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The Left and the Economic Crisis

To a large extent, the current economic malaise, at the centre of which is the continuing drama of the national debt and the international financial markets, was a predictable outcome of a massive strategic contradiction within the policies of the Hawke government over its first three years of office. It is difficult to believe that the government could not have been aware from the beginning that its stated industrial and wage strategy, based upon the Accord and a program of sustained economic growth, was sharply at odds with its deregulatory financial policies, of which the deregulation of the dollar was the most visible - if hardly the most significant - expression. And, in fact, the strategy based upon the Accord and economic growth predated Keating's accession to the Treasury, and was to some extent beyond his control.

The policy of financial deregulation, by contrast, was Keating's enthusiasm from the outset. Historically, its ascendance within the ALP Right in NSW could perhaps be traced to the party's debate over uranium mining before the 1982 conference, when right-wing numbers person Graham Richardson took the extraordinary step of inviting a US State Department official to argue a deregulatory line for the sale of uranium. The official stressed magnificently the enormous power of international capital over national economies, and the importance of not angering the financial markets by failure to honour contracts: on the N.S.W. right the lesson apparently had great effect. At any event, it was about this time that the parliamentary party's prospective strategy came to subordinate fiscal expansionism to the demands of the international financial markets.

In government this soon developed a circular logic. Financial deregulation in an expansionary environment served merely to exacerbate the private foreign debt, while the removal of exchange controls could only serve to encourage capital outflow - leading to a situation where record profits coexisted with levels of investment lower than the Whitlam years. This problem - which was far more significant for the economy than the fall in the terms of trade - was not only one of the government's own making, it was in fact a predictable outcome of the short-circuiting of the expansionary strategy by the deregulatory strategy.

The budget and the cloud hanging over the Accord have signalled that the two strategies are now at an impasse. The government's political strategy now - inasmuch as it possesses one at all - appears to be directed towards splitting the labour movement, detaching the centre and the right, and taking them over to the 'new' contractionary policies as the 'only solution' to the malaise. This appears also to be the aim of ACTU President Simon Crean, whose expressions of 'solidarity' at the recent ALP Conference can only be taken as a sign that he does not as yet possess the strength to make a move to take the centre and right over to the Hawke-Keating strategy.

The next few months will be vital for the prospects of left and progressive forces in general, and in particular for the prospects of the left within the trade union movement. It is highly important that the trade union movement is not split, and that it remains united around the only response which can retain the support of the movement as a whole, the so-called 'nationalist' economic response.

Broadly speaking, the nationalist response takes as given a number of factors - the balance of payments situation, low economic growth, and an appalling level of domestic investment. Inevitably it also takes as given the underlying structural fragility of the Australian economy, with the export sector heavy (and under Hawke and Keating actually increasing) reliance on primary produce and raw minerals. Moreover, the nationalist approach can be divided into clearly distinct short-term and long-term components. The short term component is based upon the industry development proposals formulated by the ACTU and
endorsed by the recent ALP Conference - proposals aimed at drawing an increased contribution from the industrial base, and from goods with a high value-added component, into both domestic and foreign demand. Within this short-term strategy it is clear that the elements centred around the import-substitution policies are quite well-developed, while those centred around the restructing of export goods industries are a good deal more conjectural.

This short-term component necessitated a good deal of hard thinking on the part of the labour movement left. In particular, its adoption entailed a willingness to put up with more of the orthodox Treasury approach in the short-term, with the aim of securing in the meantime longer-term leverage over the structural changes at present facing the economy. It also entailed the recognition that, one way or another, Australian industry faces a bout of 'restructuring'. The choice lies not in whether or not this should happen, but in whether it is to be shaped purely by the pulls of the international financial markets, or whether the process will be directed by conscious government policy - and whether the labour movement itself will be in a position to play a decisive role.

In consequence, the strategy based around the nationalist response entails some quite enormous risks (as indeed did the original Accord strategy). The difference this time lies in the heightened awareness within the labour movement of the importance of an import policy in any expansionist response — and in a greater consciousness of the stakes involved. If the strategy fails, the third round will be one of straight out conflict - a situation which would be costly both for the government and the trade union movement and progressive forces in general.

On one side of the current, orthodox 'internationalist' response, there is little difference in general direction between the leading sections of capital and the Hawke-Keating elements in the ALP. In the internationalist scenario, industry restructing is based upon the assumption that new export structures will be able to trade their way out of Australia's export problems. There is little difference, too, in the level of blind faith in the willingness of international capital to invest in these new structures once the fundamentals have been put in place. Nor is there any appreciable difference over the strategy's basis — an I.M.F.-style 'crisis' response of slowing down the economy by cutting effective demand.

The difference lies rather in the extreme constraints upon Hawke and Keating's ability to manoeuvre outside a basic range of responses. They are incapable of delivering the kinds of expenditure cuts which a conservative government would be able and willing to deliver; they are not at present able to deliver wide-scale cuts in public expenditure and demand; and they are clearly not able to deliver a program of privatisation to help fund the internationalist response.

This is a dilemma which ultimately Hawke and Keating could only resolve by decisively alienating every other sector of the ALP and the labour movement. Short of that, what they might hope to deliver is enough in the way of restored economic growth not ot have to cut public expenditure further. Allied with this, they probably forsee a situation of almost automatic wage discounting for the forseeable future. In any event, a large part of capital is possibly not fetishistic about the public sector - so long as welfare is funded through taxation (as in the case of the Medicare levy).

Without these constraints - with a change of government in other words - the other elements of the strategy could be expected to follow: deregulation of the labour market, initially around the edges; the destruction of wages policy and arbitration; attacks on the wages and conditions of marginalised sectors of the workforce; and the concomitant creation of a 'core' workforce resembling the old-style labour aristocracy.

Keating perhaps believes that if he can split the labour movement, and take the right and centre over to the internationalist strategy, then the government may be able to retain its 'natural relationship' with the movement, and thus also the ALP's pretensions to being the 'natural party of government'. If he fails, the government will have no other course to follow except increasing isolation from all of its natural supporters. In that case, all that would be achieved would be the laying of the ground work for the far more reactionary solutions of a Howard government dominated by the New Right. The only serious alternative in the immediate future is unity within the labour movement around the nationalist response, coupled with a much broader campaign on the part of all the left and progressive forces, welfare and community groups, leading off from the current 'Change the Direction' campaign.

(The above is based upon a talk given recently by Ann Catling, an economist with the Reserve Bank in Sydney — Ed.)

Testing Time for the Tories

The political fortunes of the Thatcher government in not-so-Great Britain are at a low ebb. The fundamental problems of the economy are unresolved, indeed worsened, by a monetarist-oriented policy approach which has produced relentless de-industrialisation and forced over 3.3 million people into the dole queues. Industrial diaputation is rife, partly because of the concerted assault on trade unionism (though the legislation to require unions to hold votes on the maintenance of a political fund to support the Labour Party has backfired, all the unions to date having voted to do so).

There is an evident disillusionment in substantial sections of the electorate which has previously given the Conservatives such strong support. The most tangible expression of this was in May when two by-elections for parliament, and nation-wide local government elections, produced almost uniformly bleak results for the Conservatives. Both
parliamentary seats had been considered Conservative strongholds. The Tory candidate just scraped home in one, and the other was lost to the Social Democratic Party-Liberal Party Alliance. The swing against the government averaged 17 percent. In the local government elections, the Tories lost more than 700 seats and control of 29 councils, mainly to the Labour Party.

Of course, by-elections typically feature an anti-government swing. And this also spills over into local government elections where people typically "think nationally, vote locally", paying only secondary attention to the local issues with which the elections are formally concerned. However, the extent of the swing was striking. Labour Party leaders were cock-a-hoop, claiming to be "on course to form the next national government". The alliance leaders were "over the moon" with the prospect of holding the balance of power in the next parliament. The Conservatives acknowledged it as a dire warning; and the staunchly proConservative Daily Telegraph ran an article, under the heading "Vote of No Confidence", suggesting that Mrs. Thatcher should resign now in order to give a less abrasive leadership time to prepare for the next general election. There is no indication that she will. Her immediate response was to give a firm assurance that there would be no change in the government's policies.

Explanations for the loss of Conservative support are many and varied. Some commentators have stressed long-term problems which have generated cumulative concern: most obviously, the chronic problem of unemployment and the deterioration in the availability and quality of social services, particularly health and education. A somewhat bizarre variant on this theme is the view that it is the very "success" of the Thatcherite economic policies which has intensified the demands for a greater trickle-down of wealth through expenditure on social services.

At the other extreme, other commentators have stressed personal problems within the Conservative Party — the conflict between Mrs. Thatcher and her Minister of Defence over "the Westland affair", his subsequent resignation and that of another minister who had misled parliament, the aggressive personal style of party chairman Norman Tebbit (famous for his advice to the unemployed: "get on your bike"), and so forth.

Then there is the Libya factor. Opinion polls suggest that about two out of three Britons did not support Mrs. Thatcher's decision to provide air-force bases for US planes to launch their attack against Libya. Quite simply, it is seen as having raised the risks of further terrorism directed against the citizenry. Moreover, it is widely seen as the act of a handmaiden to US interests. Unlike the Falklands war, it has provided no basis for jingoistic national pride. There is no glory in being the junior partner in the Atlantic alliance. Finally, and most recently, there was the Commonwealth Games where Mrs. Thatcher's intransigence on sanctions was seen as undermining the very basis of the Commonwealth itself.

Of course, there is plenty of time for reversals of party political fortunes before the next election. The British system requires a general election only every five years, so there is much more scope than in Australia for governments to pursue unpopular policies or otherwise suffer reduced popularity, but recover in time for re-election. But, on the basis of the local elections (and a previous by-election which saw an impressive victory for Labour in the London constituency of Fulham), the tide is running strongly against the Conservatives.

If a similar swing were reported at the next general election, the state of the parties would be Labour 300, Alliance 164, Conservative 159 and others 27 (compared with the 1983 election results of Conservative 397, Labour 209, Alliance 23 and others 21). But this is simply an arithmetical calculation, and more shrewd political assessments suggest a much closer balance between the support for the Labour and Conservative parties. Nudging the Tories into third place is beyond the wildest dreams of the alliance (trouncing the Labour Party would be a more typical, but even less realistic, dream). Still, the Alliance has established itself as a strong third force, more significant than the Australian Democrats have ever been on the local scene.

An inference which may be drawn from the recent elections is that there is a situation of two-two-party systems in the U.K. In one system the Tories compete with Labour, and in the other with the Alliance. Mrs. Thatcher's government has aroused such strong feelings that electors are either clearly for it or against it; and, of those against it, many vote according to which party, Labour or the Alliance, is seen likely to be the principal challenger. This tendency holds a clear danger for the Labour Party since, at the last general election, it was second to the Conservatives in fewer than one-third of the Conservative-held seats. But the Alliance, lacking a coherent solution to Britain's economic problems, ha...
the appearance of a rallying-point for protest votes. As the Daily Telegraph lamented, "it is all too comfortable for today's floating voter to float in and out of the Alliance without the soulsearching once needed to float between Conservatives and Labour".

Meanwhile, the Labour Party has other problems on its hands. Despite considerable success in rebuilding the strength of the party, Mr. Kinnock's commitment to the expulsion of the Militant tendency is bound to further fuel internal divisiveness. Kinnock's position makes him seem more middle-of-the-road in electoral terms, but at what price? The editor of The Militant argued in a letter to The Guardian that "the expulsion of Marxists is a prelude to turning the Labour Party into a second version of the Liberal/Social Democrats". After all, this is a country in which the Labour Party, for all its record of capitalist economic management tinged with reformism, is still widely known as the Socialists.

Finally, it is important to emphasise the regional character of the political situation. The United Kingdom is very far from united. In the south and south-east there is considerable prosperity, and support for the Tories remains generally strong. But in the rest of the country, from the Midlands to Wales, the north and Scotland, unemployment is acute and the level of support for the Thatcher government is minimal. The recent elections confirmed this duality, though there were significant losses even in the Tory heartlands. In the local government elections, the Labour Party successes have given it local control of all the major industrial cities. Even in the south, inner-urban areas have generally backed Labour: the first direct elections for the Inner London Education Authority gave Labour 39 of the 58 seats at stake.

The relationship between class and region is not one-to-one, but recent events have been a reminder, if one was needed, of the polarising effects of the Thatcher program. There are no grand claims about the achievement of consensus in the UK.

Frank Stilwell

**Multiculturalism in Jeopardy**

It was in 1973 that the Whitlam Labor government introduced the policy of multiculturalism. This new-found policy proposed that all Australians should be able to maintain their own distinct cultural identity without fear of discrimination, and advocated that all Australians should have equal access to and be able to participate fully in social and institutional life. Multiculturalism, therefore, was a significant departure from the past policies of assimilation and integration which had been based on the assumption that all members of Australian society should adopt "a commonly accepted way of life". At the same time, it has also been the subject of considerable debate within the left — a debate focussing on the limitations (and possibilities) of multiculturalism in addressing social justice issues.

Since the introduction of this policy, successive Australian governments of different political persuasions have given support to multiculturalism. The recent budget decisions taken by the federal government have, in one moment, removed a number of key programs and services which support multiculturalism. Despite official statements to the contrary, it appears that there has been a significant change in the government's commitment to the social policy of multiculturalism.

Perhaps the most widely publicised decision concerns the merging of the Special Broadcasting Service with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Contrary to the recommendations made in a recent government report, the government has made a decision to proceed with the merging of the two bodies. While it is still not clear what this merger means in concrete terms, it appears that the separate networks will be maintained. However, it is difficult to imagine how SBS will be able to continue in its present manner when it is placed under the control of a much larger organisation which is, itself, encountering substantial funding cuts and which has shown little commitment to the principles of servicing a culturally and linguistically diverse population.

Along with this decision, the government has decided to abolish the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs and replace it with an Office of Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs within the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. Shortly after its election to government in 1983, the Labor government reviewed the institute. The review found that the institute had been largely ineffective and described it as "a costly failure". However, the review also argued that there was a near-unanimous conviction on the part of all sections of the community that AIMA represents worthwhile ideals deserving of retention if they can be revitalised and redirected in proper channels. In June 1985 the government established a new council for the institute and amended the AIMA Act to enable it to move beyond a narrow concern with cultural pluralism into a broader concern with social justice issues. Despite these recent decisions to retain the institute under a new charter, the government has now decided to pursue a "new strategy" for multiculturalism — without any consultation with ethnic communities, organisations which had worked with the institute over the past 12 months, or the institute's council. It is not clear what this strategy will actually encompass besides the establishment of an office.

As a result of the budget cuts, the area of education in and for a multicultural society has been severely affected. The Multicultural Education Program which began in the late 1970s has been disbanded, while the English as a Second Language Program (ESL) has been reduced by forty-five percent. The Multicultural Education Program attempted to provide all students with the opportunity to develop an understanding of their own
and others' cultural heritage; acquire or maintain a language other than English; encourage parents, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds to participate in the education of their children; and also encourage schools to develop materials and programs which accurately portray the history of Australia's indigenous and immigrant people. In its weaker moments, this program supported initiatives which often reinforced stereotyping through what are commonly referred to as “spaghetti and dance” activities. In its stronger moments, it contested many of the cultural assumptions underpinning the mainstream curriculum which ensured that certain groups of students were excluded from full access to and participation in the schooling process. The disbanding of this program will certainly pose a problem for the continuing of this task.

The reduction in the ESL program is in line with certain recommendations contained in a number of reports produced for the Schools' Commission in recent years. The argument put forward in these reports was that as ESL was an essential ongoing activity of schools it should no longer be funded as a Specific Purpose Program but should be funded through recurrent grants to the states. While there have been reductions in the ESL program, the states have theoretically been provided with enough funds to continue the same level of ESL. However, without mechanisms to ensure that funds which are intended for ESL, but are not specifically earmarked for this area, are used for ESL, there is certainly a real risk that states will make significant cuts in this vital area. Whatever the intention of the federal government in this matter, in the last resort it will be up to the states as to how they will use their recurrent funding. If the new strategy for multicultural affairs is to encompass issues of access and equity, as indeed it must, then cuts to ESL would indicate that such a new strategy will not progress beyond the level of rhetoric.
ALTERNATIVES TO ANZUS

Jo Vallentine

A nuclear-free, independent Australia based on a new sustainable economic, social and political order. That's my vision and my hope. It's also the hope of half a million Australians who put nuclear disarmament at the top of their collective political agenda at the 1984 federal election. They are too small words, "vision" and "hope" and, unfortunately, much underused in Australia today. Spoken in our federal parliamentary forum, they are almost tantamount to confessions of weakness, both in mind and argument.

