and modes of operation. One example is that the trade union movement, in terms of its structures, remains extremely male, even though about a third of the movement is female. At the Trades Union Congress this year, the vast majority of
Firstly, the fact that the miners were unlikely to be united on the issue. Once it became clear that they weren't, the strategy of coercing those miners who didn't agree was pursued. This had very damaging long-term consequences.

Secondly, the importance of winning all the miners was underplayed by the failure to hold a ballot. There was no question that the no ballot decision undermined the legitimacy of the strike, among both the miners and the public.

**So you don't accept the argument that I've heard from miners that to hold a ballot on other people's jobs is unfair?**

They're two different issues. If that is true, it is also very dangerous to try to picket out all those miners who don't want to go on strike because they don't believe in it.

But it's not just a moral argument, it's political. If there had been a ballot and it had been won, the legitimacy of the strike would have been much greater in the eyes of all the members of the NUM and in the minds of other trade unionists and the public. Once they didn't, there were a lot of problems.

The NUM has a very long democratic tradition of balloting for leaders and on strike action, so this was a political argument, for leaders and on strike action, so this was not against the normal traditions. I don't think a ballot would have been won at the start because it is very difficult to get a strike on jobs since not everyone is threatened. When it is a wage struggle everyone generally has the prospect of an increase.

But you can't have effective industrial action on jobs unless you have the unity of all the miners. If only those affected go on strike, you won't win.

Can I say just one other thing about the NUM strategy. It was informed by a politics which was essentially 1970s. It was pre-Thatcherism and pre-recession, and Scargill thought they could stage a rerun of the 'seventies. It was syndicalism in action.

The miners are the leading section of the working class. So, the first thing to do was to try to get all the miners out. They couldn't achieve that because the issue was different — jobs, not wages. The circumstances were different, the politics were different. Secondly, once the miners were out, then essential class interest and class solidarity would operate. It didn't operate. There was no way it was going to operate. That was clear right from the beginning.

Instead of having a view of a struggle as having to win people's consent, both your own membership's and those outside, there were attempts to coerce, to appeal to loyalties and so forth which just weren't there any more because of the new atmosphere created by unemployment and Thatcherism.

There is now, in Britain, an alternative miners' union; there are a couple of renegade rightwing unions which are challenging the Trades Union Congress' authority overaccepting funds from Thatcher to run ballots on political funds. There is some discussion by these unions of organising an alternative trade union centre.

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The Left in Crisis

The various groupings on the left can no longer ignore the serious decline of socialism in Australia, argues Lindsay Tanner. He argues that socialists must confront the real causes of this failure to mobilise long-term support and thereby seek new initiatives to ensure the future of socialism in Australia.

A hard-headed examination of the Australian political scene in 1985 suggests that the Left is now in a very serious state of decline. Whether one looks at superficial indicators or deeper trends, the short-term outlook for the Left is bleak and the longer-term outlook simply unknown.

The Communist Party is in severe difficulties after having proved to be a relatively durable if not dynamic force in the turmoil of the 'sixties and 'seventies. The contradictions of a Eurocommunist line in a small socialist sect have gradually been exposed. The departure of the Victorian CPA leadership to form Socialist Forum in 1984 has had a traumatic impact on the Victorian ALP Left and union movement. The emergence of Socialist Forum has led to quite vicious internal conflict both within the ALP Left and in the trade union movement. The CPA is now seriously contemplating the formation of a new political party founded explicitly on the sort of "community coalition" approach which gave birth to Socialist Forum. The major area of disagreement between the two groups appears to be over the issue of forming a new socialist party rather than attempting to influence or convert the ALP — appears to be over the issue of forming a new socialist party rather than attempting to influence or convert the ALP — the perennial dilemma of Australian socialists.

The socialist sects, which have been characterised by a renewed bout of splits and realignments, have fared suffered the problem of SWP entrism and is now also in disarray and decline. However, thousands of Australians are now actively involved in community groups and issue campaigns which tend to reflect Left attitudes and philosophy, such as animal liberation, consumer groups, People for Nuclear Disarmament, the women's movement and so on. Both the Socialist Forum group and the remaining CPA stalwarts have recognised the importance of harnessing the latent political energy which rests in these forces.

In parliament, and in the trade union movement, the Left's position is weakening. In federal parliament, though more organised and cohesive than ever before, the Left remains in an entrenched minority, lacking leading national figures like Jim Cairns because of a temporary hiatus between the expiring older generation and a rising new generation of Left leaders. At the state level, the Left is strong only in Victoria and New South Wales. Yet, in New South Wales, the Right forces remain firmly in control of the party and, in Victoria, the relative strength of the Left at the parliamentary level is merely exacerbating the deep divisions within the Socialist Left over the role of labor governments.

Within the trade union movement, the Left's position has fluctuated. The massive assault on the AMWU (Amalgamated Metal Workers Union) has been averted for the time being, but has highlighted the vulnerability of progressive unions to attack by external forces with vast amounts of money. The Left has made major gains in white collar unions and more or less held its position in other areas. However, the divisions within the trade union Left, particularly over the Accord and relationships with labor governments, have severely hampered the Left.

Among the rank and file of the labour movement, and in the community generally, the situation is a good deal more serious. The proportion of the population professing a commitment to socialism is small, and apparently declining. The absence of a unifying, inspirational focus on the Left and the increasing fragmentation of Left forces has brought things to the point where outright marginalisation looms. The political debate in Australia over the next five years is likely to be fought between Thatcherite radicals and social democrat preservers of the status quo.

"... the Left is rapidly acquiring an image of an old-fashioned, outmoded theology."

Young working class people have retreated from political activity, and the idealism of middle class youth of the late 'sixties and early 'seventies has been usurped by mindless hedonism and self-interest. Rank-and-file involvement in trade unions and the Labor Party, particularly among the young, is very low, and apparently declining. The trade union movement is more unpopular, even among union members, than it has been for decades. The values of the Right are spreading, and the Left is rapidly acquiring an image of an old-fashioned, outmoded theology, perhaps appropriate during the 'forties, but now completely out of touch with contemporary reality.
Causes of Decline

The primary causes of the declining strength of the Left lie inevitably in the dramatic changes in Australian society in recent decades. In particular, the semi-tribal working class communities of earlier years have all but been destroyed by suburbanisation, improvements in transport and communications, the development of the mass media, and burgeoning materialism and the consumer culture. The post-war boom raised individual expectations and reduced the influence of work relations over social horizons. Increasing detachment of working class leaders in union and party apparatus from the people they represent has been accompanied by the disintegration of an entire political culture.

The "consciousness industries" which blossomed during the sixties, such as television, music and fashion, have dramatically eroded the distinctive working class culture of the shop floor, trade union consciousness and the ethics of socialism. Trade union consciousness has been diluted by the artificial secretion of paper membership brought on by the spread of compulsory membership by means of agreement between union and company rather than pressure from below.

"The older generation within the Left appears to believe that bad publicity does not really matter."

The changing industrial structure in Australia has rapidly reduced the numerical and industrial strength of the manual working class, traditionally the primary base of the Left and the labour movement. There are now more members of the Australian working class working in offices than in factories. The Left has compounded the effects of this change in the structure of Australian society by its almost obsessive attachment to the images of the factory floor, trade union consciousness and the ethics of socialism. Trade union consciousness has been diluted by the artificial secretion of paper membership brought on by the spread of compulsory membership by means of agreement between union and company rather than pressure from below.

The increasing dominance of educated professionals within the ALP has provided a base for the formation of a Centre-Left. Wedded to the concepts of efficiency, professionalism and elitism, most people in this group tend to recoil from the industrial militancy and economic policies of the Left, and content themselves with radical reformism on social issues. The Left faces the difficult task of trying to separate out the truly radical spirits from the naked opportunists among the centrists. While avoiding being "colonised" as a power vehicle to be used in a struggle for internal party supremacy against the Right, the Left also needs to develop a strategy for coping with the increasing problem of blue collar alienation from the ALP and politics generally, which is an inevitable product of burgeoning tertiary education, white collar employment, and radical professional activism.

The older generation within the Left appears to believe that bad publicity does not really matter, as it will not affect the faithful rank and file. Many left leaders still shun the Left because it is the "capitalist press" run by establishment lackeys like Rupert Murdoch. The same leaders drive around in cars manufactured by American multinationals which oppress Australian workers and cheat Australian consumers. Like everything else, including the Labor Party and the trade union movement, the media is part of Australian capitalism. To use it intelligently to convey the Left's message does not necessarily imply capitulation to superficial "image politics".

The media is naturally biased against the Left, but is obliged by its own precepts to provide the Left with some coverage: the Left should, therefore, aim to use that coverage to neutralise the greatest extent possible the impact of that bias. It is a sad fact, but true, that the ordinary ALP member and trade union member gets the bulk of his/her political information from The Sun, Channel 9 News, and so on.

The Left and Economic Theory

The Left has failed to come to terms with the demise of state capitalism of Keynesian economics in the mid-seventies. The Left has vacated the field of economic policy and allowed the ALP Right to dominate almost unchallenged; consequently, the central economic debate in Australia today is between social democratic supporters of the status quo and privatising liberals. Yet there are signs that the Left is now slowly and painfully coming to terms with recent change: nationalisation is now widely regarded as an inadequate solution, there is growing realisation that Keynesianism is essentially a social democratic rather than a socialist economic strategy, and the earlier crude protectionism is gradually being replaced.
by a more sophisticated and creative approach to industry policy.

However, the Left still has not recognised the extent to which the Australian economy has been integrated into the world economy, and continues to assume that the Australian government exercises the dominant role in determining Australia's economic future. The Left has suffered increasing marginalisation because of its floundering in the economic sphere, and preoccupation with issues such as uranium mining, ASIO, US bases and abortion. However important, such issues are not integral to the achievement of socialism — as a cursory examination of the Australian Democrats' policies will demonstrate.

"D... the Left now lacks a sense of itself as a 'moral community'."

A key feature of the Left's decline has been its failure to analyse thoroughly and criticise the welfare state and the various instruments of the public sector. Rather than exercising a sceptical vigilance over the efficiency and effectiveness of the welfare state and the public sector, the Left has tended blindly to defend these institutions against attacks. A related factor which provides grounds for concern in the future is the growth of the welfare politics industry and the proliferation of leftwing activists in a variety of publicly-funded and fairly well paid "social caring" and community group jobs. Although the tendency to board the public sector gravy train is both natural and understandable, lack of money and full-time workers being a perennial problem for even the most worthwhile organisations, it is important that the dangers inherent in this process be kept in mind. These include a dependence upon, and accountability to, the state, the tendency for well-paid activists to purport to speak on behalf of their disadvantaged clientele, and a fundamentally "band-aid" approach to tackling deep-seated problems.

For many years, the Australian Left has suffered from a tendency to uncritical imitation and adulation of various foreign movements and governments. A cursory glance around the Australian socialist landscape reveals the extent to which it has been shaped by overseas events. Every major crisis in the Communist Party has either been in direct response to overseas events (the invasion of Hungary and Czechoslovakia for example) or related to foreign ideological developments (the rise of Eurocommunism). Most of the smaller socialist sects are essentially colonies of parent bodies in the US and UK.

Blind subservience to the "line" of a foreign country such as Russia or China has had a particularly debilitating effect on the socialist movement in Australia, alienating many outside the movement and causing serious divisions within it. While it is obviously valuable for Australian socialists to draw on the theoretical debates and experiences of socialist movements elsewhere, it is essential that the colonial mentality of blind obedience is abandoned and original socialist thought in Australia fostered.

The recent serious decline in the counter-hegemony of socialist and progressive ideas must be seen as a vital concern to Australian socialists. The dramatic advances in the late 'sixties and 'seventies, when progressive values on a wide range of matters took hold in much of Australian society, have been turned around by a concerted counter-reaction. The impact of anti-racist, feminist and humanist values emerging largely from the youth revolt in the 'sixties has been enormous, but still, in many respects, superficial. I like smoking, people now bear an intellectual conviction against racism and yet continue to practise it in their daily lives without any apparent concern. There has clearly been a marked failure to capitalise on the major gains made during the anti-Viet Nam campaign and the Whitlam period: those which have endured have primarily been ideas of hedonism and nihilism — such as sexual liberation — rather than socialism.

As a result, in contrast to much earlier days, the Left now lacks a sense of itself as a "moral community". There has been a marked decline in distinctively working class and socialist cultural institutions. This is partly a feature of the impact of changes in society outlined above and, in particular, of the effects of television, but it also reflects the dramatic decline of morale and general optimism on the Left.

"A great deal of economic policy formulation within the Left seems to proceed under the assumption that larger budget deficits are intrinsically socialist."

The mood of the socialist movement has fluctuated between naive optimism and profound pessimism as it has moved through various phases and crises, such as the Stalinist terror, the triumph over fascism, the McCarthyist witch-hunt, and the youth revolt in the 'sixties and early 'seventies. At present, the mood both in the Left and its natural hinterland in the community is one of deep pessimism and uncertainty. The origins of this mood lie in
The development of socialist consciousness and solidarity is, to a considerable extent, dependent upon individuals having a long-term vision of their own future and an expectation of the economic and social framework in which they are likely to live out their lives. With the perceptions of young people so overwhelmingly dominated by the twin fears of nuclear war and indefinite unemployment, it is not surprising that the ground for development of socialism and especially for a forward-looking socialist vision is not very fertile.

Which Direction for the Australian Left?

The recent decline of the Communist Party into virtual sect status has been a significant factor in the increasing fragmentation and loss of direction of the Left. For years, the CPA played a central strategic role in the Australian Left, developing new strategies and campaigns, setting the ideological agenda, and marshalling human and material resources with some form of global conception of the needs of the struggle for socialism. Australian socialism is crying out for a grouping — not necessarily a political party — to take on the vanguard role once performed by the CPA.

