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AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND THE CURRENCY OF REFORM

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Science has now allowed millions of humans to understand the strange orbit of Halley's comet, to predict its arrival, its brightness, and even penetrate the comet itself, and wonder of wonders, send back images of its burning heart. To our living parents and grandparents, such scientific achievements join an already long list which, as my dad used to say, once existed only in Buck Rogers, the science fiction comic. Halley returned, though, to a world in which the results of science are perceived as a mixed blessing.

In the days before modern science developed, all kinds of ignorant "explanations" were proposed about Halley's appearance and meaning. It's amusing to read how hysteria about the comet's return in 1910 and 1834 included fears about the earth being enveloped in toxic "comet gas" or that the newly harnessed electricity would run riot under the comet's influence. Historically, comets have been interpreted as explanations for actual events. Some say the star of Bethlehem which, in Biblical myth, guided the three wise men to the infant Jesus could have been Halley in 11 BC; and the Romans interpreted comets as an omen of misfortune.

But can we afford to be superior today? Halley returns to a world in which superstition, not science, is gaining more acceptance. Subjects such as astrology ("What star are you?") are being taken more seriously. Pseudo-science, such as creationism, is being taught in US and Australian schools. If the anti-scientific impulse was purely irrational it would be simple to dispose of. But millions of people are acutely aware that human life on the planet could end because of the comet's impact. Science fiction writers and futurologists of the 'fifties thought that science would be the New Religion, but, as they say in the scriptures, that has not come to pass.

Seeing Halley links us with previous generations of humans who have stared with wonder at the starry skies, but it also serves to emphasise that we are the first generation to see religion displaced from its central role as a unifying philosophy and world view.

The earliest days of human life saw not only a struggle to survive and eat, but also to understand. When lightning and thunder were beyond the understanding of early humans, they created gods in their own image to explain them. Today, the power of the human mind to explain the physical world has made enormous strides. Science appears triumphant, yet there still seems to be a need for something perceived as beyond the realm of the physical and material.

For a growing number, creationism, which is anti-scientific and denies the findings of evolution, acts as a rallying point for this need. It is connected to a fundamentalist religion that emphasises old-fashioned values and simple moral choices. Christian fundamentalism (and, for that matter, the Islamic variety, too) seems to be a backlash and an attempt at renewal from organised religion against the processes which have undermined it.

But, for others, the absence of religion in our culture is being filled by the environment movement which has a very practical side, but also taps the need for something akin to spirituality, in this case a relationship with Nature. At its most "cosmic", it is a form of nature worship, a mystical search for "oneness" and an individual solution to the world's problems. If you have shivered alone on top of one of the peaks of the Snowy Mountains at dawn, or watched the sun rise over the Olgas—or, perhaps, watched Halley travel across the Milky Way and the infinite heavens, then you may get a glimpse of this need.

Every society must have some form of religion, whether it is called that or not, to respond to the yearning for "the spiritual", and to provide a philosophy and values to live by. Perhaps creationism and the fundamentalist world view of which it is part will fill that need. Certainly that seems to be the case in parts of the USA. Or perhaps by the time Halley returns in 2062 it will be a form of environmentalism—a rationally based "worship" of nature—which will become one of the new, popular religions of the 21st century.

DAVID McKnight
BRIEFINGS

AUSTRALIAN LEFT REVIEW 3

AQUINO AND THE LEFT

The early part of this year saw dramatic and unexpected changes to the Philippines government. While not dwelling too much on the details of the events, a brief outline will set the context for the current situation.

Prior to the February changeover, the Philippines was ruled by the Marcos dictatorship, strongly backed by the United States. However, Marcos was becoming increasingly politically isolated within the Philippines, and his attempt to maintain his 20-year stranglehold marked by an increase in human rights abuses, and a failure to take account of the poverty of the mass of the Filipino people.

Marcos, now defeated and departed, called a snap election in November 1985, under pressure from his US backers who wanted to see at least a veneer of democracy and liberalisation in their largest military reserve in Asia.

Both the election campaign and the election itself were marked by violence and corruption, resulting in the massive upsurge of what is popularly called "People's Power". The upsurge was totally unexpected — by the US, the left, and the whole gamut of the Philippines political machinery. Even the church, which backed the upsurge, could not have known that it was possible. In fact, the US was repeatedly forced to modify its policy as events unfurled and the situation became more and more untenable for Marcos.

The triumph of the left would have supported Aquino were it not for the defection of Juan Ponce Enrile and Fidel Ramos, both military leaders once firmly placed in the Marcos camp. Both men are heavily in favour of US bases and still control the Armed Force of the Philippines (AFP) a major stumbling block for the left and Aquino.

Aquino herself has remained neutral on the question of bases, agreeing to honour the current agreement and take a referendum of the people at the end of the lease.

Given the fragile situation which now exists in the Philippines, what can we expect from Aquino, and what hope is there for the left? Clearly, the US would prefer Aquino to outmanoeuvre the left, but whether she will, or wants to, is another question. It is unlikely, however, that her personal popularity, stemming as it does from a wave of resistance against Marcos and some sentimental support derived from the assassination of her husband, Ninoy, rather than in any firm belief in her capacity to change anything, will be enough. In fact, she is an unknown quantity to the majority of Filipinos.

We are left with a situation where the Philippines is still governed by a traditional elite, composed into a shaky coalition. Briefly, the power blocs can be identified as:

- The military, pro-US faction, led by Enrile and Ramos;
- the Catholic Church/Jesuit Mafia under the influence of Cardinal Sin;
- Laurel's (Prime Minister) Unido Party, very much a part of the ruling elite and fluctuating on the issue of bases (Laurel favours a national plebiscite); and
- Aquino's Lakasng Bayan, with a liberalisation/human rights philosophy but no party machinery to back it up.

There are a number of progressives within the administration, including Jose Diokno and Lorenzo Tanada, both human rights advocates, and others, who stood in opposition to the Marcos dictatorship.

While the direction Aquino takes is not predetermined, it is unlikely that the landowning elite will allow her to really come to grips with the vital issue of land reform, an important prerequisite for changing the lives of the people in the rural areas. It should also be noted that Aquino's alliance with Enrile and Ramos is very fragile. In fact, Enrile has warned that the AFP "reform movement" would be "displeased" if he were fired from his position as Defence Minister.

The military remains intact and if, as it is expected, Aquino's attempts to promote land reform fail, the AFP will be a revitalised force to unleash against the New People's Army when they increase the armed struggle in the rural areas.

Aquino has already begun to implement reforms. For example, at the May Day rally in Manila this year, she announced a range of reforms to the labour code, promising to uphold ILO conventions and make changes to the labour laws. She is moving towards creating the middle ground that the US wants.

Some sections of the Philippines left predict an erosion of the middle ground that has emerged under Aquino, and an eventual return to civil war, resulting in a left victory. However, it is possible that the ruling classes will decide that there are long term gains to be made by measures of liberalisation.

Aquino's biggest stumbling block in the liberalisation program is the economy. The Philippines is the most indebted country in Asia. It has a massive investment in infrastructure but few profitable exports. It is under heavy pressure from the IMF/World Bank to implement austerity measures but, given the economic position of the majority of Filipinos, it is hard to imagine how much more austere it could get. Foreign banks are unlikely to see the Philippines economy as a means of growth and the majority of people in poverty are unlikely to see any real difference between Aquino's government and the Marcos dictatorship.

The left finds itself in a complex situation and one for which it admits it was unprepared. However, the current situation does provide a "holiday period" where the progressive and revolutionary forces can press on with open and legal struggle, riding on the momentum of people's power.
The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), the leading force in the National Democratic Front, has called for a campaign that emphasises the close connection of fascism with imperialism and feudalism, linking also the questions of the people’s economic welfare and their struggle against exploitation.

It is important that the CPP broadens its influence among the Filipino people, supporting the initiatives of the liberal and progressive forces both inside and outside government. It must support these initiatives whether or not they are closely co-ordinated with its own organisations and activities, and statements released by the CPP indicate that this is its current strategy.

It will work two ways, through working with and in the mass movements, the CPP can strengthen the movement and encourage its direction, and also strengthen itself.

Meanwhile, the legal left has to tread carefully the line between support for Aquino and maintaining its integrity and political clout. Currently, the major coalition of the mass movements, BAYAN, is giving critical support to the Aquino government, but maintaining its right to disagree and make progressive demands. BAYAN will also be looking to increase the depth of its support and building itself up for any future turn to the right.

SHERIL BERKOVITCH

GETTING TOGETHER BETTER THAN EVER

The Getting Together Conference held in Sydney over the Easter weekend attracted approximately five hundred delegates from all over Australia. The Tasmanian Wilderness Society must be given credit for the efforts they made to facilitate such a large-scale gathering of “greens” and other peace/environmental activists. Workshops were conducted on a wide range of subjects including the role of peace education, alternative investment strategies, alternative technology, deep ecology, eco-feminism, and the trade unions’ relationship to ecology.

It was quite evident that the conference shared a deep concern, not just for conservation and disarmament, but also for issues of social justice such as Aboriginal land rights. The conference unanimously supported a proposal from the Broad Left Conference condemning the federal government for its backdown on land rights and its efforts to disband the Northern Lands Council.

The fact that the Getting Together Conference occurred simultaneously with the Broad Left Conference was probably accidental but nonetheless highlights the differences in the way solutions to current problems are seen by the two broad groupings involved. We should, however, be careful not to oversimplify the nature of the so-called “green” movement.

Just as the organised left in Australia is diverse so, too, there are many different interest groups who share a green perspective. That is, organisations and individuals with interests as diverse as conservation, animal liberation, Aboriginal land rights, feminism, anti-nuclear activism, green politics, alternative life styles, etc., strongly tend to share ideals which involve a nuclear-free Australia, a sound conservation program based on non-exploitative economic policies, and social justice. This consensus was apparent in large number of broad policy resolutions passed unanimously (bar the odd philosophical quibble) at one of the plenary sessions.

Despite this apparent unity of aims, major differences emerged between green/green and red/green. Between the greens there are differences about political strategies. In a climate of deep political cynicism some held that all political structures were, by their nature, corrupting and that the peace movement was morally obliged not to participate in the formation of yet another hierarchy which would oppress minority groups. This perspective led to calls for non-violent civil disobedience and grassroots networking. Political action at the local council level was held to be effective, providing grassroots involvement was maintained. The other perspective was that some effective political structure is needed at both state and federal levels, and that this was indeed possible, given the broad agreements between greens.

This focus on grassroots activism is present also in the European Green Community where power has been directed away from parliamentary politics. The situation is different in Australia, however, since the closest we have to an organised green presence is Senator Jo Vallentine, the independent who ran for the Nuclear Disarmament Party in the last elections. There is room, therefore, for concern that large numbers of Australians will be disenfranchised at the next federal election. Despite these differences, and others, there was a strong sense of moral community, and an as yet loosely defined coalition of groups and individuals has emerged from the Coming Together Conference. In addition, a coalition newsletter is in process.

Many of those at the conference were familiar with the broad ideas of the left in Australia. There was sympathy with the left’s concern for social justice and equity, but there was objection to the left’s traditional emphasis on economic analysis. Increasingly, it is seen that the right and left are engaged in a struggle for the spoils of relatively unrestrained development — this struggle is seen as costing the earth. There is also frustration with the left’s inability to use its trade union muscle, in particular to halt the export of uranium and to support ecological struggles. The philosophy and style of the “old left” (which remains a popular stereotype of left politics) is not as asset if you are green. Centralised
hierarchies, emphasis on labour at the expense of environment, and a high rate of in-fighting are actually some of the causes of the political disaffection which significantly facilitated the Getting Together Conference.

In some minds, though, a more important immediate concern is the ground shared by these two popular movements and whether some working alliance is possible between the left and the ecologically based protest which mostly occurs outside the framework of the organised left. The most promising of these common grounds is indicated in the Broad Left Conference's proposal to work towards policies based on environmentally sustainable economics. Current issues like the preservation of rainforests and the relocation of workers in the woodchip industry are matters that need cooperation between workers, unions and conservationists. Whatever shared antipathy to the conservative Hawke government there is should make that dialogue so much easier.

TOM JAGTENBERG

NATIONAL AGENDA FOR WOMEN

Women's organisations have until August to contribute to the federal government's National Agenda for Women. The agenda, announced in parliament last November by Prime Minister Hawke, is meant to establish a federal government program of action on women's issues up to the end of the century. In Hawkespeak, this means giving women "a choice ... a say ... a fair go".

The National Agenda was the result of the government's participation in the UN End of Decade for Women Conference in Nairobi, where the Australian government endorsed the main conference document which set out a plan of action till the year 2000. The Australian National agenda is an attempt at bringing it all back home.

The Office of the Status of Women is responsible, in the first place, for compiling the agenda. It is holding nation-wide discussions with a wide variety of women's organisations up until August, before completing the agenda for presentation to cabinet.

As part of the consultation, the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) received funding from the OSW for a National Agenda for Women Conference last April. Around 500 women participated, representing an impressive diversity of organisations and views.

Among the hundreds of resolutions supported by conference participants (resolutions were adopted by majority votes) were calls for equal pay for women, universal and affordable child care, increases in family allowances and the abolition of the dependent spouse rebate, a single national superannuation scheme, and the introduction of unemployment benefits for married women and those in de facto relationships.

Senator Susan Ryan, the Minister assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women, speaking at the conference, appealed for women's organisations to avoid the "shopping list" mentality which lacked a thorough economic and political approach to issues. "It is not good enough for WEL to say: 'There are 200 things we want...we just want those 200 things or we will sell out.'" This is unjustified criticism of the women's movement.

Whether the women's movement is willing or able to agree on a list of priorities for government action to assist women is debatable. However, it is unrealistic to believe that various sections of the women's movement will postpone their programs for change or defer to the "greater good" of a National Agenda, just as it is unrealistic to expect the Wilderness Society to reduce its demands on government because the National Trust wants priority for the preservation of old buildings.

The Accord is, in its own peculiar way, an agreed agenda for joint government/union movement action in a wide variety of areas from taxation to education, to wages and back. But government ministers would not deride it as a "shopping list" because it is intended to cover all those facets of government activity which affect Australian workers.

A National Agenda for women, though problematic, is not a bad idea. We can argue that an embryonic "agenda" already exists since the women's movement places great emphasis on discussing and changing ideas. Most women would find it a relatively easy task to list the areas in which they would support government action, those services which should receive additional funding, and so on. But there will be important variations in priorities and not all women will agree exactly on what is to be done.

Labor governments often seem to have difficulty in relating to movements. They see them as too demanding, as unrealistic, as unwilling to see the limitations which prevent governments from giving their all.

Nevertheless, it is in the interests of the women's movements to participate with the Office of the Status of Women and Labor women parliamentarians to establish an agenda for action. It is a valuable tool for activists to know what governments are planning in advance. It wouldn't harm the government to know, either.

But if the federal government is asking the women's movement to make a commitment to a National Agenda for Women, it must also be prepared to do the same. If the government continues its current economic programs it is difficult to believe that it will abide by any long-term plan to relocate resources so that women will get their "choice .... say .... fair go".

LOUISE CONNOR

AUSTRALIA'S PACIFIC CONNECTIONS

Australia's foreign policies towards the Pacific came under close scrutiny at a significant national conference held in Sydney over the Anzac Day weekend (April 25-27).

Organised by the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP) Committee, the conference, entitled "Australia's Pacific Connections: a Regional Analysis" attracted some 300 participants from all states. They included representatives from a wide range of church, aid, peace and trade union organisations, as well as many individual activists from peace, solidarity and Aboriginal groups.

Indigenous representatives contributed much insight and first-hand knowledge into the conference discussions about their struggles and the effects of Australia's policies in the Pacific island states.

Pacific speakers included Susanna Ounei from Kanaky (New Caledonia), representing the FLNKS; Julian Riklon from the Kwajalein Atoll Landowners Corporation in the Marshall Islands; Wadan Narsey from the Economics Department of the University of the South Pacific and Amelia Rokotuivuna, an activist in the Fiji Anti-Nuclear Group; Joy Balazo from the Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace in the Philippines, and Lopeti Senituli from Tonga.

The issues of Aboriginal land rights and self-determination and the effects of nuclear testing were strongly presented by Pat Dodson from the National Federation of Land Councils and Archie Barton from the Maralinga Tjarutja. Karen Flick opened the conference and welcomed the Pacific guests on behalf of Aboriginal people.

Throughout the conference, participants were exposed to the reality of the direct connections between nuclear/military developments and self-determination/independence issues, in our region. Since the first Nuclear Free Pacific conference in Australia in 1980, a greater awareness about these links and about the significance of the Pacific region, has been growing among peace movement activists and the wider community.

The Pacific Connections Conference was a further step in the process of analysing Australia's role in the Pacific — politically, economically, culturally and militarily — and working towards alternatives.

Seminars examined Australia's relationships with Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, France in the Pacific, the Pacific Economic Basin, Australian Aid Programs, Militarisation of the Pacific, the Superpower Arms Race and Australia's Defence and Foreign Policies.

Action/strategy oriented workshops covered a wide range of issues and campaigns which are underway. They were a valuable opportunity for better co-ordination and networking between activists involved in campaigns such as US Bases, nuclear warship visits, the nuclear fuel cycle, support for struggles in the Philippines, Micronesia and Kanaky, Aboriginal land rights, etc.

The conference clearly showed the significance of the NFIP movement which has developed over the last 5-6 years, not only in Australia but throughout the Pacific region. The issues inherent in the long-term goal of achieving a genuinely nuclear free and independent Pacific are now more widely understood within the Australian peace movement and other concerned organisations.

The conference opened up further possibilities and a renewed commitment to continue work around the many areas examined. Over the next few months, several campaigns will be undertaken including an International 'Disarm the Seas' action in June, work towards the South Pacific Forum in August, aimed at achieving a stronger South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, and participation in an NFIP regional conference in Fiji prior to the Forum.