It was exactly this political nearsightedness that first plunged me into the sometimes murky waters of Australian politics. After the Australian Labor Party's 1984 decision on uranium mining, there was a vacuum in the electoral field which was partially filled by the fledgling Nuclear Disarmament Party. As someone who was, first and foremost, an activist, my decision to enter the mainstream parliamentary process was not taken lightly. The debate within the peace movement has been lively since the last federal election, with some people preferring that we stay out of this arena altogether and concentrate, instead, in working through the major parties and encouraging greater mobilisation of support at the community level. There are also those who believe that parliamentarians elected on a single issue platform cannot address the many interconnecting concerns which face our society. Their suggestions focus around the development of a Green party which would field candidates with broad peace, social justice and environmental policies.

With 12 months' actual parliamentary experience, I am more drawn to the notion that I, as an independent, can do my best work concentrating on the issue of nuclear disarmament and its implications in the defence and foreign affairs area. However, I believe it is important for us to draw the connections between nuclear disarmament and the broader peace issues. Working as an independent in the federal parliament on this single issue is, as I see it, the most effective way for me to work for change. If, on my election, people thought that a politician working full time on this issue could effect immediate change, reduce the number of nuclear weapons, manage to persuade the Labor government that it should ban the visits of nuclear warships to our ports, or terminate the leases on the three major US bases in Australia, then they would have been bitterly disappointed. Rather, I consider my task in politics to be one of changing attitudes, both of the major political parties and the Australian public. And I think it is in these vital areas that we are making some headway.

The main focus of my work, as I head into my second year in the Senate, will be striving to win Australians to the opinion that the only future lies in an independent nuclear-free Australia — and that means offering alternatives to the security blanket of ANZUS. A lot of work needs to be done to convince the seventy percent of Australians who cling to ANZUS that we can survive without an alliance which has moved us far and beyond the terms of the 35-year-old treaty. The challenge of developing creative alternative strategies for our future defence and security needs is one that faces all Australians. Our psychological, if not physical, reliance on our great friend and ally would have been greatly reduced if we were more actively concerned with these issues rather than leaving them to the academic and military boffins and the politicians.

This is an area which the peace movement must also address seriously. It is a difficult task, given that the people involved in the movement have natural and strong
reluctance to consider alternative defence in the context of continuing world-wide militarisation. But if we are indeed concerned with achieving the ultimate goal of a nuclear-free Australia, we must address the very real security concerns of the majority of Australians. Australia’s progress along a nuclear-free path must, therefore, be a steady, step-by-step process.

The Dibb Report is a positive first step towards this goal as it outlines a more self-reliant defence posture for Australia. But do not think that the report somehow loosens the United States’ nuclear stranglehold on us. We are still firmly entrenched in the US’ nuclear war strategies and, until we free ourselves from this morally debilitating alliance with one of the world’s great nuclear superpowers, we will never be truly independent. In fact, Defence Minister Beazley, when tabling the Dibb Report in the House of Representatives in June this year, spent the first five minutes allaying Opposition fears that the Dibb Report would offend the Americans. Rather than offending, the Dibb Report complies with US policy to the letter. In line with the Guam Doctrine enunciated by President Nixon in 1969, Australia is finally looking towards self-reliant defence — a position which successive Australian governments have chosen to ignore. Instead, those governments chose a course which maintained our colonial client state mentality and immaturity, refusing to tackle our own defence responsibilities.

We must constantly remind ourselves of our position within the ANZUS treaty. It does not commit us to hosting US bases on Australian soil; it does not commit us to granting landing rights for B-52 bombers; it does not commit us to allowing our ports to be used by nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed warships. All of these “obligations” have come about by separate and mostly secret agreements between the US government and, on many occasions, individuals in various Australian governments. The development of the alliance has moved heavily in the US’s favour... we don’t even get a guarantee of help in time of threat to our national security. As we approach the embarrassing bicentenary of European occupation of Australia, it seems to be a perfect time to look at our sovereignty and to examine the alliance to determine whether it is beneficial or even relevant to our defence.

The Australian government has argued that we can have more impact on Washington from within ANZUS...
It is the spirit of self-reliance that I applaud in Paul Dibb’s report.

than from outside it, but I can’t see any evidence of this in terms of progress at the Geneva arms talks, nor, for instance, during the current wheat crisis. Personally, I think it is naive of Australians to think that the US government should consider our wheat farmers ahead of its own. But the interesting twist in this debate has been the suggestion that the bases could be used as bargaining chips in an attempt to get a better deal for our farmers. We are always being told of the vital role the bases play in arms control. Obviously, the work is not vital enough when the farmers and the government stand to lose $400 million in lost wheat contracts. The mere suggestion undercuts the government’s main justification for keeping bases here. It is also a good indication that the bases’ peacekeeping roles of monitoring and verification must indeed be miniscule for the government to even suggest that they may be expendable.

The current wheat crisis has put our alliance with the US into sharp focus for many Australians. Generations succeeding the World War have inherited the debt of gratitude of those who fought alongside the US between 1941 and 1945. I think we have repaid that debt many times over, and it is now time we took an independent and equal role in regional and international affairs. The events of recent months have clearly shown that our humble reliance and assumption of preferential treatment from our great ally are totally unfounded. The US could not have spelt out its position more clearly: it will look after its own interest first and foremost. It is a great shame that the string of Australian governments since 1951 did not think likewise.

It is the spirit of self-reliance that I applaud in Paul Dibb’s report. That such a report was commissioned by a Labor government which has not shown itself to be dynamically different from previous conservative Liberal governments is encouraging in that it suggests it is pursuing a more self-reliant defence posture and seeking a more public debate on defence matters. However, while Mr. Beazley made it clear that we cannot depend on the ANZUS alliance with any degree of certainty, he continues to argue that we still need the US because it provides us with intelligence information and superior military technology. It may well be true that the US provides us with a great deal of our intelligence information, but just how much is relevant to the defence of Australia? I strongly submit that very little is relevant unless we intend to do something outrageous with information such as troop deployment on the Sino-Soviet border. Australia’s own intelligence gathering service has proven, as recently as the fall of the Marcos regime earlier this year, that it can meet our intelligence requirements, and those of our great ally, more efficiently than the indiscriminate vacuum cleaners of Pine Gap and Nurrungar.

As for superior military technology, the first thing to point out is that, depending on our defence strategies, the military shopping list could vary considerably. We need only buy that equipment which is appropriate for the defence of this country. Secondly, the superior military technology is paid for at considerable price. We are the United States’ second biggest buyer of military hardware. We don’t get
bargain basement prices for the great costs of having US bases stationed on our soil, US nuclear warships or B-52 bombers visit. There is no such thing as a free lunch ... or alliance.

I agree essentially with Mr. Dibb's initial analysis of our relative security in the world, which seems to reflect the findings of the 1981 Katter report. However, Mr. Dibb's brief did not include the wider political and economic concerns that make for national security rather than purely military options. Nor was there any reference to alternative models of conflict resolution which we could explore from our secure strategic position; nor does he give us any reason why other countries in the region should not see the Australian military build-up in terms of security threat and follow suit, thus sparking a regional arms race among countries who cannot afford it any more than we can.

New Zealand is a shining example of a regional neighbour doing a serious stocktake of its foreign policy and defence arrangements. The New Zealand government is finalising its community-based defence inquiry which has been overwhelmed by more than 6,000 submissions. In October, my office is organising a conference in Canberra on alternative defence, and the keynote speaker will be Dr. Kevin Clements, one of the commissioners of the New Zealand defence inquiry. I am convinced that if we seriously hope to wreak any changes in the way we and our governments consider the defence of this country, it can only be achieved by continued and informed input from the people.

**Australia could be a creative force in this new mode of thinking**

At this embryonic stage of alternative defence, I advocate a step-by-step strategy of transarmament which would lead Australia from our new position of self-reliance within ANZUS, to defensive defence outside ANZUS, to my ultimate goal of nonviolent social, or civil defence. In tandem with these new defence ideas, Australia should be looking to develop economic security in the region. Locked, as we have been, into a superpower alliance, we in Australia have been isolated in our own region. We are considered by most of our neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region as a major annex of the United States — a country whose interests firmly rest in the palm of a nuclear superpower. Once detached from such an alliance, Australia could be expected to be an important active participant in our region's economic, political and cultural affairs. At the international level, Australia, as an independent and non-nuclear state, has the potential to be an important player in strengthening institutions such as the United Nations and the International Court of Justice, as well as encouraging alternative models of conflict resolution and thus reducing tensions between Greater and Lesser Powers.

There is no denying that we live in troubled times. With the rapid development of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, as well as a frightening proliferation of highly "efficient" conventional weapons, the world must make a determined effort to explore alternative ways of resolving international conflict. My hope and vision is for Australia to be a creative force in this new mode of thinking. Growing out of the restrictive ANZUS alliance into more tailor-made defence and foreign policies, Australia would emerge as a benchmark for other "bloc" nations, both East and West, to follow suit, between and beyond the blocs. After almost 200 years of dependence on great and powerful friends and the misguided glamour-image of the Australian Digger going off to fight other nations' wars, it is time this country reclaimed its sovereignty.

The bicentenary is a good opportunity to challenge Australians with the concept of real independence and for us to learn a little neighbourliness towards nations in our own Asia-Pacific region -- a relationship we have shamefully neglected for 200 years. I work for the day when the sun will rise on a self-reliant, independent Australia ... not as a European outpost, nor as the 51st state of the USA.

**JO VALLENTINE** is an independent Senator from Western Australia.
THE POPULAR IS PLURAL: Creating a Left Political Culture

Colin Mercer
This is not an article about cultural politics. It is, in the first instance, about a more extended concept of culture than the one we are more accustomed to. By implication, the concept of 'the political' which goes with it is also more extended. These 'extensions' — my main argument goes — are increasingly necessary in the consolidation, formation and re-formation of a popular theoretical, intellectual and cultural base for socialism in Australia. If the argument can be said to have one overriding aim then that is for us to develop a confidence and expertise in the procedures of 'agenda-setting' on social, economic and political issues rather than a reliance on the politics of the defensive knee-jerk.

What would it take to define, form or even reform the elements of a left political culture? We need to ask first, perhaps, what exactly is a political culture since the concept, after a period of disuse, seems to be creeping back by stealth or by explicit intervention into the language of left debates. Secondly, we need to ask, does the left have one and what is it like? Thirdly, if we do have one, then what, with 'renewal' and 'prospects' in mind, would be the conditions for its reformation?

The Broad Left Conference had a session entitled 'Political Culture' which was actually about cultural politics, which is something different. If I explain, briefly, how they are different, then perhaps I can mount an argument about why I think that the concept political culture — or at least the areas that it attempts to designate — might be important for debates about the future of socialism in Australia.

Cultural politics is committed to the politicisation of culture; it insists that existing forms of culture — film, the fine arts, television, literature, theatre — do not provide innocent forms of recreation and pleasure. Cultural forms are, however attenuated and mediated they might be, essentially ideological by nature. Representations of, variously, national history, women, Aborigines, human nature in cultural forms are seen as having distinctive ideological effects. The aim of a cultural politics is to intervene in these forms of representation, to refuse them, to provide alternative forms and images and ways of writing. Cultural politics interrupts the dominant ideology at those points — in cultural forms — where they appear to be most natural and spontaneous and therefore most effective as a

*Festivals have a surplus of meaning: buying an ice cream at Sydney's Royal Easter Show.*
A dialogue between politics and popular pleasures: the film *Kiss of the Spiderwoman.*

sort of unconscious substratum of the dominant culture. This is a necessary and strategic form of intervention but, for reasons that I will argue in more detail below, it is restricted in its aims and, indeed, pace the proponents of cultural revolution, only one very small part of what needs to be a much larger and more sophisticated project. Cultural politics, on the whole, tends to work on a fairly restricted definition of culture; that of, as Raymond Williams describes it, 'the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.' Turn to the reviews pages of *Tribune* and you will see what I mean: books, fringe theatre, radical film. Rarely is there anything on, for example, sport, popular television or mainstream entertainment film. OK, so we recognise that we live in a dominant culture and that it is important to bring alternative forms to people's attention but the danger is that in carving out that worthy oppositional niche we might also be confining ourselves to it, that the 'fringe' might stay precisely that. Cultural politics, as currently practised, is always in danger of becoming a rather sterile avant-gardism or at best a politics of pure interruption. More of this argument later.

**Cultural politics, as currently practised, is always in danger of becoming a rather sterile avant-gardism**

Let me explore now the concept of 'political culture' and suggest why, in the face of cultural politics it might turn out to be a more useful concept. Firstly, the term culture refers here not to works and practices in any 'artistic' sense, but rather to a more 'anthropological' sense of the term as the distinctive forms, practices and techniques of, broadly, a 'way of life'. That is, I would suggest, more appropriate for our purposes despite its rather amorphous nature. It has at least the redeeming feature of being broader in its application and not something which is only talked about in the reviews pages of newspapers.

But there is a problem with the history of the concept of political culture which, as Tim Rowse clearly demonstrated a few years back, has a dubious heritage in so far as it emerged from a combination of behaviourist theory and sociology as a way of explaining, in post-war social science and political theory, the essential pragmatism of Australian political attitudes. It was a term deployed by political theorists and taken up by politicians to both theorise and, of course, consolidate in a national mentality, the essential and immutable elements of *consensus* in Australian society. It could be wheeled on to explain the nature of voting patterns, of political parties, the arbitration system and much more. In contemporary mainstream political science, the concept is still used to explain, for example, the 'countrymindedness' of Queensland voters or their predisposition to authoritarian forms of government. It was and is a term which ignores a great deal, not least explicit areas of conflict and contestation over class, race or gender which, being on the margins as the political theorists thought, really did not significantly affect the nature of the 'essential predispositions', the mental attitudes, the apparently permanent psychological orientations of the Australian
people. To frame a consensus, as we well know from more recent uses of the term, you have to exclude or marginalise more troubling conflicts from the picture.

Given all these problems associated with the concept political culture, why bother with it at all? Why is the term enjoying something of a resurgence and why am I prepared to argue that it might have some use in debates on the future of socialism. My answers to these questions are tentative but nonetheless insistent. They are both theoretical and more immediately political. Let me take the political point first.

The emergence of an increasingly well-organised and persuasive New Right committed to reforming 'attitudes', winning 'hearts and minds' and setting the agenda for new forms of 'common sense' by engaging in controversies over the family, education, morality, the nature of economic organisation and its concommitant field of 'rights' and 'duties' seems to me to indicate something of an assault not simply at the level of political theory or economic rationalism but also and, perhaps, most doggedly, at the level of popular opinion and beliefs. OK, you might say, we can recognise this, but what does it have to do with the notion of political culture?

To answer this, it might be useful to consider one definition of the concept which focuses not so much on the way it is deployed as an instrument of consensus politics as on what its basic analytical purpose is:

the subjective perception of history and politics, the fundamental beliefs and values, the foci of identification and loyalty, and the political knowledge and expectations which are the product of specific historical experience.

Now, it might be objected that this is what marxists have always called ideology. Fair enough, but the problem with the concept of ideology is the theoretical baggage it carries.

Popular beliefs can be dismissed as ideology, as a sort of veil pulled over the eyes of the people ... to keep them dumb or keep them amused with it from the nineteenth century. It brings with it a sense of falseness, of illusion, of not seeing the real conditions. Popular beliefs can be dismissed as ideology, as a sort of veil pulled over the eyes of the people by the dominant class either to keep them dumb or keep them amused. Not surprisingly, when you begin to speak of ideology as a form of political persuasion, people are either offended or bored. This is partly because we tend to think of ideologies as purely forms of belief at the level of ideas, in the head and not as deeply sedimented, 'practical' forms of common sense, as what Gramsci called 'practical ideologies' which 'organise' human masses, and create the terrain on which people move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc. This is, I think, a more useful definition of ideology (retaining the term itself for a moment); it insists on its practical, rooted, organisational capacities, on its ability to be formative and active rather than purely reflective. It insists also on its popular nature, its depth and resilience. This is a terrain which the New Right takes seriously. In another but not unrelated context, Stuart Hall has argued, via Gramsci, that...

