PACIFIC RETRO
"If the party and its factions fail to adapt to the political culture of the 90s very quickly, the Labor Party will move into a phase of inexorable and possibly ultimately terminal decline"
Lindsay Tanner, ALR, June 1990

"I think [the Accord] should be abandoned in its present form...Most unionists don't understand what it is and if they do, they know it's bad...I'm not sure it's useful any more for the Accord to be negotiated solely between a peak union body and governments. I think it's time we started negotiating on an industry basis"
Chris Lloyd, ALR, July 1990

Twelve months ago, after Labor's election win, to argue that the ALP was in deep trouble was regarded as eccentric. Now it's rapidly becoming common sense.

Twelve months ago to say that the Accord was finished was to court major controversy. Now it's the policy of the ACTU.

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COLUMNS

MARGINS: How long can Yugoslavia teeter? 2
PROFILE: Madonna (ii) 3
CORRECT LINE COOKING: Bake My Way 47
DEAR DR HARTMAN: Who needs to read? 48

BRIEFINGS

BLEAK HOUSE: Enter stage left, the age of austerity 4
SALVATION’S SEAMY SIDE: Romania’s unfinished revolution 6
NORTHERN THAW: Glasnost goes arctic 8

FEATURES

BREAKING UP THE BLOCS: The public/private dichotomy no longer defines the spectrum, contends Barry Hindess... 10
MULTIPOLAR FEMINISM: ...and the breakup of the blocs confronts feminism, too. 14
AFTER G-7 1/2: John Lloyd and Alexander Kabakov on Gorbachev’s forlorn plea for Western aid. 16
FORWARD TO THE PAST? This month sees the South Pacific Forum meet in Melanesia. Our Pacific feature surveys the escalating clash between modernisation and tradition. Rowan Callick argues there’s no alternative to change in the Pacific, Dale Keeling looks at the suddenly changed script of Fiji’s crisis, Nic Maclean examines the plight of newly ‘independent’ Micronesia, and Brian Brunton looks at the clash of liberal values and tradition in PNG. 22

THE WILD BLUE YONDER: Roy Green argues that the ACTU’s controversial break with the wages system was unavoidable. 34

ALREVIEW

OUT OF THE Ghetto: Catholicism’s human face on the newsstands 39
STRANGE DAYS: The 60s revival: from hippie to hip 42
SHORT REVIEWS: Sex and death in Vienna and Manila 46
Yugoslavia has been on the brink of disaster for many months. Yet the crisis still hasn't developed into full-scale civil war for the reason that almost nobody really wants war. Although everyone is assuming a very military posture, the general consensus among Yugoslavs is that war is the last thing they want. It's something that's been forced on them by very selfish politicians on all sides who have used nationalist tensions between the republics to get and keep power.

Probably only a minimal proportion of the population of Serbia wants war. Chief among them are the hardline nationalists and the communists, both of whom know that's the only way they can stay in power. The Croatian government's control of the media and public opinion is quite as firm as was that of the communists; maybe even worse. And Croatian President Tudjman is building a cult of personality around himself which would have done Tito proud.

The essence of the current events is not that it is an ethnic struggle between Serbs and Croats, but an ideological struggle between the remnants of a Bolshevik class and anti-communist forces, some of which are very nationalistic, and a few of which are even fascist. Having said that, there's no doubt that the Croats and the Slovenes are light years ahead of the Serbs in their commitment to building a new democratic state.

By now the (non-elected) federal government has become an irrelevancy. There is now talk of having elections throughout Yugoslavia for the federal parliament, but it's a year and a half too late; few in northern Yugoslavia would take such a process seriously now. The only federal institution that has any possibility of being reactivated in the short term is the collective presidency. Because the presidency is technically the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, it has quite strong constitutional powers.

However, the Slovenes have said that they will only send their representative to the collective presidency if the topic for discussion is the break-up of Yugoslavia.

In the recent peace talks between Croatia and Slovenia and the federal government the army was included virtually as a separate player in its own right, which is a fairly clear admission that it is not now under civilian control. Their objective is to maintain Yugoslavia as a socialist, centralised state. But increasingly that means they're in effect defending Serbia, because the bulk of the officer class is Serb and there have been huge desertions of Croats, Slovenes, Muslims and Albanians. There has also been a purge within the military leadership of non-Serbs, partly as a consequence, of course, of the fact that they wouldn't fight aggressively in the invasion of Slovenia.

The West has to bear a certain amount of responsibility for that invasion. I myself would see a direct correlation between James Baker's visit to Belgrade prior to the crisis, his absurd comments about the need to maintain Yugoslavia as a single state, and the invasion a few days later. I believe that led the generals to believe that the West would, if not support, at least not oppose, the forcible reintegration of Yugoslavia as a single state. You could draw a fairly close parallel with the signals the US sent to Iraq before the invasion of Kuwait.

Now Western countries have finally realised that they've got themselves into an absolutely absurd position. In order to support the maintenance of a unified Yugoslavia, they've been supporting a hardline communist regime against relatively democratic forces. The view in the West has traditionally been that Yugoslavia had to be kept together because if it was allowed to break up then the result would be not only civil war, but also the destabilisation of the whole of central and eastern Europe as well as the Soviet Union—which is Yugoslavia writ large.

Now, belatedly, the West is beginning to understand that they have to make clear to the Yugoslav government that if the negotiations fail, they will only send their representative to the collective presidency if the topic for discussion is the break-up of Yugoslavia. The creation of a few new mini-states in the Balkans may be the only way out of the impasse. But this would be a dangerous precedent, of course, because if you allow Croatia and Slovenia to go, then others will be queuing up—Slovakia, Kosovo, the Ukraine, Byelorussia, the Baltic states, Bessarabia and so on. That's what Western diplomats are scared of now because the possible end result is 20 or 30 new countries in Europe as a result of the secession of these two small republics.

At the moment the feeling in Yugoslavia is that there may well be a very bloody conflict very soon, most likely instigated by the army. Such a conflict would probably take place in eastern Croatia or northern Bosnia where there are large Serb and Croat populations side by side. The tension is so high, and the stakes are now so high, that without some form of conflict, there appears to be no way out. There have been talks now for months and months, there have been meetings and summits and ultimate summits, emergency summits, rotating summits, but they've all achieved nothing, because nobody is really prepared to negotiate. It looks as though blood is going to have to be spilt before the situation is resolved. It may be that there's just no other mechanism to get Yugoslavia out of this spiral of confrontation.

PIERRE VICARY is ABC radio's correspondent in Zagreb. He spoke to ALR's Mike Ticher in mid-July.
But many also miss her cleverness. She is continually described as smart. Not clever, not intellectual, not thoughtful, but smart. As in sussed, sassy, streetwise — a pragmatic kind of intelligence that is continually devalued by those who prefer their feminism to remain rather abstract. Her acute self-consciousness about image, our collective use of star images, and indeed her own constant changes of appearance, gives her career a remarkable consistency.

Sometimes this can be plain embarrassing. The bits in the film where we are supposed to be seeing 'the real Madonna' — bleaching her hair and bitching on the telephone are, like many of her onstage routines, just too obvious, too over the top. Too much honesty flips over easily into its reverse. Can we trust anything she shows us? We see Madonna crying at her mother's grave, felling a bottle, bawling out her tour manager.

We come away knowing nothing. The myth is left intact. Onstage it is the real Madonna, off it a pale imitation of a star — charming, infantile, obsessive. Madonna knows her place, and it is at the end of a long line of female icons from Garbo to Monroe who, unlike her, were not in control of their own images, let alone their own lives. This skill amply demonstrates her shrewd manipulation of the history of the cinema.

Such techniques of irony and media literacy, though prized in the hands of men, become distinctly troubling in the hands of women — and when turned on to the question of femininity itself, transgressive. The tabloids may have shrieked that she looked like a man in drag, because she so clearly revels in the shiny surfaces of femininity that what is reflected back is their very artifice. This process, known psychoanalytically as the masquerade, is one of which she is a mistress. It can be used by powerful women as a way of disguising their threat. But the threat remains — to put on femininity with a vengeance suggests the power of taking it off.

Which is what makes the promise of the movie — 'Madonna like you've never seen her before' — even more of a come-on. It feeds directly into the very cultural preoccupations which she has so successfully exploited — the dichotomy between image and reality. We want our stars both to be out of the ordinary and yet somehow representative of the ordinary. What makes Madonna ordinary is her upfront aspiration to be somebody, to be important. What makes her extraordinary is that she has done it. Her naked ambition makes us even more uncomfortable than her naked body. Women may know what they want, but they are still not supposed to show what they want.

Somewhere along the line, we still like to think that stars are born, not made. Yet many of our biggest stars, like Schwarzenegger, have completely reconstructed themselves.

There are no more secrets. Politics too is now openly discussed in terms of appearances and sound-bites. Long gone are the times when exposing such conscious tampering with image would have blown apart credibility. Today it is an index of success. Nobody understands this better than Madonna. Whether she is lobbing about in her dressing gown or discussing her art, she reveals little of herself, but a hell of a lot about the mechanisms of stardom, and that peculiar state of permanent adolescence which our culture calls 'fame'.

SUZANNE MOORE is a British freelance writer and film critic.

ALR: AUGUST 1991
I owe my warped interest in economics to a British childhood spent entranced watching grown-ups forever talking about the bad economic news. The annual ritual of budget night only added to my bewilderment. The television screen would conjure up a pole-faced man known by the odd title of Chancellor of the Exchequer holding up a battered briefcase before a gang of photographers. In that briefcase or despatch box was the budget—a sheaf of papers, the reading of which the long suffering British public awaited with dread. Year in and year out the Chancellor’s sonorous address to the nation would be accompanied by cliches like ‘living beyond our means’ and ‘you’ve never had it so good’. All up, it was an unmitigated night of reckoning relieved only by gloom.

Coming to Australia in a big white P&O boat, I left these austere bogey-men behind. Or so it seemed. My Catholic secondary school experiences brought these ghosts back—but in another guise. Some of my schoolmasters, well-versed in cajolery and ridicule-making, engaged, it seemed, in the same tactics of intimidation, fear and confiscation. Like Chancellors they would hold up their briefcases and threaten to unleash the contents—the leather strap—on us, the unruly pupils. One sadistic master called this teaching aid “Dr Black”. Elderly masters no longer capable of wielding this weapon relied on their verbal powers to vent their misanthropy. Schoolmasters, too, were taxmen in disguise, fond of confiscating lollies and schoolboy playthings and, of course, never returning them. I imagined the schoolmaster’s locker like a coffin, full of schoolboy treasure.

I have, since those days, always painted our political leaders like bullying classmasters—killjoys from childhood. To be successful these days our leaders, be they federal or state, must appear as models of fiscal rectitude. The tighter the restraint, the better the leader. Keating’s undertaker image and Kerin’s determined jawline are only variations on this theme. Indeed, the only ‘Treasurer who did not make the grade for fiscal toughness was Dr Jim Cairns—who, because of his generosity of spirit and, equally, of the public purse, was dubbed “Dr Yes” by Treasury wits. Lynch and Howard, too, tarnished their reputations because of the rubbery nature of their figurework.

Recently, headmistress Kirner administered a collective round of the fiscal strap on those naughty spendthrift Victorians. Headmaster Kerin intends the same for the rest of us.

Everywhere, it seems, the talk is of expenditure cutbacks as fiscal fundamentalism grips the country. The moralistic climate accompanying this born-again fiscal orthodoxy is that we must do penance for the greed and excesses of the 80s. After the affluence, it seems, comes the austerity. Mr Kerin’s first task as Treasurer is to reintroduce Australians to austerity economics. This, of course, is nothing new given Australia’s mottled economic history. How can we ever forget Niemeyer’s visit to our shores in 1929? He had come, at the behest of British high finance, to tell Australians to mend their profligate ways. Then, as now, Australia had run up a huge foreign debt mostly frittered away on consumption and infrastructure spending.

That old firebrand, Billy Hughes, cheekily caught the essence of Niemeyer’s true mission—that of putting us in our place.

Sir Otto Niemeyer wants us to scrap our policy of building up Australian industries, and to confine ourselves to producing raw materials. And in order to do this we must reduce our standard of living. The diet we live on, the sun and blue skies of Australia have bred in us a spirit of optimism and class-free independence which un­fits us for the subservient role which he has decided we must fill. He regretfully realised he can do nothing with the sun and blue skies of Australia, but his faith in the chastening effect of a low diet is strong.

While we have no longer the likes of Niemeyer telling us to curb our spendthrift ways, Niemeyer’s spirit and message can still be conveyed by international banks downgrading our credit rating. And the consensus from the international financial community, of course, is that we are living beyond our means. Mr Kerin will be sorely tested in managing, as fairly as possible, this externally-dICTED reduction in our standard of living. For a short cut in his learning curve, Mr Kerin should look up the name of Sir Stafford Cripps in his economic almanac. Cripps was, for a time, Britain’s Chancellor of the Exchequer in Attlee’s Labour government of 1945-51. Cripps was appointed Chancellor at a most difficult time in British economic history. In an episode not unlike our own predicament Britain had a mounting balance of payments deficit with dwindling foreign exchange reserves.

Cripps—an austere ascetic man of pinched face and downturned mouth—warned to the task at hand. His solution essentially was to graft his personal asceticism onto the rest of the populace by reimposing harsh rationing of goods, the like of which exceeded even wartime conditions. Cripps administered Britain like a tyrannical headmaster. His moralist mission was to expunge from Britain
its hunger for materialism. Churchill quipped of him, "There, but for the grace of God, goes God!"

For ordinary folk it was a miserable time. My father still shudders at the brief memory of it all—no food, no fuel, no fun. The experience left many with a sour distaste for Labor governments either in Britain or in Chifley’s Australia.

I am not suggesting that Australia adopt Cripps’ therapy as the way of correcting our balance of payments deficit—although some cranks have indeed argued for import rationing as practised by Menzies in 1960. The only recent example of such policy extremism was by the late Romanian dictator Ceaucescu who lumbered his people with a hefty mix of frugality and rationing as a way of completely eliminating that country’s foreign debt. And we all know the ignominious end this apostle of austerity came to!

Thankfully, the only rationing we are likely to see in Australia is job rationing. Retrenchment has become the new R word. Widespread job-shedding is resulting not just from the recession but also from the ongoing campaign of microeconomic reform.

There is, however, an element of Cripps’ economic puritanism in the federal government’s penny-pinching antics over tightening the eligibility for, and deferring the payment of, the dole for those who have lost their jobs. Moreover, the long-term unemployed are being bullied into signing activity agreements with the CES at what many consider a most inopportune time.

Overall fiscal policy is strictly adhering to the canons of sound finance; Niemeyer must be smiling up above. The government’s reluctance to pump-prime the economy shows the policy straitjacket the current account deficit really is. Waiting for a private-sector led recovery has some other benefits for the government. Rising productivity will ensue from the labour-shedding now taking place. It will also get some boost from a more disciplined labour force. Wage growth, too, will be checked by the spectre of unemployment. In other words, to paraphrase Mussolini, recession puts the stamp of humility on people.

There is no doubt that we are in for the economics of Bleak House. In these grim days, then, of sound finance and economic drift we can find some comfort in Keynes, if not for his advice then surely for his timelessly relevant prose in Can Lloyd George Do It (1929).