The recent disputes surrounding the existence and activities of Socialist Forum have been perfect illustrations of all that is bad about the Left. The sectarian viciousness which has surrounded the disputes in the Victorian Socialist Left in 1985 leads one to despair for the left's future. The paranoia, personal bitterness, self-delusion and pious hypocrisy which characterise the activities of participants from all sides in these disputes is enormously damaging. Until the Australian Left is able to develop a degree of tolerance and respect for internal differences, it will remain in its present isolated, marginalised position.

The Left has contributed to its own decline by its addiction to language and expression far removed from that of ordinary people. Many on the Left have a habit of talking in slogans, appearing as priests chanting catechisms rather than thoughtful and tolerant socialists prepared to listen to a different viewpoint. The Left also suffers from occasional outbursts of erratic behaviour, such as the slapstick antics of tomato throwing and internal abuse which highlighted the April 1985 "four unions" Victorian ALP Conference.

Possibly, the most serious problem facing the Left is its failure to devote sufficient attention to questions of political theory and ideology. With the honourable exception of the Communist Party, attention to theory has always been inadequate on the left in Australia. Even today, the word "academic" is a term of abuse in the labour lexicon surpassed in virulence perhaps only by "scab".

This problem is readily apparent in policy formulation — by the Left. Foreign policy tends to be a miscellaneous collection of specific statements about individual crises, rather than an exposition of basic principles. Economic policy is usually developed without any regard for what ought to be the fundamental concern of Australian socialists — transformation of the Australian economy from a capitalist to a socialist mode of production. A great deal of economic policy formulation within the Left seems to proceed under the assumption that larger budget deficits are intrinsically socialist, that protectionism is a foundation-stone of socialism, and that regulation is the key mechanism of transformation from capitalism to socialism.

"The siege mentality which currently permeates the Left must be broken, and the earlier sense of optimism, idealism and moral commitment revived."

Nevertheless, the Australian Left is deeply divided on an ideological basis between those committed to fighting individual (most industrial) struggles without any broader vision or program for a socialist Australia, and those who do have a "grand strategy" of sorts and devote considerable energy to reining in those individual struggles in order to ensure that the strategy is not jeopardised. Those who oppose the Accord strategy have failed to develop an alternative which extends beyond the isolated industrial conflict. Those who support it have failed to realise that a strategy which allows no room for struggle from below and requires constant effort to keep the troops from mutinying is inevitably elitist and social democratic in flavour. A transformist strategy for a socialist Australia must be based on a framework which has room for the pursuit of isolated sectional struggles and enables the energy devoted to those struggles to contribute effectively to the broader struggle.

Grounds for Optimism

Although the Australian political landscape appears particularly depressing from a Left perspective in 1985, there are various factors working in the Left's favour. The most notable of these is the effective nationalisation and internationalisation of politics as a result of developments in mass communications. Ignorance is the foremost weapon of reaction and, despite its role as an agent of social conditioning, television has brought a knowledge of politics and world events to ordinary people which is unparalleled in human history. Developments in media and communications technology have also assisted the Left in various other ways. Cheaper printing, cheaper travel and the growth of public radio have allowed the left to communicate more with the outside world, and increasingly draw on sources of information which are not controlled by political opponents.

The emergence of a widespread network of conservation groups, women's groups, migrant organisations and self-help groups has provided the traditional Left with

Continued page 38.
The New Right is New

The New Right has abandoned the florid moralism of the old right as espoused by Santamaria in favour of the harsh logic of market economics. Assisted by an increasingly sophisticated public relations machine, the New Right poses an increasing threat to the left by dominating political debate in this country.

The new right is real. Expensive, glossy publications, research centres, think tanks and the gathering together of more and more opinion makers signify a departure from the Catholic moralist model of B.A. Santamaria into a new pragmatism best represented by Hugh Morgan and his economic rationalist colleagues.

There are many indicators of how this economic rationalisation has superseded the Catholic moralism of the old right. The florid imagery and philosophy of Santamaria still lingers, but its pre-modern tone and its lack of realistic economic directions has tailed the right for some time. Santamaria’s vision of the good society remains utopian; based on the purification of a diseased society.

"The florid imagery and philosophy of Santamaria still lingers, but its pre-modern tone and its lack of realistic economic directions has failed the right for some time."

In 1983, The Age published a series of articles by Santamaria outlining his ideas on the details of this diseased society and his cures for it. His view of the world “is the triumph of a particular philosophy and that is nihilism, a fundamental disbelief in any finalities at all, a continuing cultural revolution” against authority. (The Age, 14 November, 1983) In this catechism, he compares the 1980s with pre-Nazi Berlin. For him, this is the age of the breakdown of much that he values of Christianity, middle class values and the capitalist economic order with domination by inflation, unemployment, sexual perversion and delinquency. For him, the 1980s have been further complicated by law reforms like the Family Law Act. He views the legal recognition of de facto relationships with horror; making what “Roman law recognised as concubines as the legal equal of marriage”. He views the 50 percent of married women in the workforce as victims, "helpless before militant feminist and homosexual cultures".

His specific targets for reconstruction are the family, the schools, religion; a reorientation to a belief in authority and order. For the family to be reformed there must be, first, an acceptance of the biological differences between men and women. Secondly, there must be recognition of monogamous marriage as the "indispensable purveyor of all primary, social and educational services for the young, sick, disabled, old", so providing the proper substitute for the ruinous welfare state.

Thirdly, married women (while being supposedly equal) are to find fulfilment in care and caring rather than paid work and the labour force. Fourthly, it may be necessary to provide for women with children out of marriage but "concubinage will be called concubinage".

For the schools to be reformed, Santamaria looks to the reconstitution of authority, excellence, the traditional disciplines, and the abolition of liberal studies, especially sex education. His themes are very clear. Women and the political sophisticates of the Viet Nam generation are substantially to blame for what he understands to be society’s problems and a return to tradition is his solution. These visions leave Santamaria a hopeless romantic, elitist and sexist ideologue no longer adequate for the right’s more economistic prime movers. In their terms, he fails to face up to the problems of the international economic order, Australia’s place in it and the fact that his medieaval moral stance has little chance of popular success.

"These visions leave Santamaria a hopeless romantic, elitist and sexist ideologue no longer adequate .... "

The Reconstructed Right

The New Right seeks to modernise and reconstruct the goals and style reflected by Santamaria and others of his era. Their imagery, their policies and their targets for reform, however, appear more realistic, less moralistic and are centred on the economic and industrial rather than the social and cultural. Their self-professed objectives are to change public opinion, to counter the left, and to shift the focus of debate from what they believe to be a Labor orientation. Specifically, they determine to change the schools, the public sector, trade unions and the arbitration system, regulation of the market, especially the finance sector and defence policy. For all of these, they propose some form of privatisation (more recently called marketisation) and further deregulation. In the case of unions and arbitration, their proclaimed position is deregulation of the labour market, demolition of the commission.

Academic and research organisations have been established or revamped, policies and manifestos
for the rare instances of expansion in education. There has economic, public and management policy units provides corporate capital investment in the development of new all states, the Sydney Centre for Independent Studies, Institute of Labor Studies and the Institute of Public Policy in Perth. In government, they still dominate the Industry Assistance Council, the federal Department of Finance, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and many others. In the universities and institutes of technology, corporate capital investment in the development of new economic, public and management policy units provides for the rare instances of expansion in education. There has been serious discussion, too, about the establishment of private universities.

New Right journals and publications are beginning to flood the market. The Institute of Public Affairs Review, subtitled "Australia’s journal of free enterprise opinion", Reference 2000. The Optimist. Quadrant and The Australian/Israel Review are but a few of the New Right's ideological papers. Business and management conferences and seminars are also increasing in number and variety. The chief ideologues remain tied to the mining and rich rural interests, the Liberal and National Country parties. Apart from Hugh Morgan of Western Mining, there is John Howard advised by Dr. Gerard Henderson (ex-Santamaria aide), John Stone, Katharine West, Greg Lindsay, Lauchlan Chipman, Claudio Veliz, Leonie Kramer. Frank Knopfelmacher and the like attune themselves to these newer forces in virulent and generalised anti-communism, while others are specialists, like Geoffrey Blainey on immigration and Chipman on education.

Numerous so-called community organisations represent aspects of these New Right forces, especially sexism, racism and chauvinism. Many such groups are long-established and also retain strong links with the old Catholic right, like the anti-feminist, anti-abortion Women’s Action Alliance. Other long-standing groups such as National Action, the fanatical neo-Nazi organisation dedicated to anti-communism and racism, have more oblique links with them. While the corporate captains are happy to encourage racism in regard to Aborigines, for the most part their spokespeople on such matters represent apparently more legitimate views on multiculturalism. In a recent article in the Institute of Public Affairs Review, Geoffrey Blainey writes for them on matters of multiculturalism, denigrating the contribution of post World War II immigrants to Australia, referring to them as “an industry”, “the creation of Mr. Grassby in the Whitlam government and of Mr. Fraser in the late 1970s”, both of whom he claims used the ethnic lobby for electoral gain.

Still, their racism is overt. In Mr. Hugh Morgan’s infamous land rights speech he proclaimed "land rights are paganism and spiritualism", Aboriginal culture a “world of pagans, superstition, fear and darkness”. And on South Africa, they are keen for no sanctions, participation by our sportspeople in South Africa, and they point to the violence and horror of other Black African nations as far greater evils than apartheid which, in the end, they would have as a model for the rest of the African continent.

Redirecting Political Debate

In their bid to change Australia, the New Right has declared its interest in a renaissance of private enterprise economics and thinking based on the Keynesian market models. This means the circumvention of the state machinery and the longer term rebuilding of their version of the Western, liberal-democratic tradition. The targets mentioned earlier: education, the public sector, trade unions, regulation of the market, especially the finance sector and defence policy, are their immediate concerns; all viewed from the perspective of wealth creation as opposed to wealth distribution. They see the latter as the chief obsession of labour and doomed to undermine both Australia’s traditional economy and culture. The specifics of their plan require some explanation.

For the New Right, education must be freed from any trends that dilute its role as a reproducer of traditional capitalist values. This can happen most effectively if the system is competitive and elitist, with support for the development of greater privatisation. Constant attacks on education, especially state education, like Education Shambles: why our schools are in a mess (The Bulletin, 4 February, 1986), undermine any long-term attempts to make the schools more representative and egalitarian, and promote a return to tight managerial control of curriculum and administration in line with New Right thinking.

For the New Right, the public sector is, at best, a direct servant of corporate interests. It is best, for the 1980s and onward if government is small; if the state turns over its Keynesian welfare role to the market and the family; and if the power of increasingly militant white collar unions is
Deregulating the Labour Market

Deregulation, with aggressive, competitive approaches to industry and finance sectors are favoured as magical answers to Australia's industrial development and balance of payments difficulties. This classical market economics has led, so far, to a belief in further internationalisation of the economy and complete deregulation of the labour market. Unions, the Accord, the Arbitration Commission, are attacked as intolerable constraints on our competitiveness and economic growth. The New Right ideologues would destroy centralised wage-fixing, reduce youth wages, abolish awards, annihilate the unions and further promote corporate management. John Howard says "ultimately, you have to create a situation where there is a decline in union membership" (Sydney Morning Herald, 1 March, 1985). John Stone places priority on central wage-fixing: "The most important single requirement for putting Australia to rights today is the abandonment of the centralised wage determination system" (September 1985). The key is the destruction of the unions. Australia has a relatively highly unionised labour force (58 percent). This provides a challenge for deregulation strategists.

The New Right is very forthright about attitudes to organised labour, and their agreement with anti-union legislation (introduced by Bjelke-Petersen in Queensland, Fraser in the federal sphere and, more recently, by the Victorian and federal Labor governments for the deregistration of the BLF). They go much further in their hopes for the abolition of the Arbitration Commission. What must be recognised by the left is that a great deal of deregulation of employment practices has already occurred. In The Anti-Union Strategies — an attack on living standards, the ACTU's background paper, a series of anti-union employment practices are listed. These include self-employment, sub-contracting, increased outwork in the clothing and word-processing sectors, promotion of small business, individualised contracts of employment, below award rates and conditions, cash-in-hand payments, promotion of workers to supposedly "managerial" positions to avoid unionisation, greater use of casual and part-time employment and discrimination against active unionists.

"John Howard says 'ultimately, you have to create a situation where there is a decline in union membership'."

"managerial" positions to avoid unionisation, greater use of casual and part-time employment and discrimination against active unionists.

The New Right's dreams are closer to reality than many unionists realise. These practices reflect well-established patterns in Thatcher's Britain and Reagan's United States; they are directed at unions and any collective organisation of workers so that living standards and technological change can be controlled solely by capital (Trade Union Information Kit, TURC, VTHC, 1985).

New Right Society

In emphasising these specific objectives, the New Right spends much less of its public voice drawing pictures of its "good society" than does the old right. Nevertheless, they do have a complete view of society. That view is a mixture of the fundamentalism of Santamaria, with the family as essential and the consequent restriction of women to cheap and unpaid labour, and with more modern corporate capitalism pressing for aggressive open marketeering as the basis for economic growth.

In The Bulletin of 10 December 1985, Tim Duncan maps out a taxonomy of "Concerns that Divide Us", the orthodoxies of the present and of the "left" as opposed to those being promoted by the New Right. He lists them under (1) The rescue of Australian history, (2) Reasserting traditional social values, (3) The future of mankind (sic). He appears to agree with the New Right that Australian...
culture is dominated by a progressive/radical interpretation of Australia as a capitalist nation. Duncan's list asserts that the "Orthodoxy now taught in Australian schools" about the ideal society is of "a sustainable society, living within its means, conserving for future generations and living simply". The facts are very different. Most Australian education institutions teach traditional economics; there is no developed critique of capitalism. Much of the education system has remained untouched by progressive schooling techniques and traditional disciplines have always remained overwhelmingly dominant. The New Right knows full well that some diversification and modernisation of views have occurred in schools and elsewhere, but they do not sincerely believe that the culture has been overtaken by any left hegemony.