Popular pleasures are often far from ideologically sound ...

What is at issue here is the transformation of those 'practical ideologies' which make the conditions of life intelligible ... and which exercise a practical and material force by organising their actions. What is at issue is the production ... of new kinds of 'common sense'.

Read Katharine West closely and you will see that she is not writing as a Professor of Political Science but, rather, as a 'professor' of a form of political anthropology. She is concerned, perhaps more persuasively than any other exponent of the New Right in Australia, precisely with those aspects of political culture which would fall under the heading of subjective perceptions, fundamental beliefs, foci of identification and loyalty and common sense, much more than she is with taking on her opponents 'intellectually'. She is able, in her own terms, and by recognising both the breadth of the terrain which the notion of political culture designates, and the complexity of 'subjective' factors involved, to extend her political mode of address much beyond the spheres of economic and political theory. That, if you like, is the immediate political reason for my argument. But an engagement with the notion of political culture has, I would argue, a more long-term purchase in prospects for renewal and in our attention to putting our own political culture in order.

While the left has spent nearly twenty years wondering what 'the personal is political' actually means ... the New Right have been getting on with doing it.

In different terms to those envisaged by the first users of the concept of political culture there is a growing recognition that what, for want of a better world, we can call the 'subjective' side of politics — areas of choice, personal dispositions and preferences, gender and sexuality, concerns over individual privacy and legal protection of the person separate and quite distinct spheres of value — are becoming
increasingly important. While the left has spent nearly twenty years wondering what 'the personal is political' actually means, or interpreting it in unduly narrow and uniform ways, the more perceptive proponents of the New Right have been getting on with doing it — with personalising the political and politicising the personal. Questions of 'lifestyle', getting government 'off our backs', fending for yourself, Right to Life, and so on; these are the markers of a personalist politics which confronts head on the area of subjectivity, of the ethical and moral spheres about which the left has had comparatively little to say. Occupying our little oppositional or 'alternative' niche, we have tended to operate on the 'Archimedes principle' of politics; find a point outside the world with a sufficient lever and a correctly placed fulcrum and you can move that world. The trouble is, of course, that the left, like Archimedes, would be all alone out there.

This, of course, is something of a caricature but, like all caricatures, it attempts to highlight a trait, a tendency. There are notable exceptions to the Archimedes Principle in, for example, the women's movement, which has engaged directly not only in critique of existing attitudes — that by itself would be no better than what I have been criticising in the left as a whole — but also in the transformation of elements of the political culture — forms of identification, loyalties, subjective perceptions and so on. The transformation of a cultural critique into forms of political action and the formation of specific policies and legislative imperatives; this is the crucial move from a cultural politics to a political culture. There is a difference however: the women's movement can identify its main and primary constituency — women. The left, the socialist movement, has more of a problem here. What exactly is its constituency? The working class? Working people? Workers by hand and by brain? Oppressed people? All of these? If the latter is the case, as it probably is since it comprises most of the population, then how do we address our constituency?

Part of the answer to this lies in taking seriously areas of identification, attitude and belief and to acknowledge that they have more than illusory or 'ideological' forms of existence; that they have _popular_ forms of existence. The recognition of 'the popular' and a systematic engagement with its resilient texture has important implications both with its resilient texture has important implications both for the ways in which we direct our analysis of existing conditions and for the ways in which we might want to shape a more vigorous, expert and confident left political culture.

The left has historically viewed the 'popular' with stern suspicion. With faultless dialectical logic, marxists have insistently demonstrated that the popular, the people, populism are at best illusory forms concealing the realities of class and, at worst, the watchwords of fascism and reaction. Socialists are, after all, concerned with _classes_ — easily definable as we used to think — and not with this nebulous entity 'the people'. In fact, the reverse now operates. Other political forces are able to make great play of 'the people' because, although it is difficult to get hold of in an intuitive sort of way — you and I are people after all. Class, on the
other hand, is proving increasingly difficult to define even by the most skilled practitioners, especially when the adjectives ‘working’, ‘middle’ or ‘ruling’ are added to it. Class has not, of course, disappeared; it’s more a question of our resources and political imagery being no longer adequate to defining its place in political processes. Certainly, when the definition of the primary components of what you had taken to be your political constituency is at stake, then you are in a bit of trouble. One thing is sure here, though: we can no longer rely on the sort of ecclesiastical condescension with which we have customarily explained to ‘the people’ that it’s really all about class.

Perhaps the logic is not so rigorous any more but it is difficult to note a certain legacy of left suspicion of ‘the popular’ in our refusal to engage with what is demonstrably popular in Australian culture? If the only occasion for saying something about — to use the consistent example again — sport — is when it is primarily defined in the political arena of, say, tours of South Africa or the financing of the Sydney Swans by big business. If, in other words, sport is reduced to a mere side effect of central political and economic issues, and if it is allowed no realm of sufficiency, no claim to pleasure by itself, is it any wonder that we fail to engage with a dominant element of the national culture? With a few exceptions, notably — and ironically — in journals directed at mainly academic audiences, serious analysis of sport, its effects on our ‘dispositions’ — not least the disposition to go to a football or netball match rather than attend another boring meeting — is significantly absent from, and radically impoverishes, current left political culture. There is an awful lot, on the subjective side of politics, that can be said about sport — on codes of masculinity, for example, or on its effects on national, regional and class and gender identifications or on ‘lifestyle’ and the star system a la Greg Matthews, or on its effects as a medium for the New Nationalism.

The same goes for popular television and film, ignored by the left or, at best, construed as a contemporary opiate of the masses. All we can do is recommend ‘worthy’ programs on the ABC or SBS, or an intensely meaningful and relevant film at the local art house cinema, pretty much in the manner of a well-meaning parson. We can say nothing about the mass audiences for Dallas, the features of indigenous programs like Neighbours, A Country Practice, Sons and Daughters, Prisoner. And what about Crocodile Dundee? We may not like them or, simply by virtue of attending too many meetings, be ignorant of them and other spheres of popular pleasure and leisure activities, but let us be very sure that the way in which they handle issues such as gender relationships, the national character, community politics, ethical values, representations of ‘ordinary folk’ and so on is much more effective on a daily and weekly basis than a thousand mass meetings. You don’t need to subscribe to any crude theories of the effects of television on behaviour to accept this proposition; the simple fact is that, whatever their effects, important elements of political cultures are regularly deployed and circulated in these programs; they are talked about and ‘put on the agenda’ in ways the left knows and says little about. Crucially, these areas pose the central question of the range of complex and effective social identities suggested by the concept of political culture.

On the basis of these two examples, I would suggest that our current constituency, or at least our ability to address a constituency, is impoverished. It is probably vacuous to say that our constituency is ‘the people’ but we should at least initiate and maintain a sustained engagement with ‘the popular’. There is a large and fatal discrepancy between the resilient and resourceful fabric of the dominant culture and the means we have at our disposal for engaging with it. In the absence of such forms of address and engagement is it any wonder that both the image and the practices of the left are perceived and experiences as severely constrained ones? Agendas, meetings, slogans, conspiracies and a lot of unwelcome ‘soap box’ noise operating on a logic of illusions and trying to persuade the people where they have got it wrong and what they ought to be doing in the evenings or on a Saturday afternoon. Again, I apologise, a caricature but certainly, as another session at the Broad Left Conference on ‘The Pleasure Principle in Politics’ pointed out amid the smirks of ‘serious socialists’, we (who live in the realm of urgent necessity) do have a problem with our social imagery and our political symbolism.

Putting aside the smirks for a moment, though, let me suggest that this ‘pleasure principle’ or whatever you want to call it is crucially related to the questions that I have raised above concerning our engagement with the forms of popular culture. I can best do this by illustrating an experience from the UK in 1977. That year was, as you may remember, the year of the Queen’s Jubilee. The most memorable image that I have of this was the glum faces of the left as they witnessed what they thought was their natural political constituency in working class communities organising street parties and festivals and festooning the streets and neighbourhoods with bunting. The care-worn left stood back, looked on disapprovingly and mumbled things like ‘stuff the Jubilee’ or ‘down with the monarchy’. For ‘serious socialists’ there could only be one pessimistic meaning to this; the masses were in thrall to a monolithic royalist ideology. But, as Latin American friends more familiar with the nature of popular festivals pointed out to me at the time, the meanings of these celebrations were not exhausted by the fact that they
explicit object was the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of the Queen and its official train of reactionary national pageantry. Celebrations, festivals — in the manner of the Italian Communist Party’s national and regional Feste dell’Unita — have a surplus of meaning beyond their immediate objects. They are occasions for establishing, reinforcing, and furthering community values, values of solidarity and of locality and, crucially, of a range of social identities. Neighbourhoods which had forgotten that they were neighbourhoods were re-established more in spite of than because of the explicit and official intentions of the celebrations. At a broader level it celebrated certain features of both local and national membership, kinship and citizenship which are not at all defined solely by the existence of a monarchy. The British Communist Party at the time took advantage of this ‘surplus’ of meanings and organised a ‘People’s Jubilee’ which turned out, in fact, to be the largest social gathering of the British left since the war. A momentary indication, perhaps, that in engaging with ‘the popular’ we will need to get our hands ‘dirty’ by dealing with popular pleasures but might come out looking brighter and less jaded than we do now.

Over the next couple of years we are going to be confronted with this problem on a grand scale in Australia because of the advent, in 1988, of the Bicentenary celebrations. We have just witnessed how, in the USA, a potent and monumental symbol such as ‘Liberty’ is all too easily appropriated to a Reaganesque design. What are we going to do about our own forthcoming national celebrations? How are we to participate in the shaping of a national identity at the level of popular symbols and sentiments. Are we to leave this to the corporate imagination of the Quiet Achiever? Are we to celebrate a tradition of unity or diversity? How will the national image be shaped ethnically — a celebration of costumes and ‘traditions’ in a sort of vast national museum? Self-congratulation or critical scrutiny? Clearly, the role of the Aboriginal peoples will be crucial in this if they decide to participate but in addition to this we cannot afford to stand on the sidelines and watch the composite national image being put together as if it had nothing to do with us, as if it was just another show for the dominant culture, and as if, finally, we were outside of that dominant culture. As if dominance were purely an issue of imposition ‘from above’ and not also a signal of some form of acceptance ‘from below’, however negotiated and attenuated that acceptance might be.

On this last point — the dominant culture — we need, as I have suggested above in relation to sport and the media, to develop much more sophisticated lines of engagement and argument. The notion of a ‘dominant culture’ is itself, perhaps, a useful abstraction but one which it is quite difficult to identify, rather like the ‘dominant ideology’. I am not arguing that there is no such thing as dominance; it is just that when the adjective is applied to complex areas like culture and ideology, it tends to convert them into monoliths and, at the same time, to suggest that we who can identify it are somehow outside of it, in a purely critical relationship of opposition. Archimedes again. So how should we approach or, indeed, attempt to identify what we customarily refer to as the dominant culture?

Central to the formation of a left political culture would be the noise of the frantic sharpening of our analysis

But whether the monolith is called consensus or class struggle, it remains, nonetheless, a monolith. In these forms of analysis, the question remains as to how particular ‘subjective perceptions’ became established in the ways they did, and how these perceptions played an important role in sedimenting forms of social identity, beliefs, loyalties and political knowledges. In the face of this formidable array of questions we have been accustomed to using rather blunt and heavy forms of analysis. Central to the formation of a left political culture would be the noise of the frantic sharpening of our analyses.

If we are to retain some usefulness from the concept of political culture, some emphasis on how forms of social identity are not reducible to simple origins in class, consensus or capitalism, then there is a strong argument for pluralising the concept, in speaking of a range of political cultures, elements of which may be in conflict and contestation within the national culture. Certainly, there are preferred and, if you like, dominant arrangements within

Popular movies are generally construed as contemporary opiates of the masses: Star Wars.

The normal way of doing this is to identify its attributes. Let’s take a broad selection and say that it is capitalist, bourgeois, individualistic, competitive, patriarchal, racist, and neo-colonial. All of these are no doubt accurate in their own ways and in their specific fields of reference. The problem is, however, that they are ultimately only describing components of the dominant culture. Except by some notion of imposition by the dominant classes, this form of argument says nothing much about how this combination of attributes became dominant. This part of the argument is left to the assumption that, under capitalism, there is a certain logic which dictates that given ideas will come to dominate. This, of course, is not unlike that other, earlier, conception of political culture which identifies the essential attributes of Australian society in order to organise them into a monolith called consensus.

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that culture, preferred and dominant forms of identification which are grounded firmly within the popular imagination, but the important thing is that we recognise that this is a complex and plural form of arrangement in the light of which a notion like the 'dominant culture' might seem a little inadequate. The women's movement has repeatedly emphasised that gendered forms of subordination cannot be explained away by the existence of capitalism and nor, consequently, do they automatically disappear when capitalism does. The same is certainly true of racism and the persistent theme of individualism against which, we have to acknowledge, the counter position of the experience of forms of collectivism has not been resoundingly successful.

Australia is a composite of political cultures, a field of contesting positions and identities in which some become dominant, others subordinate or marginalised. That is not a once and for all situation describing the baselines of 'national character' or the 'class basis'; it is, precisely, a field of forces in which it is possible to intervene provided that we have adequate means for intervention.

The concomitant to this argument about making our arguments, forms of analysis and subsequent procedures of policy formation more sophisticated is to acknowledge an important point made recently by Michael Rustin in his argument for forms of 'complex equality':

The more prosperous and seemingly pluralistic society has become in its life-styles, the more difficult it has been for socialists to defend egalitarian ideals against the imputation that they would enforce an unwanted uniformity.

More directly relation to questions of economic planning, Rustin goes on to argue that:

Visions which conceive the abolition of a single dominant form of inequality — such as the replacement of the market by central economic planning — are often blind to the characteristic inequalities of the alternative form. Even arguments for more extensive forms of participatory democracy — for the transparency of social decision making, as it is sometimes called — often take a simplistic view of what could possible be 'transparent'. Any modern society has to have innumerable specialisms, many centres of value and decision, and therefore many competing interests, and socialist politics must now take account of these facts.

Rustin is confronting here quite simply the whole nature of a socialist vision, the whole basis, if you like, of a left political culture. It is difficult to deny the power of this argument even though it entails the unloading of a good deal of ideological and political baggage. The commitment to a pluralist socialism, the recognition of a diversity of interests and the concomitant requirement of the development of levels of sophistication in analysis, range of engagements and policy formation are all elements which, in our current left political culture, are floating around in rather disjointed ways, some partial, some more fully developed. If we could find ways of strategically developing and uniting these expertises, commitments and more localised skills in a common program of socialist renewal, then we would be talking about a vigorous and effective left political culture. This would entail, in turn, the formation of a diversified theoretical and intellectual base for socialism in Australia; intellectual, that is, not in terms of the powers of 'pure thought' but at the level of organisation, policy formation and decision making procedures in all fields.

We need 'technicians' rather than prophets

complex features of specific and regional political cultures, to know why, for example, Joh Bjelke-Petersen is popular without recourse to demeaning platitudes about 'The Deep North' and we need to engage, much more insistently and productively, with the major themes of popular and national culture, with forms of collective memory and self-definition without reducing them to excrescences of a capitalist controlled media.

And we need, finally, not so much a 'vision' of an alternative society as a set of working principles for the qualitative transformation of current forms of social and economic organisation. We need 'technicians' rather than prophets.

This, of course, is an elaborate range of demands but no apologies should need to be made for it.

3. See, for example, the recent essay by Patricia Smith 'Queensland's Dominant Culture' in Allan Patience (ed), *The Bjelke-Petersen Premierth, 1968-83: Issues in Public Policy*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1983.
7. For more extensive argument about the necessity to engage with the popular see Tony Bennett, 'In Search of the Popular' in Bennett, Mercer and Woolsall (eds), *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1986.

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MAKING WOMEN MAD: Women, Crime and Madness

Denise Russell

Sexist assumptions pervade the areas of psychiatry and criminology, and they have an important influence in reinforcing sex-role stereotypes in general. These sexist assumptions also speak specifically to the women’s movement when feminists are branded as irrational, and as responsible for the increase in the type and amount of crimes committed by women.