Negation, Restriction, Inactivity—these are the government’s watchwords. Under their leadership we have been forced to button up our waistcoats and compress our lungs. Fears and doubts and hypochondriac precautions are keeping us muffled up indoors. But we are not tottering to our graves. We are healthy children. We need the breath of life. There is nothing to be afraid of. On the contrary. The future holds in store for us far more wealth and economic freedom and possibilities of personal life than the past has ever offered.

We are wont to look back upon our schooldays and lament the discipline and truly useless information drilled into us by cruel headmasters. I’m sure that the economically afflicted from these hard times will one day look back and ask whether all this economic pain was truly necessary.

ALEX MILLMOW, a former Treasury officer, teaches in economics at Charles Sturt University-Riverina, Wagga Wagga.
Salvation's Seamy Side

One year after bands of government-led coal miners put a brutal end to the marathon protests in University Square, the congested space in central Bucharest bustles with traffic and gypsy flower vendors.

Since the bloody June 1990 crackdown, only sporadic demonstrations and strikes have accompanied the swell of popular discontent across the country. The memories of coal-blackened miners beating students and ransacking opposition offices have left their mark on the democracy movement. Yet, today, the defeated opposition of a year ago is united and organised, poised to challenge the government in elections next year.

The months immediately following the miners' rampage were dark ones for the opposition, as well as for the country. The clampdown underlined just how little the reform communist leadership of the ruling Front for National Salvation (FNS) had extricated itself from the structures and ideology of the dictatorship. The FNS's popular legitimacy, won in a landslide election victory only three weeks before, was shattered overnight. International condemnation also stung the Front badly.

Their scant material resources in ruins, the opposition was forced to start again from square one. Drubbed in the election, the historical pre-war parties, the National Liberal Party and the National Peasants Party, were compelled to admit that they lacked popular support. The students and intellectuals also embarked on a painful process of introspection.

The absence of an organised underground resistance before the 1989 revolution created a situation for the Romanian opposition unprecedented in Eastern Europe, explains Gabriel Andreescu, president of the Group for Social Dialogue (GSD), a Bucharest-based intellectual forum set up in December 1989. "For nearly a year following the revolution we had no modern political movement to fill the vacuum here," he says.

The opposition's soul-searching in the aftermath of the miners' assault led to two new organisations: Civic Alliance, and the Democratic Anti-Totalitarian Forum (DAF). Civic Alliance, spearheaded by the GSD intellectuals, linked diverse elements of the extra-parliamentary opposition, from maverick trade unions to environmental groups. Formed in August 1990, the DAF bound the historical parties with an array of other groups, most significantly the party of the Hungarian minority.

Like the former dissident movements in Central Europe, the pivotal category for Civic Alliance is that of civil society. Its charter emphasises the group's non-governmental role in building a participative democracy in which citizens control the decisions that affect their lives.

A genuine multi-party system requires a democratic political culture solidly entrenched in civil society, insists Andreescu, one of Civic Alliance's vice-presidents. "The first signs of civil society are already there," says the former physics professor, "but the legacy of dictatorship and nationalism will affect our society for decades to come."

At the base of the regime's moral and political illegitimacy, claim the oppositionists, is the distorted truth of the revolution. When the front grabbed power following the dictatorship's overthrow, it justified its authority as the popular embodiment of the revolution. In fact, the FNS inner circle, predominantly former communist party apparatchiks, had planned a coup de tete years earlier. The simple change in leadership at the top left the structures of the police state virtually intact, and the Front leadership at their mercy.

The FNS's distortion of the army's role in the revolution prompted a group of 70 officers to form the Committee for the Democratisation of the Army (CADA). Banned after the miners' debacle, CADA re-emerged late last year and joined the Civic Alliance. But its renewed efforts to initiate a dialogue between the army rank and file and their superiors have met with threats and dismissals.

Down the street from the GSD's elegant offices, CADA founder Captain Valerian Stan works in the Civic Alliance's sparse two-room headquarters. Stan claims that changes in the military hierarchy since the revolution have only been cosmetic. "Of the generals and officers who issued orders for the army to shoot on demonstrators during the revolution only one has been prosecuted," explains the 35-year-old former officer who was removed from his position last year.

The government's economic 'shock therapy' program lies at the source of its sharp drop in popularity. The second phase of price liberalisation, instituted in April, more than doubled the prices of many goods, some for the second time in six months. In downtown Bucharest, new shops sport a variety of goods from videos to German beer. But, for the average wage earner, even the staples of a year ago are now beyond reach.

Recent opinion polls reflect the broad social disillusionment with the government. Only 21% of those polled expressed confidence in president Ion Iliescu who captured 85% of the May 1990 vote. The FNS now has the complete confidence of less than a quarter of the electorate.

Yet the Front's loss has not been the opposition parties' gain. Although recent polls show Civic Alliance rapidly making a name for itself, the older parties have either stagnated or fallen in popular opinion. One survey shows the army as by far the most popular institution with the confidence of 47% of the people.

While fiercely critical of the government's economic policy, neither DAF nor Civic Alliance offer credible alternatives. Both brand the slower, socially-oriented approaches
to a market transition, advocated mostly by the trade unions, as "conservative".

"Prices have all gone up, but there's been no real economic restructuring to match it," contends DAF spokesperson Akim George, a member of the Peasants Party. "It's impossible for a bureaucracy so rooted in the old system to realise the radical free market reform necessary."

Despite their differences, DAF and Civic Alliance work together closely, forming a solid democratic bloc against the Front and ultra-nationalist parties. The older parties' reconciliation with the Hungarian minority party, the second leading vote-getter in elections planned for some time next year. Civic Alliance has also announced plans to form a party which would work in tandem with the extra-parliamentary movement.

The opposition has clearly shifted its strategy away from the spontaneous street protests of a year ago. Talk of a 'second revolution' has been replaced with calls for a transitional coalition government to rule the country until the 1992 elections.

Conspicuously absent from the forefront of the new opposition is the Romanian Students League. During the demonstrations last year, it was the students and their president, the charismatic Marian Munteanu, who embodied the ideals of the betrayed revolution. But with his graduation this year, Munteanu, who was nearly beaten to death by the miners, has stepped down from his post.

In their offices at the university's law faculty, Munteanu's newly-elected successor, 24-year-old geology student Marius Balasoiu, explains the League's new role. "The period of demonstrations is definitely over. Now is time for the organised political forces to make their move," says the soft-spoken, bearded president. He says that, while the students had won the sympathy of a segment of the population, they realised their support was not broad enough to affect the structures of power.

The gap between the opposition and the workers poses the most serious obstacle to challenging the government for power. Split between front-backed official and newly-formed independent trade unions, the working class remains a wild card in Romanian politics. A deep suspicion towards intellectuals was sown among workers during the dictatorship, and it continues to haunt the opposition today. For the unions, their top priority is maintenance of jobs and the standard of living. The opposition's wholehearted embrace of free market philosophy has simply driven many workers into ultra-nationalist and conservative neo-communist camps.

The miners' rampage illustrates just how deeply Romania remains entrenched in the legacy of its past. Whether today's opposition forces come to power in the next decade will not alone determine the country's fate. In the long term, the building of a political culture from below may prove the more decisive factor for Romanian democracy.

PAUL HOCKENOS writes on central and eastern Europe from his base in Budapest.
It is perhaps paradoxical to equate the Murmansk region of the USSR with Australia's Northern Territory. For a start one is arctic, the other tropical.

However, there are many more similarities than differences. Both regions depend heavily on the mining industry. Both are remote from the major centres of their respective countries and each is considered a wild frontier. People have to be encouraged to settle with tax or wage incentives. Both are newly settled.

Perhaps the most striking feature the two have in common is the tendency of the inhabitants to exaggeration and hyperbole. I heard from a doctor that because the Kola Peninsula cannot support its current population, 'Nature' is retaliating. Thus there is a lower birthrate, widespread infertility and a lower life expectancy. While these statistics may well be true, they probably have more prosaic causes—such as a poor diet and untreated venereal diseases brought from the West by the large numbers of sailors.

There were also stories about one million soldiers secreted somewhere in the wilderness. (The CIA estimate of the entire Soviet armed forces is only four million.) There are characters in abundance, like the person who claimed to have founded the local chapter of what Sydneysiders would know as the Bondi Icebergs. The arctic Soviets have natural ice however, and a 'skimmer' employed to stop the pool form freezing over.

Despite the wild-frontier attitudes, the Kola is perhaps a good indicator of Russian society as a whole. Towns like Apatity (200km south of Murmansk) are nothing if not suburban. The ubiquitous nine-storey apartment blocks stand side by side. From their upper windows hang plastic bags full of perishables: a functional arctic refrigerator, at least at this time of year. Meanwhile, in our hotel, skiers congregate in the lobby, equipped with the latest clothes and skis, not made in the USSR. Apatity is also a ski resort.

In Apatity people are not afraid to speak of their mistrust or outright hatred of Gorbachev, even with their bosses present. Indeed, following the revelations of official lies over the last few years, it is common to find people who no longer believe anything emanating from the government, from Gorbachev or from the Communist Party. When the question of military spending arose, I was told quite emphatically that 70% of central government expenditure (CEE) is spent on defence (the official figure is 16%). The CIA, I have since discovered, believe that it is 43% of gross national product (GNP). Questions of philosophy aside (what is truth?) it becomes a matter of choosing a figure. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the Soviet government itself knows, and the CIA admits that its own estimates are inaccurate.

This scepticism even extends to subjects which one would expect would be sacred: the Great Patriotic War (known in the West as World War Two) is now known by the latter name in the USSR. Veterans question why they fought so long to drive out the Germans when they were subjected to the continuing reign of Stalin afterwards. There would be few people in the West who would dispute the need to have defeated Hitler.

The exchange rate between the rouble and hard currencies is a story in itself. There are various official and black market rates. However, because the economy of the USSR functions (or fails to function) in an entirely different way from those of the West, some items, such as telephone calls and transport are incredibly cheap, whereas other goods are obtainable only on the black market. It seems more sensible, when trying to work out what the average Soviet citizen can afford, to compare the costs of various items with the monthly salary, rather than trying to convert the rouble to hard currency.

An average worker earns about 400 roubles per month. In the Murmansk region, salaries are about double that, to encourage people to settle. However, skilled workers can often earn four times as much from additional work for co-operatives or with joint ventures. There is thus a widening gap between those who are only able to work for the state and those with access to other sorts of income. For instance, though miners in the Donets basin in the Ukraine earn more than average, they are unable to earn extra income and are relatively poor. This is one of the reasons for their militancy.

There is also a two-tiered price structure. Some items are price-controlled, attracting long queues. Others are more realistically priced but too expensive for the average person. For example, a 500g tin of Nescafe, which looked none too genuine, was priced at 250 roubles. On the day of a further price 'adjustment' (increase), there were no signs of unrest on the streets of Murmansk, despite the dire predictions of our hosts. The Russians are long-suffering and slow to anger, perhaps.

An official estimate of the extent of the black market is about 10% of GNP. However, when one visits a typical apartment and then a department store, it becomes clear that dwellings could not be filled with possessions by buying from the stores. The longer one spends in Russia, the more obvious it becomes how pervasive is the secret economy. One Soviet economist has even claimed that virtually every enterprise must deal on the black market in order to obtain necessary raw materials which are made artificially scarce by corrupt bureaucrats. For consumers the most popular goods are those from the West: Japanese videos and cameras and clothes with Western labels. On television I even saw MTV, broadcast for one hour per week, including a dip from the repellent Vanilla Ice.

In the manner of a recently converted ex-smoker, the citizens of the Soviet
Antic embrace capitalism with naive fervour. While the newly emancipated East Germans are busy with a credit-supported buying spree, the Russians are impatiently waiting their turn. In a land of contradictions, the newfound worship of capitalism was demonstrated to me most forcefully when I discovered an empty can of British shaving cream occupying pride of place in the display cabinet of a Russian home. Yet, despite this, those to whom I spoke had a remarkable knowledge of affairs in the outside world and an even greater curiosity. The first and most common question was about the earnings of an average worker in Australia. Then followed particular questions about how much they themselves could expect to earn if they were to emigrate. Translated to roubles, the figures must have seemed enormous (though, as I noted above, this gives an incorrect picture).

An economist I spoke to (who, incidentally, wishes to emigrate to Australia) gave his recipe for the reform of the USSR. This view appears to be widely shared. First comes the abolition of the 'leading' role of the Communist Party. If the Eastern European experience is a useful guide, this would lead to the diminution of communist power to such an extent that the party would become irrelevant. This begs the question: who would then govern the country? There are many examples to follow but the most likely seems to be that of East Germany where widespread hatred of communism led to the formation of a rightwing government before the reunification. Most Russians believe, however, that the communists are unlikely to give up power willingly. The military may not allow it, in any case.

The second item on the wish list is a free market economy. This is anticipated, highly optimistically, to provide immediate benefits with consumer goods aplenty, though it would certainly have a catastrophic effect on the trade balance.

Thirdly, the borders should be opened. Were this to occur, large numbers of people would leave to try to settle legally or illegally in the West, driven by the expectation of a better life and the fear of a civil war or a military crackdown. As an example of the strength of the desire to emigrate, I was cultivated by a doctor over several days, the sole purpose being that I would convey a letter to the immigration officer of the South African Embassy in London. Of course, if everyone who wished to could leave, the economy would be further disrupted.

Lastly comes democracy: an understandable goal, and one which would make the others achievable, eventually.

While most people agree or are desperate that things must change, these great hopes are flights of fancy, with no one able to say how the reforms should be introduced. This sense of unreality was reinforced as I sat in the lounge room of a sanatorium on the shores of Lake Imandra. The lake was still frozen, even in April, as I listened to the twittering of birds inside the room. These birds were budgerigars.

FRANK FORMBY, a Sydney doctor, travelled to Arctic Russia on an Earthwatch expedition.
The public and private sectors have historically been the great dividing line for Left and Right. It's no longer that simple, argues Barry Hindess. And one consequence is the current disorientation about what the Left really stands for.

In ‘Turning the Tide’ (ALR 128, May 1991) Peter Baldwin and Peter Robson recognise that there are problems with the traditional Left case for public enterprise and an expanded public sector, and they discuss some of the ways in which the Left might lift its game. Much of what they say is sensible and realistic, but there is also a trickier and more general issue to be considered here.

The treatment of market and public control as distinct and opposed means of allocating resources is the site of one of the most substantial dividing lines between Left and Right in western politics. Other demarcations, only partly overlapping with the first, relate to the issues of democracy and popular control of government and to different understandings of freedom. Here I concentrate on the counterposition of the market to public control. Like many established ideas, the distinction between these modes of allocation is widely used in political debate, but it is nevertheless of limited analytical utility. I will begin with the distinction itself and consider why it is unsatisfactory, and then move on to consider what we are left with.

It is tempting to suggest, as Baldwin does, that the Left should adopt a case by case approach. However, the limitations of that position indicate a more general problem for the Left in Australia—and in much of the Western world. To question the counterposition of market to public control is also to question one of the most important ways in which those on the Left and those on the Right of modern politics have identified themselves and their political opponents. In particular, then, it is to bring the traditional idea of the Left into question.