BEVERLEY SYMONS

Further information and Conference Report available from NFIP Committee, P.O. Box A243 Sydney South, NSW 2000. Phone (02) 267.2030.
TAKEOVERS
ON THE
HIGH SEAS
THE CORPORATE
RAIDERS

DAVID UREN

National debate on the takeover of BHP has largely focussed on the cost to taxpayers of debt-financed takeovers. The equity of the tax system is of great importance, but the broader implications of the takeover have been largely ignored.

There was an initial flurry of concern about whether or not Holmes a' Court would close down the steel division, but John Halfpenny's comment that Holmes a' Court could be no worse than the Melbourne establishment indicated that the metalworkers had accepted his assurances about maintaining the company as an integrated group.

More importantly, however, the takeover points to profound changes in both ownership and financing which are under way, and which affect the basic stability of Australian industry.

The new entrepreneurs

Robert Holmes a' Court has always fostered an image of himself as a maverick in business circles. The man who has made the biggest capital gains in Australian history described Keating's capital gains and fringe benefits taxes as courageous and progressive. He has never indulged in the union-bashing oratory or monetarist pontificating common among his peers in the business world.

However, his fellow raider Alan Bond gave the lie to this image of a sort of corporate Robin Hood when he revealed to the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal that Holmes a' Court had tried to persuade him to combine their media forces to bring down the Burke government in Western Australia.

At the time of writing (mid-May), BHP appeared to be headed for an auction between Holmes a' Court and John Elliott's Elders IXL. It is easy (and accurate) to portray Elliott as the chosen son of the Melbourne establishment. At various times in his career he has enjoyed the patronage of Rod Carnegie (related to the Clarke family), Gordon Darling, Baillieu Myer and Ian McLennan.

In quick succession, this establishment has handed him control, first of Elders, then of Carlton and United Breweries, and is now trying to do the same with BHP, rather than see them fall to Holmes a' Court (or, in the case of CUB, to the New Zealander Ron Brierley).

Yet Elliott has far more in common with those he is fighting than he has with his mentors. He is also one of the new entrepreneurs. They are quite a breed, as can be seen from the accompanying table. They have built their empires with extraordinary speed. Ten years ago, none was a force in Australian business. Today, they are reshaping a wide range of Australian industries, covering retailing, whitegoods, brewing, flour-milling, food-processing, property, media, import-export, and resources.

Their style of operation has been to seek to take over companies which are undervalued by the stockmarket. Those companies may be undervalued because their assets have been poorly used, or because their strategic significance to competitors in the same product market has not been recognised by share investors.

It is too simplistic to describe them as asset strippers, though several of their corporate prey have been left as empty shells, notably Tooth Breweries and H.C. Sleigh, both of which were bought by John Spalvins' Adelaide Steamship Company.

They are not merely after the short-term profit. Bond has invested heavily in new brewing capacity, Spalvins has substantially upgraded David Jones, and Elliott has turned an old pastoral company into a modern trading and finance group. The improvements have not been uniform — Walton's (Bond) and Clarke Rubber (Spalvins) are still in the doldrums — but in general they have surrounded themselves with highly capable managers, and have committed themselves to further development of their companies.

They differ from the traditional chief executives of large public companies because all have significant equity stakes in their empires. In the case of Holmes a' Court and Bond, those stakes are worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

They behave as owners of their empires, rather than as managers of empires that belong to someone else. Spalvins, for example, was able to commit a sum of money equivalent to more than three-quarters of Adelaide Steamship's net assets to secret purchases of BHP shares, without any reference to the public shareholders of the company, in what amounted to a personal game of poker with Holmes a' Court.

On past form both Elliott and Holmes a' Court could be expected to use the enormous cash flow of BHP to
support further ventures into even bigger takeovers overseas. Neither has given any indication of a coherent project for the future of the company.

Last year, Holmes a' Court was talking about splitting BHP up, on the basis that having separate steel, oil, and minerals companies would allow institutions greater selectivity in their investments. Anyone wanting to hold oil stocks would not have to make an investment in steel and minerals as well. He now denies that this is his intention.

There is a powerful argument for keeping the three major divisions together. After years of lobbying by BHP, the Fraser government altered the tax act in its last budget to allow losses in one part of a company to be offset against profits in another for tax purposes.

Nor is BHP a badly managed company, by the standards of Australian industry, and it is unlikely that any change in ownership would make much difference to its overall operations in the short term.

The company could be expected to play a larger role in national politics than it has in recent years. During the crisis of 1981-82, it played a rough political game, at one stage threatening to pull out of steel altogether, effectively shutting down Wollongong and Newcastle. In general, though, it has kept aloof from business organisations and broader political issues, pursuing only its own interests. This has reflected a conscious effort to avoid being seen as a sort of corporate bully, the reputation it had under Essington Lewis before World War II.

Robert Gottliebsen has made the point that a BHP controlled by either Holmes a' Court or Elliott would mean a greater concentration of personal power in a national economy than existed anywhere else in the world, rivalled only by the Oppenheimer in South Africa.

The long term performance of the company would depend on the quality of investments made from the enormous cash flow generated by BHP. BHP has to invest in the region of $1,000 million each year if it is to avoid building up idle cash reserves. A corporate raider could use that cash flow together with borrowings to make purchases ten times the size. However, this would tie the survival of BHP to the success of the ventures purchased.

At the moment, the new entrepreneurs appear to have the midas touch. It is very doubtful that they would be supported for long if things turned sour. None of them are establishment born, with the exception of Holmes a' Court, whose establishment is South African. Most are immigrants, and Brierley retains his NZ citizenship.

Their rise to such positions of wealth and power has roots far deeper than their individual talents. It is related to changes in the nature of institutional ownership of companies, and to the revolution under way in the world of banking.

Since World War II the big life insurance companies have been the dominant shareholders in Australian public companies, and their share portfolios have been managed on behalf of their thousands of policyholders. They have drawn their boards of directors from the establishment families, and through a web of cross-directorships, control of the corporate sector has been kept within a narrow circle.

Life insurance provided nearly all the funds, and the tax act encouraged such institutions to hold their shares for the long term, since any profits made from share sales were fully taxable. In the event of takeover bids, which were comparatively rare among the top fifty companies, the institutions always supported the existing management.

Perhaps nothing symbolises the marriage of corporate and institutional establishments quite so well as Melbourne's junction of William and Bourke Streets, where the BHP and AMP towers face each other. It is but a short walk for Sir James Balderstone, who heads one board and is deputy of the other.

In the 'seventies, inflation and the growth of independently-managed superannuation funds began to change things for the life offices. Inflation brought high real interest rates, and anyone wanting just a steady income was much better off holding government bonds rather than shares. At the same time, share portfolios which were not actively managed had their value eroded by inflation.

Superannuation made a difference because shares held by super funds could be traded without attracting capital gains tax. The life offices began to sell shares as well as buy them. As well, some merchant banks began bidding for superannuation business, and with surveys of super fund performance being published in the press every three months, the heat was on the managers of share portfolios to make profits.

CSR's takeover bid for Thiess in 1979 was a turning point. Bjelke-
Petersen attempted to legislate to protect the company for one of his cronies, but the institutions bailed out, accepting CSR’s money. It was the first time that such institutions had deserted a company facing takeover. There have been hundreds of cases since.

In the ‘eighties, funds management has become a highly sophisticated industry in Australia, handling in excess of $80,000 million, of which $50,000 million is in superannuation. Fund managers around the world are looking at each other’s markets to find those with the best performance. This search for performance has favoured highly leveraged, aggressive entrepreneurial managers, and the resulting footloose character of institutional capital has profoundly shaken the stability of the institutional ownership of Australian industry.

High risk banking

While institutions still dominate the market, radical changes under way in the world of banking have enabled the individuals to rival institutional abilities to marshal capital. When Bond bid for Swan Brewery, the local merchant banking subsidiary of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank made him a personal loan of $150 million. (The bank’s Australian manager resigned in protest — a few months previously Bond had been seen driving his Rolls with bald tyres, and he was rumoured to be near bankruptcy.) Three years later, the same bank lent him another $1,000 million, and Bond had half the Australian brewing industry.

Ten years ago, banks would only lend against the collateral of an asset, and then only if the borrower put up at least 25 percent, and the asset was worth at least 50 percent more than the loan. Since then, banks have discovered “cash flow lending”. They will support a loan if the borrower can show that the project it is used for will provide the cash to service the loan. Banks used to see their business as accepting deposits and recycling funds at a higher rate of interest but, today, they see themselves as risk managers who receive interest and fees in proportion to the risks they take. They no longer limit themselves to providing overdrafts to supplement the working capital of a company. The lines between debt and equity are becoming blurred as bankers take on what are fundamentally equity risks.

The nature of banking is shifting so fast that it is impossible to define clearly where it is heading. Market practices are outpacing both theoretical analysis and the legal framework. And clearly, banks are taking greater risks than they ever have before — they are lending on the security of shares when sharemarkets are at record peaks.

There is concern, even within the banking industry itself, that loans to companies which are secured by future cash flow, can become a major new problem for the world banking industry. Such lending to oil companies is already taking its toll among US banks.

The area of takeover finance is particularly risky as the banks are advancing money on the assumption that the bidder will not only get control, but also that the target company will be able to generate enough cash to cover the cost of servicing the debt.

The new entrepreneurs are thus being carried to their positions of wealth and power by forces which tend to destabilise the capital base of the corporate sector. Institutional shareholders no longer have a long-term commitment to the companies they own. And while institutional capital still tends to be long-term in character (e.g. superannuation funds), that provided by banks is quite different. The deposit base of banks is basically available at call and the banks can generally withdraw their lending whenever they need.

This is not to say that the banks are about to pull the rug from beneath Australian business, or that the new entrepreneurs are setting themselves for a fall. However, it does not augur well for the future of Australian business — or the rest of Australia — that its ultimate owners, the banks and financial institutions, have so little commitment to it.

David Uren is a Melbourne-based business journalist.
All but those who hold the narrowest view of who constitutes the left today would agree that the left is broad, diverse, and has considerable potential. There also seems to be a fairly common view that we face many problems in being able to realise that potential. The Broad Left Conference itself was one response to these problems and aimed to make some progress in establishing broader agreement on some common goals and aspirations.

We wouldn't have been there if we hadn't thought that this was a major project requiring care and hard work. The urgency of succeeding in this project was underlined by many of the discussions. I would suggest, however, that much of the very important work that is already performed by the left goes unrewarded because socialist policies are in crisis at a number of levels. This is reflected in widespread scepticism about socialism as it has been presented in the past and in the possibilities of constructing a superior form of socialist society today.

If we are unable to tackle this problem at the same time as we shape other goals, we will continue to find many of our efforts are unable to be directed towards long-term solutions to social, cultural and economic problems.

The main points of my argument about this problem are as follows:

* That one of the most basic problems confronting the left today is how to devise a vision of socialism and a strategy that touches the consciousness of the majority of the Australian people.
* That we need to strengthen forms of co-operation and understanding between the disparate and oft-times contradictory elements of the left.
* That these problems are closely connected to one another and their solution relies on a realisation that there are many sites of socialist struggle today and that, in general, there are no hierarchies of importance in respect of them; a realisation that models or visions of socialism need to draw on the concerns of all these arenas of socialist struggle; and that both short and long term socialist solutions require the continued existence of autonomous movements and more developed forms of political co-operation, including coalitions and parties.

The links between these problems and the fundamental theoretical issues that underlie them need to be explored in the course of developing immediate points of co-operation and programs.

The alternative

There are many reasons why the majority of Australians don't identify with socialism. Of course, we don't expect the tiny minority who own most of the resources to do so. But there is still the overwhelming majority, most of whom are workers. While quite a few of these also do quite well under capitalism, even among them there is strong dissatisfaction — about the assault on the environment, on women's rights, on Aborigines, on living standards, on social welfare and the threat of nuclear holocaust among others. Yet, despite all of the potential that exists, we have to say that socialism as an alternative has not gained in popularity in recent times.

These problems can't be overcome simply by exposing the many sins of capitalism. Nor is it enough to criticise the obvious failures of the "socialist" countries, or of a social democracy that develops bureaucratic public sectors in the name of socialism.

People seem to need more tangible guarantees about what socialism could be. Even in the realm of the economy, when
change from private to public ownership is supposed to be
the most dynamic aspect of socialism, there are many
unsolved problems. The relationship between the market
and planning, and the plan and individual initiative are as
yet unresolved questions. As one visiting Chinese comrade
put it recently — "If we put everything into the plan we don't
even have time to read it, let alone carry it out".

We also know that changing from public to private
ownership of the means of production won't necessarily
solve all the other contradictions, but may perpetuate them
or reproduce them in new forms. Obvious examples are
unemployment, repression, state control of women's
fertility, and the stabilisation of the family as an economic
unit, armed hostility between "socialist" states, nuclear
power stations and other environmental problems, as well as
cultural and political conformity. These problems exist
alongside an over-centralised state apparatus and
bureaucratic practices which impede or deny the possibility
of political pluralism under socialism and the practice of a
developed worker-consumer control of society.

No one is going to believe that we can produce something
different simply because we criticise others or proclaim
ourselves to have different aims. Alternatives must also exist
in our practice and in the theory and goals that guide our
work. The possibility for this already exists in the many
political movements that have developed in the past 15-20
years as the result of the multiple contradictions that beset
patriarchal capitalism.

The elements of a new society are being sketched by the
struggles for land rights, to keep uranium in the ground and
foreign bases out of Australia, against private ownership
and exploitation, to preserve some of the finite resources of
the earth, seas, and atmosphere, to end the sexual division of
labour and the sexual exploitation of women, to overcome
racism and the economic and cultural imperialism of
industrially developed countries.

A new socialist vision

In order to realise the potential for such a socialist model
we must move beyond seeing the workers' movement and its
central economic interests as being the only pivot for
socialism. A new socialist vision should reflect the concerns
of all the radical movements as well as the economic
imperative.

This is not to suggest that we must discard everything
from the past but, while drawing on the rich store-house of
socialist, feminist and radical theory and practice, we need
to discard ideas that no longer assist the development of a
contemporary socialist practice. I include in this "discard"
basket the idea that we need to build a movement based on
class that will "represent" all liberationary struggles. Such an
aim has as its logical conclusion the need for a vanguard
party that sees all, hears all and always has the right line—
or at least until a new generation of leaders exposes its
shortcomings.

'Strong, diverse, and with considerable potential':
of contradictions. Secondly, that, because of this process, the resolution of contradictions and healthy dynamic political life require specific forms of political organisation that represents the interests of those affected — in a sense, a network of social and trade unions representing diverse interests.

This does not, however, mean that parties and/or coalitions are not needed, for no area of political representation is an island, but intersects with and requires complex interaction with, other forces as well as autonomy.

The dynamism of autonomy

The dynamic role of autonomous political activity in respect to society as a whole, as well as in changing socialist goals and priorities, can be seen if we take a glance at the women's movement. Apart from brief periods of social aberration, such as wartime, it is difficult to find advances in the social position of women, as a sex, that have not been accompanied by a vocal or strong women's movement. The flowering of socialist feminism in the late 19th and early 20th century was surrounded by a mass feminist movement for the right to vote, and the women's liberation movements of the '70s were a complex amalgam of broadly-based issues and radical politics which helped to transform socialist politics and sections of the labor movement.

The theories produced by feminists and other autonomous movements were influential in such changes, but the other decisive element was their political strength and activism. Where political interests have no strong political representation they tend to become marginalised and patronised by pious resolutions. But, where vigorous political movements exist and share some common view of long-term goals — such as a common view of what socialism is — they can help to transform the political agenda, including the content of class struggle.

Like the early socialists and Marxists, contemporary feminists, environmentalists, Aborigines and others have churned up and questioned the prevailing ways of explaining the world and have suggested new models for future social, racial and sexual relationships. They have reawakened hope for a more liberated and just society.

At the same time, most of us are here because we have also experienced limitations in our own specific areas of work. We have come to realise the need not only to be immersed in the practice and theory of individual and autonomous movements, but also to make a commitment to finding ways to promote cross-overs and joint activity. It is impossible, for example, to think of how we can defend and extend any of the gains made in public health, whether it is in community, women's, Aboriginal or other health areas,
without also making a co-operative and concerted effort to save public health from the inroads of privatisation — the assaults of medical specialists and private profiters, including the assault on Medicare.

There are many pitfalls to coalition politics but, in actual political practice, as opposed to the grand plan, there are always pitfalls. I, personally, have been unable to find any easy ways to confront class, sex, race, environmental, age, disability, sexual preference, and other prejudices in coalitions and other forms of co-operative political work. But where there is sufficient common ground to make cooperation possible, there are also some avenues for interaction on issues around which there is not so much common agreement, and the existence of autonomous movements gives weight to this. So that, while we might have a strong argument for co-operation on health care, one would not counsel Aborigines to give up their autonomous movement for sovereignty and land rights, or women their autonomous concerns about women’s rights to control their own bodies and other issues.

A new kind of party

I also believe that a political party committed to the style of politics I have described, i.e. commitment to autonomous radical movements, and willingness to draw on the whole storehouse of socialist, feminist and radical theory where it helps to promote a modern socialist vision and practice, can also play an important part in such a process.

The role of such a party should not be to substitute itself for the mass movements or to establish for itself the role of bestowing accumulated wisdom. Its basic role should be a commitment to political work in all mass movements for social justice and change, and a desire to illustrate concretely the connections between the various sites of exploitation and oppression and the forms of resistance that can be developed around them. I see it as also playing a role in helping to develop marxist-feminist-socialist theory and education, helping to develop programs and strategies, as well as helping to promote diverse forms of coalitions and alliances within the broad left movement.

I cannot envisage a political party which incorporates the whole of the left. Many are dedicated to work in the Labor Party, others to vanguardism of various descriptions and others, again, to belonging to no party at all. But I do think that there is the basis for a far more effective left political party than already exists.