Steven Goldberg, in *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*, attacked feminists for their supposed irrationality:

The alacrity with which feminists invent some ‘facts’ and reject or accept others on the basis of their emotional appeal is illusion in the guise of intellectual investigation. Invocation of this illusion as rationalisation is self-indulgence parading as virtue. There is no doubt that American society demands some new answers quickly. But the readiness of increasingly large numbers of radicals to translate nearly any new idea immediately into action does not demonstrate rational response not even pragmatic desperation but betrays an emotional development so stunted that they are forced to navigate life on one engine.

Also relevant are some recent studies which reveal that “left-of-centre” political deviance is regarded by mental health workers as more indicative of maladjustment when the purported patient is female than male.

Not only are feminists accused of irrationality or maladjustment, there is also a growing assumption in writings on criminology that the...
women's movement is a threat to the stable character of female criminality. 

My emphasis will be on sexist assumptions that relate to notions of women's sanity or insanity or criminality — not because the other areas such as treatment are not important but because time considerations force me to limit the field.

Firstly, sexism comes into definitions of mental health in women. Numerous psychological studies have pointed out that what, in the West, is generally regarded as the woman’s role, happens to coincide with what is regarded as mentally unhealthy. This relationship appears to hold for people unconnected with mental health work and for professional mental health workers. Broverman and others, in a 1970 paper, reported on a study done with a group of 79 clinicians: psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers. They found that the clinicians strongly agreed on the descriptions of a healthy man but not that of a healthy woman. Broverman et al descriptions overlap is revealed.

The Broverman studies have been criticised, but their general direction and tenor have been supported in later research. Some authors have made particular mention of the “Catch 22” situation that exists for women: “The very state of being a woman, it has been argued, contains so many contradictions and so much suffering that what appears as deviant behaviour is, in fact, an unwillingness or an inability to fit the oppressive stereotype of health”. As Marcie Kaplan suggests, the double bind that exists here could itself drive a woman crazy. Other research has indicated that biases relating to class, skin colour, or sexuality may interact with a sex-role bias.

A variety of explanations has been proposed for the existence of different attitudes towards the mental health of women and the mental health of men. Such explanations try to give an answer to the question of why sex roles are the way they are. There is not space to do justice to these issues here. One interesting approach appeals to the early relationship between mother and child with the need for males to reverse their early helplessness and dependency on a powerful female object. This may be tied in with fantasies about women’s destructive power. Sexism also comes into definitions of mental ill-health. Studies made prior to 1980 showed that women who are performing well in the female role by revealing emotional responsivity, naivety, dependency and childishness could have been subject to the diagnosis of hysteria.

In 1980, a new diagnostic scheme was accepted by most western countries — Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition (DSM-III). It has dropped the label of “hysteria” and replaced it by “Histrionic Personality Disorder”, a disorder which is mainly diagnosed in women. We can compare the elements of the description of this disorder with the description of a mentally healthy woman that emerged from the Broverman studies and a very close overlap is revealed.

**DSM-III descriptions**

- self-dramatisation, e.g. exaggerated expression of emotions
- overreaction to minor events
- irrational, angry outbursts or tantrums
- vain and demanding
- dependent, helpless, constantly seeking reassurance

**Broverman et al descriptions**

- being more emotional
- more excitable in minor crises
- more excitable, more emotional
- less objective
- more conceited about their appearance
- more submissive, less independent, less adventurous, more easily influenced

It would seem then that if we make it as a mentally healthy woman we are simultaneously fitting the diagnosis of “Histrionic Personality Disorder” –
i.e. a form of mental ill-health; or if we are not caught by that, there are two other diagnoses, in the new Scheme, which are also supposed to apply mainly to women and which also seem to be very close to the descriptions clinicians accept of "mentally healthy women". These are the borderline personality disorder and the dependent personality disorder. The "borderline personality disorder" is characterised by "instability in a variety of areas, including interpersonal behaviour, mood and self-image. No single feature is invariably present". Part of the definition of a mentally healthy woman was that she was "more emotional, more excitable, and more easily influenced". "Instability", the defining mark of "Borderline personality disorder" might not differ from these features that characterise a mentally healthy woman.

There are similar problems with the dependent personality classification. This diagnosis is supposed to apply to a person who passively allows others to assume responsibility for major areas of her life because of an inability to function independently; one who subordinates her own needs to those persons on whom she depends in order to avoid any possibility of having to rely on herself and one who lacks self-confidence perhaps regarding herself as helpless and stupid. This description is also very close to the description given of a mentally healthy woman.

Marcie Kaplan elaborates on the subjectivity of the description "dependent personality disorder", pointing out three major assumptions: (1) that dependence is unhealthy; (2) that extreme dependency in women marks an individual dysfunction rather than merely reflecting women's subordinate social position; and (3) "that whereas women's expression of dependency merits clinicians' labelling and concern, men's expressions of dependency (e.g. relying on others to maintain their houses and take care of their children) does not". She challenges these three assumptions. The head of the team who designed the new diagnostic scheme, Robert Spitzer, has responded, quite inadequately, by merely pointing out that the description is open enough to cover dependency in males as well as in females. This argument concerns the challenge to the third assumption but it does not counter Kaplan's point that specific male behaviours are often not acknowledged to involve dependency when they are just as good candidates for this description as certain female behaviours. Kaplan's challenge to the first two assumptions is simply ignored.

In summary, it looks as though women are crazy by definition and the leading experts in the psychiatric field are very happy to keep it that way.
leading experts in the psychiatric field are very happy to keep it that way.

Over the last ten years or so there has been a broadening and an entrenching of the assumption that mental illness or mental disorder is biologically based. Yet, in 1986, this assumption still remains speculative in the sense that there is no consistent body of scientific evidence which establishes a biological base for psychiatric disorders other than those where there is some obvious organic fault — such as brain tumours or lesions. I will not go into the argument for this view here, but there are some problems which may be raised with the biological orientation independent of a specific critique of the scientific evidence.

Take, for instance, the category of depression — another diagnosis which is supposed to apply mainly to women. Within psychiatry, depression is individualised. It is treated as an item of individual pathology, very often with a biological base. From an alternative perspective, one may see depression as a manifestation of a social problem. This is not to deny the depressed woman's suffering, but it is

Open-line programs on the radio ... have made clear the loneliness and frustration of suburban housewives

to acknowledge that, in order to understand her depression and suffering, we need to examine the social context. There are some present indications that this alternative perspective might have something going for it.

There is evidence that social discrimination against women and the restrictions of the traditional female role are related to the incidence of depression in women. It is more common in married women than in women who have never married, or who are divorced or widowed. Depression is less common in married men than in unmarried men. It appears then that marriage benefits men and harms women. A recent study suggests "that women wishing to avoid depression should not get married,
and confiding relationship with another person and, if possible, be part of the middle class."12

Information about the Australian context is also in line with these findings. Open-line programs on the radio, at least since the 1960s, have made clear the loneliness and the frustration of suburban housewives. A university survey, conducted in three states in 1969, showed that housewives suffer more emotional disorders than any other occupational group, accounting for 83 percent of cases detected in the survey.

In 1971, a newspaper report on women who married and moved to the newer suburbs around Sydney claims that a very high proportion began to suffer "neuroses" and even more severe "mental breakdowns" within a year of moving house. This was put down to dissatisfaction with the life of home and children when other social contacts were minimised. Profound insights such as "Man is a social animal, and so is his wife" and "The devil makes work for idle minds" were uttered by Dr. Barrow, the psychological writer in The Sun (Sydney). In a study of suicide attempts in the western suburbs of Sydney in 1971, women outnumbered men two to one. Nearly all were married and in the 21-40 year age group. The suicides were attributed to loneliness and other problems in the marriage.

A survey conducted by the National Health and Medical Research Council in 1971, the most extensive study of problems of "mental health" to that date, revealed that doctors treated twice as many housewives for barbiturate and related poisonings than they did professional, managerial and clerical workers. (Barbiturates were used as tranquillisers.) Dr. Adams of Sydney University's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, said: "This might be taken as a measure of deteriorating mental health in Australian housewives". A study in Victoria in 1971 also showed that housewives have a higher rate of psychiatric disorder than other occupational groups.

Another large study conducted in 1980 covering 37,678 adults, conducted by the New South Wales Health Commission and Medicheck, came up with the following findings: Twice as many housewives as women with jobs outside the home have nervous breakdowns; one woman in 12 and one man in 20 have breakdowns; nervous breakdowns do not seem to be related to men's occupations.

In 1982, a study done in the psychiatry department of the University of Sydney backed up the overseas studies on depression: married women were found to suffer from depression more frequently than single women or than their husbands. Professor Tennant, in reporting on the study, claimed that "it has been well proven in many studies that women have at least twice the level of depression and anxiety neuroses as men". He pointed to the uncertainty about whether this was due to biological or social differences between the sexes. On the basis of his study and large ones in the United Kingdom, he said: "it is apparent that a woman's marital status affects her mental health". Another related finding from these studies is that men benefited from having children whereas 23 percent of women with children had depression problems compared with 11 percent of women without children. Professor Tennant remarks, "Of course, kids aren't toxic in their own right. They are toxic in that they stop a woman having employment outside the home". All these findings suggest problems with the social role of women.

Married women were found to suffer from depression more frequently than single women or than their husbands

Research recently completed by Moffitt, a South Australian psychologist and Eisen, a Victorian psychiatrist, purportedly shows that women with mental problems are more likely to get married than those who do not have such problems; and that once married, the high rate of mental distress appears to fall. If women have such mental problems as depression prior to marriage, then perhaps a key causative factor is not the social role that women are supposed to perform, but rather a biological fault. This research, which is out of line with previous findings, was funded by F.H. Faulding and B.P. Australia. Obviously, further research is needed but, at this point, it is fair to say that the view that madness in women is crucially connected with the female role, has received a fair amount of support.

It cannot be denied that there are problems of depression, of anxiety, of social isolation, of unusual and unwanted experiences and so on, and it cannot be denied that many of these problems surface most visibly in particular individuals: but this is not to say that these problems are centrally located within those individuals. If the above comments on depression are correct then it may be more accurate to locate the problem of madness in the relationship between particular individuals and societal norms and demands. One indication that this might be the right direction to go is the utter failure of individualistic attempts at cure. The standard treatment for depression is drugs with their attendant side-effects. They do not solve the problems. When the person stops taking the drugs the problems reappear; but they act as a temporary blind, marginally decreasing the amount of discontent, so that efforts are not put into changing the broader situation, for example, providing child care, opening up employment for women, changing definitions of women, etc.

In summary, modern psychiatry is saying that there is a biological reality to madness in women. It may be one that is there just by the very fact of being female. Our inherited nature is assumed to channel us into ways of experiencing and behaving which will earn us the label of histrionic personality disorder; or, it may be that the biological fault is posited as specific, e.g. supposed malfunctioning of neurotransmitters as the cause of depression. In either case, the biological reality is unsubstantiated. These directions in psychiatry serve to reinforce sex-stereotypes and, in a particularly dangerous manner, as
they claim scientific respectability and obscure the sexism which imbues most aspects of psychiatry's theory and practice concerning women.

A parallel attack can be made on theories about criminality in women and the rise in popularity of biological explanations. I only have time to give some brief indications of how this would go.

Sexism comes into ideas about women and crime — firstly, in the marking off of certain offences as female offences and, secondly, in the tendency to see the crime as irrational, as going against the female role. These directions, then, serve to reinforce sex-role stereotypes especially if they are linked into biological theories.

There is only one crime which is sex-specific. This is infanticide: when a woman by any wilful act or omission causes the death of her child under one year old because the balance of her mind was disturbed by reason of her not having fully recovered from the effect of giving birth to the child. The reason why this category applies only to women is because of some implied biological cause, but this is in fact still merely a conjecture. I believe the deeper reason for this crime being designated as sex-specific is that it cuts across the supposed maternal instinct.

Even shoplifting may be seen as emerging from a mental disturbance

There are some other crimes which are not sex-specific but where female offenders outnumber male offenders. These are shoplifting, prostitution in adults, and promiscuity and "ungovernability" in adolescents. Sexist assumptions pervade the way these crimes are conceptualised in that, if the crime fits the female role, the woman may be regarded as performing a wrong but not irrational act. If the woman commits a crime that goes against the female role, the label of irrationality is applied.

Women shoplifters steal food (usually of little value) and clothes — different things from those which men usually steal — and their actions are quite in accord with women's role as providers of food and snappy dressers. Thus, their crimes may, in a sense, be validated, though they are seen as crimes nonetheless. Even shoplifting may be seen as emerging from a mental disturbance. In these instances, the woman will be regarded as suffering from kleptomania. Interestingly, in the new psychiatric diagnostic scheme, when describing kleptomania, the authors state, under the heading of "Impairment and complications": "Impairment is usually due to the legal consequences of being apprehended, the major complication of the disorder". Note how legal notions become medicalised.
The other female offences are invalidated. They break with the female role, and so cannot be the result of a rational mind. This applies to conceptualisations of prostitution as well as to female juvenile delinquency. Prostitution is commonly viewed as a form of sexual aberration — an activity that a woman is compelled to perform because of her mental disturbance, rather than an activity rationally chosen. This is true also of the ideas about the juvenile female crimes.

In a study done of children’s courts in New York, it was revealed that if girls committed acts against sexual taboos, or against parents, this was enough to lead the probation officer to assume that psychiatric help was needed, but not so for boys. Reporting on this study, in *Women, Crime and Criminology*, Carol Smart claims that “This attitude towards female delinquency reflects the commonly held belief that deviancy by a female is a sign of a much deeper pathology than deviancy by a male”.14

The fact that promiscuity and ungovernability in adolescents are predominantly female offences is a reflection of attitudes about these activities in boys and girls. Sex bias determines whether promiscuity counts as an offence. It is much more likely to count as such and to be punished by institutionalisation if it is a girl who is promiscuous. A promiscuous boy may not be regarded as deviant at all. Similarly, “ungovernability” may be understood in terms of hostility and violence: features which may either not be regarded as deviant at all in boys or whose importance may be played down. Thus again, sex-role stereotypes might influence whether the same behaviour is regarded as an offence or not.

The general tendency to see crime in women as resulting from a basic irrationality or mental disorder has the effect of entrenched sex-role stereotypes; if one is “a real woman” one could not possibly behave like that.

The treatment of women offenders is coming into line with these ideas about their supposed irrationality. For example, recently, the main women’s prison in England, Holloway Prison, was turned into a psychiatric institution.

Biological theories have been used to try to explain the apparent irrationality in female criminality. Appeals are made to the true nature of women as passive, dependent beings with a maternal instinct, and then some biological impulse or hormonal imbalance is thought to cause a deviation from that true nature. In line with this, a biological explanation is presented for the lower incidence of crime in women than in men, and to explain why there are no great women criminals.

It is, of course, undeniable that women sometimes commit crimes when they are in a different physiological state than previously, say, after the birth of a child. But we are not forced to conclude that it is the physiological change which has caused the crime. There is a large element of conjecture here and just a little reflection reveals that this conjecture is based on sexism. Similarly, some writers assert that “abnormal chromosomal balance is at the root of female delinquency”.15 This is pure invention. There is no scientific evidence for such a claim.

This biological orientation within theories about crime in women and within institutions which treat women offenders, though unsubstantiated, has very undesirable implications. It prevents us from seeing that the very description of the girl or woman as criminal might simply result from sex-role stereotyping, as I tried to show for “female juvenile promiscuity”. It prevents us from seeing that explanations of women’s crime in terms of social factors might have some plausibility e.g. prostitution may be looked at, not as a result of an abnormal biology, but in terms of certain broad social factors such as the relatively limited opportunities for women to earn a living wage, to win promotion, to achieve a secure career and to become economically independent of men. That orientation certainly seems to lead us into more enlightened directions than biological theories.

In summary, what I’ve tried to do is to show how certain sexist assumptions currently operate in parts of psychiatry and criminology and within biological approaches in these areas, and I have also tried to show that biological approaches within these areas, although not legitimated, reinforce these assumptions.

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13. Spitzer et al, 293.
14. Smart, 133.
15. Smart, 58.