The counterposition of market to public control has been an ubiquitous feature of European social thought throughout much of the modern period. In the liberal tradition, the market has been regarded both as a realm of
individual freedom and as a sphere of efficiency and economic advance. The state, in contrast, is seen as a realm of dependence and of petty and arbitrary oppression, and also as a realm of inefficiency and corruption. Liberals acknowledge that states are necessary and that there may be cases in which state intervention or planning is called for—but these are presented as evils to be minimised. In this tradition the contrast between the two spheres ensures that any combination will appear to be potentially unstable—that is, it will be in perpetual danger of moving to ever greater levels of oppression, corruption and inefficiency. Hayek’s The Road to Serfdom is one of the clearest expressions of this view, but versions of it can be found throughout the liberal tradition.

Socialist thought, on the other hand, has regarded markets as anarchic, amoral, wasteful, as placing too much power in private hands, and as generating indefensible inequalities of income and power. In particular, markets in wage-labour have been seen both as providing the basis of capitalist exploitation and as obscuring its reality. Despite these objections, socialists have rarely sought the total elimination of markets—even in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge. However, they have aimed to take important aspects of distribution out of the market altogether and to subject other aspects to a considerable degree of public control.

Although the presence of the markets of some kind has not been at issue in socialist thought, the role that they are supposed to play has been a matter of considerable dispute. The British Labour thinker Tony Crosland and other socialist revisionists of the 1950s argued that public control over economic activity was entirely compatible with a strictly limited role for public ownership. Socialism, in their view, was not so much about ownership of productive property as it was about equality—and the latter could be brought about under conditions of private ownership. In effect, they argued that once the major public utilities had been taken over, then the behaviour of the private sector could be regulated by means other than direct ownership of whole industries.
These revisionists saw no need for wholesale nationalisation, although they were not opposed to public ownership as such. Where necessary, governments should be prepared to set up public sector companies in competition with the private sector, and also to intervene in cases where private business was clearly failing the nation. In general, however, they argued that Keynesian techniques of economic management provided the means by which government could turn the private pursuit of profit into an efficient instrument of public policy. In The Future of Socialism, published in 1956, Crosland went so far as to suggest that:

acting mainly through the Budget, though with the aid of other instruments, the government can exert any influence it likes on income distribution, and can also determine within broad limits the division of total output between consumption, investment, exports and social expenditure.

On this view, full employment would bring about a number of desirable consequences. In particular, it would promote greater equality of bargaining power between employer and employee, and together with the redistributive effects of taxation, it would lead the economy in the direction of greater equality of income.

Left opposition to these views inside labour and social democratic parties has also accorded a significant role to the market. It differs from the revisionist position mainly in disputing the ability of government to regulate the economy so long as the 'commanding heights' (variously conceived) remain in private hands, and so long as there are inadequate controls over the nation's overseas trade. A minority position on the Left of the labour movement has favoured worker co-operatives in addition to, or in place of, public ownership.

The substantial role accorded to the market in the older revisionism's view of socialism is clearly predicated on what would now be regarded as remarkably optimistic assumptions: first about the capacity of governments to regulate economic activity, and secondly about their willingness to use that capacity in pursuit of socialist objectives. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, widespread (if not always justified) disenchantment with the achievements of social democracy in the West, and the perceived failure of Keynesian techniques to cope with changing conditions of world trade and international finance, ensure that those assumptions are even less plausible today than they were in Crosland's time. What remains of Western social democracy now sets itself more limited goals, and it is less optimistic about its capacity to achieve them. The watered down social democracy of the Hawke Labor government, for example, combines the revisionist view of the importance of the market with a considerably more pessimistic account of the ability of government to regulate economic activity.

There are important differences between liberal and socialist evaluations of the market and of public control. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to ignore what they have in common, namely, the construction of arguments around precisely that counterposition of 'the market' to public control. The difficulty with the liberal evaluation of public control will be familiar to readers of this journal, and it has been clearly presented in a recent article by Ross Gittins (in the Sydney Morning Herald, 3 July 1991). He notes that the basic "objection to government intervention is that, whatever its original motivation, it usually works to inhibit competition". Many liberals would add that it also works against individual liberty. It follows that removal of government controls should increase both economic efficiency and individual liberty. Gittins goes on to insist that "we know from our experience of financial deregulation that deregulation doesn't lead automatically to adequate competition. We discovered that government-created barriers to competition aren't the only barriers". Here, too, there is a similar point to be made about liberty.

In fact, there is a more general issue here. Gittins' article discusses the liberal evaluation of public control, but the problem he identifies arises on both sides of the liberal/socialist divide. What markets have in common is little more than the fact that something is marketed in them. Otherwise, markets always operate under specific institutional conditions which can vary considerably from one case to another. Institutional conditions here refers to such things as: market actors (buyers, sellers, regulators, speculators, and so on) and the resources at their disposal; normative and legislative regulation and other forms of political or administrative controls; links with and spillovers into other markets involving different sets of actors and controls. The workings of housing markets, for ex-

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ample, depend crucially on the forms of financing of house purchase and construction—and therefore on how those financial arrangements relate to the operation of other financial markets.

The general point here is that the consequences of market allocation of housing (or of medical care, pensions, sausages or telecommunications) cannot be determined independently of the institutional conditions in which those markets operate. What those institutional conditions are can vary enormously between markets for different goods and services, and for similar goods and services in different countries or at different times. Some of those institutional conditions can be set by government, but it would be a serious mistake to imagine that they can always be brought under government control.

There should be no general presumption in favour of either... the market or public control

The same general point applies to public control as an alternative to the market: what its consequences are will depend on the institutional conditions in which it operates. The counterposition of the market to public control is of limited analytical utility, but it will often have a clear contextual meaning—as in Australian debates about privatisation. In these cases, talk of ‘deregulation’, ‘privatisation’ and ‘the market’ serves as an index or shorthand for identifying a more complex set of issues. There will always be differences between market and non-market allocation, but what those differences are and how they should be evaluated will not be the same in all cases.

In practice, if not in liberal and socialist rhetoric, this point has been widely recognised. There are marvellous passages in the work of Milton Friedman and others on the Right explaining away market imperfections as if they were really the product of government intervention, and there are numerous social democratic critiques of the workings of particular state bureaucracies and systems of public provision. In these discussions, the counterposition of market to public control serves not to provide a description of how market allocation or public control operates in any particular case, but rather as an account of how they would operate in the absence of whatever is stopping them from doing so in the rough practical world. Almost despite themselves, such arguments involve an implicit recognition that the consequences of market allocation or of public control will depend on the specific conditions in which they operate.

What, then, remains of the general Left presumption in favour of public enterprise and an expanded public sector? The short answer, offered in rather different forms by both Baldwin and Robson, is that each case should be considered on its merits: sometimes public ownership will be appropriate, sometimes not.

In any particular instance, then, the relevance of public ownership or of some other form of public control should be decided by reference to a range of political objectives—not by relying on some general predisposition towards the public sector. There should be no general presumption in favour of either side in the apparent dichotomy between the market and public control. We should certainly oppose the positive evaluation of the Right of one side in that dichotomy—but we should do so by resisting the dichotomy itself, not by reversing the signs of the Right’s evaluation.

That answer is fine as far as it goes, but it also poses a serious problem for the Left. My opening paragraph noted that the treatment of market and public control as distinct and opposed means of allocating resources was the site of one of the most substantial dividing lines between Left and Right in Western politics. On both sides of that demarcation the counterposition of market to public control made it possible for diverse specific concerns and objectives to be seen as part of a broader pattern. This enabled different sections of the Left (and of the Right) and to see their own struggles as particular instances of a larger conflict, and it allowed those who supported (or opposed) public ownership for different reasons to work together against what they saw as their common enemy.

To question the significance of that counterposition is therefore to deny what has been an important historical basis of such unity as the Left has been able to achieve. It is to undermine one of the most influential understandings of what the Left is and what it stands for. This is not to say, of course, that the Left or Right can be expected to wither away, for many on both sides will remain unpersuaded by arguments of the kind made above. The influence of the unpersuaded Right and of its simple-minded evaluation of ‘the market’ is a major problem in Australia and other English-speaking countries—but that is no reason for adopting an equally simple-minded position in response.

More significantly, as I noted earlier, there are other important lines of demarcation between Left and Right—and new ones have emerged in recent years. The point to notice here is that these demarcations do not entirely overlap, and there have always been different understandings of what the Left consists of. With the weakening of what has been perhaps the most influential of such understandings in the West, the alliances which that understanding helped to sustain will have to be reconsidered—as they have been in the radically different circumstances of the collapse of actually existing socialism in much of Europe. Not all of the alliances constructed around a presumption in favour of public enterprise and an expanded public sector can be expected to survive. To ask how the Left should regard the public sector is to presume a commonality of purpose that can no longer be taken for granted.

BARRY HINDESS is professor of political science at the Australian National University, and editor of Reactions to the Right (Routledge, 1990).
Another casualty of the end of the Cold War has been the bipolar imagery of radical politics. Here, talking to ABC Radio's Coming Out Show, Meaghan Morris considers the consequences for feminist theory.

In relation to feminism, theory is the practice of reflection on the processes of political change. It's a very slow and sometimes very unrewarding activity, but nevertheless it's the ground in which we invent new ways of going about practising feminist politics.

And feminist theory has been going through an enormously productive period. Projects that have been taking years to come to fruition are now starting to emerge in the form of very serious books. That's why we see, in the United States in particular, this strange phenomenon wherein the humanities in general are under attack, but feminist theory is the area that people most want to get involved in, because it remains one of the most productive areas of cultural production generally. What's most impressive is the scale on which feminist theory has been working — the ambition of projects like Carole Pateman's Sexual Contract for instance; texts that really are laying down the basis for a whole new critique of society, and new theories of politics. That's not something that some people would expect to listen to feminism for. It's been very popular over the last few years — especially in the quick-fix media — to say 'Feminism's finished...it's boring...it's 70s stuff'. But if you actually look at the output, the popularity, the size of courses, the demand for it right across the board, in all kinds of fields of study, that's simply not so. Feminism's getting bigger and stronger and more important. One of the most obvious reasons for that is that feminism is one of the few political positions from which people can talk about the amazing changes that have been happening in world politics, local politics and the global economy over the last couple of years.

The connection between deconstruction, very loosely defined, and feminism has been a powerful one in the last decade, because feminism is a process of profoundly questioning the structure of reality. Particularly in a highly mediated society like ours, the categories that we use to think about reality are part of the way we live. They're not some decorative reflection of reality, they're the way that...
we produce our society. Feminism right from the beginning has questioned ways of thinking and the practical impact of ways of thinking in people’s lives. Because the history of women as subjected has been longstanding and complicated, feminist deconstruction has had an enormous amount of material to work with. Over the years we’ve developed skills for pulling apart the most obvious and taken-for-granted and apparently unchallengable ways of thinking. For that reason a lot of pioneering feminist theory is either laughed at as soon as it appears, or seems incredibly esoteric. Yet look at the world situation now. Two years ago virtually everyone expected that they were going to go on living in a Cold War environment forever, and that you could keep on protesting about the same old things because power blocs would never shift. Now those eternal verities of the post-war world have collapsed around people’s ears. Feminism remains one of the most powerfully equipped modes of thought for inventing new concepts of relationship and new ways of acting, precisely because it’s put so much energy into understanding how the world we live in has been stuck together.

The problem of ‘post-feminism’ is a complicated one. I have a lot of sympathy for young women for whom the word post-feminism was just a way of saying that they came to active life after the 70s with a different view of how to do things. I don’t think there was a big problem with that. On the other hand, in inner-city culture in particular, sticking the word ‘post’ in front of something in order to remove it from existence, was a very 80s thing. It was very popular in the 80s to ‘post’ just about everything and assume you’d solved the problem. The decade was such a face end of so many things—q the Cold War, the uncertainty of transition from the Australia of Malcolm Fraser to whatever it is that’s starting to develop now, with the feeling of economic panic that the media keep expressing. People were in a kind of limbo. The era of ‘posts’ ended with the stockmarket crash of 1987, and the events in the Middle East over the last few months have well and truly put paid to it. It seems fairly clear now that we’re no longer ‘post’ anything but well and truly into a new era.

One of the reasons that feminist theory has become so strong is that for at least a decade there has been a lot of soul-searching, particularly by white middle class feminists, here and in the United States, about their relationship to questions of race, class and cultural difference. And many of these questions are not always the same as questions of race and racism. Over the last few years it’s become clear that this debate is starting to open a space for a practice of politics where people can act together in some kind of coalitional way. By this I don’t just mean the kind of coalition that admits the differences between people in that kind of liberal, wishy-washy way that’s so prevalent—everything’s different, isn’t that wonderful, and so on. These coalitions are much more violent than that. People are learning to discuss and cooperate politically with other people with whom they’re very often actually quite at odds, or who have violently antagonistic interests. Perhaps it’s over-optimistic, but it seems to me that part of the sense of fear that we all have at the moment about the volatility of the world is that a lot of our available political discourses have not been very strong at thinking about a multi-centred world, and constructing an oppositional political culture that is also multi-centred. All of the classic political movements are binary ones: capital/labour, men/women, black/white. That’s not good enough any more. And because feminist theory has started to work on its own relationship to race and class and ethnicity and the environment, it has acquired a set of skills for at least thinking about these questions. If any kind of new political practice is going to come about in the next few years, it’s going to be from that direction.”

MEAGHAN MORRIS is a Sydney academic and writer. Her book The Pirate’s Fiancée is published by Verso books. She was talking to the ABC Radio National’s Coming Out Show, for their Feminist Theory series. The series is available on ABC Radio Tapes from GPO Box 9994 in each capital city.

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After G-7

Gorbachev returned from the G-7 Summit with little result. The West simply wouldn’t ‘throw good money after bad’. Here John Lloyd argues that the Western Left needs to make up its mind about perestroika, and Moscow News’ Alexander Kabakov offers a Soviet liberal’s view of Gorbachev’s failed London trip.

Around the end of June a group of Russian and American economists finished work, in a suite of rooms at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, on a document which modestly proposed the salvation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It did so by mapping out a program which would kill off socialism, replace the corrupt Soviets with genuine elections and allow it to cease to be a union. The leader of the Soviet side, a 39-year old economist and former deputy premier of Russia, Grigory Yavlinsky, had been sent there at the express wish of the Soviet president.

As his work progressed through late May and early June, the Soviet government made it clearer than it had before what his status was. Though he held no official post (except as adviser to the president of Kazakhstan), Yavlinsky’s plan was, said Yevgeny Primakov, an aide to the Soviet president, of the first importance in setting out ways in which Western aid could be used in the Soviet reform process. If he were to be successful, his ideas would be incorporated in the continuing redrafting of the anti-crisis plan, which has rolled about the various economic institutes and union and republican government structures for the past three months; and inasmuch as Western assistance would be forthcoming, so much the more radical the anti-crisis plan would become.

Earlier in the month Gorbachev took the occasion of his Nobel prize acceptance speech in Oslo to comment obliquely on Yavlinsky’s task. Perestroika had recently been revised, he said: “We have come to the conclusion that there is a need for a kind of synchronisation of our actions towards (the) end (of bringing the Soviet Union fully into the world economy) with those of the Group of Seven and of the European Communities. In other words, we are thinking of a fundamentally new phase in our internation-
al co-operation". Thus, he continued, it was urgently necessary to agree a level of co-operation to ensure the success of perestroika. "To me," he said, "it is self-evident that if Soviet perestroika succeeds, there will be a real chance of building a new world order. And if perestroika fails, the prospect of entering a new peaceful period in history will vanish, at least in the foreseeable future."