".... the hopelessly unimaginative debates between New Right and conservative Labor spell disaster for the left as a popular force ...."

Nevertheless, the left must take the New Right seriously because it does represent a range of new reactionary forces. While their philosophies are in many ways traditional, neo-conservative ones emerging out of the old right, it is more aggressive, potentially better resources and much more attuned to international economic demands. We must take them seriously because they are part of these very significant restructures in the international and social economic order. Technological change, the consolidation of transnational corporations, the increased mobility of investment capital, new production techniques and arrangements, changes in market relations between eastern and western blocs and third world countries mean the left in Australia cannot ignore the potential impact of the right's international and domestic policy options.

Not only do the New Right policies suggest Australia should leave itself totally dependent on international capital and the American alliance, they have played a part in shifting the domestic debates away from any consideration of social and economic alternatives that should be the progressive centrepiece for Labor in government. The New Right's hard core approach to a 21st Century Australia allows the ongoing conservatisation of Labor governments. Federally, Labor has embraced the deregulation of the finance sector and the continuing destabilisation of our manufacturing industry in the name of economic realism. It is still tagged radical and the dog's body of the trade union movement in the New Right's rhetoric.

Redressing the Balance

The left, the labour movement, together with the social movement of women, environmentalists, nuclear disarmers, gay activists, community groups and Aborigines do not develop realistic social and economic alternatives that address our key concerns of equality, democracy and environmental responsibility, the hopelessly unimaginative debates between the New Right and conservative Labor spell disaster for the left as a popular force for the rest of the century. Trade unions must reorganise themselves to ensure their influence is consolidated for the future, not eroded. As the most institutionalised part of the left, unions must provide the lead for left unity in committing resources to organise for the modernisation and democratisation of industry and the workforce. And they must work constructively with progressive social movements to resource research and organisation on issues outside unions.

While Labor governments are in power, unions must maximise whatever opportunities exist for intervention, education and organisational consolidation. For all its weaknesses, the Accord includes the promise of cooperation between government and unions over matters of social and economic justice. If unions can do more to make those promises real, to support and incorporate less established progressive networks, and maintain independent resources and organisations of workers, the tide of reaction may be turned and a progressive offensive can become a significant part of popular debate about issues presently dominated by the slick forces of the New Right.

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FURTHER READING

Factions, Friends and Fancies, the Liberals. P. O'Brien, P. Penguin.

Articles by B.A. Santamaria in The Age are:
"Decline and Fall", 12 November 1983, Saturday Extra, p. 5.
Anti-Union Employment Practices, Transnational Brief 12.
The emergence of a radical "green" movement in Australia, argues Trevore Blake, poses a fundamental challenge to all socialists. While socialists have many lessons to learn from the new politics of the environmentalists, the converse is also true. Socialism can offer a valuable political analysis of economic power so often lacking among the environment movement.

Radical environmentalism, especially in its "green" or "ecological" form, represents a fundamental challenge to socialism, which socialists may ignore at their political peril. Yet, I would suggest, the converse is also true. Unless socialists can come to terms with the ecological critique of industrial society, even a successful socialist transformation could, at best, offer an ameliorated, though ultimately unsustainable, permution of the present. Unless environmentalists can come to terms with the socialist critique of capitalism and confront strategic centres of political-economic power, they will be resigned to marginal utopian initiatives and issue-oriented reformist challenges. Moreover, the organisational and political capacity of labour to resist its own exploitation is of vital significance to the related struggle against environmental exploitation.

The environment is not something "out there" that can be ignored with impunity. It is not simply the object of a fashionable middle-class preoccupation with wildlife, wilderness, urban amenity and historic buildings. Although these things are important, they are aspects of broader issues involving the capacity of environments to sustain both human activities and other species, as well as cultural values associated with environments. Environmental issues therefore encompass questions of human well-being and safety, the ecological viability of human activities over the long term, deeper aspects of meaningful human experience, and the "rights" of other species. They must become central concerns of the left.

Political Economy of Environment

There is a growing perception within the left that the dependence of the Australian economy on capital-intensive, export-oriented resource and agricultural industries, and increasingly automated manufacturing industries, is incompatible with the achievement of full employment and a stable, balanced economic structure. The recent development of these industries has relied heavily on state infrastructure and subsidies supplied at the expense of wage and salary earning taxpayers, diverting funds from potentially more productive social purposes. Initiatives of ALP governments in stimulating some revitalisation of manufacturing activities, expanding service sector employment, and developing more democratic structures for economic management, have offered the prospect of limited amelioration.

However, the dominance of the economy by transnational corporations and international finance capital represents a basic constraint upon a transition to a more equitable, democratic and viable society. Furthermore, much current economic activity is unsustainable ecologically. The mining, forestry and agricultural industries in Australia are, in many areas at least, rapidly depleting the material basis of their existence, generating serious environmental degradation and destroying the remaining natural heritage of this continent, while many manufacturing industries are promoting wasteful production, generating toxic and carcinogenic hazards as well as other safety hazards.

Current economic strategies will not prevent an increase in the ranks of the unemployed and poor over the medium-term, and the associated effects will generate increasingly serious and closely related ecological, economic and social crises. Moreover, while much of our manufacturing industry has been lost to south-east Asia, the role of Third World countries as suppliers of heavily exploited labour and natural resources to "developed" countries is threatened by even more serious ecological pressures—for example, the depletion of fish, forest and mineral resources, soil erosion, climatic disruption and toxic pollution — the social impacts of which are suffered by the subordinate classes. And, of course, military rivalries, heightened by resource scarcities, pose the most serious threat, at a sub-continental or even global scale.

Undoubtedly, the environmental issues of most immediate concern to different social classes in "developed" industrial societies, and "developing" or "marginalised" Third World societies, vary markedly. Yet, it is subordinate classes which invariably suffer the brunt of environmental distress — loss of productive resources, inadequate food, clothing and housing, diverse threats to health, and destruction of cultural heritage. Similarly, the
"... greens are frequently antagonistic towards the apparent economistic-class conceptual fetishism and rigidity of much marxian analysis...."

gender bias of social power and the division of labour means that environmental conditions experienced by men and women are often very different.

Ecosocialism Versus Green Radicalism

To a substantial degree, the issues surveyed in the preceding section can be readily encompassed by an ecosocialist critique of contemporary capitalist — and state-socialist — societies. The general thrust of this critique is to the effect that transformation of both current political-economic structures and technologies is essential if a more equitable, less alienating and ecologically sustainable society is to be realised. The extension of worker and community control over production is regarded as necessary in overcoming alienation and meeting social needs, while encouraging environmentally sensitive practices.

So long as production is geared toward either private or state accumulation of capital, ecosocialists argue, vital social needs will remain unfulfilled and ecological conditions will be undermined. Moreover, the political-economic dynamic of capital accumulation is reflected culturally in a psychically repressive, anti-ecological consumerism, which denies a range of creative and enriching possibilities in social life. The ecosocialist approach is demonstrated, in some degree at least, by the "green bans" of the BLF, and by the work of organisations such as Environmentalists for Full Employment, which have developed a critique of current socio-economic and technological structures and strategies and put forward alternative strategies based on both ecological and socialist principles.

Even if socialists embrace the ecosocialist framework, green radicalism goes somewhat further in its ecological critique of industrialism and its proposals for an "ecological society". While ecosocialism tempers the predominant socialist enthusiasm for development of the "forces of production", greens see this enthusiasm — shared by both capitalist and state-socialist ideologies — as symptomatic of a fundamental cultural, psychological or spiritual repression. This repression is manifested as an inability to apprehend our human status as organic elements within the broader natural domain, closing off vital aspects of human experience in a submission to cultural materialism and utilitarianism, failing to acknowledge the intrinsic value of other living things, clinging to a mechanistic, materialist world view. The associated preoccupation with material production and consumption, class interests and politics, tends to displace awareness of the subtler dynamics of gender remain unexplored, aggressive, competitive behaviour is legitimatized, and different ways of thinking and feeling, loving and living are repressed; in short, the emergence of a more profound mutuality and co-operation is frustrated.

The green perspective thus provides an organic synthesis of certain convergent views within the feminist, environmental and peace movements. It is strongly anarchist in orientation, emphasising the need for participatory as opposed to hierarchical modes of social organisation, and spatial decentralisation — for ecological as well as organisational reasons. Yet it links localist and global perspectives through an emphasis on the moral responsibility of the affluent, industrialised world to share natural resources and assist the poor of the Third World to overcome their oppression and to develop their productive capacities to meet social needs. Ecologically and socially appropriate, small-scale technologies are seen to be vital if people are to gain control over their own social existence and achieve a harmony with their environment and, indeed, themselves. Thus, the green movement is closely connected to the anti-nuclear and alternative technology movements, as well as the communal lifestyles, community co-operatives and alternative health and spiritual growth movements, while avoiding the insularity and political conservatism commonly encountered within some of the alternative lifestyle movements. Greens stress the links between personal lifestyle choices — for example, the need to enhance household and community self-sufficiency — and the structures which shape and constrain those choices, and therefore the broader project of political, economic and cultural transformation.
Conflict or Co-operation?

It is quite apparent that, although many socialists have been active in the environmental, anti-nuclear, peace and feminist movements, a major gulf separates the socialist mainstream from the emerging green coalescence — even if ecosocialists are well represented in the Green parties of Western Europe and the embryonic Australian parties. This tension is manifested in the fact that two major gatherings designed to promote radical social change in Australia are to be held simultaneously in Sydney during Easter 1986. While the Broad Left Conference aims to extend the dialogue and links between various elements of the established left and other "progressive social forces", the Getting Together Conference aims to forge connections between people involved in diverse "alternative movements" under a green umbrella. Although discussions between the respective organisers have been held to arrange some limited interaction, the view that the two gatherings are not in competition seems sadly misplaced — certainly from a radical ecosocialist perspective.

The sources of tension between socialists and greens are obviously complex. At one level there is a frequent socialist disdain for the apparent middle-class, romantic self-indulgence of many environmentalists, who are seen to be preoccupied with "quality of life" issues far removed from the seemingly more elementary concerns and mundane experiences of the more subjected segments of the working class. Yet, from another perspective, most environmentalists might be seen to be part of the working class, being alienated from ownership or control of the means of production. Nevertheless, greens are frequently antagonistic towards the apparent economistic-class conceptual fetishism and rigidity of much marxian analysis which is seen as obscuring crucial aspects of social and ecological realities, and thereby encouraging repressive political consequences — especially when associated with vanguardist, authoritarian structures and strategies.

My own view is that a critical synthesis of marxian political economy and the green approach to human ecology is both feasible and necessary. However, some marxian theoretical constructs will have to be recognised as having finite interpretative value, rather than providing an objective means of understanding the essential dynamics of social life. Ecosocialism goes much of the way toward reconciling marxian and ecological perspectives, but there are vital elements of the green approach, informed especially by ecologically-inspired, feminist psychological, social and political analysis, and underlaid by an emerging "holistic" understanding of the relationship between humans and non-human nature, which provide the foundation for a more critical perspective and appropriate praxis. It is also essential that greens overcome their aloofness from the immediate practical concerns of the working class and the struggles of the labour movement.

A progressive greening of the left is vital and, at least in the form of ecosocialism, this is well within the bound of political feasibility. A more broadly-based, strategic red and green alliance is also feasible and urgently needed if we are to confront and transform the disastrous path of social development currently being pursued in Australia. The task for both socialists and radical environmentalists, then, is to examine the longer-term mutuality of interests of the working class and the encompassing issue of ecological sustainability so that collaborative practical and political responses may be forged.

"The green perspective thus provides an organic synthesis of certain convergent views within the feminist, environmental and peace movement."

Only if the fragmentation of social movements seeking progressive social change can be substantially overcome, through the formation of a radical alliance, will a real momentum for change be possible. It is crucial to recognise the extensive convergence or complementarity of the basic concerns of those movements working toward a more humane society — a more equitable, less alienating, participatory and ecology-respecting future.

Practical Priorities

A variety of practical links have been and are currently being forged between the socialist and environmental movements, as well as a range of other social movements. Activities which warrant
concerted action to extend their scope include:

(i) Dialogue to consider the areas of convergence and tension between the perspectives and interests of different movements and to formulate broadly-based strategies for change, in relation to both short-term and long-term objectives (e.g. regional, state and national forums or networks might be established to respond to different political issues; one of the proposals to be considered by the Getting Together Conference will be a People’s Congress);

"A major priority must be the collaborative formulation of alternative plans for economic development .... "

(ii) Collaborative research to enable a critique of the social and environmental consequences of current structures and strategies and to formulate alternative strategies for both state policies and grassroots initiatives (e.g. this might occur in relation to particular economic sectors and industries, as well as geographic regions; high priorities would be the metals and petrochemical industries, and the timber and energy industries in different states);

(iii) Commitment of resources to worker/community controlled co-operative ventures which meet social needs, create satisfying work (not necessarily paid), protect the environment, and contribute to the gradual reduction of the power of corporate interests (e.g. supported by reformist governments, union-based funds and community banks; this strategy might combine elements of market socialism and an "alternative" economy); and

(iv) Co-ordinated political action through parliamentary, industrial and community-based grassroots channels to challenge and transform reactionary state policies and bureaucratic and paternalistic practices, and direct substantial resources towards co-operative worker and community initiatives, as well as curtailing the power of corporate interests and instituting more democratic structures within the residual capitalist sector.

Planning for the Future

A major priority must be the collaborative formulation of alternative plans for economic development, management and outputs, for different sectors of economic activity and geographic regions, together with the organisation of concerted political action to realise such plans. A number of initiatives of this type have occurred in recent years and, indeed, are currently in progress, for example in the Hunter and Wollongong regions in NSW, in Tasmania and in Melbourne. A.L.P programs for negotiated industry development agreements, as well as regional planning strategies, offer significant potential for leverage in this regard.