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The following article is intended to provoke discussion around aspects of a trend of thought in left politics which, while hardly new in a general sense, has taken new directions and gained new emphases in recent years — which I will call, for shorthand purposes, ‘the alliance strategy’. Briefly expressed, the alliance strategy takes as its central reference-point an image of the political canvas where the radical and progressive forces are linked by a system of tacit and explicit alliances developed through the processes of day-to-day political activity, and also in the cross-fertilisation of political programs and political theory. At the same time, it proposes a concept of alliance which is far broader and more complex than simple programmatic compromises or political deals: one which
pictures processes of dialogue and communication (and, at times, even of struggle) as forging links between social and political forces and movements, their political and day-to-day cultures, and their theoretical traditions. It is, in a sense, a generalisation of what we have learnt about the nature of political alliances onto the complex terrain of society as a whole.

While this is basically a practical strategy, in the sense that it seems to have emerged over time as a fact against the gain of several of our traditional theoretical assumptions, it is one which has considerable consequences for our theory as well — even though valuable precedents for it can be found in the theoretical writings of Antonio Gramsci and in the political writings of other figures such as Togliatti. It is also an experience which suggests some lessons for how we conceive of the formation and development of our theory itself. Eric Aarons put it polemically, but well, when he asked:

*But if we give up the view that marxism does, or should, or will (if re-interpreted yet again) provide us with a unitary theory, a total explanation, a formula for prediction — will that not stop us from getting it all together in our heads and leave us all at sea?*

*Not if we reject that expectation, and use our theoretical resources to help us 'listen' more to practice instead of thinking that theory can somehow dictate to reality how it must behave.*

Nevertheless, this still leaves open the thorny question of how and from where we obtain our 'theoretical resources' in the first instance. If this is not at the present time a critical puzzle, this is very largely because we still have so much theoretical catching-up to do.

Now, on the question of the desirability of coalitions or alliances among the left and progressive forces on the plane of political practice, not many of us, on what could reasonably be called the renewable left, are in much doubt. Obviously, the left is in a bad way and parts of the left outside it; the second to how alliances operate between what might be called the traditional left — and in particular the trade union movement — and parts of the left outside it; the second to how alliances should be constructed in a more general sense. Whether is in doubt, and what is in desperate need of a bit of 'theory' in the sense of the word outlined above, is how we should conceive of such alliances operating, what should be the ground-rules and even, in a sense, the morality under which they should be constituted, and what, in the first instance, they should set out to achieve.

There are two distinct problems here. The first relates to how alliances operate between what might be called the traditional left — and in particular the trade union movement — and parts of the left outside it; the second to how alliances should be constructed in a more general sense. The first of these relates largely to ways of looking at alliances which are fundamentally hostile to many aspects of socialist renewal altogether. The second relates to attitudes among members of the organised left who are broadly sympathetic to the alliance strategy but who, by dint of their political education, force of habit and so on, tend to conceive of the strategy in a reductive, hierarchical or, even down-right authoritarian manner.

The argument against the alliance strategy, in the sense in which it is defined above, can take either of at least two forms. The first (and more traditional) approach is to assert what is called the 'leading role of the working class' (meaning, in fact, the trade union movement), in any alliance or coalition between left and progressive forces. Now, it bears saying that simply to assert the 'leading role' of anything in this manner is quite meaningless: meaningless not because the working class is 'finished' as a class (whatever that might mean) but because, literally, it has no practical reference to reality. The working class' (i.e. the organised working class) simply acts in any concrete political conjuncture as an element of a coalition of forces — social, institutional, even cultural — defined by the political balance of forces in society as a whole. Obviously, as an organised grouping with an enormous amount of muscle, the trade union movement has to be an important part of any realistic strategy for change. But no power on earth can give it some sort of centrifugal force in alliances negotiated on the terrain of political activity as we daily experience it. 'Leading roles' are not bestowed from the heavens — they are earned.

The second argument against the alliance strategy as defined above is a good deal more difficult to come to grips with. Its key phrase — as canonised in the title of a booklet produced by the hard-line wing of the British CP — is 'class politics', though it is far from clear exactly what that means. A familiar feature of the 'class politics' school of thought is its propensity to define itself not as a positive approach to understanding political reality, but rather by means of a primarily negative critique of the alliance strategy. Thus, the authors of the *Class Politics* pamphlet describe the theoretical basis of what they describe as the 'newer left' as 'the idea that... issues such as peace, sexism, racism and law and order are not class issues and cannot be fought out as class issues' (my emphasis — DB), entailing a strategy based upon 'substituting the politics of new “movements” and “forces” for class politics' and 'denying that they can be adequately located there', and leading to an incipient liberal pluralism in which the 'new forces' and indeed the labour movement itself become so many discrete interest groups which can only be held together at any one time by a populist electoral programme based on the lowest common denominator of political acceptability.

And indeed an obsession with 'pluralism', as the perceived 'dissolving agent' of an ordered hierarchy of political forces such as is allegedly represented by the term 'class politics', is one of the hallmarks of the class politics approach. Yet, viewed in another light, the class politics approach appears not so much as a nostalgic view of socialist political strategy, as a theoretical construct serving rather different practical ends. On one level, 'class analysis' serves as a hammer for beating over the head certain trends in the women's movement in recent years which are frankly sceptical of the supposed 'marxist-feminist' synthesis as a basis for socialist feminist practice. On another, it serves as a kind of moral prioritisation of the concerns of the traditional left, by the rather opaque device that class politics is seen to be effected by bringing the priorities of all
major participants in alliances to the altar of an already-defined class analysis. And, of course, both these elements are related: it is precisely the ‘betrayal’ of ‘unity’ within the working class (defined as above) that contemporary trends in socialist feminism have engendered, via their critique of the structures as well as the practice of the labor movement, which constitutes the defining case of refusal to succumb to the arbiter of class analysis.

In a theoretical sense, this class politics vogue, which is itself deeply implicated in what Stuart Hall has aptly described as the ‘fundamentalist marxist revival’ is both a self-protective response to the bewildering new forms of the left’s crisis, and a defensive response to the theoretical gulf which looms between older styles of politics and the politics of newer forces and movements. But, in a practical sense, it simply serves to carry on the old vanguardist approaches by new means: class politics, like the leading role of the working class, is a fount of true consciousness not itself amenable to transformation or redirection in the unfolding of the alliance process.

The reductionist view of coalition politics runs deep through the accumulated processes of thought and habit of all of us

The second problem arises among supporters of the alliance strategy who tend to reduce it to a mechanical and hierarchical process which reproduces many of the least attractive features of the existing organised left — and which are at least a part of the reason for its waning influence and appeal. This kind of approach can take any of a number of forms — appeals for coalitions based substantially along existing organisational lines, which become (or tend to become) mere coalitions of convenience for the sake of individual issues which are left essentially unrelated to other issues; notions of new parties or organisations which substantively reproduce existing structures or patterns of work, without any conception of the different needs or philosophies of groups at present outside such structures; and conceptions of alliances or coalitions based upon interpretations of programmatic unity which tend to reduce the idea of common programs to the lowest-common denominator approach. This last tendency is especially galling when it is precisely the operation of contradictions which socialists schooled in the marxist tradition have always felt to be the driving force of practical and theoretical advance.

Undoubtedly, it would be easy enough to find broad agreement between, say, the trade union movement and much of the women’s movement, for the proposition that ‘working class living standards have to be defended and improved’. It is much less easy, however, to forge instant unity around the question of how, in an economy where (whatever the method of ownership of the means of production) the total wage bill is subject to definite constraints, redistribution within the working class ought to be effected, so that the preferential status of men’s work can be countered. In the words of Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell,

If women are to share domestic labour equally with men, then men will have to increase their time spent on unpaid work. If women are to increase the level of their earnings to the point where they match men’s, then men’s earnings will inevitably decline in relation to women’s. If women are to occupy skilled, higher-paid jobs in equal numbers with men, then there are bound to be fewer of these jobs available to men.

It is difficult to see how what I will term the reductionist view of alliance politics can cope with this sort of challenge. Where the class politics and leading role approaches try to bluff through such contradictions by saying (for instance) that industrial militancy is capable of solving all wage questions, the reductionist view of alliance politics simply remains silent.

But it is impossible to understand the nature of the obstacle posed by the reductionist view of coalition politics unless it is recognised how deeply it runs through the accumulated processes of thought and habit of all of us. As was noted in the last issue of ALR, there was more than a hint of the reductionist view in the structure of the Broad Left Conference. (Although there, at least, there was the opportunity for breaking through these fetters.) A more dramatic example perhaps was the recent proposal for the new labour movement weekly 7 Days, which clearly stated that its primary role as a labour movement organ was to be (as it were) ‘rounded out’ by selective representation of the mass social movements — without, of course, giving the representatives the ability to upset the apple cart. In the final analysis, the reductionist view of coalition politics (even in its most sophisticated forms) tends to defuse the impact and the implications of the roles, aims and philosophies of the constituent elements in alliances — for instance, by reducing them to the status of minority, or single issue, groups which are then felt to be somehow ‘all part of the same mass’. Yet it is precisely upon the terrain of the autonomy and the difference of the constituent elements that genuine, fruitful alliances are negotiated and maintained.

For many years, alliances were treated basically as expediencies outside the normal ground rules of politics

Historically speaking, it has been the reductionist view of coalition politics which has dominated the left’s conception of the role of alliances and alliance strategies. For many years, alliances were treated basically as expediencies outside the normal ground rules of politics: where the out-and-out vanguardist approach had, of necessity to be temporarily tucked away in a cupboard, as it were - as in the Popular Fronts era. Historically, it is as close to a strategy of alliances in its own right as we have been able to get.

It is no coincidence, then, that the first serious attempts at formulating the kind of alliance strategy discussed here (and the kind of organisational forms capable of co-existing with it) came from outside the political culture of the traditional left — which is to say, of course, from within the experience of the ‘new’ women’s movement of the 1970s.
Here the oft-cited classical text is Hilary Wainwright's introduction to *Beyond the Fragments* (1979), although perhaps a more developed conception of the same basic approach is again provided by Beatrix Campbell:

**Alliances are not simply about arithmetic — aggregating groups of people, regarded as minorities, adding them up so that they become a majority. That view of alliances reduces politics to electoral arithmetic. Alliances are political processes which transform the constituent parts in their encounter with each other. They are political dialogues in which the constituent parts become both collective agents for change and also the subjects of change.**

This is an important concept, and one fraught with implications for the rest of our theory. And yet the theoretical tools we have inherited from the marxist tradition are almost silent on the nature of this kind of encounter. I would agree with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their remarkable recent work on *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* that a prime reason for this is the all-persuasive 'essentialism' which has underlain many marxist conceptions of the political process — although, as will be noted shortly, I have some reservations about other aspects of Laclau and Mouffe's approach.

By essentialism I mean, very broadly, the belief that the political process is given structure by an essence or essences which have a kind of universal quality independent of the existence of the structure itself. 'Motive forces', determinations in the last or any other instance, 'objective' class interests and so on are all concepts which have played this sort of role in marxist theory from time to time, quite independently of the conceptual status of other elements in the analysis. And, of course, today the catch-all essentialist device is the class politics approach, with its never-ending search for an essential 'class belonging' for problems, issues and movements; to give them a kind of fixity which could put them (as it were) comfortably 'in the frame' of our inherited assumptions about politics.

While Laclau and Mouffe draw their particular formulation of the function of essentialism from the French theorist Jacques Derrida and his critique of the structuralist trend in academic thought, it is equally applicable to less rarefied approaches to social theory. The value of this general approach is that it 'frees up' our theory for a more realistic understanding of the political processes we can see going on around us every day. Like some of the more fruitful trends in contemporary social theory, it demonstrates 'a desire to think in terms sensitive to difference (of others without opposition, of heterogeneity without hierarchy)', thereby demonstrating also an ability to see concepts in terms of the irrevocably heterogeneous nature of the forces for progressive change in societies like ours and, indeed, the increasing cultural and social plurality of the societies themselves. In the words of Renato Nicoloni, until recently Rome's Communist Councillor for Culture, 'In cultural habits and customs today there no longer exists the possibility of organic interpretations of society or values. On the contrary, there is a confused, contradictory, uneven plurality of wills, cultural expressions, values ... and we must consider it a positive phenomenon'.

The problem with Laclau and Mouffe's approach to the question, though, is that once they've dismantled the framework of some of our more stubborn misconceptions of politics and hegemony, they remain very vague about how to understand concretely the kind of terrain they've opened up. In an earlier contribution they described the hegemonic strategy a little grandly, as consisting of 'a vast system of alliances that are continuously redefined and renegotiated' — a phrase suggestive of perhaps a little too much intellectual enthusiasm and too little concrete analysis. In short, they seem less interested in their discoveries than in the process of discovering itself. So it is probably worth while mentioning briefly here — by way of an ending, if not a conclusion — a few of the consequences which flow on from placing an alliance strategy, shorn of its essentialist features, at the centre of our analysis.

One of the most tenacious beliefs of many marxists — against all the dictates of our political experience — is that,
by pointing out that people who identify themselves by means of particular movements, issues, lifestyles, subcultures, and so on which seem to escape the net of the traditional concerns of our analysis, are part of the 'broader working class', this somehow explains their senses of identity in class terms. The practical correlate of this, of course, is the fond belief that if only 'marginal' or 'backward' elements of the population could come to see themselves as workers, first and foremost, somehow this would unlock for them a ready-made critique of patriarchal, capitalist society.

Realistic class politics today lies in understanding the experiences by which people identify themselves in relation to the larger society — which they would thereupon seek to overturn. Now, it bears mentioning that there are good historical precedents for such a situation — the experience both in Australia and Western Europe between c.1850 and the 1920s is an obvious one — and in hardly any of these cases did they lead to anything resembling a revolutionary situation. But that is, in any case, largely beside the point. The real point is that realistic class politics today lies in understanding the various interlocking, but different, cultural and social experiences by which people whom we might classify as part of the popular masses identify themselves as standing in a certain relation to that larger imagined entity known as society. Knitting together the self-perceptions of people's relations to society is itself a form of alliance-building on the ideological plane which helps make sense of what we mean by 'working class'.

On one level this requires 'a means of grasping not the singular meaning (a revolt against capitalism!)' of people's self-identification in the culture of their daily lives, 'but the pluralism of the play of styles, codes and languages which can now be seen to constitute the realm of the popular'. On another, it requires an understanding of the 'underlying drift of cultural change', and of the dynamics which have produced 'a more loosely-textured, more diffuse and diverse daily experience' across the entire span of the social forces to which we attach the name of the working class. Put simply, it means that we have to seek alliances within the working class across lines of connection which have little or nothing to do with politics with a capital P. This not only means broadening-out our understanding of alliances: it also means broadening-out our conceptions of what alliances can be negotiated around. Here, an exemplary instance of the possibilities of this new conception of alliance politics is Britain's late lamented Greater London Council, which forged alliances with the voluntary sector, with community groups, with grassroots popular music and its supporters and other supposedly apolitical social forces through its innovative grants policy.

Probably the most profound and far-reaching consequence of an alliance strategy 'freed-up' from essentialism, though, lies in that cluster of ideas to which we commonly give the name 'hegemony'. Indeed, part of the problem of this important concept, as is now coming to be...
able to come to terms with the irreducible coercive or juridical mechanisms which may or may not be quickly discovered several things about the idea itself. One essentialism to our thinking about hegemony, however, we essential to the process, depending upon the nature of the aims of the hegemonic bloc are generalised to secure the support of the broader masses; and also less directly to the coercive or juridical mechanisms which may or may not be essential to the process, depending upon the nature of the society.

By bringing our understanding of alliances and essentialism to our thinking about hegemony, however, we can quickly discover several things about the idea itself. One is that any realistic account of hegemony has to understand that the various elements which go to making up a hegemonic consensus or way of looking at the world are drawn from the whole range of experiences within people's social existence, and not merely from the agenda of politics with -a-capital-P. This is simply the extension of the insights which alliance politics provided into the politics of 'class'. And, by the same token, the ideas underpinning such a hegemonic consensus are always far wider and more sophisticated than the tunnel vision which usually goes by the name of political ideology.

In an earlier incarnation, Laclau and Mouffe used to argue that hegemony was the articulation of a central 'hegemonic principle' with other ideas and values (what they called 'popular-democratic' as opposed to 'class' ideologies). But, of course, this is in itself a kind of essentialism, in that it assumes again that the essential element — in this case the hegemonic principle — stands outside of or prior to the other, contingent, elements. It is a much more adequate expression of the insights of the alliance strategy simply to view the so-called hegemonic principle as itself a contingent, totalising theory, is one which runs against the grain of all the insights of alliance politics.