It is self-evident that in both his aides' and his own remarks, the Soviet president had left a hint of menace hanging in the air. "Nice little world you have here," he was almost saying. "Pity if anything happened to it, just for the want of a few billion bucks."

For Yavlinsky's plan is nothing if not ambitious. He was the co-author, with Stanislav Shatalin (then a Gorbachev economic adviser), of the '500 day' program of radical reform: it seemed to have presidential approval, but was unceremoniously dumped last year when it was evident that Gorbachev, even had he wished to (which was never clear) could not get agreement on it from his power structure. Yavlinsky then began working with Professor Graham Allison, a former dean of the Kennedy School and a sometime consultant to the US government, on a program of reform which would be calibrated with assistance from Western governments and the international financial institutions—the IMF, the World Bank and the new European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). This drew in other well-connected academics—Sam Fischer, former chief economist of the World Bank who had overseen the production of the IMF/World Bank/OECD/EBRD report on the Soviet economy, published at the end of last year; Jeffrey Sachs, who was the dominant foreign influence on the economic thinking of the Polish Solidarity government; Robert Blackwill, the former aide to President George Bush on Soviet affairs.

All of these men, in different ways, had been drawn professionally (and often emotionally) into the transformation process in Eastern Europe. Sachs, especially, had become a
The Triangle’s Point

How do Soviet liberals view Gorbachev’s London rebuttal?

Alexander Kabakov is the deputy editor of Moscow News and a well-known Soviet novelist. He was interviewed for ALR by Mike Ticher in mid-July.

What are the implications of Gorbachev returning from the G-7 meeting without any firm promises of aid?

I think that the leaders of the Western countries were absolutely right when they refused to give direct aid to Gorbachev. Had they done so, the money would just go to the army, the KGB, and so on. Until we can reform our economic system properly, it would be best not to give aid to the government, but to invest in individual institutions, to give us new technologies and to construct modern plants organised along Western lines. We must learn how to do normal business, to change to a normal, market system, and it’s only after that that Western help will do some good for the ordinary people, and not just for the communist bosses.

How is this reform going to take place? Is Gorbachev capable of implementing it?

I think that after the progress made through his agreements with Yeltsin we can expect more from Gorbachev than we did two or three months ago. But he needs lots of time to be able to finish the reforms, to get rid of the old Bolsheviks from his circle and wait for a new generation.

But does he have that time, given the severity of the economic crisis?

We have to choose. We can try to make everything right now, immediately, in which case we will only provoke a civil war. Or we can try to have patience. Historically, impatience has always been the real catastrophe for our people—the October revolution was the first example. We must not make the same mistakes now.

Do you think that he will now accept the Yavlinsky plan for economic reform?

I think he will now, yes. After the refusal of G-7 to give him aid, he must accept it. I don’t believe that the Yavlinsky program is ideal, but it is the best program we have at this time.

Are the people ready for the painful consequences of such reforms?

There are always two sides to every event, and the economic reforms are no exception. The outcome may be good, but there will inevitably be a bad side as well. I still don’t think that most people really understand what is involved, what reform will mean, but more and more people are beginning to understand. The point is, though, that we simply have no choice, we must reform or die. We’re already without food, without order, without everything.

What effect will the forming of the new party by Eduard Shevardnadze and Alexander Yakovlev have?

We always need a balance. Until now we have had a balance between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, between reformers and conservatives. Now we have the third point, this new party, and a triangle is always more stable than a simple balance. But I don’t really think it is a good idea for them to become a party, because our society is already too political. It’s only good from the point of view of the stabilisation of the political situation.

Gorbachev seems to be under pressure from all sides: from liberals, conservatives, the people, the republics, from the West. Does he have enough power left to survive?

Gorbachev is the sort of person who can only work well under pressure—from any side. Pressure is the normal situation for him. It’s only in such positions that he has achieved all that he has achieved.

What effect will the G-7 decision have on his relations with the republics?

Republics like the Baltic states, Georgia and Moldova, are already more or less separated. I think that after returning from G-7, Gorbachev must formally divorce them from the Soviet Union, but immediately after that, come to agreements with them. I think the refusal of G-7 will force him into this position.

How do people feel about the fact that all the proposed solutions to the economic problems come from the West? Do people resent that?

I think that now our people will agree with anything that will help them to survive. The economic situation is so bad that there is a real danger that it will lead to civil war. There is practically no food in any shops. In such a situation I think the people will agree to any form of help.

Are the liberals united about what they should do?

It’s hard to say exactly, but I think this agreement between Yeltsin and Gorbachev, and this new party, can become a force which will be able to exercise real power. Most Russian intellectuals will continue to criticise Gorbachev and he needs this criticism. We were wrong when we stopped criticising Gorbachev some time ago. We must criticise him in order to save him.
missionary for the process of rapid marketisation, and had become a fierce opponent of the 'third way' in which elements of the market were introduced into a quasi-socialist economy. There were differences—sometimes large—between the economists, but a basic agreement that the Soviets should be offered, in Allison and Blackwill’s phrase, a ‘grand bargain’ which would draw the major Western economies into a relationship with reform in which certain economic and democratic goals would be agreed and for which substantial assistance would be offered.

These goals are vast. As the plan went through its final drafts, it became clear that the Yavlinsky-Allison team was proposing a complete revolution in two formidably difficult stages. In the first, broadly put, prices would be largely decontrolled, the rouble moved farther along the road to convertibility and privatisation of enterprises begun. Concomitantly, elections for the all-union Supreme Soviet should be held. In the second, these processes should be completed or stepped up—prices wholly freed, the rouble made convertible and privatisations accelerated. Aid from abroad, on a range between $20-$35 billion a year, would be directed, in the first phase, to providing consumer goods for a market which would be reasonably expected otherwise to be starved by the collapse of many of its own producers; in the second, support for the rouble as it moved to convertibility, followed by the provision of income support for the unemployed, and generally, investment of various kinds in infrastructure. The Soviet Union would become first an associate, and then at the end of phase one or the beginning of phase two, a full member of the World Bank and the IMF; these institutions, with the EBRD and Western governments operating through the expanded group of 24 which had co-ordinated aid for Eastern Europe, would oversee and monitor the process.

Beneath the economists’ prose lies the proposition of an extraordinary and unique political adventure. It is one for which both the nerves and the imagination of the Western leaders, must be strong. It is thus to be expected that large objections have been raised about the plan, for it proposes the spending of very large amounts of Western citizens’ money on a country which has, until now, squandered their earlier assistance on the preservation of a corrupt and authoritarian system.

The root objection has been that the West cannot and must not give aid to a government which has no claim to the people’s trust or support, and certainly has not got it. Gorbachev is the unelected head of state, presiding over an unelected government, pushing through a program which has never been presented to the people, and is lowering their living standards in unavailing attempts to improve a system which his party had clamped on the country by brutality on a scale never before seen and only since matched, in relative terms, by the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. This point is often and forcefully made by nationalists in the republics and radicals everywhere—the very people whom the West supports and encourages. Morality apart, the Gorbachev governments have been profligate and—on his own admission—vacillating and plainly wrong on economic questions. ‘Why throw good money after bad?’ is a reasonable question to put.

Since this appears in a magazine aimed largely, though not wholly, at the Left, it is worth adding this in parenthesis. The Left has never, as far as I know, worked out what to do about perestroika. In its early days it was hailed with some enthusiasm. More recently, it has been quietly dropped, and a certain measured enthusiasm for the radicals and the nationalists has taken its place—though with important exceptions. A few leftists have identified the miners and other working-class sections as capable of carrying the seeds of a new socialism. Others again have called for a third way. But the Left has not taken a position on what is actually on offer: a continuation of a stagnant, lurching, semi-reform fraught with the danger of reaction, or a vast transformation of the kind sketched by Yavlinsky, in which marketisation and liberal democratic practice is the overt goal. Time it did.

The Left has not taken a position on what is actually on offer

On the international level, a ‘left’ position is that taken by the Christian Democratic governments of Germany and Italy (to a lesser and less clear degree the socialist government of France), the two G-7 members most enthusiastic for assistance to Soviet reform. They believe that Gorbachev still has political tasks to perform; that he can manage both economic change and democratisation, and that his policies and government must thus be supported insofar as he proves them right. Both countries, of course, fear collapse and uncontrolled emigration; both have an increasingly large stake in the Soviet economy; both have interventionist reflexes. The Japanese, who might naturally make common cause with them, are presently hanging tough over the issue of the four Kurile Islands, taken from Japan after the war by the Soviet Union, and the bar to good relations ever since. It is commonly supposed that once that matter was settled, the Japanese would be willing to open their vast coffers to the USSR and, more importantly, support their business people in the Soviet market.

To call it ‘left’, however, is to do even more damage to that presently abused word than is done here in the Soviet Union, where pro-capitalists are commonly called Left and pro-communists commonly called Right. In fact, the argument within the West is largely a confused one: those who worked with Yavlinsky were not just anti-communist but of a liberal-radical turn of mind. They are opposed by old Leftists in the Soviet Union and elsewhere who see them (rightly) as intent on recreating capitalism, and by the Western conservative Right, which thinks, or claims to think, they are suckers for Gorbachev, or that they are social engineers who should keep their hands off the Soviet Union while it collapses by itself.
Communism is indeed collapsing in the Soviet union. Though its power bases are everywhere, and often function quite well, it has no will or capacity for either reform or reaction. Everywhere one goes now, the power centres—especially the now - disbanded but once vast Komsomol—are trying to 'go private': managers are forming phoney co-operatives to produce over-priced services for the enterprises they themselves run; party functionaries are making joint ventures; state companies are setting up commodity exchanges; academic institutes are advising foreign and Soviet companies; professors are teaching business courses; and, of course, the shadow economy surges ahead, taking over whole sectors of economic life. It is monstrously inegalitarian and causes mass anxiety among those least able to survive—but the sheer scope of the disintegration and the vigour of the private pursuits mean that, every day, it becomes more resistant to any kind of reactionary force.

Thus, the London G-7 summit has been faced with a serious decision. How far to get involved, and on what terms? The Yavlinsky plan—if it is adopted by the Soviet government as an official program—is repeatedly and determinedly conditional: assistance will be forthcoming only for deep economic change, only for genuine development of democratic forms. To assent to it in principle— even before money is considered—means becoming a partner in one of the roughest political rides of our time; allowing the West to become the target of demagogues, as well as quite sincere people, who will see the wealthy foreigners as screwing the poor Soviets to the ground for the sake of profit. Most Western politicians have enough troubles—why do they need this?

Because, in the end, Gorbachev is right. It would be a pity if anything happened to a world which has immeasurably benefited from his reforms so far and which can benefit further. In entering the world market and the world division of labour, the Soviet Union will become part of a system of corporate capitalism and financial networks of power which dwarf those of governments and which has, in the end, flattened the Soviet Union's efforts at socialist autarchy. It is this we are being asked to support, and it is better than anything else around.

JOHN LLOYD is Moscow correspondent of the London Financial Times. This article was originally published in the July edition of Marxism Today. It is reproduced here in edited form by arrangement.

Beneath the economists’ prose lies an extraordinary and unique political adventure

On top of all this, the government does not so much govern as seek to ride certain forces. Since the hopelessly inefficient attempt by the hardliners to unseat Boris Yeltsin from his then position as Russian parliamentary leader in April, Gorbachev has swung away from an alliance with them (which was never close on either side) and come over to a tactical alliance with Yeltsin (now the Russian president) and to an endorsement of republican autonomy and renewed efforts for market reform. A careful unpicking of history will be required to determine how far Gorbachev made common cause with hardliners, why he swung back, and what convinced him he must seek Western aid. For now, though, Gorbachev seems to be genuine.

If that is the case, he has committed himself, roughly, to the following: to lower the standard of living of the Soviet people for several years; to greatly accelerating the rate of unemployment, already climbing strongly; to ending any semblance of roughly equal incomes, and turning their determination over to the market; to actually, rather than verbally and formally, ending the monopoly of the Communist Party over effective political life (something Yeltsin's election will greatly speed in any case); to granting substantial economic and political power to the 15 republics—including the right of exit from the Soviet Union—and thus confining his office to foreign affairs and macro-economics. There is no way of telling how far he can do it—in reality, how far he and Yeltsin can do it, or can agree to do it.

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The 80s saw a revival of traditionalism in the Pacific. Western values came under attack from Right and Left alike. In the lead article of our Pacific feature, Rowan Callick argues that the new traditionalism is a dead end street. The Pacific has to find a political response to the inevitability of change.

The very notion of the Noble Savage, which Jean-Jacques Rousseau had freshly stated ("Man in his natural state followed the impulses of an instinct which remained sure because it had not yet degenerated into reason. Men were meant to remain in this state, which was the true youth of the world") was seen to be confirmed by what the early European explorers discerned in Polynesia. These islanders were Adams and Eves before the Fall. Original Sin had met its match! And revolutions followed. English Poet Laureate Henry James Pye wrote, "Amid the wild expanse of southern seas/Where the blest isles inhale the genial breeze/The happiest native in the fragrant grove/Woos the soft powers of Indolence and Love."

Such seductive notions of 'free love' appeared confirmed by the later journeyings of European drop-outs such as the...
artist Gauguin, and then by a whole tribe of anthropologists, Malinowski and Mead to the fore.

The extraordinarily powerful masks, carvings and other artefacts of South Pacific cultures also made a remarkable impact on the course of 20th century European art and design—celebrated in 1984 by a blockbuster exhibition at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art which juxtaposed such works with their echoes in those of Picasso, Brancusi, Modigliani, Klee, the German Expressionists, Moore, Matisse and the surrealists.

If these islands really did constitute a paradise, was the serpent always there, or did he only enter with—or indeed as—the European? Alan Moorehead, the Australian historian/journalist, wrote in The Fatal Impact, “It is the fragility of [Tahiti] through these years that strikes one. With the protection of its isolation gone and its whole way of life turned upside down, it was at the mercy of any intruder.” The rest, as they say, is history. And since then, since the fatal impact, well-intentioned Westerners have tended to treat the South Pacific apologetically, as if material development since offered, has been by way of compensation. Some would go further, and argue a restoration of traditional cultures and outright rejection of those sometimes tawdry aspects of modernity that have been on offer.

This is hardly a new debate. Boswell argued, before Australia was ‘discovered’, the case for preserving Tahitian culture. Sam Johnson replied, “When you tell men who live without houses how we pile brick upon brick, and rafter upon rafter, they would laugh heartily at our folly in building; but it does not follow that men are better without houses.”

In a book (Black Bonanza) exploring the extraordinary gold rush that has only recently petered out at Mount Kare in Papua New Guinea’s central highlands, the former publisher of Melbourne University Press, Peter Ryan, wrote,
"A brief description may seem to do less than justice to the marvellous ingenuity, patience and labour of the people in mastering a harsh environment. It is not meant to underrate their wonderful achievements.