Alternative plans need to aim to:

(i) Generate opportunities for satisfying work for all who want it and especially women, young people, marginalised ethnic groups and disabled people;

(ii) Meet vital social needs necessary for the improvement of people’s well-being (for example, providing community support to relieve women of the burden of domesticity);

(iii) Overcome structural and geographic inequalities;

(iv) Minimise health and safety hazards;

(v) Ensure ecological sustainability and a high degree of self-reliance;

(vi) Establish democratic forms of ownership and management; and

(vii) Avoid contributing to the exploitation of the people or resources of the Third World.

Such planning activities should involve the collaboration of workers, local community groups, environmentalists and other interested people. The challenge is to establish democratic structures and processes which are responsive to the concerns and experiences of people involved in different movements or areas of activity, especially at the local or regional level, to explore the relationship between their perspectives, and then, with varying degrees of collaboration, initiate appropriate practical and political strategies. Linking of the labour, feminist and environmental movements is essential for the formulation of alternative plans, co-ordinated political action, and the establishment of practical initiatives. A vigorous momentum for radical change towards a more humane future may then be achieved. If substantial interaction between people involved in different movements occurs, the Broad Left Conference and the Getting Together Conference will provide an ideal opportunity to stimulate such a momentum.

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intervention publications 19

WAR/MASCULINITY

Articles by:
Bob Connell        Chris Cunneen
Jocelyn Dunphy    Adam Farrar
Gavin Harris & Leigh Raymond

On:
Constructions of masculinity: American bases in Australia; The Nazi Visual War Machine; Boys and Crime; War and Male Desire; Australian Peace Movements; Gender and Nationalism; the Milperra Massacre; The P.E. of Arms and Disarmament.

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Eric Aarons

Rethinking Socialism

Socialists have not sufficiently appreciated the magnitude and quality of changes which have taken place in the last twenty or thirty years, says Eric Aarons. The way we look at the world, the connections we see (or fail to see) between politics and other aspects of society, and the absence of a philosophy which can make more cohesive the diversity of radical and leftwing thought, are some of the things we need to address, he argues. In the following extract from the book Moving Left: the future of socialism in Australia, he looks at some of the long-term questions confronting socialists in Australia.

Has socialism got a future in Australia?

It better have! Because we face many problems which can only intensify if capitalism continues to dictate the direction in which we go. This has been given added point by the rise of John Howard to the leadership of the Liberal Party.

It is also highlighted by the direction taken by the Labor government under Hawke and Keating. To say this is not to equate Labor and Liberal, but to recognise that John Valder, Liberal Party president, did more than crack a political whip when he said that the best scenario was for Labor to continue implementing some of the main (unpopular) Liberal policies, then be thrown from office.

And socialism will have a future to the extent that it shows that it is a resolution of the conflicts deeply felt by the poor, oppressed, exploited, alarmed and alienated of contemporary society; shows that socialism means to live differently as well as living better.

".... the reality is that socialism is weaker, more divided and less certain as to how to press its cause than it was 30, 40 or 50 years ago."

But saying socialism "better have" or "will have" a future does not of itself change anything. And the reality is that socialism is weaker, more divided and less certain as to how to press its cause than it was 30, 40 or 50 years ago.

This is so, not only in Australia where socialism has never yet achieved a major place in politics, but also in other countries where it has. No less knotty problems are evident in countries which describe themselves as socialist.

Although I cannot take this contention further in a short essay, and will concentrate on our conditions, I stress my belief that socialists seeking renewal of their cause in Australia should look deeper than the formulation of suitable sets of demands and their vigorous propagation by a regrouped left, essential though those things are ...

Socialist assumptions

The long post-war boom undoubtedly had political and ideological consequences which adversely affected socialist achievements in that period.

Large numbers of socialists, however (certainly those in the CPA), expected severe depression after the war and conducted much of their activity on that assumption, even as the boom was well on the way. (Such as a colleague who convinced a reluctant father-in-law to sell for a song land on the Gold Coast now worth millions — before that "coming depression" made it unsaleable.)

Such simplistic views of the workings of capitalism were rejected in practice as the boom continued with minor interruptions and, from the middle 1960s, the CPA began to break from the theoretical log-jam associated with stalinism. Nevertheless, many of us believed that the end of the boom in 1974 would herald a mass leftward swing — not overnight, but within a reasonable period of time.

It is well over a decade since the boom busted. Unemployment is high and, it seems, is destined to grow despite some recovery. Yet support for socialism has not received any impetus; rather, it has declined further.

Such facts — and more could be stated — indicate that the causal links between economics and politics are not as simple, direct, or of such predominant weight as many socialists have thought and their theory has suggested.

The connections between economics and politics have been over-simplified and commonly presented as encompassing the whole socialist vision. A small illustration occurred at the end of the 1983 ACTU Congress, when there had been some discussion of socialism in the media, and a reporter asked a number of leftwingers to define their concept of socialism. Practically all the responses were at the purely economic level, one Labor Party leftwinger going so far as to say that "socialism in Australia is a Jaguar for everybody".
Rethinking Socialism

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Allowing for semi-humorous exaggeration here, this kind of response is typical.

The hip-pocket nerve may be very sensitive and the most exposed, but it is not the only conduit motivating the individual or social organism, nor does it twitch in isolation. Liberation, human empathy with others, community, pursuit of self-fulfilment, an aim in life, participation in a cause greater than self, love of nature, love of country, sexuality, and other human traits and needs are all powerful forces motivating human activity.

Reassessing economic questions

My purpose in pointing this out is not to downplay the importance of economic questions. The economy is indeed connected with everything else and, in many cases, the economic interests involved in issues carry a major weight. Like others, I spent a long, not entirely wasted apprenticeship learning to discern and disclose such connections. I think many present-day radicals seriously err when they ignore them or the compulsions and restraints which economic realities impose on any social program.

My purpose, rather, is to urge greater attention in socialist thinking to other dimensions of society and to contest the view that the economic connections are the ultimate source and justification of all social struggles, or necessarily the underlying foundation for eventual, if not inevitable, socialist victory.

This theoretical issue has practically been forced upon socialists' attention by the rise of the social movements in the '60s. These have involved fluctuating, but always large, numbers of people, in passionate activity around causes they believed to be vital. Socialism, as a movement, is only 150 years old, the first use of the world occurring in the 1820s. But, in that short time, its ideas have spread more widely and deeply than those of any cause or belief in history which, in a way, emphasises its present difficulties.

Socialism always had a number of strands within it:

* a revolt against the industrial society which capitalism developed on the ruins of feudalism,
* a demand for collective ownership of productive wealth and the fostering of community as against private property, exploitation of others and extreme individualism promoted by capitalism,
* promotion of the ideal of social justice — against extremes of poverty and wealth, for equality of opportunity,
* contained in the above, an ethical critique of capitalist society in general and its economic system in particular, ranging from its injustices to its cold cash calculation of every issue, and a belief in the actual or potential "goodness" of humanity.

Although there have been differences in emphasis, broadly speaking the economic side became dominant, while the ethical was relegated to the background or even rejected on the grounds that socialism was scientific and thus value-free.

Along with these attitudes and corresponding theoretical tenets, and partly because of them, socialists have insufficiently appreciated the magnitude of the changes that have taken place in the world and have not developed either their own ethical critique of modern capitalism, or the required positive social philosophy. I believe these are the deepest roots of socialism's current world-wide malaise.

I believe that those values which oppose the values generated by capitalism, and which are necessary for the functioning of a renewed socialism, are already present in embryonic form.

The deepest motivations of the labour movement, the peace, environmental, women's, land rights and other movements, the striving of people for more control over their lives, etc. have common elements, though the degree to which they are present may vary. Putting them down schematically, they seem to me to be:

* Social need before private profit.
* People before things; meaning the right of all to the fullest individual development, not just a few, or those who climb to the top of the heap.
* Appreciation of the variety and, at least potential, richness of life and the right of people to their own "lifestyle" provided they do not harm others.
* Recognition that we are ultimately dependent on the rest of nature, dictating the goal of a sustainable society and respect for future as well as present needs.
* An orientation to the development of community and of direct democracy and consensus decision-making with corresponding reduction of hierarchical and bureaucratic forms of organisation, though with recognition that representative democracy will always have a place.
* A new approach to work which embraces the right to work, but is not confined to it. An approach which looks ahead to a new era (now technically, though not yet politically and socially within reach) in which work would not be the aim of life as it largely is in the protestant "work...
The aim would be the development of human beings for their own sake.

* A view of human nature which stresses the need to change social conditions. As stated earlier, socialism historically has put its emphasis on the actual or potential "goodness" of human nature. This is not to deny the possibility that human beings individually or en masse may become selfish, cruel, aggressive, macho, manipulative, power hungry, etc. Clearly, they can and do. The standpoint of socialists is that they aim to eliminate, so far as we can discern them, the social conditions which engender such characteristics, and to combat the values which sustain them with counter-values of their own.

"In a sense, something of the new is being created within the shell of the old."

This is far from complete, but I hope it is sufficient to make my point. In any case, a set of values or principles to live by cannot be artificially created or developed merely by "spreading the word". It must emerge organically from people's lives as they live or want to live. The grounds for optimism are that it is already emerging. Put in Gramscian terms, a new "common sense" is taking shape. From different starting points, people are developing, broadly speaking, a common view on the things they value in life and those they oppose or detest. That many do not associate their strongest feelings and aspirations with socialism is something that socialism itself has to overcome, as I have already argued.

No more than anyone else can socialists create values out of their own heads. But they can — and should — help to make more explicit the values which motivate their own and other radicals' political and social activity. They can draw out the common links in values and political import of the struggles of different movements. They can act as "organic intellectuals", as Gramsci called them (which has basically nothing to do with level of education or "brain power"), helping to develop the social philosophy, the new "common sense", indispensible in the struggle for the transformation of the old society and the functioning of a new.

This is the most essential function, as I see it, for any new organisation of socialists to achieve both identity and purpose for existence. But it is not the only one.

Two others which I would like to discuss are a common view of a "strategy" for the achievement of their goal, and a common view of proper and suitable "methods of work" to be adopted. (Again, I use inverted commas because the terms have connotations which I am inclined to disown, but I have no suitable substitutes.)

Strategy

Discussion of means to achieve the socialist goal in our kind of society can well begin with a look at the time scale of likely change. Any sober participant or observer, it seems to me, has to accept that no quick or sudden revolutionary change of the kind seen in the Russian or French revolutions, is on the cards.

If this is so, young socialists, and others who may become socialists — not just us oldies — have to recognise that they are embarking on a lifelong endeavour. But it can be quite a problem to maintain the necessary elan and offensive spirit in circumstances where the "great victory" is not in sight.

The first condition for tackling this problem is that the "vision" projected should be relevant to the concerns of increasing numbers of people. This has already been discussed as something that it is within the power of socialists to achieve.

The second condition is that the activity undertaken today in pursuit of that vision should be making an actual, discernible contribution to bringing about the changes sought. That is, it has to be more than just "spreading the word" and waiting for that grat day when "real" change will occur.

The view which equates socialism with a change in ownership of the means of production and makes it co-extensive with it, in effect means that nothing of real importance in the social set-up can be altered until that change is achieved, except to increase the number and political understanding of participants in struggle. This latter, of course, is a major concomitant of struggle, though it is not a one-way street. There is no "ratchet effect" which will stop it going back the other way. But if power is involved, if control of one degree or another is seen as a dimension of change no less vital than that of ownership, struggles take on a rather different aspect.

This view, to which the CPA has given the rather clumsy title "interventionism", signifies participation in struggles with the view that those struggles can, and with the intention that they should, change power
relations and the ideological-political conditions of the forces involved at one and the same time.

"... it can be quite a problem to maintain the necessary elan and offensive spirit in circumstances where the 'great victory' is not in sight."

Changes in power relations, and in values, can occur in all areas — in factory, office, institution, government department or instrumentality. They can occur between men and women, Aborigines and whites, children and adults, communities and developers, and so on.

Since, in addition, the spontaneously occurring struggles on a wide range of issues are developing values of the kind a future society must embody, the whole process means that socialism is actually being brought closer. In a sense, something of the new is being created within the shell of the old. Many radicals are, in practice, adopting something of this view in their own lives and are striving to live the values and principles they profess. The contention of the women's movement that "the personal is political" applies here and now, not just for some distant future.

Such a process cannot, of course, be expected to go on gradually and smoothly, because the adversary will not just be marking time. I believe the program of the CPA puts it correctly when it says:

The development of a broad alliance for socialism will not proceed smoothly. As its mass support develops, and as capitalist power is eroded, the possibility of a transition to socialism is opened up. This will be a revolutionary democratic process in which decisive state and economic power is taken from the ruling class minority and the active democratic rule of the majority asserted in all social affairs. This decisive shift in the balance of power will not happen all at once, but it must take place over a relatively short period to prevent the ruling class using major levers of power left in its hand to subvert the popular will.

The actual course of events cannot be predicted but a revolutionary transformation will involve a period of sharpened class and social struggle developing beyond normal limits." (Towards Socialism in Australia, pages 52-53.)

It is true that there may be sudden upheavals changing the long-term perspective which I have suggested corresponds with our present and currently foreseeable future. If so, one would be very happy to re-assess. But the strategic task at present, I believe, is along the "interventionist" lines suggested. The further this is taken, the more chances there are for a favourable outcome of any upheaval that may occur.

A new "party"?

Over the years, many socialists have considered the general circumstances in Australia to be such that it is too difficult, unrewarding, or unrealistic to try to pursue their beliefs in any other way than in the Australian Labor Party. The number of people holding such views waxes and wanes according to the ALP's electoral fortunes and the expectations or disappointments of Labor in office. But one can expect that the number will always be large.