Finally there is a whole complex of unanswered questions around the general problem of the perceptible gap (we could almost call it a quantum leap) between the alliance strategy as we know it in our experience, and a further stage in the strategy which would eventually push society in a socialist direction. Put slightly differently, this is the problem of how to move from the actually-existing forces for social change we have been able to detect at work in the last ten to twenty years or so, to a much broader tacit social consensus within the popular forces as a whole. (Which is not to mention the distinct but related controversies about the role of the state, parliamentary democracy, and so on.) When it comes to these sorts of quandaries, we are only at the beginning of being able to see our way through to answers which make sense in terms of the political changes we can see going on around us.

The idea of a unified socialist commonsense ... runs against the grain of all of the insights of alliance politics

The historical tradition — a tradition which socialists have inherited from earlier generations of socialists, which has often been transformed, and which will continue to be transformed, in its encounters with other radical or liberatory sets of values and beliefs.

Nor is a hegemonic commonsense or way of looking at the world simply a matter of connecting up different views of politics, seen as representing the perspectives of different social forces or movements, into some sort of seamless whole. Rather, a hegemonic commonsense is one which is able to come to terms with the irreducible differentness of perspectives within a much broader perspective which assumes certain shared general values about society, democracy, gender, the environment and so on. This is neither a good thing nor a bad thing: it is simply an observable fact about the nature of beliefs and values within a society like ours today, as well as within the left itself. The idea of a unified socialist commonsense, like that of a

5. And of course — as veterans of the era hardly need to be told — the Popular Front’s experience and its lessons remain the major historical antecedent of many of our current ideas about politics and hegemony, particularly in the debates around Eurocommunism. A rough outline of this lineage was sketched in Tribune, 11.9.85.
7. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics (1985). See also the more intelligible if more limited account of ‘class’ essentialism in Laclau’s earlier book Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory (1977), in ch. 3.
8. The debt to Derrida is clear from the latter’s essay ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’ in Writing and Difference (1978), where he imagines the concept of structure without a ‘given’ centre.
14. Stuart Hall in fact recently noted that it was precisely this problem which led him into the territory of his important analysis of the ideological underpinnings of ‘Thatcherism’ in Britain; ‘Authoritarian Populism: A Reply to Jessop et al’, New Left Review 151, 1985, p. 119.

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SOCIAL SECURITY: Is it secure?

Peter Davidson

Is the Australian Social Security (pensions and benefits) system under threat in a low growth economy? The short answer is that the system itself will survive, but with fundamental changes in the offing. Some of these pose a serious threat to Social Security dependents — a threat of marginalisation.

Last year, the Social Security Minister, Brian Howe, announced a comprehensive social security review to examine retirement incomes, benefits for the unemployed and income support for children. It was a move for positive welfare reform of a system set up in the 1940s. Howe is now being forced to redirect his energies into responding to regressive measures coming from the ‘new right’ of the Labor Party. Before considering these measures, I’ll explain the main features of the present system.

The Australian social security structure is unique in the capitalist world. It provides universal payments funded by the national government from consolidated revenue. This is a major advance on European and US schemes which are a blend of insurance and charity. For those who contribute (along with their bosses and the state) to a social security fund in those countries, there is ‘insurance’ against unemployment, old age, sickness and so on. For those who lack a stable employment history (including many women) there is state and private charity provided at the discretion of bureaucrats and welfare agencies. This set-up clearly entrenches class and gender divisions.

In Australia there are flat rate payments for all people who meet the eligibility requirements. Payment is a legal right, not a charity. The conservatives tried to introduce the insurance principle in the ’30s, but were unsuccessful; the Curtin government introduced the present system in 1944.

But there is a catch. The rates of benefit are lower than in most OECD countries. In Australia, the single pension is less than 25% of average earnings, while in European countries it is generally over 50% of a person’s past earnings.

In a capitalist society there are certain structural limits to social security spending. First, poverty is created on a wide scale because sections of the working class are marginalised: they have no work, can’t work because of a lack of alternative child care, or are in and out of low paid, temporary work. The greater the poverty, the more costly social security becomes, precisely at the time that tax revenues are dropping. Second, there are limits (at any given point in time) to the extent that capital can be taxed without threatening profitability and the reproduction of the whole economic system.

These problems are exacerbated by the ‘taxation problem’ in Australia. Australia is a low tax/small public sector economy. Of the OECD nations, only Turkey, Greece and Spain spend a lower proportion of the GDP on the public sector. One socialist solution is to tax the wealthy but they, and their conservative parties, have a buffer zone in the form of the anti-tax sentiment of many working people (or, to be precise, home-owning working people). Australia has a high level of home ownership and workers resist paying OECD-level taxes when they are heavily ‘taxed’ in turn by the banks. Although socialists only wish to tax the wealthy heavily, this has been a hard message for even the ALP to get across to working class home owners, and the Liberals have won many elections by portraying the ALP as the ‘high tax’ party.

It should come as no surprise, then, that over over 20 years of predominantly conservative rule, the Henderson poverty inquiry found, in 1976, that 15 percent of Australians lived under its austere poverty line, and placed most of the blame on parsimonious social security benefits.

The system also reflects the society we live in in more subtle ways. Benefits and pensions aren’t paid on the basis of need. They are paid on the basis of employability. People over 60 (women) or 65 (men) are assumed to be retired, and can get the Age Pension subject to income and assets tests. The same goes for invalids, who may receive an invalid pension on grounds of permanent incapacity. Able-bodied people of ‘working age’ get unemployment benefits if they prove they are available for and actively seeking employment.

Women are treated as a special case: it is still assumed they are part of a family unit and responsible for raising children. Married women can’t collect the dole because their husband’s income is taken into account. A woman is paid supporting and responsible (or caring) for children; but, as soon as she becomes involved with a man, it is assumed he will support her financially, and the benefit is cancelled.

The Whitlam government attempted to reverse the low tax/low spending equation of Australian politics, but came up against a major recession in 1974. Slow economic growth since then has narrowed the choices on both the expenditure and taxation sides, giving rise to growing pressures for changes in social security. It is no longer a battle over rates of benefit within a fixed structure; the basic concepts...
underpinning social security are being question from both left and right.

This article discusses four trends in social security today: * welfare for the needy; * unemployment benefits as a labor market tool; * support for single parents; * and pensions vs. superannuation.

In a period of austerity, the notion that welfare payments should be confined to the 'genuinely needy' has won supporters across the political spectrum. Within the labor movement, the idea is associated with a traditional commitment to equality. On the right, 'middle class welfare' is a favorite target for the purists who put economic 'rationality' above electoral considerations.

Women are still treated as a special case.

It also ignores the other side of the welfare equation: taxation. A standard argument in favour of targeting the 'most needy' is that the welfare cake is getting smaller, but this is taken for granted instead of leading to investigation of the prospects of a redistribution of wealth from the rich (via taxation) to all of us (via universal welfare provision). An alternative to the assets test would have been a wealth tax applying not only to pensioners, but all wealthy people. This would have attracted far more revenue than the savings from means testing social security benefits. By taxing the rich (including their social security benefits) those with the greatest need will benefit most.
The notion of targeting welfare services was popular in the welfare field well before the present economic malaise. The welfare sector has long campaigned against poverty and focussed its attentions on the needy. Poverty was placed on the national agenda by its efforts in the '60s and '70s. However, there are limits to the gains which can be achieved by campaigning in this way. The very notion of poverty ideologically isolates its 'victims' from the mainstream of the working class. They are already isolated in fact by mass unemployment and the child-rearing responsibilities thrust upon supporting parents.

Having revealed the fact of mass poverty, the next step is to demonstrate that it is happening to ordinary working people and not some race of alien beings deserving of sympathy. There is a material basis for this: already 20 percent of Australians are dependent on social security. Nearly everyone will be dependent on the system at some stage in their lives. A good starting point is to force the government to meet its commitment to raise pensions to 25 percent of average earnings and to increase unemployment benefits to the same level. This has the potential to unite a very broad cross-section of people and to reduce the political isolation of the welfare state's second-class citizens - the unemployed and supporting parents.

The funds needed (around $1.5 billion) should be obtained by taxing the wealthy - for a start, by withholding next year's tax cuts for the rich.

The alternative is for social security dependents to become part of a welfare ghetto. This is no doubt what Howard has in mind when he promises not to increase government spending in real terms for three years. With social security comprising over a quarter of the budget, it would have to be slashed dramatically to keep this promise at a time of growing unemployment: this would be achieved by breaking up the universal welfare system and offering tax cuts for middle income earners in return.

A national cash benefit for the unemployed was finally introduced in 1944 after about 15 years of bitter struggle by organisations of the unemployed, and unions. The catch-


cry both during and after the war was that 'never again' would the suffering and social dislocation of mass unemployment be imposed on the Australian working class. For the small number of people left unemployed after the war there would be a statutory right to benefits, provided they were 'available for and actively seeking' full-time employment.

The recessions of 1964 and 1982 changed government attitudes to the unemployed. Unemployment has increased tenfold in this period, to around 600,000 today (according to official figures); while about a quarter of this number have been out of work for over a year. Government responses have come in cycles, almost regardless of the party in government. The universal right to an adequate benefit has been threatened at each turn.

The Fraser government's response was, at first, mainly

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ideological. The community wasn't used to mass unemployment and Fraser knew the issue had to be defused because he wasn't about to do anything about it. In the first few months of government he engaged in dole bludger bashing. The government adopted a 'hard cop soft cop' approach. It tightened the work test for unemployment benefits so that people could have their payments postponed for up to six (later 12) weeks for failing to dress properly for job interviews, or for moving to an area of 'low employment opportunity'. The interpretation of policy was left to individual DSS or CES offices, and varied across the country. Also in 1976, it introduced the Community Youth Support Scheme to provide community-based training and motivation for young unemployed people to help them find work. This was to soothe the welfare sector and the churches who hit back with a vengeance when it was facing abolition in 1982.

Gradually, people got used to mass unemployment - mainly because its impact was largely confined (until 1982) to unskilled workers and their children. The unemployed were left to exist on benefits which the government failed to index and which consequently fell behind the pension. (The single under 18 dole was only $36 per week, about half the pension, when Hawke was elected.)

Labor at first sought to redress Fraser's neglect but it didn't get very far. Benefits are still around $7 per week less than pensions for adults and half the pension for those under 18. Then a new preoccupation emerged, income support for unemployed youth should be used as a tool of labour market policy. An expansionary economic program created over half a million jobs in the first three years of government. Many were government created under the Community Employment Program (CEP) which subsidised local government and community bodies to employ and train people for up to a year at award wages. The new thinking was to remove as many as possible from the dole queue and place them in training.

In 1985 the Kirby Report on labour market programs was completed, and it recommended a different approach to youth unemployment: traineeships. This involved part-time paid work and part-time study through TAFE colleges, for a period of about 12 months, with the arrangements to be negotiated separately in each industry. The scheme sounded like a positive initiative, but it had serious ramifications for income support arrangements. Trainees were to be paid a 'Trainee Allowance' which could be less than the award rate for part-time work, and could be as low as $90 per week. The implications for the social security system were clear when adult unemployment benefits were then $91 per week, and those over 18 years got the adult rate. A battle ensued between two ministers: Dawkins (with special responsibility for youth) and Howe (Social Security).

It was a classic conflict between the principle of universal payments as a right and the so-called economic 'rationalism' of many of the Hawke
Ministry. In the absence of strong political pressure to the contrary, the social security system was called upon to take on directly one of its functions: that of labour market tool. Dawkins won, and a lower 'intermediate rate' of benefit was created for 18-20 year-olds, by failing to increase their dole in line with the CPI.

No one on the left wants to see mass unemployment continue, and training and work experience programs play an important role in preparing unskilled and long-term unemployed people for work. Otherwise they would have difficulty finding work, even in a tight labour market. The greatest flaw in these programs is that, for the most part, they lead nowhere in the long run because they are not linked in any consistent way with an industry policy which generates employment in industries which are efficient by world standards. In other words, they remain basically 'dead end' programs, and unemployed people are aware of this and resent it.

The government's labour market programs have now been overtaken by an emerging economic crisis which has led the government to a retreat into austerity. Although economic growth of at least three percent per annum is needed to prevent rising unemployment, even this target is unlikely to be achieved in this financial year. The Department of Employment and Industrial Relations acknowledges that there is a strong prospect of increasing unemployment. Government policy towards the unemployed is about to turn full circle, with the Prime Minister himself taking the lead.

It was Clyde Cameron, Industrial Relations Minister in the Whitlam government, who coined the term 'dole bludger'. The Hawke government, led by the Prime Minister himself, is returning to the ideological position adopted by Fraser in 1976. 'I accept the fact that there are obviously some who are getting the benefit who shouldn't be' said Hawke in May this year, as he proposed a tightening of the work test.

He has now joined the Liberal's 'work for the dole' bandwagon. Hawke announced, in his economic policy speech in July, that a program would be established to encourage unemployed people to perform voluntary work for their benefits. He clearly wants the scheme to be compulsory, arguing, in the face of much opposition from within Cabinet, that 'if there are more places available than unemployed people to fill them, then the government will have to look at the issue of compulsion again'.

The general idea is that community organisations receive a subsidy to take on unemployed 'volunteers' who receive no payment for their services. These 'jobs' would be advertised through the CES, and the Social Security Act could be amended to make it a condition of receiving benefit that a person be available to and seek voluntary as well as paid work. This has horrific implications for social security in Australia, and it would steer us in the direction of schemes in the US which require both unemployed people and supporting parents to work part-time for their benefits. The Liberals are on record as supporting a compulsory scheme.

The work for the dole proposal has been attacked by all major welfare bodies which would have any role in setting it up, including the Australian Council of Social Service and the Youth Affairs Council. The Australian Social Welfare Union, representing non-government welfare workers, also opposes it. They point out that the present lack of adequate skilled workers in welfare organisations would consign volunteers to performing largely menial tasks, and that there is already
too much reliance on volunteers by governments wishing to fund welfare on the cheap.

Even if the scheme fails for lack of organisational and Cabinet support, it has already shifted the whole debate over unemployment from one of government responsibility to provide jobs, incomes and training, to the responsibilities (or debt to society) of the unemployed themselves. At the same time, the CEP, which provides an award wage and some proper training, has just been cut drastically. The government is obviously concerned about the political reaction to growing unemployment and some sections of it are keen to direct this response against the unemployed themselves, in a similar manner to Fraser. There is support for this approach in public opinion polls which indicate that approximately 80 percent of people support some form of work for the dole, while around 40 percent support a compulsory scheme. Prejudice against the unemployed is deep-seated.

The debate needs to be shifted back to an emphasis on employment creation through government intervention in the economy and industry development planning. Then the training schemes currently in place will make more sense. In the meantime, the right to a decent income without all manner of strings attached, must be fought for.

Supporting parents (the vast majority of whom are women) are the most threatened of social security dependents in the new environment. A Sydney Morning Herald poll in April this year found, in answer to the question: ‘Who is in the most need of government support?’, only four percent said supporting mothers. Five times as many supported the young unemployed or age pensioners. Yet supporting parents rate alongside the single unemployed as the most impoverished beneficiaries. The face of poverty today is female.

The Supporting Parents Benefit is paid to single parents, of whom the vast majority are separated or divorced women. The benefit has been surrounded by controversy since Labor introduced it in 1974. It was staunchly resisted in the bureaucracy. The popular mythology in social security offices through the 70s was that most claims were fraudulent — that the claimants were actually living with men. At first, benefits were cancelled on the mere suspicion that this was the case, with no reason given until the cheque failed to arrive. There was enormous stigma attached to the benefit, and it is not surprising that most beneficiaries only continue to receive it for around two years, according to the Social Welfare Research Centre at the University of New South Wales.

According to the SWRC, there are three reasons for the poverty experienced by most supporting parents. Firstly, the lack of child care — only about a quarter of single parents with pre-school age children are employed, and only a similar proportion use formal child care services. Second, employment opportunities are diminishing. Third, benefits are very low, and over three-quarters of the people on supporting parents benefit (SPB) earn no extra income. Benefits are so low, primarily because of the government’s failure to index additional payments for

The alternative is for social security dependents to become part of a welfare ghetto
children or to set them at a realistic level (presently $16 per week). One-fifth of Australian children live in poverty, and a large proportion are dependent on supporting parents benefit.