"Sometimes, say on a calm day towards evening, one may sit quietly and contemplate the Highland scene: wild mountains of amazing blue, softened and domesticated by the regular patterns of the sweet potato gardens where the warm red earth glows with fertile promise; blue smoke smudges of cooking fires rising from picturesque houses clinging like swallows' nests to cliff-tops; roar of white water from mountain streams. Heaven might look like this, and one wonders briefly why people so lucky as to live there would ever want to change their way of life.

"Alas, it is a romantic illusion. The Highlanders were at the mercy of natural disasters, of hunger, of real disease and almost equally real sorcery, of sudden and treacherous murder, and of a system of law whose final arbiter was the axe. They were proud and able people, but they were poor, and mere subsistence was a struggle."

'Paradise' is in the eye of the beholder. And the same isolation that protected the fragile societies of the South Pacific, also imprisoned them. Today, the tension persists between the traditional and the modern, though the absolutes are at either end of a continuum; there is no clan break. Scarcely an islander has not been preached to, or bought from a trade store, or been told to pay tax.

Indeed, it is arguable that the concept of a Paradise is more important for the western outsider than for those who live within the region—especially for those Westerners seeking models that appear to fit (or that they break. Austra­lia bought from a trade store, or been told to pay tax. 

For those who live their daily lives on an atoll or a highlands ridge, 'scenery' and, indeed, the flora and fauna which surround them hold no discrete aesthetic value beyond the use to which they can practically be put. A deep gorge deters enemies; a bird of paradise can be killed for its plumes; a coconut tree means food, clothes, shelter, drink. Modern, 'introduced' values and their concomitant industrial products are widely seen as part of this same utilitarian smorgasbord; most are sampled, and some found edible (Christianity, rice, rugby, guitars, outboard motors), others too bitter or difficult to persist with (marxism, multiculturalism, strong spices, hard drugs).

Such 'browsing' can arouse considerable frustration in the foreigners—whether he or she intends to do good or to do well. This is especially the case with the Pacific's approach to capitalism. Islanders generally approve of the accumulation of wealth, but disapprove of its undue retention by individuals. There is no social welfare system outside the French and American colonies; the independent nations expect extended families to take care of themselves, especially since they still own their traditional land.

This capitalism-without-tears is not, of course, a success. There can be no capitalism without tears. Thus—alongside the key roles of aid and therefore the bureaucracies, and also of remittances from islanders living abroad, in many island economies—the region's private sectors have remained both sluggish and dominated by foreigners. Few islands entrepreneurs have emerged to emul­ate the dubious examples, say, of Australian luminaries such as Alan Bond who parked so much of his temporary fortune in the region, in the Cook Islands.

Wolfgang Kasper, professor of economics at the Australian Defence Forces Academy in Canberra, puts the case for change thus (in Aid and Development in the South Pacific): "Recently liberated entrepreneurs in many developing countries are now rapidly creating productive jobs where bureaucracies and central plans previously failed. The South Pacific could also benefit from re­lying much more on individual or co-operative initiative and the market place...

"When the outsider raises such ideas, the answer is likely to be that this is against the 'Pacific Way'. The outsider will be told that those South Pacific people who have been fully exposed to individualistic societies, such as in Hawaii, Tahiti or Guam, have lost their identity.

"One hears pleas that the rat-race of the mass societies should not be imported into the South Pacific. And the belief is widespread that small, remote societies could not possibly compete in a modern, anonymous world. One also hears that individualism and rivalry have no place in small, intimate societies. The deeply religious people of the South Pacific also tend to invoke Christian reservations against the self-interested egotism of the market place. Instead, they advocate the fraternal community spirit of collective solutions.

"However, one soon realises that such objections invari­ably come from members of elites who have a personal, material stake in the status quo, including self-appointed Western experts who specialise exclusively in South Pacific affairs."

Kasper fails, though, to tot up the costs of rapid 'individualisation' of the region, among them the need to introduce a new welfare safety net, and to transform land ownership patterns to permit the use of land as collateral in capital raising. And he might have added that, in social as in economic organisation, there is no truly indigenous model that fits the region's growing and changing aspirations. Rather, as people seek more material choices, so they are seeking more involvement in decision making. And, of course, the faster the enhancement of education to facili­tate participation in the modern economic sector, the greater the demands for such participation. Yet many islands leaders, even those who played a prominent part in leading their nations out of colonialism, are fighting a rearguard action to quarantine economic change lest it threaten their privileged positions in both traditional and modern sectors.
In Fiji, a constitution and a new electoral structure have been imposed through which President Ratu Sir Penaiia Ganilau and Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamaosee Mara (and how significantly paradoxical that these ageing aristocrats maintain both traditional Fijian and imperial titles in a republic claiming to be the economically thrusting 'little tiger' of the South Pacific) expect to maintain or even tighten their hold over the country. At the same time, General Sitiveni Rabuka appears to be at last waking up to the way in which he has been manipulated to maintain the hierarchical status quo—whereas he, a commoner, had hoped, however misguidedly, to be an agent of change, establishing a new path for the ordinary Fijian. In fact, the coup and their aftermath had far more to do with the struggle for power, in class and regional bases, within the Fijian community than with racial antipathy to the Indians. Rabuka and the Fiji Labour Party remain unlikely bedfellows. But stranger configurations have been seen in the South Pacific. He has been unusually supportive this year of strikes by miners and farmers, and earlier by nurses.

Indeed, unions are re-emerging in the region after a largely passive period in the 80s, as major forces for change. Yet all their leaders' mental agility will be required to demonstrate the hypocrisy of the old established islands political leaders who, to the applause of the World Bank and other international institutions, donors and investors, are attempting to infiltrate a Thatcherist economic strategy while wrapping around themselves the smug flag of the 'Pacific Way', and denouncing critics or opponents, including unionists and journalists, as foreign dupes.

It is instructive that, in several countries, including Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, smart modern buildings were constructed for central banks before parliaments (which are only now being built in the latter three countries). At the same time, warnings should be posted about accepting at face value the rhetoric of many of those island leaders who would denounce 'capitalism'. The signals the islands 'radicals' send to their foreign supporters are not always those which are heard at home.

Today, for instance, Vanuatu's Barak Sope is, by most measures, a moderate politician with conservative leanings on foreign affairs. Most South Pacific nations, for historical reasons based on the failure of the colonies to attract significant private sector investment, depend heavily on their public sectors for employment and other economic activity—yet in two decades or so of independence, no thoroughgoing socialist has been elected to a parliament (nor, might Kasper and Co add, has any thoroughgoing capitalist).

And on Bougainville again signs have been extraordinarily misread. Mining has been widely blamed for the tragic train of events. However, only months before fighting broke out on the island its provincial premier, Joe Kabui, signed enthusiastically a deal with Sydney business people Marty Dougherty (he of the Fairfax farrago) and Benedict Chan to allow their company to explore all Bougainville. And it was Bougainville MP Fr John Momis who effectively set up the deal, and witnessed its signing.

Although Bougainville might appear simply a story of a hearty return to tribalism in horror of modernity, a longer-term perspective will identify a different trend. Many—almost certainly most—Bougainvilleans seek a suitable blend, but have not yet been offered it. The Bougainville Revolutionary Army certainly does not offer it. Tribalism, especially for women, today offers a blank future, both in practical terms—it cannot produce a pump to supply water, or kerosene for cooking and lighting—and in terms of participation. Some areas of Bougainville have traditionally arranged the passing on of land through the woman's line, matrilineally, but this has never offered women anything approaching an equal role in decision making in tribal affairs.

It is inevitable that the PNG government will offer Bougainvilleans a degree of autonomy, or even a vote on independence, ideally worked towards over a year or two—as were the Matignon Accords arranged for New Caledonia. But it cannot responsibly do so while the island is yet controlled, in a manner, by armed gangs loosely owing allegiance to unelected leaders who to date appear to have provided scarcely any services to a population increasingly anxious about schooling and health supplies in particular. Francis Ona and his advisory council of 30 ('Francis and the Supremes', as they are known locally) may be the leaders the people would choose. But that remains to be tested.

Over on Vanuatu, Fr Walter Lini, Prime Minister since independence 11 years ago, had sought to shore up his crumbling authority by adapting the constitution to grant traditional chiefs a greater role, for instance in controlling the movements of clan members to overcrowded urban areas. Yet on 7 August, at a party meeting, Lini is almost certain to be replaced as Vanua'aku Party president and therefore as Prime Minister, by Donald Kalpokas, one of the party stalwarts whom he dumped from Cabinet this year. Again, a leader of the modern sector has returned in the South Pacific to seek a legitimization of his fraying authority by a traditional structure whose own waning power he himself has helped undermine.

Such manoeuvres will persist across the region during the 1990s. And, indeed, some may at first succeed—especially those that relate intimately to lifestyle, such as the fight-back by kava, the traditional narcotic, against largely foreign-owned brewers of beer. (In Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila, there are today 134 'nakamals' or 'kava bars'—despite the power-campaigns of the opposition, which uses slogans such as 'Mi filim Forex i kam along': 'I feel a XXX coming on'.)

But the longer term prognosis must be for continued change, and not necessarily for the worst. And the more honest and less emotive the domestic debate, the more clearly the alternatives are enunciated, the more participation in the process the better; this is not the traditional 'Pacific Way' (which was, in truth, an often bloody process)—but it may prove a more positive one.

ROWAN CALLiCK is a senior writer with Time Australia.
When Sitiveni Rabuka appeared at the union picket lines outside Suva's Colonial War Memorial Hospital midway through last year, few people paid much serious attention. The national strike by the Nurses Association had drawn considerable public sympathy, and Rabuka, the man who in 1987 said that he wanted to turn Fiji's vibrant union movement into a carbon copy of Singapore's government-controlled labour organisations, had nothing to lose from backing the nurses.

A year later, Rabuka is being denounced by some erstwhile colleagues from his post-coup cabinets for having sold out to the union movement. Sakeasi Butadroka, an extreme nationalist and supporter of the 1987 coups, told a small anti-union rally in Taukei in mid-July, that Rabuka should "never be trusted again". According to Butadroka, Rabuka had betrayed Fijian interests by bringing the national union leadership and the republic's president together to settle a pending national general strike on the terms demanded by the unions. Certainly the role played by Rabuka in averting the national strike planned for July 16 was quite remarkable, particularly given the aura of victory it gave to the Fiji Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party, once among Rabuka's bitterest enemies.

Since the 1990 nurses' strike, Rabuka has promised gold miners that he would never send the troops in to break their strike, which is now more than five months old. He then extended this guarantee to the striking sugar cane farmers, the majority of whom are Indian, thereby precipitating a political crisis for the interim regime that he had originally appointed. This gradual change in Rabuka's attitude towards trade unionism has to a large extent been the result of his partial disillusionment with the chiefly system in whose name he mounted both military coups in 1987. During the last 12 months he has openly supported a policy of Fijian commoners taking a far greater role in government and business, a policy that does not sit well with some of the aristocratic chiefs, who believe that political control is their birthright. It has also been noticeable that racist comments from the man who once wanted the country's large Indian community to leave have dwindled to zero.
Last year he again surprised everybody by meeting with Indian squatters evicted by the interim regime and providing them with food parcels.

The differences between the old and the new Rabuka have sharpened in response to important changes in Fijian society. Over the last few years there has been a steadily growing number of indigenous Fijian sugar cane farmers, an occupation once the near-exclusive domain of the Indian community. Within the paid workforce there are also far more Fijians, and this has been reflected in the trade unions. The country's largest union, the Fiji Public Service Association, often painted by extremist demagogues as an 'Indian-dominated union', now has a majority of Fijian members. Yet there has been no discernible move by those Fijians either to overthrow their high-profile leaders, who are Labour Party stalwarts, or to leave and join the ethnically exclusive Viti Civil Servants' Association, a creation of the regime.

These changes have served to blur the lines between the Indian and Fijian communities and, most importantly, have brought more Fijians into the mainstream of Labour politics. During the cane farmers' harvest boycott, one of the most outspoken leaders of the National Farmers' Union (NFU) was Marika Silimainbau, a Fijian. NFU and Labour Party officials have expressed their delight at the multi-racial composition of the large crowds drawn to the NFU's meetings throughout the cane belt.

According to the Fiji Labour Party's acting president, Dr Tupeni Baba, the changes in Rabuka's position are not just overnight opportunism: "I think Rabuka has seen what is happening to the commoner in Fiji. In 1987 he knew little about politics and the way that the system of government works. He was a military man. After four years his naivety has been replaced by his own first-hand experiences. He can see now that many of our goals were justified and that we had the support of a sizeable number of Fijians."

Concerned at the incompetence, the lack of concern for poor Fijians and the confrontationist policies of the interim regime, Rabuka gave an interview to the Fiji Times on June 8, in which he called on the regime to resign. The catalyst for the call was a statement by the President, Ratu Sir Penai Canilau, in which he threatened to send troops in against striking cane farmers. The publication of Rabuka's response caused a political crisis and for several days it even looked as if a coup was possible - but this time against the men he himself had put back in power four years previously.

Rabuka went so far as to draw up a list of Ministers that he wanted to appoint to a government that he would lead. The list never became public, however, because ultimately he was left with a coup option that he would never take - the arrest of the country's most powerful aristocrats, including Ratu Penaia, a man who is also Rabuka's traditional paramount chief. In the end he made a private, although some say guarded apology, resigned from the army and joined the cabinet that he had denounced so strongly just a few weeks earlier.

For Labour leader Dr Baba, a cousin of Rabuka's, there was never any chance that the Labour-led coalition would join a Rabuka government. "We don't support military coups", he told me. However, the coalition stated that they would give some thought to consultations about the makeup of a new government of national unity based on the Deuba Accords signed between the two former prime ministers (Dr Timoci Bavadra and Ratu Mara) and the then Governor-General, Ratu Penia, in September 1987.

Those accords, which would have steered Fiji back to parliamentary democracy, provoked Rabuka's second coup, but have remained the linchpin of the coalition's policies for a return to parliamentary democracy ever since. During August, the Labour Party will hold its annual convention in Lautoka, the centre of its Western power base. The delegates will there debate the wisdom or otherwise of a boycott of national elections proposed for next year. They may also elect a new leader, a course necessary following the decision of Adi Kuini Bavadra to live in Australia with her new husband.

The coalition won the 1987 general elections by building an alliance between working- and middle-class Indians, Western rural Fijians and urban Fijians in Suva. It is that alliance which the constitution is specifically designed to frustrate, through four particular measures. Firstly, the Indian community will be marginalised by being allocated just 27 seats (38%) in parliament, although they constitute 46% of the population. Urban Fijians will be similarly under-represented. Conservative Eastern provincial regions will receive a disproportionate number of seats, at the expense of indigenous Fijians from the economically powerful, but politically weak Western regions. Lastly, voting will be strictly along racial lines.

For the coalition to win, they would need to record a national aggregate vote of at least 70%, and to capture eight seats not allocated to Indian voters. This seems unlikely. The recently published electoral boundaries have reproduced the constitutional gerrymander, giving the Labour Party little hope of victory in a handful of Fijian seats, even if they win a handsome aggregate vote.

For Labour though, one of the major factors yet to be considered seriously is the impact of Sitteni Rabuka. He is now expected to get the blessing of the Great Council of Chiefs as President of Ratu Mara's newly-founded Fiji Political Party. This means that he could lead the party into the 1992 elections as the preferred candidate of the chiefs, but with a populist mantle, a mantle that up to now has been worn by the Labour Party. Conversely, it could be that Rabuka's conversion to a less extreme view of Fiji's future could legitimise the Labour Party's 1987 vision of a multi-racial Fiji in the eyes of enough voters to give them the parliamentary backing they need to mount a future challenge.