Why do it at all? The two main alternatives offering are to work in the Labor Party or to continue to be satisfied with the loose networks that presently exist. In respect of the latter, there is a strong argument to support the need for these informal networks to have firmer links. A new party could also adopt more of the network form of organisation and much less of the centralised party form. If such a party were serviced by an open newspaper and journal, these could play a crucial role in promoting discussion and suggesting directions for theoretical and practical work.

Such a party could bring together activists but not seek to strait-jacket or dominate their work in mass movements. Unity of purpose could spring from shared strategies and programs, not the forming of tight blocks in political movements. A viable left party could also help to close what I believe to be a damaging split in the development of the two most dynamic theories about social change — marxism and feminism. I refer to their increasing integration into academia and less and less into the specific problems of political practice and movements. This is not a question of separating theoretical development from the realm of intellectuals, who play a very important part in the whole socialist process, but of returning the two disciplines to the environments which produced them, and the application of theory to the problems of developing political practice.

In the short and long term, the problem of how to construct more effective forms of left organisation is as much part of the process of building towards socialism as any program or strategy. Will there ever be a day when conditions favour the formation of a mass party of the left that can heal all the splits and divisions? I don’t think so — there is certainly no model anywhere to suggest it and some evidence to show that it could only be achieved temporarily by instituting harsh disciplinary measures which are unproductive and unacceptable. Revolutionary strategy is never crystal clear and diversity is an essential element of the process. But the problem is that we tend to be immobilised by such diversity, or accept that disparate groups are the only form of left organisation to be considered, while others work in the Labor Party — some because that is where they think the left should work, and others waiting for a split or the true revolutionary vanguard to emerge.

I cannot canvass the arguments for being in or out of the Labor Party but, in respect of a more effective left party, my own experience has been that at least as many Labor Party members say that we need such a party so that they can continue their work as there are those who exhibit hostility to the project. Certainly, the work of all the left would be considerably more difficult if there was no left wing in the Labor Party. But the fate of the ALP also seems to depend on other things, and that includes a healthy extra-parliamentary left — by which I don’t mean one that has no interest in parliamentary politics, but one that is oriented towards political action and organisation that is not tied to the ballot box.

Without a more attractive alternative than exists at present, the ALP could easily become the main magnet for those on the left who want to work in a political party. There are many of us who do not consider this viable — the alternative is to see the left in the terms I have suggested and build towards a new form of left political party. If enough of the left decide that it is worth the effort it can be done.

We could build a mass party of the left that recognises that capitalism and patriarchy can only be defeated by a political struggle which is waged in the parliaments and the streets in the workplaces, in the homes and bedrooms of the nation, in the rainforests, in the suburbs and countryside, in the schools and universities, in the theatres and at and around the Aboriginal sacred sites and lands.

Joyce Stevens works at the Women’s Employment Action Centre in Sydney. She was formerly National Women’s Organiser for the Communist Party.
AFTER THE EVENT: 
BROAD LEFT VIEWPOINTS

DAVID BURCHELL

It brought together more than 1600 people from all parts of the country and from all areas of work. It brought open and constructive debate on such vexed questions as the Accord, economic strategies, the public sector, the socialist countries, the Labor government — and even, contrary to all expectations, the BLF.

It lifted the morale of most, and brought a sense of relief to many — especially those from outside the metropolises or the major left institutions — that they were not alone in their hopes and fears. The national Broad Left Conference, held in Sydney over the Easter weekend, was instantly recognisable as the largest and most timely gathering of the left over the last decade, and its influence is sure to be felt for some considerable time to come.

Possibly the most dynamic contribution to the conference’s success was the intervention of socialist-feminists, and especially the Melbourne socialist-feminist group. Among many others, Anna Kokkinos redirected the debate from the more sterile polemics over the role of the ALP to the question of grassroots alliances. Ann Sherry discussed the relationship of unions to social movements, Kate Macneill stressed the centrality of feminist insights to left economic strategies, and Penny Ryan and others visualised a future in which child care would become an integral part of working life.

The land rights movement had a high profile. Barbara Flick pointed to the inter-relationship of land rights issues and “movement” issues, while Marcia Langton, on a more cautionary note, recalled past fickleness on the part of the environmental and anti-uranium movements and called for more principled alliances in future. Helen Boyle probably reflected the emotions, if not the more serious analysis, of those involved in the debate with her parable of joining the ALP being like “trying to reform a crocodile from the inside”.

On the ALP left, by contrast, Brian Howe was noticeably reticent about the land rights debacle, preferring to cauterise rightwing economic policies both inside and outside the federal government. Frank Walker spoke on the threat of the New Right and its think-tanks. Bruce Childs and Anna Kokkinos discussed the relationship of the ALP to the left and progressive mass movements, with the former stressing what he saw as the centrality of the ALP to socialist strategy. Representing the trade union left, George Campbell provided a critical defence of the Accord and Laurie Carmichael analysed the current economic malaise and the role of government policy. Jennie George and Tricia Caswell both emphasised the impact of the women’s movement upon the trade union left.

The conference was not, and could hardly have been, a source of “instant” unity or a worker of strategic miracles. A few came away disappointed that nothing had happened in the way they had vaguely hoped it might. In a sense, this said more about the nature of such expectations than about the conference, or even the state of the left. The conference was a new kind of left gathering precisely because it did not assume that anything predetermined should ensue, or that there had to be an outcome expressable in manifesto terms.
At the same time, the conference was not, by any stretch of the imagination, a mere "talking shop". In the first place, the disavowal of cosmetic "unity" staked a good deal on the maturity of the diverse forces and groups comprising the broad left — a stake which clearly brought rewards. This meant that issues which did not offer easy solutions or consensuses were able to be discussed in an open and critical manner. In consequence, a number of the commissions which reported back to the final plenary session became vehicles for the carrying through of broad left perspectives beyond the conference itself. Notable among these were the left unions coalition meeting in Melbourne in May, and the development of a community group/union coalition. In that sense at least the conference clearly was the initiator of broader debate.

Many people had feared that calculated sectarianism could too easily triumph over a genuinely pluralistic left gathering, as had too often been the case in the past. In the event, these fears proved misplaced. Sectarian currents, unable to dominate debate by virtue of the sheer numbers of people present, were forced to the expedients of a rival evening rally and a rival press conference in order to maintain their self-isolation. It became an object lesson in the dead-end paths leading from the kinds of "narrow left" approaches.

If there was a single frustration which seemed to strike a chord among participants, it might have been that the structure of the conference tended to reinforce existing divisions and hierarchies within the left, rather than forging links between them. In large part, this was probably an inevitable side-effect of the vast range of inputs made available to the organising committee by grassroots activists. That such damaging demarcations could be overcome was evidenced again by the contribution of the Melbourne socialist-feminist group which struggled to install a feminist perspective into a range of fields far

Open and constructive debate — without 'easy solutions': participants at the Broad Left Conference.
removed from the narrowly “feminist” themes in the program.

Following the conference, ALR approached five participants - Barbara Flick, Kate MacNeil, Andrew Theophanus, Jim Falk and Kim Back - and asked them their overall impressions of the conference and its longer term significance. We asked them:

* What they felt was the major positive contribution of the conference;
* What aspect or aspects of the conference gave them the most hope for the left’s future;
* How they felt the conference responded to the problem of how to view the federal ALP government; and
* What aspects of the conference suggested to them that the left had changed its approaches and attitudes since the last major gatherings of this kind.

These are their responses.

**Barbara Flick:**

Barbara Flick works for the Western Aboriginal Legal Service in Dubbo, NSW.

I found it really easy to work with the women who were organising, and also appreciated the response we got from George Campbell and the people on the national organising committee when we were working around the land rights question and trying to get a statement into conference. It was very good the way the conference responded to that.

So I saw that as a good way to address lots of people about an issue that we felt was important at that time. It was really good the way the whole thing was organised, also the women who were working and the women who were on the panels. I didn’t expect it to happen, but I was pleasantly surprised about that.

I don’t know whether I got any hope out of it at all. I mean, we’ve given up hoping. We’ve given up thinking that we’re going to get anywhere with the left or anybody else actually, but it gave us an opportunity to contribute to the conference and, hopefully, to educate the people about what is happening in the Black community.

It was also good for us to get involved in other panels like those on nuclear disarmament, international relationships and just the position of workers in the country. But I think the left has to be much more organised. I saw the conference as a forum in which people were able to get together and talk to each other. People of the same political persuasion were actually able to work through their ideas with other people and I don’t think they would have got that opportunity anywhere else.

So, as a forum, it’s a very good idea and should go on. It should be something that happens once every six months or so. That’s the only way the left is going to get anywhere. They were forced to think a little about what is happening with women and what is happening with workers, and to work towards some sort of left philosophy about how you encompass all those things and become one force.

Not just a coalition of forces where people start thinking, well, that’s the way you think about people who are oppressed in the community, they’re not special, or they’re not different, they’re just part of your overall view of left politics and you should care about them.

I think that people on the left find it difficult to work out how to view a federal government which is supposed to be Labor and who are acting like Liberals. It is much easier to react or respond to things that the Liberal Party is doing when it is in government, and people get more active, more vocal, and campaigns seem to work much better when you know who your enemy is.

But it seems more difficult for people to get it together when there is a federal Labor government. The whole idea about another party, and all the people who supported working within the party was a difficulty and it certainly wasn’t resolved. So it makes it much more difficult to organise ourselves as a group if you’ve got these two different points of view.

People are saying, stuff it, we’ve had enough, you know they have betrayed everybody. The problem is that there aren’t many alternatives. And if there is going to be a real alternative, then a lot of work has to be done, there’s got to be a lot of educating the masses. It’s no good setting up another party which has a hierarchy and doesn’t respond to what people are saying on the ground.

But people are waiting for options and alternatives, particularly people away from the capital cities where they only have two alternatives. So that’s something that I think could and should happen — that there should be more alternatives. But, then, the way the federal government works, it’s hard to say whether you’ll have any influence anyway.
Jim Falk:

Jim Falk teaches at Wollongong University: he is the author of Taking Australia off the Map.

I think the major contribution of the Broad Left Conference was to demonstrate that the diverse groups which make up the "left" are capable of recognising that it is possible to co-operate with each other on mutually held objectives, even though differences continue in their analysis of why those objectives are important and how they should be reached.

The development of land rights as one of those objectives was also important. It represented a recognition by the left that its common objectives extend beyond its more traditionally held concerns. And, the most overwhelmingly positive feature of the conference was the breadth or feeling of goodwill by those who attended towards each other. Although factional differences continue to exist, those at the conference seemed ready to demonstrate that they are prepared to operate with each other on mutually held objectives, even though differences continue in their analysis of why those objectives are important and how they should be reached.

The largest area of disagreement seems to be how we should approach the ALP government and Accord. I don't think the conference has taken us as far forward as we need to go with this issue. Still awaiting a careful analysis of just what the Accord has achieved in comparison to what it purports to achieve, and a comparison with any damage it has also done by holding back political developments which might otherwise have occurred. However, I do not believe that the issue of the Accord did, or should, be allowed to interrupt the process of reuniting the left on a wide range of issues.

Over the last ten years since the last major left conference (the radical ecology conference) we have seen a recognition by the left that a wide range of issues, outside the traditional concerns, are issues which it can, and should, legitimately intervene in. Environmental, peace, women's, Aboriginal land rights, and issues of economic justice have, over the last ten years, been areas in which leftwing groups have intervened with great success — they have developed mass movements which extend far beyond the traditional left. This central lesson of the last ten years was fully understood by many people at the conference.

It seems to me that that recognition can provide the basis for a reuniting of the broad left into a large and growing political force in Australia over the next ten years.

Andrew Theophanus:

Andrew Theophanus is a federal Member of Parliament and a member of the Socialist Left of the Victorian ALP.

The positive contribution was that the conference led to an understanding of the issues that unite people from a number of left perspectives. It was very impressive to see a number of fundamental issues which unite the left — and these include industry policy, redistribution of wealth to the poor, Aboriginal land rights and anti-discrimination — discussed at such length.

I believe that there is room for guarded optimism as to the future of the left, provided that a number of theoretical and ideological differences can be subsumed for the sake of unity. At a time when there is an attack on the left generally from the New Right, we should not allow such theoretical differences to undermine us.

While the responses to the current direction of the ALP government were quite understandable, I do feel there was insufficient appreciation of the efforts of the left of the Labor Party which has to work under difficult circumstances and is in a minority position. The conference further confirmed my view that socialists ought to join and work within the Labor Party.

The left, I believe, is now a lot more self-critical and realistic. There is a much greater appreciation that slogans and old formulas are no longer adequate and that detailed policy development on complex issues is needed. These include such things as what is the role of the market, what is the role of the public sector.

Kate MacNeil:

Kate MacNeil works for Jobwatch and the Council of Action for Equal Pay in Melbourne.

There was general feeling among socialist-feminists that a major contribution of the conference was the acceptance of the legitimacy of the economic concerns of women and the need to place these matters firmly on the left agenda.

The presence of socialist-feminists on panels in key economic and political sessions gave a broader perspective to the issues and set the tone for more down-to-earth discussion. This, in turn, made material more accessible to the audience and encouraged people to engage in debates on issues that might otherwise be alienating.

The experience of working very successfully with socialist feminists from all around Australia during the conference has encouraged many women to establish stronger socialist-feminist networks in their own states. This will, hopefully, ensure a continued input into future activities of the left.
One of the most significant developments was the apparent acceptance by trade union representatives and left parties of the need to re-evaluate their constituency. It was recognised that many of the campaigns of unions are linked with the demands of people organising outside unions. The joint public sector/community groups campaign to defend and extend the public sector is one immediate expression of this.

It is hoped that unions, and particularly the ACTU, will heed the criticisms made of current trade union strategies favouring higher paid workers over lower paid workers and largely ignoring the needs of those outside the paid workforce.

It was particularly encouraging to see that, while the "organised" left might have been regarded as having had limited impact lately, there were large numbers of people at the conference who were clearly engaged in struggles at a grass roots level, and who spoke with the passion and anger that such involvement brings. The challenge for the left is to focus its attention more directly on the current and very real struggles of people.

A very strong feeling came through from the conference that the left must throw off its current complacency towards the Labor government. This does not have to take the form of a full-scale assault on the government but, rather, a wide mobilisation around particular demands.

Instead of getting bogged down in debates over whether we're pro- or anti- this particular Labor government, it was felt that support and encouragement should be given where positive actions are taken by the government and where the government breaks promises or acts against the interests of the people there should be united resistance. The economic policies of the government, particularly the Trigal, were identified as immediate targets for this activity.

I felt that there was considerable dissatisfaction with the Accord process which was seen by many as discouraging mobilisation around issues, and diminishing the capacity of the left to resist future attacks. It was widely accepted that this trend needs to be reversed.

Whether there has been any real change will only be able to be established over time, for, while the conference had many positive aspects, it was still very much a talk shop.

It was encouraging to see that old political divisions generally did not surface. This seemed primarily due to the fact that debate focussed on current economic and political reality rather than organisational differences. The conference articulated many demands around which all on the left can unite and which should receive widespread support from the community.

If these common demands provide the focus for unity and co-operation across the left, then there is cause for optimism. However, if energy is again diverted into organisational questions, then little will have been gained.

**Kim Back:**

Kim Back works at the Cabramatta Community Centre in Sydney and is a member of the Communist Party.

In my opinion the major achievement of the conference was the presence of a significant number of Aboriginal people, attending the conference as a whole as well as to discuss land rights — and the need this highlighted for better links between the left and the Aboriginal movement.

What gave me the most hope for the future was the way participants were interested in identifying the links between the range of different issues and movements across which activists are involved in building towards socialism. In practice, it would have been easy for people simply to have attended "their" sections of the conference, and to have remained unconnected to issues outside their own area of interest — yet mostly they chose not to do so. And the statements compiled by the various commissions at the end of the conference seemed to indicate that a broader socialist-feminist, anti-racist politics was being demanded of the left as a whole.

As far as I was concerned, the conference responded well to the challenge of how to view the ALP government. The sections of the conference I was involved in demonstrated a sensible critique of the government's backdowns in many of the areas that brought them to power in the first place — the Accord, land rights, uranium mining and welfare spending...

If I were going to criticise the conference for what it left out, I would say that there were major gaps around the area of looking concretely at multiculturalism in Australian society and within the left. This required a broader critique of multiculturalism in practice, and more analysis of the needs of ethnic minority groups — especially those from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

The conference failed to reach significant sections of activists within a number of ethnic minority groups. We also failed to look at how the structures of the left exclude people, especially people of non-English-speaking backgrounds, and especially through racism.

Another gap was around the need to develop serious responses from the left to the actual needs of a variety of exploited and oppressed groups at present marginalised in the left's perspectives. An example is the declining influence of the left among young people, and the problem of how to build forms of political activity and a political culture that involves the needs and experiences of more young people.

The conference did seem to me to indicate that certain parts of the left have changed their attitudes and approaches over the last decade. An indication of this is that after ten years of seeing active movements campaigning around issues not traditionally seen as "class" issues (although in reality they are integral to them), many people are starting to see the left as a broad concept involving many different ideas of what political action is and might be. While some areas of the left seem as if they've missed the last ten years altogether, the world of left politics in 1986 has become more open to adopting coalition-building as a stated strategy. Likewise, much of the left is gradually becoming more aware of on whose terms decisions are made in the old world of left politics — and who gets excluded.
**AFFIRMATIVE ACTION**

**FEDERAL PARLIAMENT**

**MP attacks women's bill**

By MARY-LOUISE O'CALLAGHAN

**CANBERRA:** The proposed affirmative action legislation will bring shades of Russia to Australia, the National Party MP, Mr Ian Cameron, said yesterday.

"I've never seen such a wank of a Bill in all my life," Mr Cameron said in the second reading debate on the Bill in the House of Representatives. "Why on earth do we need this sort of legislation, for God's sake?"

Referring to the requirement under the proposed legislation for companies to prepare annual reports on their affirmative action programs, Mr Cameron said: "If they don't do it, they're going to be fined. Shades of Russia, shades of Russia."