The benefit has always been precarious because it confronts the ideal model of a family with two parents with the reality of separation and divorce, and the need for state support. It offers a long-term alternative to dependence on men. At

The debate needs to be shifted back to an emphasis on employment creation

the same time, the numbers of supporting mothers on SPB has doubled from around 100,000 in 1974, to approximately 200,000 today. The reasons are mainly social, although a higher proportion of single mothers is dependent on SPB today for economic as well as social reasons. Separation and divorce increased in the 'seventies, partly reflecting the fact that people married earlier in the early 'seventies. The divorce rate is now, in fact, reducing, but it is still high enough to excite the paranoia of the 'moralists' who call for the tightening up of both family law and SPB eligibility. There is now a burgeoning alliance of convenience between bodies like the Catholic Social Welfare Commission (who preach the virtues of the 'family') and economists who preach the virtues of small government.

Into the fray steps the Social Security Review with its proposals to improve the enforcement of maintenance payments by non-custodial parents (usually the father). A number of options have been floated, from direct deduction from the wage packets of maintenance payments ordered by the Family Court, to the automatic deduction of maintenance according to a fixed rate per child and payment into a general fund for supporting parents. Most maintenance orders are not properly enforced, and reform in this area is long overdue. These ideas have been picked up by the Finance Department as a money-saving measure; and the department would like to see the proceeds absorbed into consolidated revenue (in other words, no increases for SPB). This highlights the dangers in moves to deduct maintenance according to a fixed formula. It may simply be used as a device to shift responsibility from the state to non-custodial parents which would be quite consistent with the 'moralist' approach. The removal of the discretion of the Family Court to take into account the nature of the prior relationship is another issue that warrants careful consideration.

The most effective solution in the long run is improved child care and employment prospects for single parents. The state must acknowledge its responsibility for the raising of children through community and work-based child care, rather than tossing it back to single mothers. Some form of government income support for parents of pre-school-age children will probably be needed for some time, and perhaps this should be universal rather than confined to single parents.

One proposal recently floated is a universal benefit for parents (whether working or on SPB) which incorporates the family allowance (now paid to all parents of dependent children) and the extra benefit payments for children of social security beneficiaries. Single parents would then get one payment for themselves (because they can’t work) and a share in the universal payment
for children. Such a payment would probably be means tested. This has the political advantage that all parents would have a common interest in raising the benefit.

Supporting parents would be far less isolated if all people (single or not single) caring for a pre-school-age child at home also received a benefit to compensate for their unavailability for work. This would do away with the need to investigate constantly whether single parents are still single, and remove the stigma from supporting parents benefit.

There is another long overdue but difficult reform which is required if we are to improve the social security status of women. The system still treats women basically as the dependents of men, and families as single income units. The supporting parents benefit is not paid to a woman involved in a relationship with a man. There is still a 'married rate' of pension or benefit, fixed at about 5/6ths of the single rate; and married women can't receive the dole if their husbands work full-time.

In England, the women's movement has been campaigning for some time for 'disaggregation' meaning that the income of one's partner be ignored for social security purposes, as it is for taxation purposes in Australia. Current trade union thinking in Australia is against this on the grounds that the wives of wealthy men shouldn't receive unemployment benefit. However, from a broader social viewpoint, this reform is long overdue, and there are always other ways and means of 'soaking' the rich.

When the trade union movement neglects social security, its members often lose on the swings what they gain on the (industrial) roundabout. Living standards can be improved by direct trade union action against employers or by campaigning around the social wage. Unions are now waging a massive struggle to extract superannuation contributions from the bosses. It is a progressive struggle inasmuch as, at present, only half the workers (and largely the better-off half) receive superannuation.

However, the social wage side of the equation has been neglected. When the new superannuation schemes start to pay benefits to retired workers, social security entitlements of these workers will be affected. Superannuation is not exempt from the Age Pension income test, and for every dollar received over $30 per week, a single pensioner loses 50c of his/her pension. The government is delighted (all except the Social Security Minister Mr. Howe) at the future savings on Age Pensions which are in store.

Superannuation will also increasingly affect the age pension in another way. There are generous tax concessions for employer contributions to superannuation schemes and for superannuation payments in the form of regular 'annuities' to retired workers. So generous are these concessions that the government estimates that it will forgo a total of $4 billion in tax in the new financial year as the superannuation push gathers steam. This is more than two-thirds of the annual age pension bill. Clearly, future governments won't be able to finance both these tax concessions and the pension. The pressure for worker contributions to superannuation schemes would be inexorable.

**Superannuation contributions... in the final analysis, are simply another form of fringe benefit**

This, then, is the choice: either sponsor a greater expansion of superannuation through tax concessions, or preserve the age pension as it stands. Which is the more progressive approach? The question was answered clearly by the labour movement in the 1930s when the conservative government sought to introduce its national superannuation scheme in place of the pension. A universal age pension funded by a progressive tax system benefited low and middle income earners, especially women and others who have a 'broken' employment history.

There is no reason for thinking that this has to be the outcome of the ACTU campaign, and the key to solving the problem is twofold: the pension income test and tax concessions for superannuation. In 1974, a government inquiry into national superannuation recommended a two-tier system of retirement income: the age pension and a universal superannuation payment equivalent to five percent of average earnings. The latter payment would go to all and would not be means tested. The government would pick up the tab for those who lacked the employment history to generate the money needed for the five percent payment from superannuation contributions. The government now proposes to set up a 'safety net' scheme for workers not picked up by the industry schemes, but if this is established it will probably only apply to people in the workforce.

The five percent payment on top of a pension of 25 percent of average earnings would meet the pensioners' demand for a retirement income of at least 30 percent of a.w.c.

On the taxation side, there is little justification for tax concessions for employer contributions. Tax concessions for superannuation fund investments — involving huge sums of money — should be used as a lever to influence investment policy. The rate of taxation of superannuation payments for the wealthy should be reviewed. In 1983, the government increased the tax on superannuation payments to a ceiling of 30 percent, a figure still well below the highest marginal tax rate. There was an outcry at this which was totally unjustified. One of the major campaigns against the changes was run by the airline pilots. They have recently completed a similar campaign to transfer their current fringe benefits into superannuation contributions in effect to avoid the fringe benefits tax on their employers. This demonstrates clearly the potential for evasion of a progressive tax through the tax concessions for superannuation contributions (which, in the final analysis, are simply another form of fringe benefit).

The age pension is the rock on which the universal social security system is founded. If it is eroded, the more vulnerable benefits will follow.

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NOEL COUNIHAN

Robert Smith

Noel Counihan was born on the eve of the Great War; he died recently, some seventy-two years later. Throughout his career as an artist, extending over more than half a century, he produced work consistently dedicated to a humane, committed attitude to the world. Yet his view of the world was not static. Just as life underwent numerous changes, from Depression to war to Cold War and McCarthyism, to new interventionist wars, to a great wave of liberation movements, so Counihan’s art developed and changed with the times.

It is important to realise that his work has this internal consistency and continuity as well as development and change, for they are joint indicators of Counihan’s artistic and political integrity. In that same period, Western art also went through numerous changes, but they were changes usually defined in purely stylistic terms. One style was succeeded by another in an increasingly formalist cycle which came to be known as “the mainstream” of modern art. Although it is now becoming recognised that European modernism had powerful political origins, from World War II onwards formalist critics increasingly argued that politics and art do not mix, and that art is only “pure” when it is free from politics. Today, we can see that such theories and the art they supported were integral aspects of the Cold War and of rampant consumerism. It hardly seems mere coincidence that art, like other commodities became more and more subject to the rule of the marketplace, with art objects treated as investments, and styles rapidly superseded to prevent over-supply of any one particular kind of product.

These conditions exerted an enormous pressure on artists, no matter how genuine, to conform to the latest supra-national artistic fashions. Part of the attraction of modernism was that artists were able to convince themselves that its emphasis on “formal values” offered them artistic independence, free from the debased moral values of bourgeois utilitarianism. In the name of rejecting false social values, subject matter was devalued, becoming a mere pretext for formal “experiments”, or was renounced altogether. The fact that Noel Counihan was responding to events in the wider social context rather than to the isolationist and elitist attitudes of this self-defining “mainstream” of “contemporary art” gave his work a genuine sense of purpose which stimulated its autonomous internal development. This has been the case with all committed artists: Goya in a Spain subject to oppression and obscurantism; Daumier involved in the struggle of the French for republican democracy; Kollwitz in a militarist Germany moving towards successive wars and Nazi domination. It is no accident that Counihan saw himself as working in the same humane and realist tradition of which they are part.

The realism practised by such artists is not just a matter of technical skill giving the pictorial illusion of actuality. That rather naive approach can be equated with the art of the chocolate box, and might aptly be called descriptive naturalism to differentiate it from the more incisive and critical type of realism. Realism is not just a question of style either, any more than contemporary art is for that matter. To identify contemporary art or modernism with a particular style or sequence of styles is to trivialise the whole idea of modernity, or of contemporary relevance. As long ago as 1945, Bernard Smith perceptively referred to Noel Counihan as a
“contemporary realist”, making the very valid point that there is no basic conflict between modernity and realism.

“Modernism” is quite a contentious term. If it means anything worthy of note it must refer to meaningful awareness of significant events, conditions and attitudes in the world about us. Counihan was a choirboy in St. Paul’s Anglican Cathedral in Melbourne in the 1920s, and suffered retribution when he had the temerity to protest at the unfair treatment of another member of the choir, whom he considered “a victim of oppression”. So, even before Counihan was influenced by the events and atmosphere of the Depression and the impending war and fascism, he had this propensity for human compassion and social indignation. That, above all, is what is continuous in Noel’s work. It inspired him to help found the Workers Art Club in 1931, to participate in the campaigns of the unemployed against evictions and for freedom of speech and assembly, and it led him to take a leading part in the movement against war and fascism. He was involved in one famous episode which led to legislative moves to curb the excessive power and ambition of Victoria’s Chief Commissioner of Police, Brigadier-General Thomas Blamey (later Australian Commander-in-Chief in World War II). Police had been preventing unemployed protesters in Brunswick from making public speeches by arresting them for allegedly obstructing the traffic. Noel thwarted this police tactic by addressing the public from inside an old lift-cage bolted to the top of a wagon which was padlocked to a shop verandah. The resulting publicity gave rise to the 1933 Street Meetings Act requiring the courts to be satisfied in such cases that there really had been undue obstruction of actual traffic. Robert Gordon Menzies was state Attorney-General at the time, but took no part in debate on the bill, which tends to suggest that he did not share the alarm of his conservative colleagues at Blamey’s apparent attempts to act as a power above the law.

In the light of Noel’s wholehearted involvement in political
activity, it would almost seem unnecessary to discuss the relationship between art and politics in his life, except that the process of artistic creation is widely misunderstood, and especially the production of politically-committed art. Many people of the left (and of the right!) see such art as nothing more than literal illustrations — the kind of treatment which, as in bourgeois naturalist art, produces nothing more than descriptive naturalism, leaving viewers to draw the appropriate conclusions, according to their point of view. Not even in his illustrations to literary works did Counihan lapse into this literal kind of approach. His art is the natural outcome of his profound convictions about life, and not just a translation of his political beliefs into pictorial forms. Rather, his politics and his art both arose from the same source in his compassionate and socially aware nature. The same impulse which motivated him to become an artist led him to join the Communist Party, and he never lost sight of that basic impulse common to both — the impulse towards a better and more equitable world.

In art, Counihan’s themes are always related to social equity, liberation from oppression, and opposition to war. There is constant awareness that these are not just political abstractions, but real issues involving real people, and requiring social action. With specific oppression and specific wars the subject matter varies, and the character of his art changes accordingly. The human figure is usually central because he is concerned about human interests and the human condition. One of Counihan’s great strengths is the superb drawing ability which he nurtured by continually drawing from the model at a time when, under the spell of modernism, drawing, and especially figure drawing, was generally out of artistic fashion. On the basis of such rigorous methods of working, Counihan’s style is derived in accordance with specific topical subject matter. In 1931, when he was seventeen or eighteen, he produced his first prints — two linocuts: Tycoon and A Sexless Parson. There is no doubt that these represented, for him, two aspects of institutionalised society, each of them indifferent to the fate of individual human beings. There are recurrent allusions to both throughout his work, often many decades later. When Albert Namatjira died on 8 August 1959, Counihan saw this as martyrdom by the callous institutions of commercial society, and set about creating an allegorical image of Namatjira, choosing the linocut medium with its starkly dramatic graphic potential. A first attempt was rejected, but the definitive version was ready in time for a hand-printed impression to be reproduced with Counihan’s written tribute to Namatjira in the Melbourne Guardian on 27 August. With bitter irony, the mission-reared artist is shown crucified against an impersonal background of the city with its cathedral, symbolising the vested interests of church and corporate capital. Nearly twenty years later, in 1978, similar imagery re-emerged with his awareness of “lots of young unemployed dosing out — a return to the ‘thirties”. The resulting series of drawings and prints include some called City, others called Cathedral, clear references to the continuance of the same indifference there had been to the plight of the unemployed during the Depression, and to the death of Namatjira in 1959.

Some of Counihan’s most powerful works arise from his response to the Viet Nam war, and especially the involvement of young Australian soldiers. In his own words, he was distressed by “the hypocrisy and cant of our position here, the despoliation and corruption of masculine virility in the sense that we sent very young men who hardly knew where Viet Nam was. They went off with faces like babies’ bums”. Noel depicted these youngsters as simultaneously unwitting aggressors, and victims, dehumanised by the experience. His drawings, paintings and prints carry symbolic undertones of crucifixion, of quasi-phallic potency, and of potential fecundity as a positive counterpart to the defoliation of both the countryside and the young manhood of the intruders. As the other side of the equation he saw the gross individualism and self-indulgence of the mercenary society which sent off its youth to die in unjust wars. This engendered a corresponding series of works on The Good Life, with symbols of moral blindness, physical decadence and social decline. In a related series, The Laughing Christ, a sardonic Christ-figure mocks the depraved ethical values of a society which pays only lip-service to ostensibly Christian standards.

Counihan constantly worked from the particular to the general, so his works stand as great universal images of human suffering, human endurance and human aspiration. In the past five years he had repeated heart attacks and a stroke which made the doctors think he might never work again. Work was very important to him, for he looked on himself as a worker just as much as the workers whose lives and interests he was representing in his art. During his last twelve months or so, sometimes working as little as an hour a day, he produced some really striking images. They reach out with a universal significance. Some of them are to do with what he saw, on the television, of what was happening in Lebanon. But they go beyond that: they work from the particular to a generalised statement about great human issues opposing oppression and opposing war and looking forward to a better kind of real world.

ROBERT SMITH teaches art history at Flinders University in South Australia, and is the author of the standard work on Noel Counihan’s prints.
New Horizons

Viewpoints on *Moving Left*, edited by David McKnight (Pluto Press, 1986). Reviewed by FRANK STILWELL and BOB MAKINSON.

The need for the left to reassess its position in Australian society and politics is all too obvious. The New Right is rampant (although the ideas are far from new, being largely a mixture of social Darwinism and pre-Keynesian economics).

The Hawke government is pursuing policies of conservative economic management which make John Howard’s policies as Treasurer in the previous Liberal government look positively anemic. The buoyant economic conditions which prevailed in 1983-85 are now in tatters, with all the leading economic indicators pointing to a looming recession. Australian capitalism is not delivering the goods.

Yet the support for a left alternative has not been established. The membership of the existing left political parties is small and fragmented. The ALP left is not evidently influential in the determination of policy (with the exception of the effective brake it placed — in conjunction with the trade unions and welfare groups — on proposals to the 1985 Tax Summit). The conservative media bias perpetuates a bourgeois hegemony, most obviously in the realm of economic policy, where the manifest irrationality and blatant egalitarianism of the “economic rationalists” currently holds sway.

In these circumstances, the issues raised in *Moving Left* are crucial and timely. The project which the book represents — one of stocktaking reappraisal, self-criticism, and redirection for the left — is admirable. The nine contributors represent a spectrum of views, including “green” and feminist perspectives, ALP and CPA, for and against a new left party; but, more important, for the most part their contributions are open, inquiring and non-dogmatic. This is a book to stimulate critical rethinking on the left, both individually and collectively.