DALE KEELING is the editor of the Fiji Voice.
The US has cast off its trusteeship of tiny Micronesia. Nic Maclellan contends that the consequences of this end to 'neo-colonialism' will be more bad than good.

Last December, just three days before Christmas, at four o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, the United Nations Security Council voted to terminate its trusteeship over the islands of Micronesia. The UN's decision received little coverage in the international media—but will have longlasting effects for the island nations of the Pacific. The vote ends United Nations oversight of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas. The people of Belau, whose anti-nuclear constitution has been a thorn in US Pacific policy for over a decade, remain under the last surviving trusteeship in the world.

For years, the Soviet Union had refused to go along with US designs for the small island states of Micronesia, blocking a Security Council vote to terminate the UN trusteeship. But with Cuba the only dissenting voice, the vote was rushed through at a time when world attention was focused on the Gulf. During the euphoria of US-Soviet detente in the lead-up to war against Iraq, the Soviet Union was unwilling to stand in the way of US policy for Micronesia.

With the support of the nuclear powers, and encouragement from Australia and New Zealand, the Security Council ended the trusteeship—even though many people in the region were opposed. The Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, one of four entities making up the trusteeship, was not even formally notified of the vote. According to Marianas' Governor Larry Guerrero: "The time is not right for Security Council termination of the trust for our people. We still desire to have the protection afforded us by the United Nations." He claimed that the United States did not respect the Marianas' right to full internal self-government or the country's 200-mile exclusive Economic Zone, and that the US had not fulfilled the provisions of the trusteeship agreement.

It may seem strange that these countries seek to remain under a trusteeship, when all the others created after World War Two have ended as nations have moved to self-government or independence. Although the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia were eager to end the trusteeship, the other small island nations are now deprived of the opportunity for international scrutiny through the UN.

The United Nations established the trusteeship for the islands in 1947 following the defeat of Japan. The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI), to be administered by the United States, was the only strategic trusteeship in
the world, and gave the US unlimited military rights and control over access by foreign powers. Unlike other trust territories established after World War Two, it was under the control of the UN Security Council rather than General Assembly, which allowed oversight through the UN Trusteeship Council and other UN institutions.

Under the UN trusteeship, the United States government was charged to "foster the development of government or independence...[and to] promote the economic advancement and self-sufficiency of the inhabitants". But even before the trust territory was created, the US had begun a series of atomic and hydrogen bomb tests at Bikini and Enewetak atolls in the Marshall Islands. From 1946 to 1958, the US conducted 66 atmospheric nuclear tests in the Marshalls, leaving a legacy of health and environmental effects that linger to this day.

By the early 1960s, the Kennedy Administration faced criticism of its neo-colonial policies in the Pacific, at a time when a wave of decolonisation was sweeping Africa and Asia. A Congress for the Micronesian islands was formed in 1964, but moves to full independence or self-determination foundered. The US began separate negotiations with the leaders of the Northern Mariana Islands, and, in 1975, they became a commonwealth of the United States. Throughout the 1970s, US officials negotiated with Micronesian leaders to establish self-government, but were reluctant to recognise full independence; the Micronesia islands have retained their strategic importance, from missile testing in the Marshalls to the option of using land in Belau for military bases. Critics of US policy argued that successive US administrations have used a divide and conquer strategy in order to protect US strategic interests in the islands.

The people of Belau first accepted their own constitution in 1979—but its provisions banning nuclear activity and protecting Belauan land have been a stumbling block for any agreement with the US. Belauans have had to vote three times to reaffirm their constitution, and seven times on the agreement with the US that will govern future relations—the Compact of Free Association—in a process marked by violence, corruption and the murder and suicide of the first two presidents of the country.

Both the Marshall Islands and the neighbouring Federated States of Micronesia (Pohnpei, Yap, Chuuk and Kosrae) ratified compacts which came into force in 1986. Under the compacts, the two countries receive aid from the US, while giving up control of defence and foreign policy. Both the Marshalls and FSM joined the South Pacific Forum in 1987 and established diplomatic relations with a number of countries, including Australia (which has established an embassy in Pohnpei to cover the region).

After 40 years of US administration, the former American trust territories are locked into a cycle of aid dependency. After years of benign neglect, the islands only now have the power to administer basic services that were neglected under successive US administrations. Despite a massive aid influx, social development in the small atoll nations has not benefited all of the population; with one of the highest birth rates in the world, the Marshalls now has two out of three children malnourished, and many people with treatable diseases (for instance, 6% of the population has syphilis).

Through a Nuclear Claims Tribunal, some Marshallese can now claim compensation for the effects of nuclear tests in the 1940s and 1950s. A major radiological survey of the islands is under way as is a door to door oral survey of women on a number of atolls, to build a database on the effects of radioactivity on reproductive health.

Although the nuclear tests ended over 30 years ago, the Marshall Islands remain crucial to the nuclear arms race. The US still test-fires ballistic missiles from Vandenburg Airforce Base in California to Kwajalein atoll in the Marshalls, to establish the pinpoint accuracy needed for nuclear war fighting. Even after the Reagan era, Kwajalein retains its importance. A series of 'Star Wars' tests are currently being conducted; in January, an anti-ballistic missile fired from Kwajalein as part of the ERIS tests successfully blasted an incoming Minuteman rocket fired from California.

The social fallout from these tests has had a major impact on the Marshallese. People from around Kwajalein atoll have been relocated to Ebeye island, just a few miles from the USAKA base on Kwajalein island itself. Nearly 10,000 people live on just 72 acres of land—one of the highest population densities in the world.

The local municipal government and the Kwajalein Atoll Development Association (KADA) have made heroic efforts in improving the physical conditions on Ebeye over the last decade, after Marshallse protested against their plight. Once known as the slum of the Pacific, with poor sanitation, no regular water supply and atrocious health conditions, Ebeye now hosts its own power generation, a desalination plant for water and improved housing for some of the population. But even these improvements cannot mask the stark contrast between Ebeye and the US base at Kwajalein, home to 2,300 civilian contractors and US army personnel. Half the population of Ebeye is under 15, and children play on windswept concrete and tarmac streets. In contrast, Kwajalein, visible just across the water, is a transplanted piece of California, with swimming pool, baseball fields and tennis courts, manicured lawns and supermarket facilities. Marshallese workers travel by ferry or US army barge to work at the base each day, to be transported back to Ebeye at nightfall.

The ending of the trusteeship provides an opening for some Micronesians to transcend the colonial divisions that have separated them from countries in the south-west Pacific. But, as Western leaders proclaim the importance of a revitalised UN Security Council in a new world order, it's worth noting that the UN will not provide the same forum for deliberation on the affairs of these small island states.

NIC MACLELLAN, formerly a journalist and development worker in the Pacific, visited Micronesia in April and May.
**FEATURES**

**HIGH \_Fling**

**Tribal conflicts, rape, lawlessness**—Papua New Guinea's fragile liberal democracy is straining at the seams. At the heart of the crisis, argues Brian Brunton, is the narrow reach of law.

In paper the constitutional and legal institutions that protect rights and provide for the rule of law in Papua New Guinea are impressive. The Papua New Guinean Constitution has a detailed Bill of Rights. Basic rights such as the rights to life, freedom from inhuman treatment, the right to the protection of the law for accused persons, and the rights to freedom of speech, conscience, religion, assembly, association are guaranteed. There are independent courts, a public solicitor, a public prosecutor's office, and an Ombudsman.

Despite the array of constitutional institutions the system has worked only with difficulty, after a fashion, sometimes slowly, and not as well as one might like.

However, Papua New Guinea's peculiar variety of constitutionalism, modelled on the Westminster system, is now in crisis. The universities were closed down in July 1991. April saw a transport strike in support of a general election. The defence force and the police have far more autonomy than they have ever had. There has been a curfew in the capital and in most other towns for most of 1991, which has at least brought some respite from one of the major symptoms of social unrest: violent crime. Parliament has amended the constitution to permit vagrancy laws to be re-enacted and allow the passing of a Peace and Good Order Act which regulates the holding of processions and meetings. The Morobe provincial government has sent the bulldozers into urban migrant settlements and cleaned out non-Morobes by destroying their houses, ignoring a national court order. In July parliament will debate a death penalty.

There has been a major civil war, and the national government has lost control of one of its provinces. The world's largest mining corporation, RTZ, was thrown out of Bougainville by a ragtag peasant army. Earlier this year RTZ's partially-owned Mt Kare mine was closed for a short time by violent landowner action and more recently Placer's Forgera mine was closed by violent workers. These events are set against a background of endemic tribal fighting in some parts of the Highlands region, routine violence by the police everywhere and, in the Bougainville operation, by the defence force.

Politically, the essence of constitutionalism in Papua New Guinea is the Westminster system 'PNG-style', incorporating national, provincial and local elections. However, the
Placer's Porgera mine was closed by violent workers. These events are set against a background of endemic tribal fighting in some parts of the Highlands region, routine violence by the police everywhere and, in the Bougainville operation, by the defence force.

Politically, the essence of constitutionalism in Papua New Guinea is the Westminster system 'PNG-style', incorporating national, provincial and local elections. However, the reality is that strategic power is concentrated in the hands of cabinet, a group of senior bureaucrats and some influential businessmen. The opportunities for popular participation in decision-making are limited, particularly in matters affecting natural resources and economic development. Seemingly, popular movements are only taken seriously when they threaten to destabilise the whole system, a situation which leads to increasing cynicism and alienation in the community.

The practical limitations on the rule of law in Third World countries are well known. In extreme cases judges and lawyers have been dragged from their courts and offices and have disappeared. A greater part of the faculty of Law in El Salvador was murdered by the military during the 1970s. Less extreme were the pressures placed on the judiciary by Marcos in the Philippines, or by Rabuka in Fiji.

In Papua New Guinea the pressures facing the judiciary are more subtle. They are to do with the problem of legitimacy that arises from the impotency of the system and the failure to deal with human rights abuses. On the one hand the courts deal with matters that are of great concern to many ordinary people: public safety and the protection of the individual's private property. On the other hand the judicial institutions are perceived to support existing inequalities and promote further disparity.

These contradictions raise fundamental questions of legitimacy. Is the social function of the legal system to safeguard the interests of elite power structures? Or is it a system primarily concerned with its own institutional survival and well-being? Certainly many judges and magistrates would aspire to the protection of human dignity, but practically the problems of maintaining basic operational systems mean that the law often operates roughly and has to close its eyes to human rights violations in order to maintain institutional viability. At best these compromises have the tendency to identify the legal system with the state, and with the move towards authoritarianism.

In Third World countries generally, and in Papua New Guinea in particular, the danger is that constitutionalism comes to be seen as part of authoritarianism. This view is not without some material basis because Third World authoritarianism has its roots within the indigenous culture, colonial history, and the post independence settlement.

There is a tendency to romanticise pre-colonial society, but in Melanesia life expectancy was probably between 25 and 35 years, with a high rate of infant mortality. It was a life, at times brutal, with the constant threat of outside aggression, internal conflict, disease and hunger. The idea that pre-contact Melanesian communities experienced a form of human freedom is a romanticism, and does an injustice to their history. Nevertheless, there is much that is positive in Melanesian tradition, in common with all tribal and communal peoples, that points the way to those who seek to transform the modern state.

European colonialism extended into the Third World practices common to all peoples who sought to acquire by force the territories of others. The methodologies were uniform: piracy, theft, genocide, slavery, brutal repression, economic exploitation of the crudest and most vicious kind. But crucial to the understanding of colonialism is the idea of dependency. Dependency arose because of the destruction of indigenous institutions, or at best their subordination, and the restructuring and imposing of economic and political institutions that tied the colony to the metropolis. The
tragedy of the Third World is that at independence only some of the colonial institutions disappear, others merely change their form.

Colonialism laid another part of the modern foundation for repression in the Pacific: most post-independence settlements were based upon the exclusion of the masses from effective control of society. The backward and dependent nature of the colonial economic and political structures led to a poor level of social consciousness about constitutionality, the rule of law, legality and equality. After independence, there was no opportunity to mould a democratic practice, nor to build up the conventions necessary to maintain a multiparty, pluralistic political framework. With few exceptions (some would argue that Papua New Guinea is one of them) constitutions were imposed and borders drawn with scant regard to community sensibilities, promoting ethnic or religious tensions and the spilling of much blood.

However, it would be a mistake to think that human rights violations in the Pacific and elsewhere are simply grounded in subjective factors that have become ingrained in either indigenous or neo-colonial consciousness. Third World countries like Papua New Guinea exist in a set of economic conditions that locks them into a cycle of crisis.

Papua New Guinea has at least three economies. The first is modern, dynamic in character, regulated and responsive to global markets. It also has an isolated, introverted indigenous economy that has little or no link with the dynamic sector. Finally, there is a peasant sector, with one foot in both the modern and traditional economies. While the traditional and peasant sectors employ the bulk of the population, it is the dynamic modern economy that creates the national surplus. This sector of the economy is dependent upon metropolitan markets and commands. Importantly, the linkages with the metropolis limit the country’s autonomy and capacity to accumulate. Indeed the rate of accumulation in the modern sector does not keep pace with population growth and it is this shortfall that fuels much discontent.

The distorted nature of the economy affects the nature of society. First there is a significant declassed element: large groups of traditional farmers, unemployed rural youth, unemployed urban migrants and quasi-criminal elements: small business, service sector elements, peasants, public employees, the police and military.

Underdevelopment and low economic growth rates compel a high level of state intervention in the economy. The state is the biggest employer and property owner; it is expected to provide the infrastructure and a suitable climate for foreign investment. A burst of monetarism attempted to contain state intervention during the 80s, but the bureaucracy in Papua New Guinea has remained intact, as has the idea of state intervention in civil life.

Endemic economic crisis is common among post-colonial societies; certainly it is to Papua New Guinea. The cyclic economic crises of the metropolitan economies are compounded in countries at the periphery of the global market because of their dependency upon conditions in the First World, and because of their adverse demographics. The effect of this endemic crisis is to limit development strategies and, more importantly, to create a consciousness that existing development strategies are doomed. In the long term this consciousness fuels unrest and creates tensions that affect all aspects of a country’s life. The economy cannot satisfy popular expectations. In the extreme case youth are alienated, women marginalised, traditional institutions fall apart or are dislocated. People respond either inchoately and negatively through criminal acts, or more systematically and politically in co-ordinated rebellion.

In Papua New Guinea youth are not just marginalised and subjugated; they are abandoned with no dignified function or place in society. The danger is that this can lead to continuous and intensified generational struggles and a lessening of traditional institutional restraints.

Increasing state lawlessness and human rights violations also call for attention. The police use punitive raids as
regular means of intervening in rural areas and an almost routine use of unlawful force during investigations, to such an extent that judges now examine carefully the admissibility of all records of interview challenged in the national court.

Police and soldiers routinely commit atrocities in the field. Before Papua New Guinea withdrew its forces from Bougainville 19 people were allegedly ill-treated or tortured by the security forces. The link between the human rights violations in Bougainville and economic policy was all too clear. The dispute was about and in part caused by the presence on traditional land of a huge foreign-owned mine, but not all human rights violations are so directly linked with policies of foreign investment-led growth.