Mr Cameron claimed that the proposed legislation will establish a "vast bureaucracy" and a "Directorate of Affirmative Action," to which companies and institutions of higher learning would be required to report on the achievement of self-set forward estimates of their own affirmative action schemes.

Mr Cameron, who has remained a vocal opponent of the Bill despite a decision by the Opposition not to oppose the legislation, said affirmative action was not needed because a woman's place was in the home.

"If we have such a high unemployment rate among young people, why should women and mothers be forced into the workforce, for God's sake, when their own children are at home without a job?"

"The problem we have in Australia today, and you are not going to fix it by forcing more women into the workforce and compelling employers to take more women on."

Mr Cameron went on to say that the National Party is "nonsensical."

Mr Cameron claimed that the proposed legislation was "about giving women incentives to stay at home and bring up young Australians the way they should be brought up, and not in some specialised, rat-bag Russian-style child-care centre set up at the factory door."

Mr Cameron, who was reminded at least once by the acting deputy speaker that it was the affirmative action legislation he was talking about, also said he did not support pensions for single mothers.

"The married people in this place are sick and tired of what is going on. I have four children. I am sick and tired of working my guts out and paying taxes which are used to support unmarried mothers."

Mr Cameron suggested that there should be affirmative action for men as "practically 90 per cent of right attendants are women."

The Opposition have lined up unusually large numbers of speakers for the debate.

**Govt's long-term vision of immigration**

By ROSS DUNN

Australia's annual migration intake may increase to 170,000, the Governor-General, who is also the Governor of New South Wales, said in a speech yesterday.

"The Government's long-term vision of immigration will see a substantial increase in the number of people coming to Australia," Mr John Gorton said.

Mr Gorton said the increase would be achieved by improving the intake of skilled workers and by increasing the number of students coming to Australia.

"The Government's policy is to increase the number of people coming to Australia, and this will be achieved by improving the intake of skilled workers and by increasing the number of students coming to Australia," Mr Gorton said.

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"The Government's policy is to increase the number of people coming to Australia, and this will be achieved by improving the intake of skilled workers and by increasing the number of students coming to Australia," Mr Gorton said.
The current debate in Australia about affirmative action, particularly from the right, is deliberately mindless and confusing. We need some categories to apply to the debate which will be useful at dinner parties and other venues where people get you so angry that you turn blue and red and can't think what to say. These remarks are quite practically intended even though they may sound very theoretical.

The four categories are: (a) the issue of accurate definitions; (b) the issue of what I'll call, in shorthand, the automatic moral superiority of women; (c) the issue of class, income, and masculinity protection; and (d) the issue of using the patriarchal state, or what we might call the judo of feminism.

Point one is the issue of definitions. Much of the current debate about affirmative action deliberately confuses how the term affirmative action is used in Australia in state and federal legislation with how it has been used in the United States.

Affirmative action was invented in the United States in the 1960s as a form of presidential action by John F. Kennedy and his successors to remedy extreme social problems.

It's fair to say that the extremity of the remedy — direct, positive discrimination as we call it here, or preferential treatment for Blacks — was in response to serious social disruption, including what looked like revolutionary situations in some Black ghettos, such as Watts and Detroit. I'm not making value judgments on this, but it's very important to understand it historically.

When Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) was translated to Australia it came in a milder form. Affirmative action in Commonwealth, New South Wales and Western Australian legislation provides for targets in hiring but not quotas.

Gabriel Moens, a member of the faculty of the Sydney University Law School, has written a report on affirmative action originally commissioned by the Human Rights Commission under the Liberal government. The Labor government has, in fact, repudiated his report. There was a bit of a scandal, as I understand it, because the commission was being accused of suppressing it. But lest this precious body of scholarship be lost to posterity, it has now been published with the support of the Centre for Independent Studies, a rightwing organisation; in effect, with the support of the New Right. The study is called *Affirmative Action: The New Discrimination* and, from a newspaper account, it seems quite clear what it's about. I'll quote a choice bit which refers particularly to universities.

**Hard vs. Soft**

When referring to the difference between the American and the Australian affirmative action programs, Moens uses the terms (no comment, but consider these in the context of patriarchal language) "hard" and "soft" programs. The American programs are hard, in that they actually provide in some cases, for direct preference to people from the target groups, as opposed to Australian programs which are soft because, with some exceptions, they operate on merit. Thus, Equal Employment Opportunity in Australia means just counting and making sure that we're removing the barriers so that women and other members of minority groups get a look in.

Moens makes two points. Firstly, while Australian programs are currently "soft" they could become "hard" later on. Once affirmative action has a foot in the door there's no guarantee it will not change in character, on the model of American developments.

On this point I would not quarrel with Moens. Particularly if soft programs are seen to fail, pressure will inevitably mount for giving them more teeth. But it is a form of bad faith to say (a) soft can become hard; (b) here are the arguments against hard; and (c) the arguments under (b) stand up against affirmative action in any form, specifically against Australia's current programs which are soft.

The second point is the view expressed about the role of universities. Moens states that, "introducing hard affirmative action programs could dramatically change the function of tertiary institutions from preservers of traditional knowledge to instruments of
social engineering".*

Shock, horror! The university might actually become an institution which determines people’s later fate in the world and decides who shall live and who shall die, who will have a high income and who will be on the dole. We can’t have that!

Muddying the debate

That is what I mean by “mindless and confusing”. Moens is muddying the debate, swirling up a cloud of misinformation to obscure the important issues for discussion. When you get into one of these arguments with people, it is crucial to find out what they are talking about. What do they mean when they use the term affirmative action? Are they referring to preferential hiring of members of target groups, and within that, are they talking about people with equal qualifications to, or lesser qualifications than, the members of the majority groups usually selected for the positions being discussed? Are they talking about so-called soft affirmative action programs which, in effect, have no power to enforce the filling of targets and which merely set them as forward estimates.

Affirmative Action is now a technical area, and there is a range of measures discussed under the umbrella term. It is thus crucial to be clear what country is being talked about, what year, what legislative provision and what practices within that, what actual practices are being discussed, because there’s legislation, and then how it’s implemented.

The second category is the issue of the moral superiority of women and is probably addressed more to the left than to the right. The notion is that the rise of women, even in small numbers, to positions of authority and high income outside the traditional area of women’s employment, must be justified by the ideological soundness of those women. That is, the shift of greater power to women, socially speaking, can only be justified if those women are ideologically sound feminists who are going to change the world in the correct directions. I make this argument frequently as a defence of EEO and AA. If enough women get into places of influence and power and they are feminists, then they will have the opportunity to exert influence in areas of policy, etc. But, underlying this is the assumption that if such women are not ideologically sound, if they are rightwing shits, then they have less entitlement to positions of influence and power than rightwing shits who are men.

Article of faith

Very often we are making the argument, as feminists, that the point about giving women greater power and influence in the society is that women will bring with them a different perspective and will, in fact, effect social change in the direction of egalitarianism. That’s almost an article of faith in a lot of feminist circles. However, the truth is that women as a group have much less power, much less income, many fewer options educationally and vocationally than do men as a group.

One argument for affirmative action is that it will broaden those options for women, giving them access to a wider variety of education and training, and then to kinds of work, and levels of work, including positions of very senior responsibility. The entitlement of women as a group or as a class to that greater access should not necessarily be linked to an expectation of their intrinsic moral superiority over their male peers. That’s a very nineteenth-century argument for feminism.

I gave a talk at the University of Wollongong which has just appointed its first woman professor, Dr. Carla Fasano, who holds the Chair of Education there. I was giving my * As cited in The Australian, 13 January 1986.
standard EEO talk about merit and how women have to have a look in, how women are often not judged accurately on their skills and so on, and often in a competition that is fair and open, the women, at least 50 percent of the time, will have the edge on the male candidates.

I was going on with my rave about how women would contribute to the university "a range of other skills and life experiences" and enrich the community overall, when Carla cut in and said, "Listen, I'm sick of this. I don't care if these women are better, let them be worse! We just want in." My jaw dropped, and I thought, she's right: in effect, the argument should be about a slice of the action.

**Gender bending**

My third category is the issue of what I'm calling class/income/masculinity protection. This draws a lot on the work of Clare Burton, which looks at the role of gender in the workplace. When looking at affirmative action programs, much of it has to do with opening up areas of work to women that have not traditionally been accessible to them. We've had, in recent years, in New South Wales (the media love this), the first woman train driver and the first policewomen. Much of that debate looks at the challenge to gender roles and gender expectations that is constituted by the entry of women into non-traditional areas.

Clare Williams' book *Open Cut* is a brilliant exposition of the linkage of masculinity to certain kinds of jobs. She discusses open cut coal mines where, in interviews with the miners, one grasps the enormous intensity of their identification as tough men out there with these enormous machines that are shearing off the top of the mountain. Being the men who drive these machines is not just related to the issue of income and access to those jobs, which is very well protected by trade unions. It also concerns the meaning of those jobs to the men in terms of their identity, their strength in the world, and their sense of themselves.

Clare Burton, Claire Williams and others who have written about this, talk about the resistance of men to the entry of women into so-called non-traditional areas as an issue of masculinity protection. This is a psychological argument, an argument about identity. When the women are interviewed, and I'm thinking of some of the American material about women who have become coal miners and gone into the so-called hard (again) masculine professions, these women are not discussing gender identity. They're talking about income. "I wanted to have more money and more security and this job pays so and so many dollars an hour". So they're not having a crisis about their femininity, they are, in fact, entering an area of work where they will be rewarded for skill and ability in a way that they do not get rewarded in the traditional areas of work for women.

There is an American example of how women are (or are not) rewarded for traditional female skills. The official government evaluation of skill sets salaries in a certain range of public service positions. Women in one particular classification of book-binder in the government printing office were not awarded any points for skill in sewing because it was assumed that all women know how to sew.

When the men entered that field they got extra points because they had learned to sew and it was considered an acquisition of skill.

That is why I say it is also an issue of class. Many people say affirmative action is only about senior women getting more money. It's also about women at the bottom of the heap getting a bigger range of jobs to go into, some of which will get them out of impossible financial situations.

**Feminist judo**

My final category is making use of the patriarchal state. I called this feminist judo, cleverly placing yourself so as to use the overwhelming weight of state power in your favour. This is a very big debate in women's studies circles. Is the state a patriarchal institution, is it inevitably masculine? If it's masculine and serves masculine interests, is it not a contradiction for us, as feminists, to use the power of the state to defend women?

This is a serious issue in the intellectual and university debate about affirmative action, because in a sense it's attacking feminism for being insufficiently of the left, insufficiently wedded to the class struggle because it's appealing to the state which defends patriarchal capitalist interests only.

I suppose, though, that the intervention into that argument is to say: Look, the debate about the state is much more complicated. There are all kinds of different concepts of the state. One of these is as a countervailing force to the raw untrammelled action of capitalism as an economic system. There is a very long and honourable history, particularly in Australia, of using state intervention as a force for social change, as a brake on the interests of capital.

A striking example is the industrial arbitration system. Historically, it has been an important brake on the free play of the labour market. A feminist attempt to use the state, with all the doubts and fears that you may have about it, nonetheless in this tradition. A group with limited social power is calling upon government action in a sense to even up the odds against an otherwise very harsh and untrammelled market for the purchase of people's labour as a commodity.

Women are in a very respectable tradition on this point. A legitimate counter-argument to this raises the question of control and accountability. If the women's movement says "Right, we want such and such legislation", and the government of the day says "OK, there's votes in this, folks" and passes the legislation, one is then faced with the issue of implementation. How can we control the legislation, does it continue to act in the interest of the people who brought it in, or who were responsible for it being brought in? That's much larger issue.

But, with all the reservations one may have, I don't think that it is illegitimate for a social group such as women to require government to intervene to make the labour market for women fairer. I think that, in this, feminists are part of a very respectable tradition of social change.

Hester Eisenstein is leader of the EEO Unit in the NSW Department of Education.
BIG VISIONS AND BUREAUCRATIC STRAITJACKETS

SUE WILLS

The response of the state and its instrumentalities to the demands of radical movements always involves an attempt to co-opt, constrain and thereby contain them. At the stage when political parties and governments develop policies and draft legislation there has already been considerable watering down of those radical demands and a translation of them into the currency of reforms. These policies may or may not be acted upon and the laws selectively enforced, or not at all.

A large part of the development and implementation of government policy and the ways in which government legislation is administered falls to the bureaucracy. And, just as the labour movement has sought to influence industry and government by worker participation in decision making, so the broad women's movement has sought participation in, among other agencies, government and bureaucracy.

While the Women's Liberation part of the women's movement has always been much more wary and ambivalent about direct involvement at the core of government than the WEL part, there has, overall, been a great deal of effort expended in this kind of activity. Some parts of the movement have stayed outside, hammering away, submission writing, protesting and getting only as close as participation on advisory boards. Another part has taken a deep breath and dived in, taking jobs in the bureaucracy in the main in order to try to hold off the processes of containment of the demands of the movement.

Bureaucratic straitjacket

The second route to trying to achieve the goals of the movement is undoubtedly extremely difficult for the individuals who try it and partly because one of the methods of containment is to try to keep individuals, individuals. You only have to look at the short periods of time that Liz Reid, Sarah Dowse and Anne Summers have been able to stay in the various forms that particular jobs have taken.

The pressures of the bureaucracy to conform to its view of the extent to which change is desirable and achievable, to conform to its mode of achieving change, are extraordinarily strong. More often than not, these pressures succeed by a combination of socialisation, overwork, frustration and, probably most importantly of all, isolation from the movement whose goals you sought to further by taking the job in the first place. For those who do not become isolated from their movement, two sets of pressures apply which lead, as one woman has put it, to problems of “balancing credibilities”: if you are to be effective in the bureaucracy you have to develop and retain credibility there — and if you succeed in that, you are likely to put in jeopardy your credibility in the movement and become isolated from it.

One aspect of maintaining this credibility is the pressure which requires that skills learnt in the movements be utilised to produce units or projects within the bureaucracy that reflect feminist concerns. The positive aspects of this are often offset by a subsequent lack of concern for maintaining and giving support to the autonomous groups that made it all possible.

Funding, for example, for community projects, is all but non-existent, excepting for some CEP grants. These grants, however, are quite unsuitable for such groups, most of which have no other full-time workers. These circumstances also create very frustrating experiences for those employed under these grants. The imperatives of the bureaucracy, whatever the intentions, tend to take over.

Part of the process of socialisation into the bureaucracy is somewhat paradoxical. From the perspective of the activist outside it demanding to be told what's going on, the slogan “knowledge is power” rings true. Trying to work within the bureaucracy, knowledge can, at times, seem disabling. In an interview with Michelle Grattan of The Age (11.1.86), Anne Summers summed it up:
When you are a student you are not interested in constraints, only in the big visions. When you're involved in the system you become involved in the constraints and you have to work your way around them.

All this is by way of introduction to the question of affirmative action and acknowledgment that the position that femocrats are in is not an easy one, and still to say that I believe that there is scope within legislation — the black letter law — to make some headway, but that it is being put in a bureaucratic straitjacket.

Problems

There are problems with the New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Act and its Equal Employment Opportunity provisions. One of the biggest problems is the assumption that no matter what differences there are in the current positions of women, Aboriginal people, the physically disabled and minorities from a large number of different ethnic backgrounds, no matter what differences there are in the historical conditions which have led to these current different positions, no matter the differences in the absolute numbers and proportions of the total population they comprise — no matter these and other differences, the employment problems of all these groups can be solved by the same mechanism. Basically, that mechanism is this — that if you treat everybody as if they were physically able, intellectually unimpaired, white Anglo-Saxon heterosexual males, everything will be fine.

Given those and other problems with the legislation, we've got it and we have to try to use it in whatever ways we can. If you look at Part IXA of the New South Wales Act, which contains the affirmative action provisions, the wording is sufficiently vague for a whole host of things to be done in its name. At the moment, it applies to New South Wales government departments and statutory authorities, universities and colleges of advanced education. What that part of the legislation requires is that those organisations — in order to achieve the purposes of the legislation — have to draw up and implement equal employment opportunity management plans for their own organisations.

The management plan shall include:
- policies and programs and provisions for communicating those throughout the organisation;
- the collection and recording of appropriate information;
- the review of personnel practices and policies within the organisation;
- a statement of goals or targets where these are reasonable; and
- statement of the means of evaluation of the programs developed.

Much of what goes on in an organisation can be looked at under these provisions which are minimum not maximum requirements: what is "appropriate information" for example. That can be widely defined, as can the boundaries of any review of personnel practices and policies.

Questioning work values

The review could involved and, I would argue, should involve a systematic analysis of the ways in which the work that women do and the skills which they bring to an organisation are undervalued, and what efforts to shift the balance of values can be made, rather than the development of "strategies" for getting women up the career ladder. It could and should involve a questioning of the values attaching to particular kinds of work behaviour.

For example, I've spent time over the last six months following the job evaluation officers at Macquarie University around while they interviewed members of the general staff about whether or not the work they're doing warrants the position they occupy being upgraded. The job evaluation system does not allow for any element of personal merit and the major criterion for upgrading is whether the responsibilities and duties of the job — not the volume of work done — have increased over time.

The job evaluation officers can't actually articulate how they determine whether responsibilities have increased. One of the criteria being applied is that of supervision of others within a fairly strict hierarchical notion of supervision: and supervision of others is rewarded by upgrading.

One of the sections under review consisted of several women. When two of the more highly graded of them were interviewed, they were asked whether they supervised the others in the day-to-day sense of work allocation, approval of leave and flexitime, and so on. Good heavens, no, we all work it out together; we do the work that has to be done and we just make sure that we're not all away at the same time. No supervision, no upgrading.

Better approach

Now, it seems to me that you can approach the problem which that encompasses in several ways: one way would be to send some of those women off to assertiveness and supervision training courses and have them learn how to behave in an organisationally correct fashion. Another would be to try to change the system of values at work which penalises co-operative work relations rather than rewards them.