The most obviously tantalising area of debate involves the relationship between social movements and political parties. The movements formed around issues of environmentalism, peace (including the movement against uranium mining) and feminism have been more prominent and commanding of community support than the formal party organisations of the left. (One might also add to the trilogy a fourth leg, that of anti-racist movements, broadly encompassing the movements for multiculturalism, for Aboriginal land rights and against apartheid.) How, if at all, are these social movements, which are certainly not socialist in all respects, to be linked?

Attempts by existing political parties of the left to capture movements are obviously counterproductive, as the NDP/SWP experience has shown. Is some kind of “rainbow coalition” the answer? That seems too diffuse to be effective, let alone to serve as a means of accelerating the process of people’s radicalisation through struggle and of harnessing that experience to a socialist analysis. So what of the third alternative, of a new political party built on principles of environmentalism, feminism, peace and anti-racism? Could this generate anything more than the superficially progressive policies of the Australian Democrats?

What, if anything, would be its relationship to a marxist analysis of capitalism or to a vanguard role in the process of political change? My own conclusion, derived from pondering the contributions to this book (and other discussions and experiences) is that a new political grouping is needed. There must be an effective means of harnessing the progressive elements within the various social movements and of seeking to capture the energies of those on the ALP left who are disillusioned with the unprincipled politics and conservative economics of the Hawke-Keating administration.

Still, the issue of an alternative strategy remains a problem. The introduction to the book notes that “the economy is the logical starting point since, if the left is known for anything, it is that it places the control and operation of the economy at the centre of its theory and practice”. A number of contributors subsequently refer to the issue: but it is clear that they are more comfortable discussing visions of socialist society and/or problems of reconciling social objectives and political practices, than in setting out a transitional program for managing and transforming the capitalist economy. John Mathews’ chapter in the book suggests that the Accord has — or could have — the role of a transitional program towards socialism: but with the benefit of a few months more hindsight, it seems like so much wishful thinking. What would a more radical alternative economic strategy look like? Is it possible? These are questions which clearly underlie the discussion of the prospects for progressive social change: they are not adequately considered in this book but, by the same token, they are not pre-judged either. The formulation of an alternative economic strategy is clearly an important and urgen
analytical task for the left. What this book reminds us is that the process of such strategy formulation must be decentralised, participatory and democratic.

It is not difficult for the left to be self-critical. The problems of analysis, including the reappraisal and modernisation of marxist analysis, are daunting. The imperfections of the institutions of the labour movement, such as trade unions and existing left political parties, are evident: everyone has their own illustrative anecdote. The task is to rebuild without unnecessary demolition in the meanwhile. The foundations are there. The revolutionary slogan “liberty, fraternity, and equality” remains a shorthand expression of the objectives: if nothing else, it reminds us that the New Right should not be unchallenged in their claim on the objective of liberty — its preconditions, of course, include the elimination of economic exploitation. So, too, the goals of fraternity (suitably modified to eliminate patriarchal connotations) and equality remain the moral high ground which the left should continue to take pride in occupying.

The various contributions to Moving Left are a frank airing of different views about the most appropriate process of rebuilding and regrouping. It deserves to be widely read. A more sharply focussed introduction or conclusion — even the reproduction of David McKnight’s previous essay published in Socialism in Australia: Toward Renewal — would have helped bring out the key issues. It is hard to imagine the right coming out with such a public exercise in self-appraisal and criticism: but the left has nothing to lose for such candour. Pluto Press is to be congratulated for its good work in providing a vehicle for this ongoing debate.

FRANK STILWELL teaches economics at Sydney University.

Moving Left is dense reading, but worth it. It is a useful step in analysing at least three of the key questions facing us:

* what are the ideas around which sections (not necessarily all) of the left could, or should, unite?
* what are the ideas on which a new or re-formed socialist formation could being to gain mass support?
* what sort of organisational forms will lend themselves to the complicated, and sometimes contradictory, tasks of movement-building and party-building?

The concentration on ideas is not accidental — nearly all of the contributors acknowledge that counter-ideological struggle is the order of the day. Some express this as popularising a “new socialist vision” for society. Others see it in more traditional (they would say “less nebulous”) terms of program and policies. The distinction is scarcely important — socialist renewal will require a thorough spring-cleaning from ethics to economics and back again.

All the contributors demonstrate some commitment to an integration of the socialist economic and class analysis with “new movement” analyses. All are concerned with what sorts of visions and policies will strike a chord with a constituency in the working class and beyond, and with what sort of package of radical reforms could provide a platform against the current rightwing offensive. Not all see that offensive in the same light — Belinda Probert, in an otherwise incisive essay, denies “any generalised shift to the Right, nor have progressive forces generally been more on the offensive than usual”. This may be so for some of the social movements, but is certainly not true for the union, welfare and living standards areas.

Some of the old perennial debates are given an airing — what is class? To what extent is work in the ALP desirable or possible? These get a reasoned and tolerant treatment that probably has more to do with the selection of contributors than with any real new-found consensus on the left. The problem of linking socialist and “new movement” goals into an integrated program is mainly dealt with at the level of practical politics, with an occasional encouraging foray into the moral implications, which are, after all, essential if our ideas are to inspire millions. The only attempt at a philosophical approach is by Eric Aarons, whose “rainforest ecosystem” model of society is counterposed to the mechanistic views which tend to dominate socialist theory.

One nevertheless gets the feeling that we are still dealing with variants of the shopping-list approach, with a main aim of negotiating a new working relationship between existing progressive forces. There is less attention to the tactical and strategic problems of appealing to entirely new sections of the population. The whole question of nationalism or national identity, which is certainly recognised as an area for activity by the right, is largely ignored. Nor is there more than a cursory reference to the migrant communities, their orientation towards the ALP, and whether that can be changed.

One key practical question in the debate on the limits of reform is touched upon by some contributors, and can be illustrated by environmental issues. While the Franklin Dam and NSW rainforest decisions have been politically significant and have secured those areas for the time being, it remains true that an ironclad social consensus on preservation of wilderness and genetic diversity is still a long way off. Incremental gains, based largely on piecemeal legislation, can still be rolled back by a mere change in government and, in any case, are not comprehensive. (Witness Aboriginal land rights, around which there were real but fragile advances in the 1970s.) Rainforests are, thanks to the work done by the environmental movement, a popular issue. Preservation of semi-arid environments has less public appeal, but no less scientific or social priority.

Environmental politics must sooner or later tackle the need for a national land use plan as a national priority, which enshrines wilderness preservation as a national goal, but also sets management goals for exploited land (including freehold). The left and environmental movement could be seen in this way to be taking up major national issues that no one else is prepared to address. We could...
begin to get across the idea that three-year electoral schedules and political expediency provide no rational basis for dealing with many of the problems facing Australia and its working people. This is not to suggest that we should not pursue incremental legislative gains — but we should also begin to muster support and expertise for cogent and popularly-arguable national goals. Socialism is, after all, supposed to promote rational and humanistic planning for social development.

The same sort of reasoning applies to any strategy for significant constitutional reform, or for revival of the recently-murdered Bill of Rights, and for industry/government research and development strategies. The general problem remains of how best to popularise the notion of goals and planning, and particular reforms. It can do us no harm to try out alternative approaches to coalition building on such questions, as long as we can (eventually) wrest from the right and big business control of Australia's political agenda.

BOB MAKINSON is a peace activist and a member of the C.P.A.

After the Decade


It might seem a trifle late for a review of a book which was, as its preface states, produced "as an attempt to capture the essence of the position of women" at the end of the UN Decade for Women. But then, it sometimes feels as though the women's movement has been placed in a time warp — with the End of the Decade providing a signal for conservatives to turn the clock well back. With this book, despite some of its shortcomings, we can savour, to an extent, the gains made through hard slog, and an awareness of differences within the international women's movement.

The book looks at five aspects of women's life: family; work; education; politics; and sex. Two countries are examined under each of these: a poor country and a wealthy country, with a woman from a poor country visiting the wealthy country and vice versa, each giving their personal impressions of the country visited. The purpose of this was to give the book "true depth". And the purpose of the reciprocal conjunction of wealthy and poor was to avoid "just another piece of international voyeurism" with "the rich world ogling at the poor". Hence, under the heading of "Women and Sex", Australia was visited by Elena Poniatowska (journalist; born in Paris of French-Polish father and Mexican mother; now living in Mexico), while Angela Davis (Black American activist) visited Egypt. With all due respect, the fact that the writers spent only a matter of days (eleven in Elena's case) in each country means that the pieces are indeed impressionistic. This, in itself, can be useful to locals — to see just what it is that impresses a visitor. But there is a very real danger of mixing preconceptions and foreknowledge with first, fast impressions. What can result are clichés. In the case of Australia, I fear this was the result.

The section on Australia begins with a full-page pic of a Surfers' meter maid — replete in tinselly highcut one-piece bather, sash and hideous tiara. 1950s waitress-style headdress with the words 'METER MAID' appliqued across it — and grasping a parking meter. Elena Poniatowska's observations of Australia were that of a tourist-with-a-difference, in that she had a specific brief and contacts were provided. But these observations were not particularly new or enlightening.

The comparisons between rich and poor communities are inevitable, and it is of value to see someone else's astonishment at the community services women in Australia have gained through the hard struggle of the women's movement; women's confidence in their own sexuality; and, inevitably, the continuing and high degree of exploitation of women and sex through commercialism. It is also useful to be reminded, albeit secondhand in this instance, that Aboriginal women are well and truly fed up with the predominantly anglo-feminist movement's pontificating on and co-opting of their specific concerns. Nevertheless, the real issues for Australian feminism are far more complex than such an impression might give readers outside Australia (and even readers outside the women's movement in Australia).

It came across quite clearly that allotting each country a specific topic was perhaps not the best way to gain an informed opinion of the state of the women's movement and women in general. And this was compounded by the shortness of the visits. A particular example is the assignment of sex as the specific topic for Egypt. Angela Davis was taken aback by the "palpable hostility" from a group of Egyptian women when she introduced her topic. However, she handled the situation with sensitivity, and her experience as an activist and theorist helped produce an interesting account of Egyptian women's concerns. It's worth noting that the editors apologised for a lack of adequate communication with Davis over the project's intention.

And that intention was to produce a substantial analysis of, and insight into, women's lives around the world which, at the End of the Decade for Women, would set the future agenda. For the reasons I have mentioned, it has fallen short of this, but it is still a worthwhile addition to literature on the development of the international women's movement.

There are other pieces by recognisable names, such as Nawal el Saadawi (on the UK), Germaine Greer (on Cuba) and Marilyn French (on India). The book also contains a useful statistical section. It was certainly a mammoth task — an appetiser, perhaps, for a deeper analysis.

JANE INGLIS is a feminist activist and a member of the Sydney ALR collective.
Depression, the war, and the Yiflies and rial working class suburb, through the sound a good idea. The contributors have description ol the often appalling account of what it was like to work at employer, as told by thirteen men and

BROWSING

Ken Norling


Since its beginning in 1984, the Living Museum has tried to record the lives of working people in Melbourne’s western suburbs. This volume continues that project by presenting an oral history of what was once Foottscray’s biggest employer, as told by thirteen men and women who started working there in the years before World War II. It is not just an account of what it was like to work at Angliss, though it does provide enough description of the often appalling surroundings to make vegetarianism Angliss’, though it does provide enough pages.


This is a short version of a yet-to-be-published history of the A.N.C. It is intended to provide both a history of the struggle for Black liberation in South Africa, and a statement of the current goals and strategies of the movement. The history of the A.N.C. is very much the history of modern South Africa. It begins with attempts to petition the British government for equal rights for non-whites in the new Union of 1910, catalogues the continual frustration of constitutional and non-violent attempts to get reforms, and concludes with a description of the politics of armed struggle. It is a good short account of why that struggle became necessary, and a clear statement of the position of one of the world’s most prominent national liberation movements.


Now and then commercial publishers will produce a book by an Aborigine, or about Aboriginal life, but such occasions are rare. The A.I.A.S., however, has been publishing such works for many years now. This, like many of its publications, is a memoir of what it is like to live as an Aborigine in white Australia. The author was a Kalkadoon, born in north-west Queensland, but sent with her family (except a brother who was old enough to work on the station) to Palm Island, where she spent her childhood. Her story is often a sad one, but it is also the story of a woman of strength and determination making her way in a world where her abilities and her humanity were almost constantly ignored or denied.

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

OUR BROKEN DREAMS, by Panagiota Halvatzis. Richmond Workers Health Resource Centre, Melbourne, 1986. $2.00 paperback, 22 pages.

Our Broken Dreams is an all-too-brief autobiography by a woman who came to Australia in her youth with a dream of a better life in a new country. In fact, she was to spend 23 years working in textile factories, usually in the most primitive conditions on antiquated machinery, and usually on piece work, until Repetitive Strain Injury made it impossible for her to continue working. In part, this is a record of her coming to terms with that experience, including her struggles with the medical profession to get proper diagnosis and treatment. It also provides an account of her work with the Workers Health Resource Centre trying to change conditions in factories so that others do not suffer the same injuries. It is an often grim story and it is made grimmer by current threats to the funding of the centre by a state government department which apparently prefers to pay its money to health professionals who are never likely to see the working conditions which produce their steady flow of patients.

Available from Richmond Workers Health Resource Centre, 246 Church St, Richmond 3121.


These pamphlets are aimed primarily at secondary school students, but could be used far more widely, given how little knowledge there is of the realities of Southern Africa. They might be a little dated, particularly in the light of the growth in strength of the Black opposition over the last two years, but they still deserve wide circulation. They provide an invaluable summary of the ways in which apartheid works, and of how South Africa exploits Namibia. All the facts are here, sharply and clearly, and are supported by a photographic record which makes it plain why people are willing to face any suffering for an immediate end to the systematic barbarism of the white regime.

Distributed by Pathfinder Press, Box 37, Leichhardt 2040.
HAVE YOUR SAY!

ALR READERSHIP SURVEY

As you may have noticed, the last issue of ALR was available at newsagents in Sydney and other parts of NSW. Soon, we hope to make it available at Melbourne newsagents, too. We're also stepping up our advertising and promotions. To do all of this properly we need to know more about our readers, and about the magazine — and for that we need your help. Please fill in the following survey and return it to:

ALR Readership Survey,
P.O. Box A247, Sydney South,
N.S.W. 2000.

Q1. How long have you been reading ALR?
Less than one year □
2 - 3 years □
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Q2. How much of ALR do you read, on average?
Three quarters □
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Q3. How many people, apart from yourself, usually read or look at a copy?
None □
Three □
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Two □
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Q4. How did you first come across ALR?
Heard about it from a friend □
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If other, please specify .........................................................

Q5. Which of the following magazines, newspapers do you read?
Australian Society □
Social Alternatives □
Chain Reaction □
Greenpeace Examiner □
Hecate □
Gay Information □
Mainstream Unionist □
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Q 6 How old are you? ........................................

Q 7. Are you:
   Single □
   Living with a partner □
   Married □

Q 8. What is your residential postcode? .....................

Q 9. What is your highest educational qualification?
   School certificate □
   HSC □
   Trade certificate □
   Diploma □
   Tertiary degree □

Q 10. Sex:
   Female □
   Male □

Q 11. What is your after-tax income per annum?
   0 - $5,000 □
   $5 - 10,000 □
   $10 - 15,000 □
   $15 - 20,000 □
   $20,000 - 25,000 □
   $25,000+ □

Q 12. Are you:
   In paid full-time employment □
   Self-employed □
   In paid part-time employment □
   Unwaged □

Q 13. If in paid employment, are you employed in the public or private sector?
   Public □
   Private □

Q 14. If public, which of the following:
   Public service □
   Education □
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   Other □
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   Retail □
   Services □
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   Other □
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Q 16. Which of the following are you:
   House/flat owner □
   Housing Commission tenant □
   Private tenant □
   Co-op tenant □
   Other □

Q 17. Are you a member of any or several of the following?
   A trade union □
   A peace group □
   A community group □
   An environment group □
   A women's group □
   An Aboriginal group □
   A gay group □
   A solidarity organisation □
   A housing group □
   A welfare group □

Q 18. In the last month, how much have you spent on:
   books □
   records cassettes □
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   eating out □
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In our last issue A.L.R. carried a special feature on Affirmative Action which had the New Right's plaything, The Bulletin, fuming about 'crude feminist porkbarrelling'.

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