Human rights violations of women are more complex in their origins. There is evidence of continuous threats of and actual acts of violence throughout the lives of women who tend to be pushed out of the dynamic sectors of the modern economy and are confined to the mundane of subsistence and reproduction. Broadly, this is a reflection of social conditions and structures in traditional society, exacerbated and intensified by colonialism and neocolonialism, and shows the inability of a more modern ideology to penetrate community and the relative ineffectiveness of Christianity, liberalism and social democracy within small introverted agrarian and traditional communities. Women’s reaction to oppression is a symptom of their marginalisation. When they strike back it tends to be as individuals; co-wives, competing girl friends, boy-friends and husbands are killed, generally because society offers no recourse for their grievances.

Perhaps the most useful insight into the relationships between human rights, community and state is found in the perception of a high incidence of pack-rape in Papua New Guinea. The basis of the subordination, manipulation, and exploitation of women in traditional societies was men’s control over most economic resources. Traditionally, ideology portrayed women as dangerous, inferior, untrustworthy creatures who were to be kept under control. Violence, including rape, was one of the methods by which this subjugation was achieved. The ideas and practices have not diminished with independence, but have been accentuated as men scramble to compete in the cash economy among themselves. The state and missions have perpetuated women’s role in domestic production and the family.

Old men used the ideology of the contamination of women to maintain their monopoly over the exploitation of women’s labour, particularly with pig rearing. Young men who wanted to progress in traditional society had to conform to this monopoly if they were to rely on the largesse of the old men to pay their bride price. But the cash economy has disturbed the hold of the older generation over the younger. Some young men can now buy their own brides. This breakdown in economic control over the behaviour of young men is seen by one recent analyst, Laura Zimmer, as one element in the rape complex. The other is the incomplete socialisation of young men who drift between town and village. Young men no longer learn how to live with women as enjoyable and trustworthy partners.

The inability of the Papua New Guinean state to provide a firm democratic basis is not just a matter of political disposition; it is structural. The narrow basis of the modern economy means that the nightwatchman state is unable to apply sufficient resources to the task of modernisation.

In PNG the legal system and constitutionality have historical associations with state repression, the manipulation of power elites, and the toleration of much that is cruel within the community. This is not a rejection of constitutionality; rather it is a search for a more respectable basis on which it should rest.

Constitutionalism and legality gain their legitimacy by fulfilling real social needs within complex societies. People want to see an end to disputes, to bring about reconciliation and healing and to feel justice in the texture of the acts of the law. Although legality may ultimately rely on coercion, coercion is not a value which a legal system should prize. Indeed the struggle within legality and constitutionality over the centuries has been to wrestle with, isolate and formally (if not always in practice) abandon the cruellest and most extreme forms of coercion, while attempting to maintain a system of quality control over the coercive elements that remain in place.

The coercion within the legal system is partly a matter of the tradition of authoritarianism within the Western state itself, but not exclusively so. Community shares with the state a dark side. Controlling blood feuds and ‘a rhetoric of just deserts’ are part of a struggle with community that is by no means over. A positive feature of this slow process has been the increasing importance given to the ideal of human dignity.

In the short-term the prognosis is by no means optimistic. The economic, political and social crisis of Papua New Guinea is intensifying. The legal system is part of a mediating complex and cannot withstand determined political pressure. The failure of the judicial institutions to deal with the Bougainville crisis meaningfully is testimony to that. We have seen recent moves to close the political space in Papua New Guinea by restricting the right to freedom of expression. Greed, ethnocentricity, chauvinism and tribalism lie behind the moves to control urban migration through vagrancy laws. Next month parliament will debate the death penalty. It can be safely predicted that human rights and human dignity will come increasingly under pressure, not only from the state but also as people respond to the narrowing of the political sphere. One thing we can be sure of is that violence generally begets violence. There are no easy solutions.

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The ACTU's turn to enterprise bargaining has been the cause of much soul-searching and controversy. Here Roy Green recalls the manoeuvres leading up to the fateful decision. He suggests that, whatever the dangers, the ACTU really had no choice.

Shrugging off its critics, the ACTU's powerful wages committee in July unanimously reaffirmed the direction of its wages strategy. But what is the ACTU's strategy, and why are they pursuing it with such single-minded determination despite the apparent setbacks and reported divisions within their own ranks?

On the eve of the meeting, in language redolent of earlier wage campaigns, ACTU president Martin Ferguson declared that it was a mistake to believe the Industrial Relations Commission was the fount of all wisdom and a protector of workers. He said, "History proves it is the role of the union movement to achieve breakthroughs on wages and conditions, sometimes, if necessary after a period of prolonged struggle".

The similarity, however, is deceptive. The campaign to secure Accord Mark VI is unlike any previous wage campaign. It is not just about short-term improvements in wages and conditions, but the future of Australia's entire wage fixing system, particularly the role of the IRC and the scope afforded to workplace productivity bargaining.

To understand the ACTU's dilemma, we need to go back to the 'two-tier' wage system of 1987, which permitted a limited form of productivity bargaining under the 'restructuring and efficiency' principle. In retrospect, the introduction of this principle by the IRC may come to be seen as the decisive break with the traditional approach to wage fixing, whereby productivity gains were distributed nationally according to notions of 'comparative wage justice'.

The origins of the traditional approach may be traced to the 'historic compromise' earlier this century, which made tariff protection for manufacturing firms conditional upon payment of a 'fair and reasonable' wage to the workforce. The determination of this basic wage became the function of a central arbitration body and, although 'capacity to pay' was a factor to be weighed against the 'needs' of the
worker, it was not until 1961 that it encompassed measures of national productivity.

The problems with this approach were three-fold. First, the basic wage was a somewhat arbitrarily fixed 'family wage' based on the needs of a male breadwinner and his family rather than a rate for the job. This meant, of course, that women's pay was fixed at a lesser rate and, even after the equal pay decisions of recent years, there is still no procedure for making 'comparable worth' claims based on proper job evaluation.

The second problem, from a trade union perspective, was that reliance upon central wage fixing could all too easily be accompanied by an atrophy of workplace organisation, except to the extent that unions regularly pursued 'overaward' claims at enterprise level.

The third problem became evident as a result of the substantial tariff reductions implemented by the present Labor government. While the trade crisis of 1985/86 provided the immediate pretext for a reassessment of the traditional approach to wage fixing, it was the exposure of Australian firms to international competition which threw into sharp relief the relative inefficiency of much of our private manufacturing sector.

Essentially, the two-tier wage system replaced across-the-board pay rises with a flat rate increase (the 'first tier') plus a percentage increase (the 'second tier') which could only be paid in return for significant changes to work practices at the enterprise level. The idea was to bring about dynamic efficiency gains through a shift in focus to workplace bargaining, but in practice the system degenerated into a narrow cost-offsets approach.

Award restructuring, the brainchild of Laurie Carmichael and the ACTU, was designed to redress the deficiencies of the two-tier approach and create a fairer and more effective framework for decentralised wage bargaining. It would first realign wage rates within and between awards to develop genuine career paths for employees and improve the position of the low paid, especially women, through 'supplementary payments'.

It would also put greater pressure on employers to achieve workplace efficiency gains through better training, work organisation and new technology, rather than through the erosion of hard-won working conditions.

In a series of national wage decisions in 1988/89, the concept of award restructuring was embraced by the IRC and distilled into a new 'structural efficiency' principle, which radically broadened the agenda of industry and enterprise negotiations. New pay increases were made conditional upon modernising individual awards. However, as the IRC noted on a number of occasions, progress tended to be slow and uneven across industries and occupations. And this was meant to be the easy part—the 'paper work' as Carmichael described it. Still to come was the requirement to translate the revised awards into action at enterprise level, with completely new skill levels, job responsibilities and pay structures.

Meanwhile, employer groups were getting impatient. In 1989, the Business Council of Australia released a weighty report advocating the merits of an accelerated transition to more decentralised bargaining arrangements, if necessary bypassing the award system altogether. Already the large companies represented by the BCA were taking advantage of the greater flexibility offered by the 1988 Industrial Relations Act to negotiate imaginative enterprise-based agreements with the unions.

The realisation was also dawning at the ACTU that time was running out. At the next election there was every chance that the Labor government would be unseated by a doctrinaire conservative one which would move rapidly to establish a framework for enterprise bargaining without the safeguards sought by the unions. Although the ACTU had embarked upon an ambitious program of union reform through amalgamation and, most importantly, the development of 'single bargaining units' at the workplace, the program had scarcely got under way.

The ACTU had a difficult choice. They could cling ever more tightly to the skirts of the IRC and follow each worthwhile but increasingly ponderous step down the 'structural efficiency' path in return for meagre pay instalments. Or they could rise to the challenge issued by the BCA and turn it to their advantage, as they had done originally with the promotion of award restructuring as a 'managed' transition to a more decentralised system.

After all, a commitment to enterprise bargaining at this stage on the ACTU's terms would not only provide a much-needed impetus to the process of labour market reform, but would also offer the prospect of substantial pay rises for workers fed up with restraint. In addition, of course, it would surely take the wind out of the Coalition's sails in the one area where they were able to present a distinctive and potentially popular policy.

So it was that on a hot February afternoon in Canberra, a month before the 1990 election, the entire ACTU wages committee, led by Bill Kelty, met Paul Keating and the Minister for Industrial Relations Peter Morris for twelve hours of negotiations on the shape of a new wage agreement, 'Accord Mark VI'. As expected, after a vigorous debate at its conference four months earlier, the ACTU wanted two cost of living adjustments to follow the way for unions to negotiate additional wage rises. More controversially, however, the ACTU argued that the time had come to abandon the 'no extra claims' commitment, the cornerstone of pay restraint since 1983, and open the way for unions to negotiate additional wage rises based on "achieved increases in productivity and profitability". Although these wage rises would take effect at enterprise level, the metal unions also retained the option of negotiating productivity agreements within an industry framework, primarily to gain the support of the Metal Trades Industry Association.
The government broadly accepted the merits of the ACTU's case, with two provisos: that the two cost of living adjustments would continue to be linked to the progress of award restructuring; and that the productivity-based wage increases had to be accommodated within the government's aggregate wage target of 6.25% for 1991/92.

After some hurried calculations, Bill Kelty made the necessary commitments, little knowing that the recession and the IRC would soon make them redundant.

Even before Labor was returned to office in March 1990, George Campbell, the newly-elected secretary of the Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union, began to sound out the MTIA on what he imagined would be a path-breaking metal industry agreement to place before the IRC's national wage hearing later in the year. But he was firmly rebuffed—not just on account of the size and timing of the pay increases, but also on the basis of the very nature of productivity bargaining contemplated by Accord Mark VI.

MTIA chief Bert Evans rejected workplace productivity bargaining for three reasons. First, recalling the experience of the 1981/82 pay round, he argued that over-award payments would 'flow on' to workers in other firms irrespective of productivity gains. Second, bargaining at enterprise level was inconsistent with the steady progress being made on award restructuring. And third, perhaps to frighten the AMWU, "enterprise bargaining is only feasible if you have enterprise unions".

Against the MTIA, it was argued on the first point that the economic circumstances were now very different from 1981/82, as was the role of both the unions and the commission. If a round of workplace bargaining was to go ahead, it could more easily be accommodated in a depressed economic climate than when activity began to pick up again. Indeed, a degree of flexibility at this stage, as well as generating productivity improvements, might even reduce wage pressures further down the track.

On the second point, the metal unions responded that it was precisely because award restructuring was bogged down that it needed a further boost to secure its effective implementation at enterprise level. The advantage of properly conducted productivity bargaining was that it would give employers and unions the freedom not only to negotiate fundamental changes at the workplace but also to share the rewards of productivity growth on a long-term basis.

Finally, no one could deny that enterprise bargaining was associated with enterprise unions in Japan. But was it also the case in countries such as the US and Britain, where enterprise bargaining was entrenched, or in Germany and Sweden where, as in Australia, it was in the process of being adopted? In those countries, unions organised along industry or occupational lines had not dissolved themselves into enterprise unions but, instead, operated workplace bargaining units in the form of 'joint union committees' or 'works councils'.

After a series of rolling stoppages in the metal industry, the parties eventually resolved their differences in an unwieldy but mutually acceptable compromise. The MTIA would agree to the idea of special productivity payments at enterprise level, but only on certain stringent conditions. These were that the payments had a predetermined cap, as in the 1987 second tier wage round, and that they were not overaward payments but part of the terms of the award.

In other words, each enterprise, on reaching a productivity agreement, would have to seek approval from an industrial tribunal to access the award and make the agreed payments to their workforce. It was not just the ACTU and the government which reacted with horror to this scenario. Other employer groups, particularly the Confederation of Australian Industry, saw greater potential for a flow-on to other industries from an award variation in the pace-setting metal industry than from any number of overaward payments.

The IRC too was placed in a dilemma. Its natural instinct was to supervise closely any move to decentralise negotiations; but, on the other hand, it resiled from the prospect of having to ratify formally every productivity deal in every enterprise in every industry. Nevertheless, Deputy President Keogh gave provisional blessing to the metal industry agreement, pending the outcome of the national wage case.

In opening the wage case, the IRC called for written submissions from the parties and followed these up a month later with a list of over 60 questions. In their submissions, the ACTU and federal government argued strongly for the implementation of Accord Mark VI, whereby productivity payments would be based on 'section 115 agreements', paid rates awards or, in the case of minimum rates awards, overaward payments. In addition, the ACTU amended its submission in response to the metal industry agreement to include the option of productivity payments in the appendices to awards.
The ACTU’s Grant Belchamber, in the course of the hearing, stated that every element of the claim was “fundamental to the integrity of the package as a whole”. Moreover, in words which would soon have to be matched by action, “the ACTU and the trade union movement will not give a commitment to work within a wage fixing system which does not deliver the totality of that package”.

The MTIA also embraced the metals agreement in its submission, but again made clear its reservations about productivity bargaining. The CAI, on the other hand, preferred productivity-based wage increases to take the form of overaward payments. And the BCA—surprisingly, in view of its earlier vocal support for enterprise bargaining—expressed no attitude towards the details of its implementation.

The ‘war of words’ reflects a deeper struggle for credibility

When the IRC finally released its national wage decision in April, it was as though a bomb had blown up in the face of the ACTU. It came as a particular shock to Kelty who was, at that time, in the UK extolling the virtues of the Accord as a co-operative approach to wages policy. Concluding that unions and employers “have still to develop the maturity necessary for the further shift of emphasis now proposed”, the IRC endorsed the MTIA view that it was preferable to continue with the process of award restructuring, based on the existing structural efficiency principle, with only a few modifications. To make things worse for the ACTU, the very employer groups which had advocated enterprise bargaining now took malicious pleasure in calling upon the ACTU to accept a process they had themselves criticised for its lack of results. At least the MTIA was predictable.

It was in this emotion-charged atmosphere that the ACTU and the government decided to press ahead with the implementation of Accord Mark VI, come what may, in the trough of a major recession. The MTIA’s Bert Evans implored them to wait until the IRC’s promised November review, and NSW Labor Council assistant secretary Peter Sams even accused Kelty of “playing into the hands of the federal Liberal Party”. With the benefit of hindsight, the ACTU campaign could not have been more badly timed. But what choice did they have?