Others, while sceptical of the Labor Party's socialist-credentials after its nearly 100 years of existence and its record in office, for various reasons stop short of joining the existing socialist parties and groups.

The Communist Party of Australia is conscious of the dangers and the possibilities of today, and of its own unsuitability, for historical and other reasons, to itself cope with those challenges. It has therefore taken the initiative to call for a socialist renewal, for a regroupment of the fragmented left, and has raised the possibility of the formation of a new socialist party.

"Party" is another word with so many connotations from that past that it is not entirely suited to what is required by socialists today, when traditional political practices and forms of organisation are being increasingly questioned.

"The grounds for optimism are that (a new set of values) is already emerging. In Gramscian terms, a new common sense is emerging."
methods of work, including non-manipulative relations with other organisations and respect for their autonomy. * fostering of a broad understanding of the overall social political situation, of its separate components and of their inter-relations.

Further believe that such tasks cannot be adequately performed by socialist groups which now exist even should the desired co-operation between them develop, nor by the Labor Party. Attitudes to, and relations with, the Labor Party is a subject in itself, but the main points are set out in the decision of the CPA Special Congress in November 1984.

Socialists in the ALP are only too well aware of the restrictions they face inside the ALP and the problems of an essentially electoralist party. Socialist advances can only be democratically achieved if there is widespread support for socialist alternatives. To do this we need a party which provides a focus for socialists to develop a strategy to build this support in every sphere of social and political life.

Socialists in the ALP are in an invidious position. By seeking to change the ALP into a socialist party they risk retaliation from those who would be quite happy to see a new kind of trade union centre. They feel that the issues of principle are either ignored or underestimated. The absence of mass support for their positions, however, makes the development of extra-parliamentary mass movements the key to creating new possibilities for change and to developing mass support for more far-reaching changes.

For these and other reasons, only an independent socialist party can begin to build support for socialist alternatives without threatening the electoral viability of the ALP and a return to the reactionary climate engendered by conservative governments.

The form which a new "party" would take, the actual steps which might bring it into existence, cannot be decided by any individual or group, or decided in advance. They will emerge, if the possibilities actually exist, as I think they do, from practical co-operation and discussion among all who believe that socialist renewal is a central need of our time.

Eric Aarons has been secretary of the Communist Party of Australia, and spends his spare time sculpting.

Behind Marxism Today continued.

We are in a very dangerous situation because, for the first time this century, the existence of the unitary trade union movement in Britain is under challenge. If there is one thing the left must protect and fight for it is a unitary trade union movement. If that is destroyed, then with it goes much of the effectiveness of trade unionism and with it goes the modern Labour Party. I think the stakes are more or less as high as that.

There are two sets of forces which are making waves in the trade union movement at the moment. There is the right who would be quite happy to see a new kind of trade union centre. They see it as a new, collaborationist trade unionism based largely on no-strike deals of one degree or another. But also, a section of the left, the hard left in particular, has consistently and completely either ignored or underestimated the importance of maintaining a single trade union centre. They felt that the issues of principle have priority over all else.

The sensible left position is to start with the principle that we must maintain a unitary trade union movement even if that means that the TUC is united around only a very low, lowest common denominator. But better than that alternative which will be two centres organising probably less than would a single centre.

Louise Connor is the national organiser of the CPA, and a member of the Melbourne AIR collective.

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the Editors, Social Alternatives,  
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Is the Australian manufacturing sector slowly recovering from the recent recession, or is there worse to come? Rob Smith argues that the present high growth rates cannot be maintained due to the long-term run-down of Australia's industrial machinery. As such, the union movement, through the Accord, has an important role in pressuring the government to promote increasing industrial investment to secure future job growth.

Despite the recent economic optimism resulting from the current high growth rates, there is a latent crisis in the Australian economy. Future productivity growth can only be maintained through the constant reinvestment in Australia's capital stock, the very machinery of industry. However, this equipment is mostly ancient, due to long-term neglect, a problem which is further aggravated by the increasing shift in investment from manufacturing to speculation in property and other non-productive activities.

The crisis would be immediate and not just latent were it not for the fact that there are minerals to dig up and sell. But, in the 15 years in which Australia has become a major supplier of unprocessed raw materials, South Korea and Taiwan have become major producers of medium technology manufactured products.

The global structural changes resulting in manufactured goods becoming the fastest growing segment of international trade have not benefited Australian producers. On the contrary, for Australian producers these changes have resulted in a declining share of that trade.

Economic Theory

Gone are the days when it didn't matter that economic advice to governments, business and trade unions was naive and insular. Such advice, then, as today, informed by orthodox economics, does not and cannot grasp the real nature of capitalist competition and the structural crises which are generated within it. However, the present, though still latent, crisis can only be exacerbated because of the irrelevance of the policy advice from orthodox economists.

The examples of South Korea and Taiwan signify a different world. Competition among capitals is fiercer, faster and more pervasive.

Since the mid-1960s, when US companies increased their level of direct foreign investment, production has increasingly been organised on a global basis and the rising proportion of international trade intra-company reflects

"Gone are the days when it didn't matter that economic advice to governments, business and trade unions was naive and insular."

that. Twenty years on, the pressure is now on all companies, even on Australian companies, to look globally for the most profitable sites. In the mid-1980s, going off shore still presents to business the old incentives of cheap labour, repressive labour laws, and low taxes, plus the added attraction of an increasingly skilled
workforce utilising the latest industrial equipment. The currently high profit levels of Australian companies will, in part, be invested abroad. Certainly BHP has said so.

The world economy has changed and capital is more mobile than before. The economic right is intuitively correct in recognising the direction of the changes, but it remains incapable of analysing them. The fundamental flaw in all mainstream economic analysis is to view consumer demand as the initiator and mainspring of economic activity.

"... it is not true that the only alternative to tariff protection is complete freedom for market forces ...."

In this view, producers make things because people need those things, i.e. the purpose of production is to satisfy social needs. It's then only a short step to assert that those things could be made here if the price was high enough so that reasonable profits could be assured. Historically, tariffs were the way the market for Australian-made products was protected. Consumers could be satisfied. Profits could be assured. Workers could keep those jobs. Consumer sovereignty reigned.

It also entails the view that our plant and equipment can physically make those things, even though we know that the equipment is old and much of it obsolescent. This was the conventional wisdom and politicians found it expedient to use tariffs to try to protect both local profits and local jobs.

In a capitalist economy, tariffs do turn down the competitive heat on manufacturers. As a result, pressure to reinvest is reduced and the secret of capitalist success, the fastest growth of labour productivity relative to rivals is here dissipated.

Beyond the Safeguards of Tariffs

Today, the right and left agree that tariffs will not protect particular jobs. But it is not true that the only alternative to tariff protection is complete freedom for market forces as called for by the New Right and all those urging deregulation. If that were the only alternative then the prospects for Australian wage and salary earners and for welfare recipients would be gloomy indeed. But, of course, the New Right economic policy of deregulation concerned only with profits and, under the deregulation scenario, Australian capital could do well enough; for small business, things can only deteriorate.

We could expect a further decline in manufacturing employment as Australian producers became importers or moved their production facilities off-shore. The dollar would become less stable as the level of the current account deficit depended even more on the volatile prices of primary product exports. Much of the so-called services sector would also be less stable because of the increased unemployment and the probable higher rate of inflation.

There are controversial questions for the left here. To make no policy intervention is politically to abandon the field to the New Right. Economically to take no action via the state means further relative decline of the development of the productive forces as design skills, engineering skills and the skills of production workers are less and less employed. There would clearly be an erosion, perhaps a severe erosion, in the strength of unions organising production workers and, to a lesser extent, among those organising maintenance workers. Whether this is a case of "the worse, the better" depends on your optimism about the prospects of replacing the industrially based trade union oriented left with an increasing professional and middle class based political left, as the former loses many of its members.

"Primitive economic theory has produced primitive management practices, aided and abetted by politically expedient government policies and pragmatic unions."

On the other hand, making a policy intervention that makes local capital more productive is obviously not a progressive step unless time is bought, i.e. maintaining for a bit longer existing industrial strength and using it to assist in developing a coherent political strategy on the left. The irony is that mainstream micro-economic analysis is irrelevant to understanding capitalist growth and its contradictions, and that it is Marx's analysis of competition that is a more realistic account of actual business practice and of the space in which it has to manoeuvre.
Capitalist competition is fundamentally the struggle to secure profits by reducing production and distribution costs and speeding up turnover. Only thus can prices be reduced in the final markets of sale, i.e. be competitive. Historically, the most important method of reducing direct labour time per unit of production has been increased investment in fixed capital equipment.

But, for Marx, profits (the expansion of capital value) are the capitalists' primary aim. The aggregate satisfaction of consumers (much beloved by mainstream analysts) was, and is, an incidental outcome of this relentless pursuit of profits. Of course, producers and distributors assess prospects for future sales. But, if a company can make or distribute a product at a lower unit cost than any others in the industry, then it is likely to be profitable to make that investment, regardless of whether existing producers have unsold stock.

So, for a producer entering the industry with technology which gives a lower unit cost of production, matching physical supply to consumer demand is an accidental outcome. The aim is to secure profits by making the investment. If that means unsold stock in the hands of other companies with higher production costs, too bad!

The mainstream idea that actual consumer demand or expected growth in that demand draws forth additions to supply which then match physical quantities required is a fantasy equilibrium. Not only doesn't it exist, there is no natural tendency towards it, either.

It's in this context of understanding competition as the battle to lower production costs and to achieve a greater market share — both of them now global battles in many industries — that we look at investment patterns in Australia, at the state of existing capital stock, and at an important part of the capital goods industry.

A Vintage Industry?

We know that manufactured products have always been only a small fraction of Australian exports. But look at what a recent report on Australian heavy engineering said about production equipment and the approach to production:

A significant proportion of Australia’s specialist equipment is old. Some of it was obtained second-hand as part of Australia’s war reparation dues. Other pieces were made by companies themselves during World War II. (p.46)

The all-round jobbing ability which was developed in the 1930s and 1940s still characterises much of the heavy engineering sector today. These skills have served the small Australian market well for more than forty years. (p.86)

On the other hand, few companies had a systematic approach to assessing where the best prospects for work might lie over the medium to longer terms. (p.109)

But the problems are not only the age of the capital stock and its low productive capacity, but also the approaches of management. "An industry 'rule of thumb' suggests that about 80 percent of output is produced by about 20 percent of the capital stock. The other 80 percent of the capital is required only for the more infrequent types of work and when demand is unusually high". (p.46) The corollary is that 80 percent of capital stock produces only 20 percent of output: an astonishing result if you understand that competition is about production costs and profits.

There has been a fundamental confusion between the engineering life of equipment and its competitive economic life. Of course, Australian companies cannot tender competitively here and overseas when the mass of their equipment is so old and so slow that the productivity of their workers is far too low. Primitive economic theory has produced primitive management practices, aided and abetted by politically expedient government policies and pragmatic unions.

The Growth of Non-Productive Investment

Whether we look at all manufacturing industry, or whether we look at heavy engineering in particular, there has been a long term decline in the rate of investment which improves productivity, i.e. new capital equipment.

On the other hand, in those sectors which merely transfer title or position to commodities which have been produced, namely, finance, property and business services, there has been a steep increase in investment. Figure One compares the expenditures on new capital equipment by the sectors of manufacturing and finance, property and business services as a percentage of the expenditure on new capital equipment by all industries.

The report notes that it was not practicable to seek data on the age of capital stock for Australian engineering firms, presumably because it was too old! On the other hand, 1980 estimates for South Korea's heavy engineering equipment "indicate that one-third of it was then three years old or less and 85% of it was six years old or less". (p.46)
Predominantly, the increased investment in finance, property and business services has gone into leasing plant and equipment back to business. Discounting for inflation, by taking the expenditure as a proportion of GDP, there was a fourfold increase in these leases between 1968-69 and 1983/4. It would be comforting to think that manufacturers had become more efficient in the use of their funds employed and, instead of locking up capital in the purchase of plant equipment, were modernising so rapidly that they only leased in order to gain fastest access to new technology.

"... strategically, industry policy is important because it influences the long-term level and range of jobs available."

Alas, a recent breakdown by the Australian Bureau of Statistics of goods leased suggests otherwise (#5644.0). At 33 percent, motor vehicles were the largest single category of leasing, while industrial plant and equipment was lumped into the residual category of "other", and altogether only amounted to 11 percent.

In the present climate, one is compelled to think that much of the vehicle leasing business was a means for individuals to avoid tax. If correct, then a baleful hidden legacy of the '70s tax rorts will be — Keating's mild capital tax reforms notwithstanding — a slowing down, and even a fall, in the rate of investment in new capital equipment by finance, property and business services. With it will fall the rate of growth of employment in the private sector.

The Running Down of Australian Industry

Striking confirmation that manufacturing companies in Australia have been steadily running down the basis of their competitiveness comes from comparing the levels of expenditure and repair and maintenance to the levels of expenditure on new fixed capital equipment. The results show exactly what we would expect from very old equipment.

In 1971/2, repair and maintenance expenditure for all manufacturing industry was equivalent to 28 percent of what was spent on new fixed capital equipment. By 1983/4, the same proportion was over 68 percent. In the sector including industrial machinery and much heavy engineering (Australian Standard Industry Classification 33), the proportion was 29 percent in 1971/2 and over 70 percent by 1983/4.

No wonder heavy engineering plants were closing rapidly, and thousands of metal workers were losing their jobs. The so-called investment incentives of the 1970s were a political gloss. Ad hoc and expedient, as are most policies in the micro economic area, they had no effect, and cannot be treated as serious policies.

The Accord and its Critics

It's clear that much needs to be modernised in Australian manufacturing industries if workers there are to have a continuing flow of employment, if the economy as a whole is not to become disastrously dependent upon imports, and if we are to expand our capacities to design and develop new technologies and processes. Of course, production is still in the hands of capital, but the question is whether the restructuring imperatives from transnational corporations are faced by a business-government alliance or a union-government alliance.