The black letter law, the working of the legislation, does not prevent either of these approaches, or others, from being adopted. The bureaucracy that is administering that law pushes for the first option — it's quicker and it leaves the notion of organisational hierarchy not simply intact, but strengthened because some of those who were previously excluded from getting up in it are given a stake in its maintenance.

From the point of view of somebody out in an organisation, my problem is not with the written law (nor yet with the organisation), but with the bureaucracy which is trying to constrain a broad interpretation of the legislation by insisting on uniformity of approach from vastly different sorts of organisations, by an obsession with quantitative over qualitative changes, by an insistence on doing it yesterday (which inevitably means doing it superficially) and doing it their way.

Sue Wills is EEO Officer at Macquarie University in Sydney.
The adoption of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) goals and legislation, and the use of Affirmative Action (AA) programs to achieve these goals, are an important response by governments to the demands of the women's movement, and other movements. They have been supported by trade unions, largely through the impetus of women and other activists, but they are also consistent with traditional labour movement support for specific reforms which will benefit their members.

For me, the most important aspect of EEO and AA legislation and programs is that they are a public acknowledgment that discrimination exists, and that there is an obligation on the part of the state and employers to take steps to remedy it. In that sense, they are an important ideological blow against conservatism, however limited or watered down their effects may be. Like other reformist legislation (e.g. health and safety legislation) supported by the labour movement, the struggle then continues about the nature of its content and how effectively it can be implemented. Another important aspect for unions is that EEO and AA programs present a challenge to unions themselves, and to their own structures. Although there are now far more women actively involved in unions, it is still a fact that women and other oppressed groups are under-represented in decision-making bodies. This means that unions need their own EEO and AA programs, and some are now developing them, particularly the public sector unions.

Once EEO and AA legislation and programs are on the agenda, the issues involved are clearly of industrial importance: they include access to jobs, selection processes, work organisation and rates of pay. I intend to focus on both the limitations of existing EEO and AA programs and the important industrial issues they raise which must be addressed by unions.

My own experience of EEO and AA legislation and programs has been in the South Australian and federal public service areas while working for public sector unions. It is, of course, in the public sector, where governments can legislate directly, that most programs are under way. The federal AA legislation now being debated in parliament does encompass private employers, but their participation is voluntary. This means it will be largely ineffectual for the mass of women, and other groups who suffer discrimination and are employed in the private sector. Whether real attempts are made to combat discrimination and widen the range of jobs available to women and other groups in the private sector will largely depend on trade union action and negotiation.

The South Australian public service has had EEO policies since 1975, but an EEO management plan for implementation was not actually adopted until 1985. It was called EEO and not AA because the Public Service Board (PSB) felt the latter sounded too radical and would provoke too much resistance. The plan was devised at PSB level with minimal consultation with unions. There was a consultative body, but it met very infrequently, and a separate executive body with no union representation actually made the final decisions about the plan. Each department was then meant to adopt its own version of the plan and conduct a statistical study of the distribution of designated groups (women, ethnic minorities, Aborigines and the disabled). It was then supposed to devise a series of specific programs to achieve a more equitable distribution of these groups through the structure. This could involve, for example, having programs and employment goals for each group. But there were no compulsory targets for particular departments, except for the setting by the PSB of a minimum level of recruitment of Aboriginal people to the service as a whole. The new SA public service legislation contains EEO principles, but no specific directives or time frames for departments to implement them.

The federal program is also called EEO, and is similar in structure to that of South Australia, except that it does have legislative compulsions under the new Public Service Act for departments to complete certain steps within given time frames, and obligations to explain why if they do not.
However, departments still have control over the precise nature of the plan, and there is capacity for procrastination (at which senior bureaucrats are expert).

In practice, the limitations on implementation of these programs are enormous. The basic major obstacle to real implementation of EEO or AA is the hierarchical nature of the public service and the fact that class structures are closely integrated with other oppressive and discriminatory practices. And, of course, all the budgetary pressures and cutbacks on the public service as a whole have their effects. Because the oppresses groups are at the bottom of the structure, real implementation of EEO could throw the structure into crisis. If women, for example, who do most of the lowest-paid and lowest-classified jobs, had real opportunities for promotion, who would do these jobs? Management is very conscious of these issues, and meaningful upgrading of these jobs, which is again required by a serious EEO program, means increased expenditure.

The example of the clerical barrier in the South Australian Public Service illustrates this point. This barrier exists at the seventh year of adult service as an assessment before progress can be made to higher-paid classifications. Criteria for assessment are whether the work is repetitious, routine and without major responsibility, or whether it is more varied and responsible. And, (you guessed it!) most of the jobs usually done by women, like typing, word processing, reception, switchboard, etc. have been defined as below the barrier.

Since 1975, all during the discussion of EEO programs, the unions have made industrial claims for the removal of the clerical barrier. These were refused by the Public Service Board and both conservative and Labor governments. Now that EEO is a public issue, the present Labor government is becoming more embarrassed by union claims that real EEO means the removal of the clerical barrier. This is a useful lever in the argument, but it will still take an industrial campaign to achieve the structure into crisis. If women, for example, who do most of the lowest-paid and lowest-classified jobs, had real opportunities for promotion, who would do these jobs? Management is very conscious of these issues, and meaningful upgrading of these jobs, which is again required by a serious EEO program, means increased expenditure.

The second major obstacle to implementation of EEO is the fact that they are often opposed and/or misunderstood by managements who feel extremely threatened by it and obstruct it as much as possible. As a trade union official, I have spent many hours explaining the principles of EEO to managers. Those managers who do support EEO are under pressure to implement it in the way which will be the least disruptive and cost the least. This usually means promotion of a few hand-picked women, and representatives of other designated groups, and having some extra training programs without tackling the discriminatory structures and practices which affect the mass of workers.

Thirdly, the staffing and resources of the EEO units set up to implement the programs is woefully inadequate. This relates back to general budget cuts in the public service, but departments do also have some discretion about allocation of staff. Perhaps even more importantly, the status of EEO units and officers in relation to other management structures is often, at best, ambiguous and, at the worst, powerless. The results of long and painstaking research, or investigations of complaints, are simply ignored by other levels of management. The better staff in these units often refer EEO matters to the unions because they know it will take industrial bargaining power to achieve the results.

Having examined all these limitations, it might seem tempting for unions to abstain altogether from involvement in, or support for, EEO programs. But there are several dangers in doing this. Firstly, management can then undermine the union by claiming it is not interested in EEO issues which affect its members. Secondly, management may attempt to set up a parallel system of representation outside the unions to implement its plans. I understand this happened to some extent at the beginning of EEO programs in the NSW public service, when a system of spokeswomen was set up by management. They were not necessarily union members but became involved in industrial issues. I understand this situation has now changed and the unions are now more closely involved. In the federal public service, unions have claimed, and achieved, consultation and involvement in EEO plans, and have been able to negotiate them as industrial issues. This means they can argue for real changes which will be in the interests of their members.

Finally, I believe that unions can only do this if they get their own act together and make sure that members of oppressed groups have a real voice in their own unions. If these groups are involved in formulating the union policy and programs for EEO, and are on the decision-making bodies, the union can plan industrial campaigns to achieve EEO objectives, despite the inadequacies of management-initiated EEO plans.

Pat Ranald is Women’s Officer of the Administrative and Clerical Officers Association (ACOA), NSW branch.
RESPONSE AND REVIEW

JULIE CORK, JULIAN FOLEY, SYBILLE FRANK, and DEBRA GRAHAM

As Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) practitioners within the public sector, we share Hester Eisenstein's concern with the attacks on EEO and Affirmative Action (AA) from the right. These attacks, although shallow and semantic, are nevertheless influential and widely reported.

It is of equal concern that these attacks have not been well answered. Although the charges of the right have been refuted, the defence of EEO/AA programs has lost credibility because most of the defenders are seen as having vested interests in the EEO/AA system. The wider left, and especially feminists outside the EEO field, have either remained silent, or have launched their own criticisms, largely based around a belief that the state cannot be used to change radically the situation of women and other oppressed groups.

The dearth of wider theoretical discussion among the left and feminist groups around these issues is worrying. In failing to analyse seriously the implications of EEO/AA programs, especially within the public sector, we believe that the left and feminist groups have ignored the potential of such programs to effect real and significant changes in areas such as the sexual division of power in the workplace, the re-evaluation of work done by women and men, and the working conditions of women.

Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle asked in 1984 "...under what circumstances could EEO threaten patriarchal relations in the workplace?" This question has gone largely unexplored. In this contribution we seek to investigate issues which are central to the preceding papers; the concept of the "femocrat", and the power of the bureaucracy to defuse the challenge posed by EEO reforms. In particular, we would like to look critically at some of the current responses to these issues from left and feminist circles, and sketch out the sorts of responses which might be needed if Game and Pringle's question is to be addressed. In our comments we go beyond regarding EEO as restricted only to women in the public sector: for EEO programs also operate in relation to other disadvantaged and oppressed groups, including Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and migrants.

The concept of "femocrat" is as negatively-loaded in left debate as is that of "feminist" in the right's discussions. It generally conjures up notions of women who have forsaken their feminist and/or left allegiances to capitalise on EEO/AA programs, and to take up well-padded seats within the bureaucracy. It roughly parallels the opprobrium directed against senior Aboriginal public servants who, by accepting positions within the bureaucracy, are seen to have abandoned the values of their community. The discussions of how feminists become femocrats often begins and ends debate on EEO; if women involved in EEO end up compromised by their positions in the hierarchy, how can their work ever challenge the status quo? EEO programs are often dismissed out of hand in this way, depriving us of closer understanding of their wider operation or impact. Not only does this line of argument misunderstand the relationship between the feminists who moved easily into the system in the initial phase of EEO activities, and the present operation of EEO, but it serves as a blanket which smothers inquiry.

Hester Eisenstein suggests that, rather than focussing on the type of woman empowered by EEO programs (feminist or not, "good" or "bad" feminist, etc.), our analysis should look at whether women are being empowered at all, and the processes through which they can be empowered. For example, in failing to distinguish its targets clearly, the "femocrat" discussion has been unable to take account of women who have actually discovered feminism in the working environment itself, sometimes with the assistance of an EEO program or co-ordinator. It is interesting to note that the condemnation of "femocrats" is often based on their perceived class position. The WEL women who moved early into the system were perceived as middle class; did this make their co-option easier? What, then, are the implications if women from "working class" backgrounds seek to enter and move through the bureaucracy?

There are other aspects of the attack on "femocrats" which are disturbing. The term is often used without definition, to cover all women who have achieved any power within the bureaucracy, so compounding the resistance they already face from their own managers. It may be ideologically acceptable to be a "victim", to occupy a low status, low-paid position at the bottom of the heap, but look out if you venture outside those jobs! Discussions about "femocracy" also often overlook the positive role played by some of these women in supporting the empowerment of women and other oppressed groups, either within or as clients of, the bureaucracy. The question of how women, feminists in particular, are seen to be co-opted in moving through the system is, however, an important one. Sue Wills considers the process by which this can occur, emphasising the difficulties faced by feminists working for reform within the bureaucracy. These difficulties cannot be denied, nor would we seek to deny the conflicts which can occur and the compromises which are often made. However, to assert that feminists can no longer be "good" feminists (a problematic concept!) if they also identify with their employing agency is similar to arguing that trade unionists cannot be effective if they are also "good" employees. To be influential within an organisation, to be in a position to locate its weaknesses and use its internal contradictions to criticise and to promote change, requires moving away from merely acting as "infiltrators" of the system.
An important element in determining how effective women can be in challenging organisational structures is the degree of support they get both within but, more importantly, from outside the organisation itself. Support from, for example, women’s networks within the organisation can be helpful, especially for women in relatively powerless positions. But trade unions, feminist structures within unions and feminist organisations can be more powerful sources of support.

That socialist and feminist theory does not yet fully comprehend the implications of EEO activity in large public sector organisations is evidenced by the emphasis in present debate on the notion that the state can readily accommodate EEO initiatives and, in fact, can actually use EEO programs to reinforce bureaucratic power while allowing little real change. This fails to recognise that external social change, and pressures for internal reform place the bureaucracy at the moment in a state of turmoil. Strategies of change can be effective in such a situation.

Sue Wills’ account of the job evaluation review in her organisation offers an example. Without moving into the debate as to whether the participative work arrangements within the unit described are essentially “women’s values”, it is clear there is at least an issue of a challenge to organisational values here.

Sue Wills proposes two alternatives: to move into an organisationally-endorsed work pattern; or to press for recognition in the organisation of arrangements which these women have established. Decisions on strategies such as these are made by EEO practitioners every day. Collectively, the strategies adopted could have the potential for real structural change, and the re-evaluation of the position of thousands of women in lower paid jobs. Further, the strategies could make an impact on people in even more powerless situations, for example, outworkers in the textile industry, or Aboriginal people in marginal and subsidised employment.

Pat Ranald stresses that issues at the heart of EEO/AA implementation are industrial issues. This underlines a further, and clear, danger of patriarchal state organisations setting the agenda for EEO activity. Union involvement in the implementation of EEO offers a broader overview of its implications and provides negotiating power which can respond to that of management. It is important to remember though that unions often become involved in EEO because women who have moved into the bureaucracy to press for change, perceive that such structural change will also have to be pressed through industrial channels. Like others, these women recognise that activity will have to take place at both levels, and be co-ordinated.

The labour movement is, then, operating to offer the support to EEO practitioners which is not available from theoreticians. What sorts of theoretical analysis and input, though, are we seeking?

Anne Game and Rosemary Pringle have offered crucial insights into occupation segregation on a gender basis. And, as Hester notes, the works of Clare Burton and Claire Williams have investigated the male response to the movement of women into areas of traditional male occupation. A compelling example is Hester’s articulation of the operation of “masculinity protection”. This clarifies the common experience among EEO practitioners that the response of many men to the “intrusion” of women into their workplace goes well beyond an anxiety at an expanded field of competition within their career streams, or hesitation at having to adapt to new working patterns and behaviour. The extent and intensity of the resistance can only be properly explained by perceptions such as these.

Hester extends this analysis elsewhere to suggest that the threat of EEO is more fundamental; that the presence of women in the workplace is an assault on the male categories of the public and private domains — categories which are also central to analysis of capitalism.

We have drawn a number of conclusions from our readings of the preceding three papers. First, we noted that individual EEO practitioners are already promoting activity which goes beyond the “shopping list” of specific objectives which is all EEO monitoring agencies typically expect of EEO implementation, to pose a real challenge to the existing structure of the bureaucracy. Secondly, we noted that they are doing this within the public sector and the labour movement in the absence of support from theoretical analysis from the left or feminism. Indeed, at times they operate in the face of criticism from these circles which we believe to be based on cloudy notions of the potential that EEO/AA programs have for structural change.

Finally, we believe that activists such as the authors of these three papers throw up a challenge to the left to “deglobalise” its analysis of the bureaucracy, ands to look inside it to the operation of internal power relations. There is a challenge also to feminist theory to expand its investigation of power, and male resistance, to take account of the particular situations of women in large state organisations. It is a challenge to develop the theoretical basis and strategies which will allow EEO/AA programs to be effective as part of the wider program of change.
AFIRMATIVE ACTION

PROGRAM FOR CHANGE

Reviewed by LOUISE CONNOR.

At a recent gathering of my extended family, two issues seemed to find particular disfavour among my typical "Aussie" relatives: affirmative action and land rights. On both issues, people complained that it wasn't fair that some people were favoured over others on the grounds of their (Aboriginal) race or (female) sex. On others, the media's support for such bigotry are distortions from the right. It details the myriad of programs, legislative reforms and changes taking place under the rather broad banner of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity. And, through it all, the right's misinformation campaign and the media's support for such bigotry are forming the population's opinions.

Program for Change, a series of eleven essays on affirmative action in Australia, edited by Marian Sawer, has arrived with perfect timing to challenge the media myths and the distortions from the right. It details the real origins in a strife-torn America in the 1960s and earlier. Governments acted then to secure some jobs for black people in the face of misery, militancy and, in some cases, near-revolution. Other essays provide details of early affirmative action measures in Australia — before the concept was named — which are useful in siting recent legislation within a longer time frame, as a response to movement and group pressures for more equitable treatment.

Gail Radford's essay, "Equal employment opportunity programs in the Australian Public Service", for example, places the first initiative towards providing equal employment for women as early as 1949, when women were admitted for the first time to the Third Division in the Federal Public Service. The "marriage bar" was repealed in 1966, allowing married women to continue in work after marriage, and providing a limited form of maternity leave.

Radford's essay is also valuable in reminding us that affirmative action is not just a "women's issue", but is important to many groups of workers who have borne the brunt of discrimination. People with disabilities were, in fact, the first group to receive particular attention from the Public Service Board when, in 1971, it assigned Special Placement Officers to help test and place disabled applicants and to act as points of contact for them. The essay shows the incredible number of ways in which discrimination operates — from language used in selection tests to the absence of hard data on who are employed where or,

more particularly, who are not getting jobs.

A common theme in Radford's and other essays is that voluntary schemes just don't deliver results. Both the federal and South Australian public services have had programs for over ten years (there was affirmative action before Peter Wilenski!) but, in both cases, their effects were way short of desirable. Radford puts the problem clearly: "Overall, it could be seen that the results of the board's strategy of encouraging a voluntary approach to EEO had been disappointing. Although action by the board had clearly resulted in an increased awareness of, and sensitivity to, the issue of EEO for women and disadvantaged groups in the service, the number of staff allocated to EEO duties was clearly inadequate .... "

Reliance on enlightened managers or assertive disadvantaged people can't redress discrimination, particularly when much of it stems from the very structures themselves.

Program for Change includes essays on affirmative action or equal employment opportunity legislation in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria, which shows that not two approaches are the same, and tackles some of the thorny problems involved in legislative attempts at social change.

Mary Draper's essay on affirmative action in Victoria, reminding us that it was indeed the Liberal government which first introduced legislation, needs to say little more than that to dispel the paranoia that this is all a socialist/feminist plot. In fact, a popular argument is that affirmative action is good business sense and a wise use of "resources".

The far-reaching potential for affirmative action can't be doubted. Whether or not it is realised is another matter of which most essayists in this book are obviously aware. There is a reluctance on the part of some writers, however, to admit that such legislation and programs could assist in real changes to work patterns and revalue certain skills required for, for example, secretarial work. Perhaps this is a reaction to the hysteria of the right so that some practitioners are feeling under pressure to limit affirmative action to sound management techniques.
Perhaps it is my bias, but I prefer the highly centralised model for equal opportunity programs and affirmative action adopted by the Victorian Labor government, which includes a review of all occupational classifications in the public service and, even better, a keyboard review which will include the impact of new technology, the benefits of job redesigning to take account of mixed functions of many keyboard operators, and the impact of occupational health and safety issues on workers. It warmed the cockles of my heart to learn that bonus payments of senior executives in the Victorian public service are now linked to their performance on equal employment opportunity issues.

Program for Change is a useful account of where Australia is at on this issue but, like most books, it has its shortcomings. The lack of a specifically trade union response is a serious omission. In only a few essays do unions even rate a mention. Along with this is a silence on the role of the women's and trade union movements of providing ideas upon which bureaucracies can act. Bureaucracies and legislators operate in response to pressure from outside, more than to internal demands, and affirmative action, campaigns for women to enter non-traditional occupations, and equal pay are all ideas and issues within the women's movement. Feminist and labour movement theorists and activists have contributed substantially to the debates on these concerns. Likewise, other movements such as Aboriginal and self-help movements, advocates for rights for people with disabilities and migrant organisations have also contributed ideas and support for affirmative action.

Unfortunately, much of the statistical data in this book is already outdated, and there have been changes to some legislation. This is, of course, unavoidable when writing on current issues. But there appears to be quite a considerable time lag between the writing of some essays in the book and publication (1985).

Affirmative action is a very elastic concept, but Program for Change shows it in a positive enough light to make it worth while fighting for effective, broad application of the ideas and legislation. As has been said in many places before, reforms like affirmative action, when combined with a desire to challenge radically the inequalities of working life in Australia, and when not seen in isolation, are worthy of the women's and labour movements' support.

Cartoons by Christine Roche, from the book I'm Not A Feminist, But .... (Virago Press Ltd, 1985)

How Social Impacts can help you achieve Equal Opportunity Objectives

Social Impacts is a management consultancy with specialist expertise in equal opportunity and affirmative action programs. We provide advice on how to develop a more responsive approach to human resource management programs. We have a consultant team in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane, and have the resources to handle projects in other Australian cities.

We support the action proposals outlined in the Commonwealth Government's Green Paper on Affirmative Action. We also endorse the Action Plan as outlined in the Affirmative Action Manual. In doing so we have devised a program of nine consulting modules. Some of these may be carried out concurrently with one another or it may be more appropriate to undertake an isolated initiative.

The program has been developed by Anne Gorman, Managing Director of SOCIAL IMPACTS

1. Initial information briefing and/or discussion with senior executives.
2. Development of a proposal.
3. Identification of personnel responsible for the program.
4. Research and personnel audit, organisational systems analysis, staff consultation.
5. Designing the action program.
6. Implementation and communication of the program to all stakeholders.
7. Staff development and training.
8. Selection of ongoing organisational targets or pilot areas.
9. Monitoring and evaluation; analysis of results.
STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

TRICIA CASWELL

The conference gave me hope. It filled me with optimism about the variety and vastness of the left in Australia, our convictions, our culture and our potential. To have people from Tasmania, North Queensland and the West giving up their longest weekend of the year to tackle the problems of the world and its future has boosted the morale of most progressive people I know, whether or not they actually attended.

My hopes arise out of the initial goals we set ourselves as sponsors, my particular experiences during the conference, and tales others have told me. The 1600 who attended all attended different conferences — there were so many panels, action working groups and workshops that one would expect the participants to have had very different experiences. Some days I did talk to others who had reported ideas and activities that were entirely different from my experience. I think that is terrific. It means the worlds that left people participate in are spread right through the fabric and business of Australian life. It means that diversity can exist within a framework of common values and goals without reducing and restricting ideas and activity. It means we are able to be creative about our political and social work, welcome and work with those who are not carbon copies of our particular heroes or ourselves.

The degree of unity expressed on the last day when so many packed the Great Hall to hear the final reports and summary statements from the commissions on issues around industrial and economic policy, social movements, international peace and solidarity, women and left political strategies was deeply moving.

Analysis was not the strong point of the conference, but real progress was made in many hearts and minds "about the need to establish ongoing structures to provide proper political analysis, political education and more effective communications across the left; the extension and development of more effective forms of democracy and participation within the left" (from the Summary Statement). It will be much harder to get our hearts and minds geared to practice; to be more communicative and democratic across the left; but the recognition of the complexity of women's issues and Aborigines, about the vitality and potential of social movements was a significant step forward. Even the very conscientious among us were forced to acknowledge that there is much persistent left activity that we do not know about. In government departments, in country towns, in conservative community organisations, progressive ideas are being presented and supported by many who have no political organisation to rely on, and who may have no connection with orthodox left traditions. Many of us have failed to appreciate the diversity, even the commonness of such activity. We need to be much more broad-minded about what we regard as progressive; we must be less anxious to dismiss the supposedly eccentric.

In the context of economic alternatives and the performance of Labor in government, the Accord was soundly criticised on many grounds, and particularly that Labor had failed to deliver on anything but wages policy. And there was considerable debate about the success of even that policy.

Despite the immense disappointments and frustrations of Labor in government, participants overwhelmingly endorsed our continuing activity inside and outside the Labor Party. There was a reluctance to consider seriously the establishment of a new party. Instead, the seeds were sown for further co-operative ventures like the conference itself, for better communications across unions, social movements and community groups; for the establishment of purposeful coalitions, such as around the public sector. Already, representations about the government's failure in Aboriginal land rights have been lodged, a public sector coalition has established some roots, a left unions meeting has been called to discuss the Accord, and the National Steering Committee is to meet once more to discuss further action — including the publication of some of the proceedings. In Victoria, the local steering committee is proposing a Victorian Broad Left Conference in 1987.

Rather than the conference setting rigid and specific goals and activities for the future, for me it set in train a critical review of the past with invigorated hope for the future. I shall never again think of the left in terms of parties and unions. I shall never again feel we have all the answers, or that it's just a matter of time and political will. If we are to be an influential force in shaping the future, we must take heed that most Australians do not take us seriously; that our influence in the past has seldom been attributed to us unless in a very negative sense, say by the New Right. It is incumbent on all progressive activists to treat the conference as the very beginning of a new era in left politics in Australia, where the barriers among the left and between the left and the Australian community continue to be challenged until they remain no more.

Tricia Caswell is an industrial officer for the Victorian Trades Hall Council, and a member of the ALP.
THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

MIKE DONALDSON

Political discussion at the Broad Left Conference formally centred in a couple of workshops with themes such as the future of the left, and in two forums on the Saturday and Sunday mornings. Jim Falk hit the nail on the head when he asked at one of the latter, "Where is the united front?" In a sense, the question was rhetorical for at least part of it was there listening to him, but what both we and he were looking toward was the development of some organisational form that could carry through the agreements and continue the discussions of the weekend.

It was my sense of those discussions that we generally agreed on the need to continue to construct the united front, popular unity, rainbow coalition, democratic organisation, people's movement, broad alliance — the name is secondary — to meet the diverse conditions of the various states and regions. The success of the conference demonstrates that the regional broad left organising committees were useful structures and despite their non-democratic establishment they may be possible places to begin. The experience of the South Coast committee was that those on it were generally worried that it was too limited in its spread.

Some key questions that need to be resolved in the establishment of a front/coalition/alliance are: should organisations affiliate to it or should it comprise individuals? Would it be an electoral vehicle and, if so, would that mean that Labor Party people could not be members of it? My own view is that groups, organisations and parties — migrant organisations, branches of political parties, women's centres, community organisations, trade unions and so on — should be able to become members but that adequate provision should be made for individuals whose organisations would not seek affiliation. The question of federal, state and local government elections is a vexed one on which I have no light to shed. On the one hand, one of the attractions of such a formation is that it would bring together ALP lefts and progressives and those outside the ALP. On the other hand, I have little doubt that, in NSW at least, the pressures towards electoral activity would be strong.

Some issues for such a form are immediately obvious, the slashing of the social wage through budget cuts, equal pay, the housing crisis, the poverty of the unwaged sections of the working class, child care, taxation reform, community and public health and welfare, alternative media.

A second theme of the political discussions of the weekend was the formation of a new party to the left of the ALP. It was pretty widely agreed that such a grouping was needed but not what it should be. Suggestions included non-marxist radical reformist; socialist; marxist-leninist; marxist; and new. Discussions towards a new party have been ongoing in rather a low-key way since the Communist Party of Australia's Congress in 1984 and will now continue with greater optimism and seriousness of purpose.

Whatever its ideological complexion, and my view is that the new party will be marxist at least, it must, like the current CPA, draw together the diverse forms of socialist energy and activity if it is to be an effective political force. But the movement toward such a new political party must not be confused or conflated with the establishment of the alliance/coalition/front — the two processes are not antagonistic, but nor are they synonymous. The alliance/coalition/front will neither be marxist nor probably will it be socialist, though I hope that it would include all those who consider themselves so to be.

This confusion and conflation is evident in the statement on the Easter Conference by the Association for Communist Unity (Left Unity News, 2, 3). The ACU suggests that one of the final results of the conference was agreement on a united form of activity to implement a common platform of policies. Agreement on areas of interest there was, agreement on a united form of activity there was not. The ACU says that "dialogue at the conference opened the way for a much better understanding of the necessity for these many-faceted activities to join the common stream of activity for socialist transformation". My point is that this "common stream" does not yet exist in any formal sense and thus cannot be "joined". The ACU concludes too that the "spirit of unity will grow still further and the prospect of a completely united left movement can become a reality". Perhaps by a completely united left movement the ACU means a party, but it is not just the confusion of streams, movements and parties that worries me. As leninists and dialecticians engaging in a changing world, the ACU would understand better than anybody that what is "completely united" is dead.

Mike Donaldson teaches Sociology at the University of Wollongong and is the president of the South Coast District of the Communist Party of Australia.
LABOR AND LAND RIGHTS: 
THE GREAT SURRENDER

MARCIA LANGTON

The most alarming aspect of this picture is the way in which the sovereign rights of Aboriginal people have yet to be recognised.

Despite the rapid approach of the bicentenary of the first act of dispossession, there has been no concerted attempt by the settler state to legitimise its occupancy of our land. Australian governments repeatedly have refused to recognise Aboriginal people as being wrongfully dispossessed and of the need for the return of our traditional lands and for meaningful compensation for dispossession.

The historical fiction of the peaceful acquisition and settlement continues. Only the means have changed—from violent acts to legislative ones.

The present predicament of Aboriginal people is the direct historical result also of the doctrine of *terra nullius*, that legal fiction of British international law which justifies the total dispossession of Aboriginal people on the basis that British society, unable to recognise the political and juridical trappings of Aboriginal society of 1788, deemed the Aboriginal inhabitants of this land not to exist and therefore the land a colony ceded to the British crown. Aboriginal land was not conquered, according to this doctrine, but ceded, because it was, according to legal fiction, uninhabited.

As the Bicentennial comes closer, so does a complete betrayal on the question of Aboriginal land rights. Even the gains made under the Fraser government are being rolled back by the "pragmatism" of Labor's right.

Marcia Langton is the Land Claims Coordinator of the Central Lands Council, in Alice Springs. She gave this speech at the opening of the Broad Left Conference at Easter this year.

Contemporary Australian political life is currently dominated by the politics of pragmatism and opportunism, of reaction and economic rationalism. There is little evidence in the Australian polity of any agenda for the achievement of social, political and economic justice for the oppressed, the poor and alienated of Australian society.
Further. Aboriginal people today may not challenge this extraordinary conclusion because no new evidence may be introduced to the argument according to the logic of this kind of law-making — the law of British imperialism.

Successive Australian governments, not legally bound to deal with us in an honourable way above the oscillations of electoral party politics, have failed to recognise our humanity, our right to certain universal requirements of human existence and, most fundamentally, our right to sovereignty.

For 197 years Aboriginal people have fought for justice and an appropriate settlement with the settler state. Reconciliation of the two peoples is now more distant than ever.

It is, at the least, ironic and extraordinary that we are now petitioning a federal Labor government for a very circumscribed gesture of justice: for the retention of basic rights conceived by a previous Labor government and implemented by the conservative Fraser government; for the enactment of Labor Party policy on Aboriginal affairs; and for the fulfilment of commitments made by the present government to grant land rights in accordance with five principles.

Five Principles


The five principles are: Aboriginal land to be held under inalienable freehold title; protection of Aboriginal sites; Aboriginal control in relation to mining on Aboriginal land; access to mining royalty equivalents; compensation for lost land to be negotiated.

In March, the Cabinet released to the land councils its decisions on its preferred model for national land rights. This set of decisions does not provide for national land rights, but rather for state and territory rights, and pastoralist and farmer rights.

In reneging on its commitments to Aboriginal land rights, the dealings have been federal government to state and territory government, rather than direct and honourable dealings with the representative organisations of Aboriginal people.

The National Federation of Land Councils has repeatedly made it clear that any national legislation must be the
product of authoritative negotiation between Aboriginal people and the colonist government.

The typical strategy of bankrupt politicians dealing with our affairs has been to deny the representatives of plainly representative national Aboriginal organisations and summits. The political entities which are not representative, which argue for rights which have nothing to do with the welfare of Aboriginal people, nor even the welfare of Australians in general, are such bodies as the Australian Mining Industry Council, whose representativeness has never been questioned by the Cabinet or even its individual ministers.

Rather, these cabinet ministers turn to the devious strategy of blaming the alleged lack of compassion among the Australian people for their failure to meet their commitments — commitments made not just by the federal Labor Party, but by previous conservative governments.

The recent Cabinet decision to amend the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 will, if pursued, among other things:
* give the Northern Territory government additional powers to control Aboriginal land;
* force Aboriginal people to accept that the Northern Territory government should have this additional power;
* legitimise the claims of the Northern Territory government and the state governments that they should have power over Aboriginal affairs, contrary to the spirit of the votes of over 90 percent of the Australian people in the 1967 referendum and contrary to the wishes of Aboriginal people.

In particular, the Cabinet decision proposed to:
* allow the Northern Territory government to compulsorily acquire Aboriginal land for public purposes;
* take away the right to claim unused stock routes and stock reserves;
* take away the right to convert Aboriginal-owned leases to Aboriginal land;
* impose a ten-year time limit on lodgment of claims;
* give the Northern Territory government ownership and control of all waters on Aboriginal land;
* make grants land conditional or determinable.

On the question of mining, while Cabinet proposals suggest a limited right to withhold consent for mining on their land, and to impose conditions for such developments, Aboriginal people require guarantees that the right to withhold consent will not be compromised, and that the right to negotiate will be open and not limited.

The government has been denounced by Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory because of its failure to provide for community living areas on pastoral properties ("excisions"); secure tenure for Aborigines living in towns and town camps; legislation for the protection of sites; mechanisms to redress the N.T. government's diminution of Aboriginal rights of access to pastoral leases under the Crown Lands Act.

The federal Cabinet's proposals in relation to Aboriginal people elsewhere in Australia have not resulted from discussion or negotiations with Aboriginal people. Rather, they are a reflection of what state governments have indicated they are prepared to accommodate, not what Aboriginal people desire or what has previously been promised by the Labor Party through its platform or the five principles.

**Burke government proposals**

For Aboriginal people in Western Australia, this means acceptance by the federal government of proposals from the Burke government which:
* do not provide for Aboriginal land to be held under inalienable freehold title;
* do not provide for Aboriginal control in relation to mining on Aboriginal land;
* do not provide for access to mining royalty equivalents;
* do not address the question of compensation;
* do not guarantee the protection of Aboriginal sites;
* do not provide Aboriginal people with the right to control access to their land;
but which reflect:
* dominance of the mining and other development interests within the Western Australian Labor government;
* the political expediency of the Burke government and its lack of commitment to justice for Aboriginal people and its refusal to recognise our sovereign rights;
* the inability and unwillingness of the federal Labor government to adhere to its party platform and to use its constitutional and judicial powers to intervene in a Labor' state;
* the unwillingness of the Hawke government to show effective political leadership in this area of social justice.

**Queensland position**

The fate of Aboriginal and Islander people in Queensland as a result of these Cabinet decisions is like that of the people in Western Australia. Not one of the five principles of this government's Aboriginal affairs policy has been adhered to in either of these states.

As we understand it, the majority of Aboriginal people in Queensland reject their state government's "deeds of grant in trust" legislation. They would prefer Commonwealth legislation granting real land rights as opposed to the fifty-year leases being granted to communities at the whim of the state government and under the condition that communities co-operate with the state community services legislation.

Of course, in Tasmania, the government refuses to accept that Aboriginal people exist, let alone that they have any legitimate sovereign rights, or that their demands for compensation should be met.

The fact is that the federal Labor government has indicated its preparedness to capitulate to the demands of governments, particularly those in Western Australia, in Queensland and in Tasmania.

**Federal government record**

The record of the federal government in relation to consultations with Aboriginal people is a sorry one. In May of 1985, the Prime Minister and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs met with Aboriginal representatives from throughout Australia to discuss the Preferred National Land Rights Model.

At that meeting, it was agreed that, before any proposals in relation to land rights were agreed to by the government, widespread consultation would take place with Aboriginal people, and that financial resources would be made available to facilitate this process. This has not happened.