The United States and Britain have recently been through a so-called phase of de-industrialisation, and both conservatives and liberals have called loudly for the "revitalisation of industry". From Reagan and Thatcher, the strategies for industrial renewal have been combative, explicitly anti-union, and have used unemployment as a weapon. On the basis that the sum of what is good for business is good for the economy and for the country, Thatcher especially has relied on the market to allocate resources. Howard seeks to do the same here.

By contrast, the Accord is a watershed for what it consolidates and for what it potentially foreshadows. The differences is not simply that the state is intervening. In Australia, the state has long intervened on behalf of business by tariffs and subsidies, though it was the increasing ineffectiveness of that patchwork of ad hoc interventions that helped to topple the conservatives in March 1983. The difference is that the ALP government's economic strategy centres upon a relatively detailed set of commitments to the union movement.

The Accord differs from the British Social Contract of the mid-1970s, both by its details and because the institutional framework that can implement significant parts of it are well established. It also differs from the Austrian model where key union leaders are also members of the government. The formal autonomy of the ACTU tactically gives greater bargaining flexibility while, at the...
same time, strategically offering more consistent pressing for workers' interests unswayed by electoral temptations. The return to centralised wage fixing plus no extra claims was a compromise among unions that extended solidarity on wages from among members within unions to the trade union movement as a whole. It was a clear rejection of the free market approach and removed the need for an overwhelming focus by individual unions on wage relativities; anomalies where they already exist, or arise, can be dealt with by a work value case.

But that defeat of the free marketeers not only removed divisive economism and expanded the influence of the ACTU on wages and other matters of direct concern, it also institutionalised the union movement's intervention on the broader issues of taxation, superannuation and industry policy. In turn, this has expanded the opportunities for individual unions to act on these same matters.

Tactically, a fairer system of taxation and universal superannuation are important struggles that directly and personally concern union members. But, strategically, industry policy is important because it influences the long-term level and range of jobs available.

The two major left criticisms of the Accord are, first, that this compromise gives up workers' basic claims via their union, i.e. their right to demand that capital pay more for their labour time whenever and wherever they believe that they can win that struggle. In short, wages militancy is not only the most direct and relevant form of struggle but it will also heighten all workers' consciousness both of their class position and of their potentiality to bring about the transformation of capitalism.

The second criticism is that, in a capitalist economy, the state, via governments seeking re-election, ultimately must maintain business confidence to make profits. Hence substantial collaboration by unions with such a state enhances the power of capital over the unions' own members; literally, it incorporates the working class into the interests of capital.

".... the question is whether the restructuring imperatives from transnational corporations are faced by a business-government alliance or a union-government alliance."

These are powerful criticisms because they go to the heart of capitalist appropriation of wealth and because they seek to limit the possibilities for union leaders to do deals against the interests of their members.

The classic form of action over wages and conditions by individual unions has undoubtedly increased real wages and led to safer work environments. But it was always a defensive reaction and, in practice, has not led to a self-aware class determination to transform capitalism. If anything, it has led to a different form of incorporation; namely, to one similar to the mainstream economists' view that satisfaction comes from individual consumption and in order to consume more, you need more wages.

The main problems with the two criticisms are that both assume the existence of an active working class consciousness and they assume that the state contains no contradictions in its promotion of the interests of capital. Accordingly, workers are already homogenised as "the working class" and only remain to be mobilised. In this big bang view of transforming capitalism, no day-to-day steps are possible save for the wages struggle by fiercely independent unions, and the building of a revolutionary party.

The Future

All of this brings us back to the present context of the global restructuring of production by the transnational corporations and the impact that has on local companies and on job security.

Never before have there been such powerful means for capital to co-ordinate research and development, design, and the production process itself on an international scale. Unless substantial steps are taken to improve the capital stock and to upgrade workers' skills, more production facilities will close down here and relocate offshore.

Twice before, important economic reports have been shelved: the Vernon Committee's in 1965 and the Jackson Committee's in 1975. In the present context, five years, not ten, sees the development of whole industries in East Asia. Time is short and systematic policy intervention is a necessity. But the present federal government appears to have been seduced by the dogma of pure competition and the rationality of market forces for the restructuring of local manufacturing. It has thus dragged leaden feet on submissions on industry policy despite its formal commitment in the Accord.

Nevertheless, that commitment can be used by unions to campaign for greater local sourcing of materials, components and equipment; to negotiate for the development of new products and processes to retain jobs; to urge initiatives for new investments and to pressure the government through the tripartite industry councils to put together packages of finance and skills that make such projects feasible.

In itself, the Accord is not THE ANSWER. Even if it were fully honoured, it would still not complete a social democratic charter. However, if it lasts, it does begin to provide a framework through which individual unions and the union movement can practically broaden the economic rights of workers and those seeking work. Through it, unions can extend and insist on consultations on economic planning as well as consultations on what were formerly management prerogatives. In short, the Accord can be used as a small but actually existing step on the long road towards a future Australia where production and distribution are socially, not privately, controlled.

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The Left in Crisis continued.

potential allies sympathetic to the Left's approach, and with a very important source of new policies, new ideas, and new political techniques. These organisations often pose a refreshing challenge to established shibboleths of the Left, and allow for a fairly dynamic relationship between political party members and community group activists.

"Rather than exercising a sceptical vigilance over the efficiency and effectiveness of the welfare state and the public sector, the Left has tended blindly to defend these institutions against attacks."

These developments are symptomatic of a wider syndrome of immense significance to the Left: the increasing politicisation of women, migrants, church groups, welfare organisations, and white collar unions. In many respects, quite independently of the established Left, groups such as the Brotherhood of St. Laurence and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace have begun to espouse policies on issues such as poverty, unemployment and foreign military bases which are similar to Left positions. Similarly, white collar unions have begun to reflect an increasingly radical and aggressive activist stratum within their rank-and-file membership, often people previously involved in, or exposed to, the wave of student political activity on campuses in the late 'sixties and early 'seventies.

The most promising recent development for the Left in Britain has been the surge of activity and achievement in local government. Local authorities have been used as a base for intervention in the planning, investment and production processes to an extent simply unheard of in Australia. The leftwing leaders of such authorities have been aggressive and innovative in their approach and, consequently, managed to achieve substantial public support despite the constant attacks of the Thatcher government and the vitriolic British press. The Australian Left needs to recognise that grass roots work at the local government level is a much better way of building genuine consciousness than the ritual capturing of major institutions in society.

The final important reason for holding some faith in the future of the Left is the growing indications of movement towards left unity. Almost every major party and sect on the Australian Left seems to have been involved in unity discussions with another organisation in the past couple of years. As usual, greater adversity tends to produce greater unity and, although there are very deep divisions within the ALP Left in Victoria, there are good reasons for an optimistic outlook in the medium term for unity and cooperation within the left forces throughout Australia. Once again, the major stumbling block will be the inevitable question of attitudes to Labor governments and the Labor Party.

The Way Ahead

The Left's initial concern should be to bring about a drastic overhaul of its political technique. The lingering antipathy to the media must be brought into a proper perspective, and a professional approach to propaganda and media presentation developed. The Left needs to muster its forces to devote a much more substantial allocation of resources to printed material, and to start exploring the enormous possibilities offered by the extensive public radio network in Australia.

There is an urgent need for the Left to broaden its horizons. At a time when the Australian economy is being rapidly internationalised, the ALP Left is struggling to maintain the fledgling national left structure first established only a couple of years ago. Communication between the ALP Left and similar groupings in other countries is inadequate. Sections of the Australian Left such as the CPA have a proud tradition of internationalism, and it is vital that that tradition is revived and refurbished for the Left as a whole.

A revival of theoretical debate is also essential to the regeneration of the Australian Left. That debate which does occur remains remote from most left activists. The time is ripe for a broad assessment of the Left's traditional dilemma relations with the ALP. Australian socialists have never really been able to come to terms with the choice between electoralist and agitationalist politics: the end result of this inability has been a perpetually equivocal attitude to the Labor Party. If the ALP is to become a pale imitation of the US Democratic Party, Australian socialists within the ALP will be obliged to reassess their attitudes towards the party.

Although the CPGB Eurocommunist "broad alliance" approach is not necessarily the correct path, there can be no doubt that the Left needs to reorganise around new concepts and new structures to take account of the emergence of new forces on the progressive side of the political spectrum. Attempting to explain the rise of these forces in purely class terms, and thereby relegating them, in practice, to a subsidiary and submissive role, is simply not feasible. The ALP Left has developed invaluable informal links with community organisations in the welfare sector and the peace and disarmament movement. It is necessary to develop different mechanisms for strengthening the relationships between these organisations and other progressive sections of the labour movement.

"The Australian Left needs to develop an ethic of 'building socialism from below'."

It is crucial that the Left comes to terms with the trend towards white collar employment and the gradual proletarianisation of white collar workers in Australia. There exists within the white collar sector a vast and largely untapped potential for political and industrial activity. Mobilising this potential will be difficult: it requires nurturing of the idiom of the office rather than the factory floor, recognition of issues that are important to white collar workers, and a drastic revision of the Left's attitude to public sector efficiency. The key need for a collective change in the state of mind on the left, to
eliminate the "middle class bureaucrat" stigma still attached to white collar workers.

Fundamental change is required in the Left's approach to youth. The impact of the consciousness industries since the sixties may be annoying, but it cannot be ignored. The

".... the Left needs to reorganise around new concepts and new structures to take account of the emergence of new forces on the progressive side of the political spectrum."

Left needs to identify the common denominators of contemporary youth culture, and integrate socialist perspectives with them to the greatest extent possible. It is essential that the Left transcends the apocalyptic visions of nuclear nightmare and deals also with the more mundane levels of youth aspirations.

Coming to Terms with Change

The entire basis of the Left's approach — a commonly agreed set of socialist ethics — is in urgent need of reinvigoration. One of the major reasons why the Left has developed an image of pig-headed conservatism and aberrant opportunism is its failure to assert fully the "moral foundations" on which socialist doctrine is based. The Viet Nam campaign and, more recently, the NDP phenomenon have demonstrated the extraordinary power of the moral impulse in Australian politics. However much the Left is committed to economic ideals such as protecting Australian living standards, the primary rationale behind any socialist position should be that it is fair and just.

The application of socialist moral philosophy to the personal lives and relationships of socialists is equally important. Tolerance, understanding, and a willingness to listen to and treat seriously another person's point of view are in short supply on the left in Australia. Male socialists need to recognise that however progressive the attitudes they profess about women may be, in practice, most, if not all of them, have taken about two steps down a path of a hundred towards living in genuinely equal relationships with women, whether politically, sexually, at work, or otherwise.

The Australian left needs to develop an ethic of "building socialism from below". Australian socialists are still heavily permeated with the philosophy of "capturing the state", and thus tend to devote too much energy to taking control of institutions and not enough to activity at grass roots levels such as local government and community groups. It is a short-sighted approach for socialists to rely on the quirks of representative democracy as a means of achieving control of social institutions, as ultimately they will be constrained by a politically backward rank and file to have a say, but also by being genuinely part of that rank and file, and reacting in a tolerant, creative and non-manipulative way with other rank-and-file people.

The final key requirement for a Left resurgence is the development of a basic practical program which is readily understandable and clearly transformist, and allows a role for individual struggles in the industrial and community spheres. The electorate is increasingly judging all parties, and particularly the Labor Party, by practical considerations: hence, although the development of a "moral crusade" aspect to the Left's appeal is of great importance, its value is minimal unless it is accompanied by clear-cut practical policy proposals.

These suggestions for reviving the Left's political fortunes all boil down to one thing: a dramatic change in consciousness within the Left itself. The siege mentality which currently permeates the Left must be broken, and the earlier sense of optimism, idealism and moral commitment revived. Many techniques and approaches traditionally employed by the Left need to be abandoned or substantially revised. Australian socialists need to

"Until the Australian Left is able to develop a degree of tolerance and respect for internal differences, it will remain in its present isolated, marginalised position."

develop an entirely new strategy which both harks back to the traditional moral ethics of socialism and acknowledges the contemporary realities of a rapidly changing society, a "new socialism" to counterpose to the threat of new conservatism.

While it must be accepted that underlying economic forces provide the motivating force behind social change, the Australian Left cannot simply sit back complacently, set in its ways, and wait for it all to happen. The present decline is very serious, and shows no signs of abating: it will take a massive effort of will on the part of the Left to eventually revitalise the socialist cause in Australia.

Lindsay Tanner is a Socialist Left member of the Victorian ALP Administrative Committee, and president of the Victorian ALP Economics Policy Committee.

Autumn 1986

Lindsay Tanner is a Socialist Left member of the Victorian ALP Administrative Committee, and president of the Victorian ALP Economics Policy Committee.
Money, Men and the Motor Car continued.

important for Labor, symbolising neatly and visibly what the Bannon government stood for. It served to color in, in the public's mind, an image which Bannon had been sketching in over his three years of government.

The Grand Prix was a symbol of exciting state development, more apparent than real, but attractive nonetheless to many voters who didn't want to hear about the Liberals' rather dull and negative alternatives. The Labor government utilised the race, along with the just-completed Casino and the Adelaide Railway Station and Environments Redevelopment Project (ASER) to show that the state was on the move. Essentially, this constituted an economic strategy centring on the tourist industry and the luxury market — a poor alternative to one aiming at a strong indigenous manufacturing sector in key industries. Amid the media euphoria, heightened by the approaching Jubilee Year in 1986, the precariousness of this economic strategy hardly seemed to matter.

The Bannon Factor

Over a full-page gigantic head and shoulders picture of John Bannon, the copy read:

Only this man can keep South Australia up and running. While the Liberals were nitpicking and whingeing, John Bannon was putting South Australia on the map ... Grand Prix. ASER, yes, 30,000 jobs, front-runner for the submarines. Now we're up and running we can't afford to risk the future. Don't take a chance. South Australia needs John Bannon.

This ALP election ad demonstrates another important ingredient in their success — the standing of Bannon as a politician. He is the most popular political leader in Australia in 1985, consistently scoring over 75 percent approval rating in the surveys. Bannon was seen as being personally responsible for the Grand Prix, intervening to clinch the deal and skilfully overseeing its very professional completion. The same approach has been used with a number of other development initiatives, notably over the bid to get the federal government's submarine contract. Despite his conservatism, almost shy personal presentation, Bannon is increasingly regarded as a "man of action", the marathon runner who has been able to win the race to develop South Australia, to get things moving again. It's not surprising, then, that the ALP made its election campaign slogan: "South Australia is up and running".

The State Government as Enabler for Business

The Grand Prix was also a very good case study in Labor's partnership with private enterprise. The government fulfilled an entrepreneurial role, assisting private sector operations — an enabling role quite different from the big government image which conservatives like to paint Labor as encouraging (and which some socialists privately dream of).

At a large rank-and-file union forum dealing with privatisation, the premier spelled out his philosophy on the role of government. He spoke of the need for "a strong partnership between the public and private sectors". "The public sector," he said, "was essential for the state's survival but, at the same time, it should be neither inefficient nor expand haphazardly into areas where the private sector was performing well." Public Service inefficiency and low productivity could not be tolerated, and he supported greater "commercialisation of public sector activities".

This idea of a lean government performing an entrepreneurial role to assist private enterprise has generated considerable support from among the business community and the media. It made it very difficult for opposition leader John Olsen to make much ground when he launched his ham-fisted privatisation crusade. Surveys in the marginal electorates close to the poll showed voters to be much more concerned about taxes and economic matters than privatisation. Many middle-of-the-road voters were probably fairly happy with the state government's approach. On top of this, with budgetary restraints and staff ceilings clamped on hard for the full three years of the Bannon administration, there was little opportunity for the Liberals to credibly paint Labor as promoters of a bloated public sector killing off private enterprise.

In fact, to a marked extent, the Bannon government echoed the Playford style in the area of economic development. During Playford's long reign as SA's premier, the Liberal Country League government was very active in attracting manufacturers, offering financial concessions and government-underwritten infrastructure as enticements. Bannon, in the changed circumstances of the 1980s, is also operating in this way. Thus, he is following a model with which many South Australians are familiar.

When claiming victory on election night, a triumphant John Bannon faced the media, not in his regulation coat and tie, but sporting a windcheater embossed with the Formula One Grand Prix logo. The party faithful, gathered together, cheered enthusiastically.

The Liberal election night party was much quieter as Olsen's team stared at the prospect of a Bannon Decade and their years in the wilderness. They were very subdued, just as they had been a month earlier when the glamorous motoring heroes roared through town to the applause of a huge crowd assembled.

FOOTNOTES

1. Advertiser, 5.12.84.
3. The SA Department of State Development estimated local tourist revenue from the 1985 race to be $55.5 million. It predicted an overall injection of $15 million into the local economy with the equivalent 570 to 850 jobs of one year's duration. The department acknowledged that these figures could only be rough estimates as it was an unified project. The Grand Prix Board has yet to release figures on the economic impact of the race.
4. Advertiser, 4.11.85.
5. Advertiser, 4.11.85.
6. Advertiser, 4.11.85.
7. State public service trade union seminar on "Privatisation". Trades Hall, Adelaide, 18.11.85. Address by J. Bannon.
8. During the election campaign, the usually pro-Liberal Party Advertiser supported the Labor Party.

John Wishart is a CPA activist from Adelaide interested in environment and labour movement issues.
THE SOUND OF TRUMPETS

Reviewed by Dick Blackburn


This substantial book deals almost exclusively with events in South Australia as constituted since 1911. References in it to Broken Hill, NSW, are not extensive, but they are obligatory for this work, those concerning the northern part of the state before 1911 relate particularly to the Chinese question. There are five parts in chronological sequence, followed by a brief conclusion, three appendices, 28 pages of references and notes, 11 of bibliography, and 14 for the index.

The Wakefield Press was established by the South Australian government and is the official Jubilee 150 publisher. The book is well presented and appears to have few errors. It was launched with enthusiasm last August by Clyde Cameron, well-known Labor Party stalwart, to an audience of trade union officials, party leaders, writers, educators, journalists, and friends.

The author has worked in the metal trades, served as an editor of the South Australian Tribune (1946-51) and was secretary of the Communist Party in SA during 1963-73. He has previously written pamphlets and a longer work Representatives of Discontent — History of the Communist Party in South Australia 1921-1981 — which was published in 1983. That book should be consulted for more detail than can be found in Sound of Trumpets.

The first part of this new publication, with nine chapters for the period 1815-1880, shows distinctive features of the new British colony. It was founded by a company, not as a penal settlement. Mining of copper ore was important from the 1840s, and brought thousands of migrants from Cornwall. Another distinctive group — the Germans — contributed to early success with agriculture and horticulture. Labour disputes were evident from the outset — on ships making the first settlement at Kangaroo Island in 1836 Churches and pubs were important for workers, and they gained more experience of organisation in friendly and building societies in the prosperous 1870s. South Australia was the third most populous Australian colony, with a mix of mining, agriculture, and manufacturing Aborigines had been dispossessed, trade unions existed, and class divisions were evident.

The maritime strike of 1890, and events leading to it, including establishment of the United Trades and Labor Council (UTLC) in 1884, are dealt with in the three chapters of the second part. The third — Labour in Politics, 1891-1908 — records the formation of the United Labor Party and the introduction of new ideas. Henry George had an enthusiastic reception when he came to Adelaide to speak about Single Tax. His admirers in the state were among the settlers in William Lane’s South American colony and in the village settlements of the 1890s, most numerous along the River Murray. George Buttery, a trade unionist once involved in the First International in London, and thus acquainted with Karl Marx, became president of the UTLC in 1890.

After the 1890 strike, the numerical strength of the UTLC declined for some years. However, workers turned to political struggles. Their demands were pressed at first by supporting the more liberal parliamentary candidates; later they elected Labor men. Parliamentary support by Labor was given in the 1890s to the liberal Kingston government; in 1908, the first Labor government ruled with liberal support. One chapter in this third part deals with the women’s movement, including reference to the Working Women’s Trade Union, formed to combat sweating in the clothing trade, and to the achievement of women’s suffrage in 1894.

Continued page 43.
“Revolution at the Burra Mine”
South Australian headline September 19th, 1848

‘Sound of Trumpets is one of the most exciting and encyclopaedic books ever published on the social, industrial and political history of South Australia.’ (Clyde Cameron)

Sound of Trumpets presents the first history of the labour movement in South Australia, from 1836 to the present.

A gap in Australian history has been closed. Previous histories had little to say about the experiences of the working classes and their relationship with the other parts of South Australian society. Sound of Trumpets has rescued real people from obscurity. Real people struggling to give meaning to a working class existence. Real people with tales to tell.

The book begins with the movement’s origins in Britain’s post-Napoleonic War industrial revolution. It records the 1836 settlement of the Province as a solution to unemployment and falling profits. It examines the rise of capital and wage labour in colonial rural and mining pursuits. It describes the consolidation of the movement over great social issues of the 1880s. It considers the rise of political movements, pre-World War I organized labour and the ensuing war and peace, boom and bust, technological and social revolution.

Many of its themes are relevant today: unemployment and economic uncertainty, taxation, shopping hours, protection of local industry, state aid to private schools, parliamentary salaries, racism, sexism and movements against war.

Jim Moss writes an entertaining narrative with verve and commitment. The book is a product of a man who has lived the labour movement, beginning first as a trade unionist in the 1930s and working later as editor of the South Australian Tribune. It shows the value of his extensive travelling to study communism in Europe, Russia and China. There are few professional scholars who have revealed, as Jim Moss has, the qualities of inherent dedication and erudition in their work.

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The fourth part, with four chapters, covers the influence of socialist and syndicalist ideas from before World War I, the divisions within the labour movement during and after the war, and the turmoil in Adelaide in 1926-28 associated with the wharf strike and effective in combating the industrial Groups and preserving their own influence. No emphasis seems to be given by the author to the long existence of the UTLC as a united body — without the complications known in some other states.

Labor governments have been formed from time to time in South Australia, usually from extreme dissatisfaction with more conservative regimes, but they have only once remained long in power. They have achieved some important reforms in more prosperous times, but Fiasco has been the consequence of a Labor government undertaking repressive actions or otherwise becoming isolated from the workers.

The great strength of the book is its lucid and coherent account of workers' struggles over nearly 150 years. The large collection of references is a measure of the author's industry in searching the files of metropolitan and provincial newspapers, archival material, university theses, pamphlets, books, etc. The publication will provide a basis and stimulus for many students of South Australian labour history, perhaps it will be an example for other parts of Australia. The men and women who became prominent in the movement are mentioned throughout the text. Except for a few like John Verran, these people generally qualify for no more than a line or two about their background. Clearly, the book is not rich in personality — there is just enough to whet the appetite for more details.

The final chapter mentions some changes since 1985. It refers to publications as recent as 1984, including Dunstan's political memoirs (1981), but it fails to touch on the impressive recent growth of the trade union movement. In 1981, more than 78,000 were covered by affiliations to the UTLC. By 1974, the number was 118,000 (Appendix III), and in 1984 it had risen to 170,000, according to the centenary history of the UTLC. This growth may have been due principally to the new affiliations of white collar and professional unions, including administrative and clerical officers, municipal officers, nurses, college academic staff, and CSIRO research workers. These changes make the UTLC more representative of the working population which now includes many in tertiary industries and a large proportion of women.

Readers will look in vain in the author's brief conclusions for any comparison with other Australian segments of the labour movement. His last pages show concern, above all, with central issues of power and the role of parties. It would have been valuable to have gained some leads for interpreting the apparent failure of the labour movement in this state in respect to municipal government. Is there in the trade union movement some old-fashioned neutralism towards politics which affects the SA local government scene? In the same line of speculation, is it true that this labour movement surveyed by Jim Moss has little interest in social and cultural affairs, to which he makes prefatory reference? At least there appears to be almost nothing in the text on these matters. There have been significant developments in these respects at least elsewhere in Australia — and not all recently. Examples are presented by the Lidcombe Workers Health Centre, the Victorian Labor College, and the WEA, the Society of Labor Lawyers, and the Green Bans by the BLF. The influence of the Australian labour movement has certainly been evident for years in literature and song, theatre and cinema, and the pictorial arts. It is remarkable that a study which seems to have left no stone unturned in its search should thus indicate no working class contribution from SA to these issues.

In the 19th century, newspapers were often given portentous names such as Tribune, Clarion, Herald, or even Trumpet. It is from The Penny Trumpet, first circular of the UTLC, in 1884, that Jim Moss drew the title for his book. One might say of it that trumpets of the SA labour movement are certainly now heard far and wide, even though their sound is limited to a few notes. On the whole, however, the author has done extremely well in recording the history of the most significant and deep-seated conflicts in sunny South Australia.

Dick Blackburn has had a life-long association with the labour movement in Victoria and South Australia, where he has lived since 1946. He is a member of the CPA.
HAZARDS OF
THE JOB

Reviewed by
Sol Marks

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK: Australian Trade Union Representative Handbook, by John Mathews. Pluto Press, $19.95, and available through TUTA or union offices.

It is just over ten years since Patrick Kinnersley’s The Hazards of Work: How to Fight Them (Pluto Press, 1973), was published. This book provided workers with the first definitive study dealing with the growing realisation that work hazards presented far greater problems than the dangers of physical injury and the more apparent toxic chemicals. It represented a milestone, and a basis for the development of on-the-job struggles for reasonable standards of health and safety.

It soon became obvious, in the light of the rapid increase in available information, that something more was required. The Hazards of Work appeared only a year after the release of the Robens Report and necessarily could not provide a critique of its implementation. Material on a number of matters including the all-important subject of repetitive strain injury was insufficient, and the detail on the British legal system was largely irrelevant in this country. Accordingly, there has been space for an up-to-date work dealing with the Australian occupational environment.

This space has now been occupied by John Mathews' Health and Safety at Work, to the extent that, given the authority and detail of its contents, it must have a significant bearing on the direction of work in the occupational health and safety field for years to come. For this reason, it should be the subject of the closest scrutiny, its strengths recognised and used, and its apparent weaknesses examined and discussed.

The Myth of Danger Money

Mathews commences his book with a graphic account of the death of an electrical fitter and, in detailing the circumstances, exposes the myth of the “careless worker”. In the same chapter he also makes the most important point that many workers reject the idea of safety, because it is associated with extra discipline and meaningless procedures. Unfortunately, he proceeds with another myth: that past trade union policies were to trade safety for danger money. This assertion has often been made, though usually by interests antipathetic to the trade union movement. It is true that some backward sections of the union movement did trade safety, but to promote this as a general policy has no more validity than assertions about the “careless worker”.

What is important is that this assertion expunges the life and work of magnificent trade unionists, and the splendid militancy of many shop floor workers. In Victoria, that included people like Paddy Malone, the forgotten man of the BLF, Jim Roulston and Stan Willis of the Boilermakers Society, and George Seelaf of the Meat Industry Union. I am sure their counterparts existed in other states. Jim Healy of the Waterside Workers afforded the highest priority to health and safety and the right to work in dignity.

The crucial difference between the quality of leadership in the past and present is the body of knowledge now available for the development of policy.

The British Model

Mathews’ book is subtitled "Australian Trade Union Representatives Handbook". It has been clearly written for this newly emerging role in the Australian workplace, basing itself firmly on ACTU policy which, in turn, follows the British model set up under their Health and Safety at Work Act of 1974.