There was no consultation, before or after the Cabinet decision, with the Aboriginal people of Western Australia over the deal made between the federal government and the Premier of Western Australia. The Aboriginal Affairs Caucus Committee has asked the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to defer the implementation of the Cabinet decision until:
* the committee has had discussions with land councils and officers of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs over the
proposals to amend the Northern Territory Act;
* Aboriginal people in Western Australia and elsewhere have had sufficient opportunity to consider adequately the proposals for that state, and have provided their response to the minister and this committee;
* this committee has had the opportunity to examine these responses, consider the options available and make recommendations to the minister and Cabinet, particularly with regard to matters that may require a possible review of the initial Cabinet decision.

The Aboriginal struggle for justice in this country needs the various political parties and groups who assert their support for land rights to unite behind the main objectives and not allow spurious ideological divisions to prevent them operating co-operatively.

A handicap which must be overcome is the tendency, apparent in the heady days of the anti-uranium campaigns of the 1970s, of vested interests and pressure groups to use Aboriginal land rights as their cause celebre when their real objective was the prevention of uranium mining.

Once the decision had been made to develop the N.T. uranium industry, the support of these groups for Aboriginal people and land rights was most conspicuous by its absence.

What such groups fail to recognise is these acts of political opportunism serve only to discredit Aboriginal claims and frustrate and undermine our efforts for the recognition of our sovereign rights.

Similarly, there are those people who operate within political parties who lack the knowledge and commitment to our cause, yet trumpet their support and advocate action for their own political purpose, perhaps because of some internal party disputes. Invariably, these individuals act on their own volition without direction from Aboriginal people, from positions of almost total ignorance.

There are, of course, organisations and individuals who take particular care to consult with and be advised by Aboriginal people and particularly with Aboriginal representative organisations.

The churches, trade unions, prominent members of the various factions of the Labor Party, members of leftwing parties and interest groups, the Democrats, and even a small number of Liberal Party members and their supporters, have all shown a willingness to consult and listen to Aboriginal views.

However, as yet, the support articulated by such individuals and organisations has not been translated into an effective political voice.

The major task ahead of us is to ensure that we Aboriginal people have the means to have our voice heard, to redress the imbalance in public support for our cause which has resulted from the recent racist and divisive campaigns against us.

As an absolute minimum, the progressive forces in Australian political and social life should be united in their efforts to support Aboriginal people in their struggle for the resolution of the land rights question and for Aboriginal sovereignty.

The National Federation of Land Councils regards the recognition of the following rights as intrinsic to the resolution of our struggle for self determination:

* recognition of Aboriginal sovereign rights and prior ownership of Australia;
* the right to claim all unalienated land, including public purpose lands;
* the right to control access to Aboriginal land;
* the right to refuse permission for mining and other developments on Aboriginal land;
* the right to negotiate terms and conditions under which developments take place;
* the right to compensation for lands lost and for social and cultural disruption;
* the right to convert Aboriginal properties to inalienable freehold title;
* the right to excisions on pastoral leases.

These crucial matters of principle should form the foundation of any political program adopted by progressive individuals and groups in Australia. Until these objectives are met they should be at the forefront of the political agenda in this country.

Until the Australian non-Aboriginal people come to terms with these demands, then their status in the world community will continue to diminish. This is especially so as the contradictions of those who actively support the plight of indigenous people elsewhere in the world and who fail at every level to address satisfactorily the issue of our Aboriginal sovereign rights become apparent.

The current trend towards diminishing or taking away the existing rights of Aboriginal people must be reversed, as must the federal government's moves to abrogate its responsibilities for Aboriginal affairs to the states and the Northern Territory.

For progressive forces in Australia, their tasks in this regard are clear:
* The need for those who advocate Aboriginal sovereignty to inform themselves of the issues involved and consult with Aboriginal people and organisations.
* We must unite to reset the nation's political, social and economic agenda so that Aboriginal rights are accepted as a major priority, particularly as the bicentenary of the initial invasion approaches.
* We must subsume individual, party and interest group desires and provide every possible support for the claims of the Aboriginal people.
* The left should provide, at the request of Aboriginal organisations, resources (physical and material) for the purposes of research and back-up.
* The left must reassess its ideological positions and commitment to the question of Aboriginal sovereignty.
* We must mount a massive public education and advertising campaign to address the question of racism in the Australian community.

In so doing, we are addressing crucial related aspects of the question which concerns us all, the survival of the planet in the face of the dangers of nuclear holocaust and irreversible environmental damage, that is — structural violence in the form of racism and economic pragmatism.

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PUTTING AUSTRALIA BACK IN THE PACIFIC

STEWART FIRTH

When we talk about Australia’s Pacific connections, one of the things we mean — though not the only one — is Australian foreign policy. And, of all the things that governments do, foreign policy is what they most like to keep to themselves and away from public view. So anything we can do to show that people care about Australia’s foreign policy and think it ought to be changed can only be good.

The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence is about to hold an inquiry into Australia’s relations with the South Pacific. This is a question which is urgent in a way in which it hasn’t been for a long time. It is urgent for particular reasons, and I want to state them:

First, let us consider what has happened in the South Pacific in the last two years. France is more isolated than ever in the South Pacific. No one except the French likes French colonies and French bomb tests. As the state of emergency which was declared in Kanaky last year showed, the struggle of the Kanak people for independence has intensified. And independence has intensified. And the same holds true elsewhere in the region where the last two years have been so vocal on human rights in Central America, has said almost nothing about human rights in the South Pacific.

The result has been to shake the ANZUS Treaty to its foundations. In April, when Mr. Hawke was in Washington to agree with President Reagan, Reagan said he hoped New Zealand would soon return to its traditional role as a responsible member of the ANZUS Alliance, in other words, to its pro-nuclear role. Like the French, the Americans had a bad year in the South Pacific in 1985.

To make matters worse for the US, Kiribati had the gall to sign a fisheries access agreement with a Soviet fishing company in October 1985. While it might be all right for the US to trade with the Soviet Union, the government of one of the poorest countries in the Pacific Islands wasn’t supposed to, even though fishing access fees represent one of its few sources of export income. Why wasn’t it supposed to? Because allowing the Russians in didn’t suit the strategic interests of the US.

In its own colony in the Micronesian islands, the US has recently been putting the final touches on a new relationship which will keep Micronesia firmly under American control and prevent unwelcome developments like the Kiribati fishing deal. In Belay the Americans claim that the recent plebiscite gives them the right to bring nuclear weapons into the ports of that country, even though it has still a nuclear-free constitution.

In Fiji, the Americans have been trying to make sure that they have one rock-solid ally among the South Pacific island states; and, for the first time, the Americans are supplying an island state with direct military aid. But in answer to that, and to the conservatism of the Fijian government, a Fiji Labour Party was formed in the middle of last year and is now regarded as a significant factor in Fiji politics. The Fiji Labour Party is closely aligned with the Fiji Anti-Nuclear Group.

Rapid changes

What I am saying is that things are changing rapidly in the South Pacific. Change will be forced on Australia whatever happens. But what is most important is that there are now opportunities for genuine redirection in Australia’s policy towards the South Pacific.

The same holds true elsewhere in the region where the last two years have also brought upheaval in some countries.

When 10,000 village people crossed from West Papua into Papua New Guinea in the early months of 1984, they provided a vivid illustration of what life is actually like under Indonesian occupation, and they also created an acute foreign policy problem for PNG. Mr. Hayden, who has been so vocal on human rights in Central America, has said almost nothing about human rights in West Papua. So the real question is still: what is Australia going to do about the
border problem, and about the people in the camps themselves? Are we going to sell them out as we sold out the people of East Timor?

Then, in February this year, we saw the unfinished revolution in the Philippines. At the point where Aquino replaced Marcos, the issue of Australia's role in the Philippines was thrown into sharp relief: just who were we supporting up there? Could we really pretend that our military aid did not help to make it possible for the Philippines Armed Forces to batter down on ordinary people? And Mr. Hayden raised the possibility that, under ANZUS, Australian troops might be called upon to help put down communist rebels in the Philippines.

What, then, is the common thread in the role which Australia plays in the South Pacific, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines? Do we play much the same role everywhere in the region? And, if so, what is it?

Our role in the South Pacific and PNG is to keep the region safe for American strategic interests, especially now that New Zealand is proving to be an unreliable US ally. That has been our role since the Second World War, and it is a two-sided thing. America wants us to be pro-American, and the Australian government believes we can only be safe if we are pro-American. With the exception of the Whitlam government, all post-war Australian governments have bent over backwards to please Washington in the belief that they can thereby win credit.

**Great Protector**

Since the days of the British Empire, Australia has looked overseas for a "great protector"; and Australia's attitude has been to win the favour of the great protector. The idea that by being helpful we can win credit in Washington and therefore protection from the great protector in the event of war forms the basis of Australian defence and foreign policy. This can be seen clearly in the Strategic Basis Papers which were leaked to the National Times in 1984: by being always ready to assist the US, Australia will win brownie points in Washington. And Australia will play its part in a number of ways: by providing staging facilities for USAF aircraft, receiving USN visits, supporting the American bases. As far as the South Pacific is concerned, we win credit for ourselves by keeping things quiet and stable for the Americans in the Pacific Islands. In the Philippines Australia is far less influential, so there we have the secondary role of backing up American policy by doing much the same things as the Americans do except on a smaller scale.

Australian thinking about the Pacific is dominated by the conflict between the superpowers. In attitude, we are still colonials. We derive our ideas about foreign policy from one of the superpower capitals. We measure what we do in the Pacific, not by the yardstick of what is best for the region, but according to the requirements of the new Cold War. Like the Americans, we quickly reinterpret North-South issues of independence and developments as being essentially East-West issues of strategy and
security. When Kiribati want a tiny amount of independent economic development, we worry for our own security and what the Americans might think. For all the talk about the International Year of Peace, the Australian government supports a nuclear alliance. It identifies itself with America’s worldwide ambitions, and is prepared to see nuclear weapons used to defend those ambitions: and Australia brings the same bloc or superpower mentality to its policy towards the Pacific. Only a non-aligned Australia could begin to act in the best interests of the region.

Of course, it is a bit more complicated than that. Australia has always seen itself as the interpreter of the Pacific Islands to the Americans. Australian Foreign Affairs officials think of themselves as understanding the Pacific in a unique way. So Australia does do things the US would never do. One example is the limited nuclear-free zone which Australia, together with most of the Forum countries, is creating in the South Pacific. America would prefer not to have a nuclear-free zone at all because it closes off too many defence options for the future. But the Australian government recognises that anti-nuclear feeling in the South Pacific is simply too strong to resist: far better, therefore, to construct a nuclear-free zone which does not affect American strategic interests and, in the process, take some of the sting out of the anti-nuclear movement in the region and in Australia itself.

In promoting a moderate nuclear-free zone the Hawke government is trying to channel anti-nuclear sentiment in the South Pacific away from radical measures of the kind taken by New Zealand. The zone will be safe for the US, even if not ideal. Last year, Australia urged the US to bring its influence to bear on France and persuade the French to stop testing. Why? Because French testing is a powerful symbol for peace movements in the region. As New Zealand shows, opposition to nuclear weapons logically becomes opposition to ANZUS, which is a nuclear alliance. It is a short step from “I am against nuclear weapons” to “I am against ANZUS, which is a nuclear alliance and makes Australia a nuclear target”.

On the issues of French testing and the nuclear-free zone, Australia is playing the role of a friendly critic of the US, trying to make the US aware of its own best interests in the long term. Australia seeks to be the intelligent interpreter of Western interests in the region. And the Hawke government seeks to satisfy anti-nuclear feeling in the Pacific before it endangers the broad American alliance with the region. What is needed is an Australia that puts Pacific interests before Western interests.

So far, I’ve dealt with political connections between Australia and the Pacific foreign policy. But as we all know, those connections are also economic. Australia dominates the South Pacific economically, through trade, aid and investment.

Economic connections

In trade with the island countries of the South Pacific Forum, trade is more than ever in Australia’s favour. We export a great deal, we import very little, and so the island countries depend on us to make up the difference in aid. There is an agreement called SPARTECA which allows a lot of island products into Australia duty-free, but the products which matter most to island countries are all excluded from the list, or else subject to severe quotas: sugar, textiles and footwear. As Wadan Narsey has said, there are creative ways in which Australia could increase trade with the Pacific without increasing the exploitation of labour in island countries. We could say: we will let in your garments as long as you can show us that garment workers are effectively unionised. If Australia had a true labor government, that is what we would be doing.

If you are in a small, poor country, trade offers you the chance of independence. Aid, which is what Australia prefers to give, creates dependence. That is why the Americans and the French shower their Pacific colonies with aid.

Since 1976, when the Russians offered to build a fishing base in Tonga, and gave Malcolm Fraser a terrible scare, Australia has taken over the role which New Zealand used to have of supplying aid to the South Pacific countries outside Papua New Guinea. Mr. Fraser always saw aid to the South Pacific as a contribution to the defence of the Western alliance, and the amount Australia gave depended largely upon what the Russians were doing. In 1980, Australia had announced that it would be giving $84 million for the next three years. But, after the Russians invaded Afghanistan, the amount went up to $120 million. We now give about $58
We expect the kind of deal which the Fiji government has just done with Australia's Channel 9, giving Channel 9 a TV monopoly in that country for many years. We expect island countries to become more and more integrated into the entire Western economic system. That is the definition of progress which we like Islanders to have, because it suits Australian business people.

Military connections

The connections are political, they are economic. They are also military. Australia is part of a vast machine for the waging of nuclear war. It is a machine which consists not just of bases, ships, aircraft and troops. If the most important parts of this machine would somehow be seen all at once, they would emerge as a web of listening devices and electronic trip-wires spread across the Pacific from the west coast of the US to East Asia and Australia, each strand of the web linked with the rest. Australia is allied to military forces which are being rapidly nuclearised with awesome and destabilising weapons systems like those of the Trident submarine and the Tomahawk missile: and our participation in all of this is justified by Mr. Hayden as contributing to "stable deterrence", a doctrine which says that, given the right circumstances, we should lend our help to the killing of tens of millions of people.

The American historian George Kennan can imagine no issue at stake between the US and the Soviet Union which could be worth a nuclear war: "no hope, no fear, nothing to which we aspire, nothing we would like to avoid — which could conceivably be worth a nuclear war". In the same way, Australia and the Pacific Island states have no issue in their relations with other countries which could conceivably be worth the use of nuclear weapons on their behalf. Yet, just such nuclear defence is that the broad American alliance with the region offers. It promises not defence but annihilation. It makes us targets. Joy Belazo has told me that people in the Philippines were made aware of just how much the American bases at Subic and Clark make her country a target during the recent Libyan crisis, when the American bases went on a special alert. Would Belau, population 14,000, be safer with or without the protection of the American armed forces?

Cultural and personal

Australia's connections to the Pacific, finally, are cultural and personal. What Australia does in the Pacific is, in part, a reflection of what kind of society we think we are. To give an example: the visit of the Torres Strait Islands dance group to Hawaii in late 1982. The question we have to ask is: which Australia is going to make links with the people of the Pacific? Is it going to be the Australia of old-fashioned Queensland racism? Fortunately, that kind of Australia is at last on the wane. But is it going to be the old white Australia of privilege and private school education?: not racist at all, but certainly concerned mainly with forging links with privileged Islanders, with Island elites, who tend to share a similar view of the world.

What about the other Australia of Aboriginal people, of migrants, of women, of working people? What is needed is for the other kind of Australia to make links with the people of the Pacific. That is what the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement is about: that is what the Australia’s Pacific Connections Conference is about. In a sense, we are all Pacific peoples, whether we are the descendants of those who first came here, or the descendants of those who came much later from overseas. We have a common interest in freeing the whole region from the domination of the superpowers and the colonial powers, and from the ways of thinking about the world which they encourage. We have a common goal in preventing Australia from becoming the superpower of the South Pacific, and in an Australia which defines itself differently — an Australia with full land rights for Aboriginal people would be an Australia which also effectively backed the anti-colonial struggle of the Kanak people.

The conference, then, was not just about what the situation is in relations between Australia and the Pacific; not just about Australia's Pacific connections as they now are. Its more important aim has been to show what those connections could be, and how we can go about changing them.

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Crime fiction has many aspects of modernity. It is itself an inherently modern form. There were no literary detectives before the urban anonymity of great cities and industrial townships actually required specialists to track down criminals.

Spy fiction only developed as people became widely aware of the domestic threat in international conflict; in Britain that was by the end of the nineteenth century, and in the striking case of America not until the late nineteen-forties.

The same sort of social and temporal links cause changing aspects of policing and responses to crime to be represented in changing phases of crime fiction. Science, or perhaps scientism, in Conan Doyle; psychology or an approach to it in Agatha Christie. This is not reflection, as some naive forms of social and literary commentary would have it. The role of culture in its many media is to respond to socio-historical phenomena and, especially in fictional media, to process them in an ideological framework of greater or lesser relationship to reality. Sherlock Holmes’ “science” was a validation of that empirical idealism on which contemporary bourgeois theories of knowledge were grounded. (Catherine Belsey’s Critical Practice makes a good statement on this.) Agatha Christie’s “psychology” was a front for practices of detection which privilege, as defence against crime, a pattern of stereotypically “feminine” skills — watching, listening, noting the positions of furniture and the details of human relationships. Both best-sellers have a complex ideology embedded in their “modernism”.

It is important to recognise the tendentious character and treatment of aspects of “reality” in crime fiction (and all cultural forms, for that matter) before considering the rise of the terrorist thriller in recent years. Not that the topic itself is new. As long ago as 1907, Conrad’s The Secret Agent explored in a liberal humanist context those who set bombs, the diplomats whose agents they are, and those other people who become enmeshed without guilt of any kind. Bombers and other terrorists crop up in early spy thrillers like William le Queux, John Buchan and E. Phillips Oppenheim. True to his antique positioning, Ian Fleming had fiendish foreigners like Ernest Stavro Blofeld planning to detonate the whole British status quo.