This act followed the findings and philosophy of the Robens Report: In the United Kingdom, the Committee on Health and Safety at Work were strongly in favour of self-regulation and the voluntary approach (The Robens Committee, 1972) the fundamental premise upon which they based their report was that “the most important single reason for accidents at work is apathy” and that this would not be overcome “so long as people were encouraged to think that safety and health at work could be ensured by an ever-expanding body of legal regulations enforced by an ever-increasing army of inspectors”. They concluded from this that the primary responsibility for doing something about the present levels of occupational accidents and disease lay both with those who create the rules and those who work with them. Proper recognition of this responsibility required that both employers and employees should make a greater voluntary effort to reduce current levels of work-related injury. (Neil Cunningham and W.B. Creighton, “Industrial Safety Law in Social and Political Perspective” in R. Tomasic, Legislation and Society in Australia, Allen and Unwin, 1980, p. 148.)

Power of Representatives

In an address to the August 1984 meeting of the Melbourne Workers Health Action Group (WHAG), Breen Creighton reported
on two studies on the extent of safety committees and representatives in Britain. One from 1981 showed that seventy percent of all workplaces had committees, safety representatives or both, and that these seventy percent of workplaces covered ninety percent of the workforce.

His comments on their impact were somewhat ambivalent, but he did say “the general feeling I got was that they were a quiet success”

Translating the above figures into the Australian industrial environment must be a matter of speculation. My personal observation as a worker and an activist in a number of establishments, leads me to the firm conviction that safety representatives will be as effective as the shop steward in any given workplace. That is, the relationship of forces in each workplace will determine whether the safety representative acts on behalf of the workers, or is so influenced by management as to be part of the processes of control. It is not uncommon, for example, for ethnic workers to believe that the shop steward is part of the managerial process.

This must not be taken as a criticism of the shop steward movement, but the fact that this applies, to some degree, inevitably leads to concern that the safety representative can be effective only in a situation where shop floor strength or job permanency provides protection from employers' powers to terminate employment or to victimise in other ways.

At least one writer has drawn attention to these problems with the British scheme:

The conclusion that very definitely emerges is that the self-help model is ... an inadequate prescription for maintaining and improving health and safety standards at work when labour market forces are unfavourable to employees. In these circumstances, it is inevitable that employees will find that their most effective defences lie with the external inspectorates. It follows that there is seemingly little utility for employees in moving from laws of a mandatory kind to codes of practice which are administered by self-help methods when the employment climate is adverse. (Stan Jones, “Health and Safety at Work: The Self-Help Model Ten Years On. The Law Teacher, 1984, p. 129.)

Rank General Electric

Matthews uses the experience of the Melbourne Rank General Electric struggle of 1981 as an example of how an industrial dispute over the incidence and treatment of Repetitive Strain Injury produced a settlement that served as a model “that ACTU policy has built on, and other unions have been able to follow”. (p 400)

I have no quarrel with his account of the struggle (see Creighton and Micallef, Journal of Industrial Relations, September 1983) nor with the manner of its use. However, the full story of the RGE experience can be used to demonstrate another lesson.

The attitude of the RGE management was consistently hostile. In the early stages of the struggle, they had issued a document that purported to show that the incidence of RSI rose only after and because the union had distributed explanatory material on the subject. Eventually, they were able to push aside the terms of the settlement which had resulted from the dispute which the workers lost their shop floor muscle because of retrenchments following a downturn in the market.

Fate of the Unorganised

Statutory protection and agreements notwithstanding, this is the bottom line— the often unspoken but clearly understood appreciation by both sides of the power nexus, particularly in private industry. It is the final governing factor in the degree of effectiveness of the application of the Robens principle.

Braverman quotes Brecht as a

Some there are who live in darkness
While the others live in light
We see those who live in daylight
Those in darkness, out of sight.

The application of the Robens principle will provide those who have already achieved a measure of protection with greater rights. Those at or near the bottom of the work hierarchy will be little or no better off. Protection and extension of safety standards goes far beyond the appointment of safety representatives and joint union-employer health and safety agreements.

Health and Safety at Work now occupies the space available for a definitive work on the subject in the Australian environment — it is highly unlikely that anyone will try to produce an alternative in the foreseeable future. Does this then neglect that section of the workforce not covered by the authority, influence and policy of the ACTU and, if this is the case, does this lack of coverage constitute a threat to the proper implementation of that policy?

Only some fifty percent of the Australian workforce is organised into unions, and many of these are covered by unions which, either for reasons of lack of will or industrial composition, do not afford adequate coverage for their members.

Other sections of the workforce are so disadvantaged that it is virtually impossible for even the most highly motivated unions to help them. These include the fringe-dwellers of the workforce: the many out-workers, those who work in the small, often unregistered shops, young workers in fast food outlets, and many others. Some of these sectors of work present the greatest hazards. These workers are far beyond the range of the safety representative movement, and can only be protected by a vigorous and determined inspectorate equipped with the powers and human resources to deal with the problems.

Representing Broader Interests

The Australian trade union movement is faced with the twin threat of privatisation of public utilities and deregulation of industrial relations, among other things proposed by those who want to change the balance of power in the
workplace. We do not have to wait for alternative governments to implement these measures, as a degree of privatisation is already in progress in both federal and state spheres, and deregulation is continuing apace with the growth of contract labour, owner-drivers, franchise outlets and other means. Their escalation, in present times, is serious enough and the prospect of marked increase with the return of Liberal governments is indeed grim.

The politics of trade union interests are part and parcel of the politics of the country. For this reason, the ACTU, in endeavouring to retain Labor in office, must act and be seen to be acting in support of all who are disadvantaged, whether they are members of unions or not. Confinement to the parameters of the interests of its own immediate constituency can only assist reaction in the long term.

**Individual involvement**

Mathews states: "The whole emphasis of this handbook is on providing workers' health and safety representatives with the skills they need to negotiate with their employers to obtain improvement in their work organisation and environment." (p. 506) Indeed, the book does precisely that, with a positively awesome display of detail and authority. However, what it does not do is equip the representative with a guide to how to provide workers with the capacity to play a role in self-determination of their own health and safety. As Mathews sees it, the primary level of intervention is the representative, not the worker.

Given, for example, that in many instances the incidence of R.S.I. is a result of production processes involving massive capital investment, it is reasonable to assume that any health program adopted jointly with employers, would be likely to be confined to the symptomology of the onset of the condition, and provide information that would give the workers the capacity to make value judgments on the effect of the organisation and tempo of work, and involve them in trying to assert control over the production processes themselves.

A further example is provided in the section of the book dealing with organising on the job. Mathews lists eleven major issues for examination only one of which involves organising the workers, and this is confined to: "Working through the union — procedures for representatives remaining accountable, reporting back and setting up a union only health and safety committee." (p. 507)

There can be no disagreement with this and the other listed issues. They are all proper and important to the subject. What is lacking is the basic need for safety representatives to be involved in a two-way, ongoing education process that will provide them with a constant enrichment of how workers feel and react individually and collectively to their work, and will equip the workers with both formal and informal understanding of relevant issues.

The development of the capacity of the individual to make judgments on the immediate work processes is essential as a countervailing mechanism against the deskilling and alienation of our day. The corporatisation of industry and commerce has created a situation wherein the processes of ultimate decision making are located in an area so remote as to be beyond the conception of the individual worker.

This corporatisation is reflected in the trade unions which are forced to seek amalgamations in order to achieve a structure of a scale capable of developing the resources required to modern needs. This, in turn, produces an inevitable accom­­paniment of bureaucratisation.

These situations should be recognised by the trade union movement in the form of deliberate planning of compensatory strategies that should include an interventionist mechanism at the point of application of labour.

Crucial to the level of health, safety and well-being is the degree of control that the individual worker has over the work situation. Empirical studies carried out over a number of years in the compensation office of one union covering a wide range of occupations with varying degrees of risk, revealed a pattern of incidence of injury related inversely to this degree of control.

The apparently high risk area of construction work carried out by tradespeople with a high level of intervention in the conduct of work processes showed a far lesser incidence of injury, than in the mass production sector, where a largely migrant female workforce worked at the mercy of management-designed, machine-paced processes. The production press is one of the most common causes of injury yet, if these were guarded as required by law, injury should be virtually impossible.

This does not contradict or counterpose the need for a collective attitude on matters that affect "the collectivity of workers", but the single worker is a unique individual and should be able to express this individuality in some measure as it relates to his or her immediate working environment.

**Shop Floor Know-how**

Mathews makes extensive use of the work of technical experts. He quite properly sets out sufficient information and sources to provide the safety representative with the capacity for a critical evaluation of the input of these experts. It is unfortunate that this necessarily presupposes a fair level of literacy in the English language, thus making it difficult for those who are often at the greatest risk to be directly involved.

He also overlooks the level of expertise that exists on the factory floor. In a paper given at the "Break Down the Barriers" Conference on the employment of disabled people held in Canberra in 1981, an ergonomist described how he, in many circumstances, would seek advice from the particular disabled person as to the requirements of job adaptation, and then discuss the question with a maintenance tradesperson who would fabricate and install the adaptation. Similarly, shop floor know-how, acquired over a long tradition of work, often intuitive in form, can provide low-cost, effect answers to questions of health and safety.

**Health and Safety at Work** marshalls an enormous body of information which represents a valuable resource for those involved in the occupational environment. Mathews succeeds in achieving his stated purpose of equipping the safety representative with the skills required for the role. There can be argument about his presentation — I found it wordy and loaded with technical detail which could otherwise be sought out by the person involved in the particular subject.
While I accept that Mathews has the right to restrict himself to his stated audience, I am concerned that, in doing so, he has squeezed out the possibility of a more general treatment of the subject. For this reason I believe that he could well have introduced a balance by including an overall picture with ideas that cater for those outside the orbit of formal union structures.

Final judgment of the achievements of the book must be left to the safety representatives and others who must endeavour to put its teachings into practice. It is certainly the most authoritative and detailed collection of technical information available in the English language, and for this at least, we should be thankful.

Sal Marks is a retired metalworker. He started work at the age of 14, in 1932, and in his first year on the job survived a near-fatal accident which caused a permanent minor disability.

At 20, he was a shop steward in the Amalgamated Engineering Union. He received an early introduction to the traditional attitudes of the union:

"I was quickly told 'never sell your conditions' by a shellback from the District Committee, and I can clearly remember many struggles on the shop floor over health and safety issues over that period."

After working for 14 years at Ford's Broadmeadows plant, he became compensation officer for the AMWU in 1976. He was largely responsible for the union's initial policy on health and safety, possibly the first definitive policy produced within the Australian union movement on the subject.

He is a foundation member of the Melbourne Workers Health Action Group, and is currently heavily involved with the Richmond Workers Health Resource Centre.

"Fifty years of work left its marks — industrial deafness, a most vexing frosty morning whiterfinger (loss of feeling in the thumbs caused by vibration), a chronic but well-managed back condition, and sundry aches which are a possible combination of aging and work trauma."
AUSTRALIA'S BEST KEPT SECRET

Reviewed by
Andre D'Cruz


The economic and social consequences of the recession on the industrial city of Wollongong on the NSW coast have been staggering.

In the early 1980s, the combined effect of the disastrous Australian steel crisis and a subsequent restructuring of steel manufacturing left the region in a severely depressed condition.

Wollongong's strong blue-collar community was to be the ultimate victim of this, “the worst recession in post-war history” — 8,000 of their number were made redundant (unemployed) with little hope of regaining their jobs.

SCB explores the economic and social dynamics of the crisis, placing specific emphasis on the “human” response to it. It is a study of great significance to South Coast people because it is still very relevant — about 20 percent of the area's workforce remain unemployed.

Wollongong's problems began in 1982 when BHP — the largest employer in the region and the mainstay of the national steel industry — realised it was in serious trouble.

Diminishing markets, poor long-term management, a major recession and inefficient manufacturing methods had brought the Big Australian to the financial brink.

The only way left to avoid absolute corporate collapse was to accelerate the technological restructuring of the steel industry. BHP duly introduced a rationalisation program and brought new, less labour-reliant means of steel production to its South Coast works.

The economic result of this “technological solution” was that fewer workers were needed to manufacture more steel: the social consequence was mass unemployment in the Steel City — an area dependent on the BHP plant and affiliated industries for two-thirds of its income.

As the industrial workforce was cut down from over 18,000 to 10,000, the people of Wollongong — who had ridden on boom time prosperity for two decades — began to face a "social holocaust".

Steel City Blues is the product of over 100 interviews with persons somehow affected by the economic downturn in the region — from disillusioned school kids unsure of their future, through to BHP bosses, the men who made the crippling decisions.

How these people adapted to the recession and what courses of action they have taken to overcome the problems associated with it is the chief focus of the book.

Julianna Schultz creates a striking picture of the difficulties which sectors of the steel community were made to confront at this time. She also objectively analyses the cause of the crisis, thereby placing it in perspective for the uninformed reader.

The depiction of the Kemira miners' strike, and other forms of working class protest, highlight Schultz's unbiased approach towards management/labour conflict. While it is made clear that Wollongong is a city proud of its activism and union heritage, no "sides" are taken in the book's final conclusions.

Indeed, Schultz seems to maintain a rather cool attitude when mentioning political, class or industrial action and relies more on the discussion of social effects to make her lasting points.

The results of the crisis have been far-reaching, with legal proceedings against BHP by retrenched female workers making the news recently.

The “class” spawned from the collapse of the Steel City — the industrially redundant — remain a significant percentage of the region's population. They are still suffering the feelings of guilt, worthlessness and insecurity linked to long-term unemployment. However, the serious problems of these people just break the surface...

To appreciate the fuller “human” dimensions of Wollongong's struggle, it is worth reading about it first hand.

BHP announced a massive profit of over $150 million in November 1985. The bosses had got their recovery. Steel City Blues tells of the human cost.

Andre D'Cruz until recently was a resident of Wollongong.
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