Recently, the convergence of European ultra-radicalism, Arab activism and other types of imitative and inspirational violence have had very wide impact, especially because they are so suitable as subjects for television news. Their effect on the thriller is clear. In The Little Drummer Girl, John Le Carre gave up his absorption with British moles for the P.L.O., and Frederick Forsyth turned from various types of crime verite to...
There is a sense that all this really is beyond control now, that figures like Smiley and M. are no longer credible. The final pattern, with our only living loyal man stuck in Moscow, with the new Labour prime minister under Red control, is a starkly strained cultural representation of current British disarray and distress.

If things look so bleak from the right, the view from the left is less immediately austere. Pluto Press is putting out a series of leftwing thrillers and they, too, are moving into terrorism. Peter Dunant’s Exterminating Angels is a polished and well-constructed study of a radical group — no sign of generic strain here. An ultra-secret radical group, more white tie and tails than white collar, have been organising with great success a set of bloodless and mostly humorous actions against people responsible for ecological outrages. Safe, a bit soft, entirely successful: so much so that SIS approves of them; they do no real harm and justify SIS’s own claims for more money and staff.

But the radical press grows tougher. They decide to take on the industrialists who profit from selling inadequate nutrition in third world countries. So they seize and starve in the same way members of the businessmen’s families. With customary round-the-world action and technical detail (still empirical idealism by the way), the novel sets this new plot in action. But it also shows group members growing uneasy as the guiltless are enmeshed. Eventually everything goes wrong, through a mixture of human care and carelessness; the group is destroyed and their radical adventure is over.

An intriguing story. Does it mean that this sort of radical action goes too far? That seems the surface of the book, and so it is not very radical at all. Pluto have, in fact, published some left-wing thrillers like the stylish and unusual His girl in the Cold and Per Wahloo’s richly radical construction of a radical group all come essentially from the bourgeoisie: they are 1960s-educated radicals. Having no history on the left, no family members dead from TB or silicosis, none maimed by industrial accident or rickets, they are terribly shocked at the sight of pain and blood. Whether deliberately or not, the story criticises their naive idealism, as does Raymond Williams’ equally enigmatic The Volunteers, which also explores the process of radical practice, in his case long-term moles in the upper bureaucracy.

If Dunant’s novel is finally obscure and unconfident in impact, that is no doubt because it does indeed make a serious engagement with violent ultra-radical action, instead of taking the softer option and merely uncovering conservative crimes and holding up shocked hands. Rightwing thrillers usually demonstrate with confidence the practices of conservative power — William Haggard and Anthony Price would be classic cases. But some centre-right thrillers have recently exposed the oppressive function of the modern state — what Ernest Mandel in Delightful Murder calls “state crimes”. The Spy Who Came in from the Cold did that, and so does Robert McCrum’s In the Secret State, though both seem ultimately to value nothing more radical than extreme individualism.

The evolution of both the rightwing thriller and the leftwing thriller shows how political times and their refraction in crime fiction are changing. But the fullest recent treatment of the topic, with professional international terrorists and also ordinary people driven to violence by state terror, remains the powerful final novel in Maj Sjowall and Per Wahloo’s richly radical series of ten, simply entitled The Terrorists. Searching and subtle, it relates to contemporary reality in an unusually clear-eyed way. It even includes the assassination of a prime minister of Sweden. That book will take some surpassing in the emergent sub-genre of the terrorist thriller.
BEHIND THE AIDS HYSTERIA

Aids and the New Puritanism, by Dennis Altman (Pluto Press, 1986). Reviewed by DEREK PAYNE.

In Australia, as of 29 April, a total of 203 cases of category A AIDS had been notified, and of these, ninety-nine had resulted in death. Most of the cases occurred in gay or bisexual men, the rest of the cases being intravenous drug users, haemophiliacs, people receiving blood transfusions, heterosexual men; one case was reported of a person from a country where AIDS is epidemic, and eight of the cases were women.

A precondition for contracting AIDS is infection by the HTLV3 virus which travels in blood and semen. Hence, the sharing of needles, transfusion of contaminated blood, transmission from mother to foetus through sharing blood, and some sexual practices (not just homosexual) can transmit the virus. It cannot be transmitted through social contact, nor is there any evidence of effective saliva transmission of the virus which is easily killed outside the bloodstream. It appears that only ten percent of people infected by the HTLV virus develop AIDS, while others develop less severe illness, or show no ill effects.

The risks of transmission can be reduced significantly through using HTLV3 anti-body testing to screen blood transfusions and products, provision of needles to intravenous drug users, the use of condoms, and education campaigns. Unfortunately, though, more cases can be expected. The virus can have an incubation period of up to five years, so most cases transmitted in the early 'eighties won't have surfaced yet.

It is not a "gay plague", nor is it a widely contagious epidemic. Comparison with the bubonic plague or the 'flu epidemic after World War I shows clearly that disease has social and political, as well as medical dimensions and, furthermore, the medical dimension is affected by the other two dimensions. The historical accident of AIDS being discovered in the West in American gay men first, rather than in haemophiliacs first, or in Africa, has had major consequences for the way that AIDS has been seen and has had a social/political effect on the medical research establishment, governments, and the health care system.

Denis Altman's book, AIDS and the New Puritanism, is a personal and political exploration of all three dimensions of the syndrome. Altman begins his book by detailing some personal experiences of AIDS, commenting that "the high concentration of cases among certain groups and localities in a few urban areas (in America) means that a few people have felt a disproportionate amount of personal loss". For those in the high risk groups, the lengthy incubation period brings us face to face with questions of our morality and our fears. Altman also reports the courage of people with AIDS, determined not to be labelled as victims who live one day at a time.

Altman outlines the particulars that make AIDS such a political syndrome. The first is its occurrence at a time when modern medicine is supposed to be able to cure and control most diseases, while AIDS is incurable and affects otherwise young and healthy people. Secondly, it was first found in the West, mainly in stigmatised groups — gay men, intravenous drug users and Haitians. Thirdly, it was linked with sex — challenging public sexual morality.

He sees AIDS as politicising gay men around the issue of health care in a similar manner to that of the feminist critique of health developed in the early '70s. However, he argues the need for immediate practical responses and the major role played by health professionals which will limit the growth of this analysis.

In Australia, the gay movement, through the community-based AIDS councils, has struggled to make the medical profession and health departments accountable on the question of AIDS treatment as has been evident at public meetings where medical specialists have spoken.

Another example of this political struggle has been the debate around anti-body testing. The presence of the HTLV3 virus is difficult to test for, so the main test in use is for the presence of HTLV3 anti-bodies. Anti-bodies are produced by the immune system in an attempt to neutralise a virus. A positive anti-body test means that the person has come into contact with the virus; it doesn't tell us whether the virus is still present, nor is it any indication that the person will develop AIDS. In view of the danger of people who are anti-body positive being discriminated against, the community-controlled AIDS councils have
recommended against anti-body testing unless as a diagnostic aid during illness, as part of a properly-planned research project endorsed by the AIDS councils, or as part of blood, tissue or organ donation procedures. They also recommend that any healthy person who chooses to have supports this argument.

healthy person who chooses to have

The police have raided a few of these houses, and confiscating the broths and increased syphilis effectively through the closing such solutions are, in most cases, in particular focussing on the debates in America over whether gay male bath houses or saunas should be closed. I say apparent because, in my community health and civil liberties, I only to control syphilis effectively through the closing of brothels and increased criminalisation of prostitution supports this argument.

In Australia, although the Festival of Light has picketed a gay sauna, and the Victorian police have raided a few saunas in Melbourne (claiming that they were brothels, and confiscating the free condoms), on the whole the gay community and the AIDS councils and saunas have been able to co-operate in safe sex education and fund-raising for the AIDS councils.

Altman spends a chapter on the apparent conflicts between community health and civil liberties, in particular focussing on the debates in America over whether gay male bath houses or saunas should be closed. I say apparent because, in my view, such solutions are, in most cases, not only a threat to civil liberties, they also don’t work, medically speaking. The evidence of past control syphilis effectively through the closing of brothels and increased criminalisation of prostitution supports this argument.

In Australia, although the Festival of Light has picketed a gay sauna, and the Victorian police have raided a few saunas in Melbourne (claiming that they were brothels, and confiscating the free condoms), on the whole the gay community and the AIDS councils and saunas have been able to co-operate in safe sex education and fund-raising for the AIDS councils. It will come as no surprise to ALR readers that the level of government co-operation and support for the grassroots AIDS councils varies from state to state. Victoria leads the way, with the Cain government providing government funding for a gay-controlled Gay Community Health Centre similar to neighbourhood-based community health centres. On the other hand, the situation in Queensland leaves a lot to be desired, and the NSW Labor government, while better than its Queensland counterpart, has also gone in for homophobic publicity stunts.

In America, the situation varies from city to city. Health care activists and those interested in the political economy of health will find Altman’s account of the American health care system informative. The American government has failed to provide proper health care for people with AIDS or fund adequate research. This led to a world-wide International Mobilisation Against AIDS on 26 May to register the anger and distress of the gay community at this unforgivable failure.

The fact that AIDS can be transmitted sexually has led to much soul-searching by gay men about gay male sexuality. Questions of sexual morality, and what should be the emotional meaning of sexuality are being discussed. Altman’s book provides an overview of these discussions. One response, typified by the gay writer, Larry Kramer, is that the party is over. Gay men must stop sleeping around and should have, in the past, fought more strongly for the right to get married. Another response, voiced by Cindy Patton, calls for the need to reaffirm the vision of lesbian and gay liberation, arguing that “we were not wrong to attack the anti-sex morality of our society”.

Altman himself writes that “to simply assume that a return to conventional mores is either possible or desirable is a mistake and ignores the effects of old-style repression”.

There are several problems with these discussions, the first being that they often presume certain individualistic assumptions about sexuality. Homosexuality is not confined to the “gay community”, and the community itself is a social/political formation whose historical evolution helped to create certain individual identities in the first place.

The second danger which Altman points to is that of lapsing into metaphor. The problems of emotional fulfilment from this or that lifestyle, are, in a sense, separate from those of the transmission of the virus. The danger of infection by the HTLV3 virus lies not in a particular gay lifestyle, nor in sex itself, but in particular sexual acts performed without proper protection.

Whether the gay movement will be able to communicate this to the wider society in a situation of mounting seriousness and possible panic, we have yet to see. Denis Altman’s very readable book is a contribution to this process.

Derek Payne is a Victorian State Organiser for the Communist Party.

THE CHILD CARE CRISIS

Caring for Australia’s Children: Political and Industrial Issues in Child Care, by Deborah Brennan and Carol O’Donnell (Allen and Unwin, 1986). Reviewed by JUDY HILL.

Caring for children in Australia has traditionally been regarded as a family affair, where the child’s well-being depended on the social and economic status of his parents, untrammelled by government intervention. Only in cases of extreme need or irretrievable family breakdown could state or community support and regulation be accepted.

In a timely and comprehensive survey of political and industrial issues moulding public policy attitudes to children’s services, Deb Brennan and Carol O’Donnell argue strongly that child care is an essential community service which is required by all families with young children. They assert that child care is a profoundly political issue. It concerns the distribution of power, resources and opportunities within families and within society at large. The amount of funds allocated to services for children, the level of service provision throughout the community and the wages and industrial conditions of child care workers are all measures of the extent
to which women and children are valued in this society.

If the availability of child care services is one criterion of the value of women and children in Australian society, *Caring for Australia’s Children* clearly illustrates long-term political neglect. Brennan and O’Donnell note that, based on 1980 figures, just 5.8 percent of Australia’s 1.1 million children under five years of age have access to a child care centre of a family day care scheme. The authors challenge the views that low levels of usage of child care services actually indicate low levels of demand, and that most parents do not want to use formal services, but would prefer to have their children minded by relatives, neighbours and friends. Research evidence to the contrary is cited, clearly proving that services are either non-existent, filled to capacity, too expensive, open at unsuitable hours, or not located on public transport routes.

The paucity of service provision is not only of concern to working mothers. Social, economic and geographic factors have caused fundamental changes in the structures of families so that parents seek access to children’s services because they recognise the benefits to their own children. Attendance at a child care centre provides educational experiences, opportunities for companionship, imaginative play and loud and messy games which may not be possible in a small house or flat. Therefore the authors conclude that child care is an eagerly sought and valued family support service, especially for those parents with children who are socially isolated or disabled.

Aboriginal communities have set up child care centres to further cultural self-determination among young Aboriginal children. Migrant families see child care services as a better alternative than repatriating their children, or leaving them with minders they do not trust.

If there is such a demand for child care services, and parents regard them as a normal social provision such as educational facilities, why have Australian politicians been so reluctant to acknowledge child care as an important policy issue? Brennan and O’Donnell outline the development of Commonwealth children’s services policies up to 1985. A brief historical account underlines the ideological force of the belief that child care should be only for families in need and the impact in the 1950s of Bowlby’s theory of maternal deprivation.

Until 1972, there was no significant Commonwealth policy for child care. The provision of these services was largely a state matter. As a result, service provision was desultory, unplanned, unrelated to population concentrations and either privately owned or of a welfare nature. With the introduction of the Child Care Act in 1972, the Commonwealth government was enabled to provide capital and recurrent grants to non-profit organisations for child care, while the parliamentary debates during the bill’s passage indicate the government’s reluctant acceptance of such a measure, and politicians generally mouthed traditional attitudes about women’s place, the authors rightly emphasise that it was a significant development for the provision of children’s services in Australia.

In December 1972, the first Labor government for twenty-three years was elected. An outline of the considerable public debate about children’s services which followed clearly indicates that considerable pressure had to be maintained to ensure that Commonwealth child care policy addressed family requirements for care. Despite election promises to the contrary, the Whitlam government, in 1974, felt it necessary and possible to scale down its Children’s Services Programme from $130 million to $34 million. Intense and bitter lobbying against this decision resulted in the restitution of program funding to $75 million, and an announcement that “by 1980, all children in Australia (would) have access to services designed to take care of their physical, social and recreational needs. The conclusion drawn by the authors is that this was a historic pronouncement which committed the federal government to the universal provision of children’s services in Australia for the first time.

The vulnerability of children’s services to ideological and political change became apparent in the lean years of the Liberal-National Party government: a government which had, by the 1982/83 financial year, reduced children’s services expenditure in real terms to 22.4 percent below the 1975 figure.

Subsidised child care was stigmatised as a residual welfare service, rather than a normal social provision. The underlying philosophy of the Fraser government was that a normally functioning family would not require child care services or would be able to buy them privately.

It is not surprising, then, that the Hawke Labor government, elected in 1983, included among its policies, a commitment to child care as a right for all families, and funding levels which would allow services to be provided at a cost which could be afforded by the majority of users. It also embarked on a major expansion of services and, during the 1984 election campaign, promised to create 20,000 new child care places over a period of three years.

However, the positive direction taken by Labor, as Brennan and O’Donnell point out, has been severely undermined by massive cuts to children’s services funding announced in mid-1985. The extent of these cuts is greater than in any single year of the Fraser government. Senator Peter Walsh, Finance Minister, quoted in the book, seems to sum up the Labor government’s current attitude to children’s services funding. Having estimated the cost of child care for every pre-school child with parents in the workforce to be $500 million for capital, and $500 million for recurrent funding, he added: "Child care should not have the priority entailed in that sort of expenditure. To expand the programme in that way would be a misallocation of funds."

Brennan and O’Donnell are naturally cautious about the long-term outcome of these cuts while, at the same time, arguing strongly against the government’s reasons for implementing such draconian measures. That it is a result of political priorities, rather than good financial management, is evident from the authors’ telling comparison of government policy on the dependent
spouse rebate and child care fees. They point out that the government is willing to enforce high fees in child care centres where they do not know the levels of family incomes, yet ignore the massive cost to the community amounting to $1,000 million per year for the dependent spouse rebate, knowing that 40 percent of it goes to households with incomes above average weekly earnings. Although child care has become a political issue, political commitment has often proved tenuous.

In the latter half of the book, Brennan and O'Donnell explore the industrial side of child care policy. They argue that working with young children in Australia is undervalued and underpaid. Child care work is defined as women's work and is regarded as an extension of women's supposedly natural ability to nurture. This view leads to an assumption that there is no necessity for child care workers to receive training. As a result, child care work is frequently undertaken by unpaid and untrained workers who depress the market so that wages and conditions of child care workers can be kept at a low level. The small industrial gains made when Child Care Act funding was tied to award wages have now been undermined by changes to the act so that staff employed in child care centres are again to be determined by outdated and inconsistent state regulations. These issues have recently caused considerable distress among parents and staff who regard training as an essential component of good quality services.

The book highlights the direct relationship between the availability of child care services and equal employment opportunities for women in paid employment. The authors point out that the care of young children is not just the responsibility of women and the establishment of an adequate network of child care services is essential if women are to assume an equal role in our society.

Government neglect and its propensity to see child care as a family (i.e. woman's) responsibility can only be remedied by strong and concerted action from parents, unions and lobby groups.

It has been said that child care is the public policy issue around which all other factors influencing the relationship of the sexes are brought into play — on one side or the other. There are attitudes towards women which stem fundamentally from economic motives: that women are taking men's jobs, that they accept lower pay, that they are antagonistic to trade unions, and that they weaken the general bargaining power of labour. There are also the attitudes which are essentially relational, such as the masculine desire for comfort and the smooth running of a household, the need of care for children, and the conventional conceptions of woman's place that are part sexual, part religious and part political in origin. Child care is an issue which is a singular focus for complex attitudes and for interwoven rationalisations.

Caring for Australia's Children examines the many aspects of the children's services debate with some compelling insights and intelligent argument. There are many aspects which have been omitted or lightly touched upon: the impact of federal/state relations, the Australian view of welfare, the taxation system — to name a few. This limitation does not detract from this book: rather it highlights the need for further books. This one achieves its aim of drawing together the broad political and industrial dimensions of the child care debate, and it accompanies it with shrewd political insight. It is an excellent starting point for those concerned with any of these issues. Its optimistic proposals for the future development of child care policy and its confident assertion that child care is reaching political maturity, will encourage those who are working, or wish to work, in this area. In addition, an excellent set of footnoted references is available as an initial guide.

Judy Hill works at the Community Child Care Centre in Sydney.
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