The next logical step in wages policy had been agreed with the federal government as part of the Accord process and now it had to be implemented, irrespective of the commission’s decision. Those employers who had already reached Accord Mark VI deals with unions were now called upon to put the agreements into effect, and those who had not were wheeled into the firing line. By July 19, the ACTU claimed to have secured deals covering two million workers.

The problem for the ACTU was that many of these agreements were, at the insistence of employers, subject to ratification by the IRC. In the public sector, federal Industrial Relations Minister Peter Cook was prepared to deliver the Accord Mark VI package for public servants, including a ‘market rates’ adjustment, without the endorsement of the IRC. But in the private sector, provisional agreements in road transport, building, finance, metals and the waterfront were being closely scrutinised by the IRC for any significant discrepancies with its April decision.

In a superficial sense, the stand-off between the ACTU and IRC has come down to a ‘war of words’. For example, the acceptability of an agreement now seems to depend on the form of words used by a union in its commitment to make ‘no extra claims’. However, this matter of semantics reflects a deeper struggle for credibility on the part of the protagonists, as they seek to define the shape of a new wage fixing system.

The IRC cannot afford to let itself be seen merely as a rubber stamp for the unions or the government of the day. Yet the ACTU, after a profits boom fuelled largely by wage restraint, must deliver a framework allowing greater flexibility at the workplace. And the government, too, in the words of Senator Cook, has “a commitment to micro-reform and a very short agenda to get there... I would hope that everyone would appreciate that and play along”.

So where to now? In the short term, the IRC may well be persuaded to bring forward its November review of the wage decision to September. It will then have another chance to tackle the difficult issues of how much scope to permit enterprise bargaining within a centralised wage fixing system, and how to balance the principles governing productivity deals with the wider considerations of fairness and comparability for the workforce as a whole.

No one can pretend that the resolution of these questions will be simple or straightforward. In the longer term, their resolution will depend not on Bill Kelty, Bert Evans or the IRC, but on the quality of management and union representation at workplaces across Australia. In a recent speech to employers, IRC president Barry Maddern made reference to Mikhail Gorbachev’s defence of perestroika at the 19th all-union congress of the Soviet Communist Party. “The questions asked, rhetorically, include: whether the cause will fail in the face of complexity and the unusualness of the task; whether those who prefer stagnation will triumph; or whether the task will fail because too many want to fall asleep today and wake up when everything is all right.” That is not a bad way to reopen the 1991 national wage case.

ROY GREEN teaches in economics at Newcastle University and was an adviser to two former industrial relations ministers.

Responses to this article will appear in upcoming issues.
Out of the Ghetto

A movement beset by dogmatism and decline. Sound familiar? Actually, it's Catholicism.

Mike Ticher spoke to the editors of a new magazine which aims to revive Catholic thought.

Morag Fraser and Ray Cassin are editor and production editor of Eureka Street.

What was the impulse behind the foundation of Eureka Street?

MF: The Jesuits wanted to shift away from having close links purely with Catholic bodies—Catholic schools and the like. That move away from a closed Catholic culture is one of the main motivations behind Eureka Street. Also, there has been a large number of closures of Catholic media organs in the last few years, and so there was a hole in the market which we want to fill. For the Catholics at whom it's pitched (and it's not just pitched at Catholics), there really isn't anything else to read. This country has approximately a 25% Catholic population, and they're certainly not all on the Right. That is our bread and butter audience, but unless we get beyond that niche we're not fulfilling our purpose, which is to broaden out into a whole range of political, social, cultural and religious issues.

What does Eureka Street offer which other publications can't?

MF: One of the things that struck us particularly was the concentration and decline in standards in the daily press, a closure of that journalistic culture. There were too many people who just knew one another, just knew the political scene. So one of the things that we claimed to offer in the very first edition was news that people are not necessarily going to read elsewhere, and written by people who are not just part of the journalistic culture.

RC: To some extent all monthly magazines have been in a position to benefit from the bad things that have happened in the mainstream media. The concentration of ownership of newspapers and TV channels has made them less attractive places to work, and a lot of journalists who really care about their craft are looking for other places to publish. Insofar as we're offering anything different, we're able to provide a link between those writers and others who are in more traditional Catholic circles.

MF: So much analysis in the monthlies and the dailies in Australia in the last ten years has been economics-focused. This may sound like cant on my part, but to me it's been a pretty value-free environment, and lots of people with a concern about economic downturn in this country are also concerned about a spiritual malaise that underlies that. There are ways of looking at things that are different from the business review pages, and it's one of our aims to incorporate not just people's concerns with how much money they're earning, but what they're earning it from, what the ethics are. For example, in the July issue we had a long article, by a philosopher about lying—not just Bob Hawke lying, but lying in general. Now there are not too many daily newspapers which can afford to do that. People lie in public life all the time, but we don't take much time to stop and analyse it.

Has there been much opposition within the church to the fact that it's turned out to be a fairly liberal, Left-leaning magazine?

RC: Very little. There might be people who think we should be more 'religious', but I don't think they would form a definable group that would actually try to change the magazine.

Are there other magazines which have tried to occupy similar ground in the past?

MF: I think they've always been more specifically Catholic than this one.

There have certainly been magazines like the Catholic Worker which were wholeheartedly committed to social crusades, but there probably would have been recognisably Catholic concerns in most of the issues canvassed there. It was a different world.

How much latitude do you have to be critical of the church in general or the Jesuits in particular?

MF: It's difficult to see that we could have trouble with the people who are financing the magazine, but if we don't encounter some opposition from the wider body of the church, or Catholics generally, then we won't be doing our job.

RC: Of course the magazine has a Catholic identity, but there is within the Catholic church a commitment to having a range of opinion and a respect for conscience. I think there's a greater variety within the church than many people outside it realise. The number of beliefs that you're really committed to holding is relatively small. It's an interesting sign of the times that although Eureka Street is substantially under the sponsorship of the Jesuits, the day to day work is mainly done by lay people. If it had been started 20 years ago there would have been only Jesuits sitting here talking to you.

What in particular has made the difference between now and then?

MF: Australian Catholicism has changed quite dramatically, especially because of migration. Just in this office there are Arab Christians, Vietnamese Christians, Irish, Italians, Western Samoans, Lebanese. That makes it impossible for us to become too predictable because there are too many people around, all with different opinions.

RC: Until the late 1950s, Catholicism in Australia was an Irish ghetto. Now the Catholic church is probably the most multicultural part of a multicultural continent. You could say that a lot of what it means to live and work in a multicultural society became apparent within the church first. It's
Ray Cassin and Morag Fraser

created a very different kind of church from that which many people had known back in Europe.

What are the issues within the church that are going to be central to the debates in Eureka Street?

MF: The central question is the interaction of church and state politics. This a major issue in Europe at the moment, with the rise of religiously-inspired nationalism, while in America the church and state are embroiled in the legal aspects of abortion. Then there's social justice. The Catholic church does make fairly frequent statements on aspects of social justice; it's one of the better things it does. Jesuits have long been involved in trying to change attitudes towards the treatment of Aboriginals, for example. The church has become identified with overtly anti-establishment political movements in recent years—for example in Poland and in Latin America. Is there a danger that it has come to be seen more as a political vehicle than a repository of spiritual values? There already seems to have been a sharp decline in church attendance since the demise of the communist regime in Poland.

MF: Of course the church has always been deeply involved in politics. I don't think you can answer in general terms as to whether it's a problem for the church, since there are very specific problems in each country. The Polish question is very obvious because we have a Polish pope, but the problem of church-state relations is a universal one.

RC: What's interesting about the Polish example is that Poland seems to be in the process of becoming another Western country. I think some people have been dropping out of the church in Poland because their interest in it was originally as an expression of Polish nationalism. It's a problem for the church if it ever becomes too closely identified with a particular set of political arrangements. It essentially compromises it, and that's why this magazine can never be political in the partisan sense of the word. But we will be interested in politics in the wider sense, in encouraging people to think about political issues in a way that isn't narrowly self-serving.

Eureka Street covers many issues which have no discernible religious connotations at all, but also deals with straight theology. How do you reconcile the two?

MF: We don't physically divide the magazine up into 'the religious section' and 'the non-religious section' for a start. We would like to think that there's a certain ethos that pervades the whole magazine, and which you could broadly describe as Christian. We keep a section on theology, because there's nowhere else accessible in Australia you can read about it, but we hope the values that you might find in the theological and religious articles are also the ones
which inform the rest of it. There's a definable perspective, if you like, and you get that partly because you choose particular writers, and you tackle things in certain ways. It has a lot to do with honesty of argument and clarity of presentation.

RC: We want to have some communication with people outside the church. We want to show that because you happen to be interested in what people might see as narrowly religious issues, it doesn’t mean you’re not part of the wider community too. What we’re trying to show is that nothing is off the agenda. One spin-off from that might be that people outside the church think, “oh well, if they’re interested in that, what have they actually got to say on religious issues”.

MF: That sounds a bit as though we’re trying to evangelise through the backdoor, which is not exactly what we’re about. We want people to think.

You talked about the magazine having a Christian ethos, and also about the current ‘spiritual malaise’ in Australian public life. Obviously Eureka Street doesn’t stand either for Fred Nile-style religious politicking, or for a retreat into purely spiritual concerns. How does one realistically apply spiritual principles to political questions?

MF: You can’t separate the two. Fred Nile’s Christianity is a very narrow religious manifestation and discriminates against a lot of people—that’s not what we’re interested in at all. There are people in Australian public life that manage to do the sorts of things that we are committed to—people who put their public lives on the line in the service of other people. It’s a very old-fashioned value, but there are some who still subscribe to it.

RC: In the main political parties there are people—like Michael Tate in the Labor Party and Fred Chaney in the Liberal Party—whose Catholicism has a lot to do with the interest they take in public affairs. They would undoubtedly disagree very strongly with each other about many things. But if they didn’t think about ethical issues in the first place, they wouldn’t be doing what they are doing. You could say that this magazine is a publishing expression of that interest in the way in which Catholicism fits into public life.

MF: Also I think it’s important to insist that there should not be a split between your ethical opinions and what you do in public. There shouldn’t be one world inhabited by political interests, and another, where ethical interests are espoused, cordoned off somewhere else. There’s been a long history in the Christian tradition of cutting yourself off from the world, and this magazine is not about that at all. It’s not a tradition that we either repudiate or deny, but we’re different. There are splits in public life and we would like to see them reintegrate. We’re at a fairly crucial time in our definition of what Australia is and it’s important that our depictions of Australia do ourselves justice.

MIKE TICHER is a member of ALR’s editorial collective.

Judy Horacek

RAINY DAY ACTIVITY:
Working out exactly which animal is who in Orwell’s Animal Farm

I just don’t see any resemblance to Lenin
You mean animals didn’t take any part at all in the Russian revolution?
So which revolution is “Watership Down” about?
Who is Jonathan Livingstone Seagull & who is he working for ??!
Strange Days

It's official: we're living in the 60s—again.
David Nichols (below) and McKenzie Wark (overleaf) look at the revival of 60s music and culture. What does it all mean? Does it mean anything?

"Later, when Grant became totally absorbed by a Charlie Mingus album cover, I disappeared into the bedroom and masturbated. I took my time and my fantasies were very detailed. It seemed like hours passed. Psychedelic jacking off—that was the 60s for you."

So says The Doors' drummer John Densmore in his newly published Riders on the Storm—My Life with Jim Morrison and The Doors. Densmore, having 'lived it', might be justified in writing off 'the 60s' like that. But it's safe to assume that such a flippant attitude is anathema to most disciples of Morrison and The Doors. (Who, I should add, didn't 'live it' for the most part. Densmore himself writes about youngsters who weren't born when his band was at its peak who are now fervent followers of their music; it's these kids who went to see Oliver Stone's The Doors. Their thirty/foursomething parents were the minority.)

Looking back from the beginning of the 90s, 'the 60s' (the term, in this case, seems to mean '67-'69 and maybe a little beyond) seem like a period of great musical and artistic experiment, adventure and innovation to people who conveniently ignore the fact that consumers then were as much interested in corny ballads and novelty records as they are today. The Doors, The Stones, The Beatles, Hendrix, The Velvet Underground—all those names and more are constantly being cited as the written-in-stone greats of rock 'n' roll, stylistic launch-pads for all that's worthwhile in rock music now.

The last 12 months have seen the 20th anniversaries of the deaths of two of these 'greats'—two Jims, as it happens—Jim Morrison (died July '71) and Jimi Hendrix (died September '70). Like another Jim—James Dean—their fans' fascination with their deaths only fuels the flames of these iconic phoenixes. There's another, more practical, aspect to worshipping a dead star, too. Unlike Bob Dylan's admirers, for instance, a Hendrix or Morrison fan doesn't have to be periodically embarrassed by a new record from a middle-aged shadow of a genius.

The similarities between Hendrix and Morrison are, of course, purely superficial. Same time, different places, different backgrounds—probably even different fan groups. Hendrix was an innovator, remembered by most as a technically brilliant guitarist but probably enjoyed by lay people largely as a great singer/songwriter. These days (despite the re-evaluation of his work by Charles Shaar Murray in the recent book Crosstown Traffic) Hendrix is seen as a bit of an anomaly—unlike Morrison, whose legacy is constantly described as "timeless". This is because: (a) Oliver Stone's movie gave us a vibrant and handsome Val Kilmer, recreating Morrison in-the-flesh and of-the-moment; (b) many Doors songs fit stylistically with more contemporary rock songs—unlike a lot of Hendrix's heavy-riffing psychedelia; (c) the surviving Doors supervised post-Morrison releases respectfully and intelligently—whereas Hendrix's posthumous releases are often scrambled and messy; and (d) dare I say it, Hendrix was black and Morrison white.

Noel Redding's book on Hendrix, An You Experienced? The Inside Story of the Jimi Hendrix Experience (co-written with Carol Appleby) tells us a lot about how the 60s are being reshaped and rewritten. Redding—who played bass in the Experience—has apparently spent the last 20 years steeped in bitterness, fighting (not very successfully) an alcohol problem and trying (with even less success) to reap some financial reward from his years as a member of Hendrix's band. Indeed, the book reads as a relieved gasp that someone is actually listening to his catalogue of accounting and legal woes. Redding (who come across as a likeable bloke) didn't want to seem like a breadhead at the time, so he never bothered to ask his managers or Jimi what was going on moneywise. Not surprisingly, they never got round to telling him (he still doesn't know). In this respect, I think
we can say that nothing much has changed in the music industry.

Unfortunately, though, Redding's recollections reveal little about Jimi himself. "A lot has been written about the man," he understates early on in his book. "A lot of it true, as far as I know, and a lot of it crap". People do say if you remember the 60s you weren't really there—maybe that (and the two intervening decades) have blunted Redding's reminiscing powers.

John Densmore, on the other hand, has a rosy array of Morrison stories on display. But then, he would have a different perspective; unlike Redding, he's never been 'down the dumper'; he only had to stand back and watch as The Doors' legacy (and presumably his bank account) grew and grew. Unfortunately, the book does have an irritating 60s approach: parts of it are written directly as an open letter to the long-dead Jim ("Well, we finally visited your grave..."), and it's heavy on Californian otherworldly philosophies. But at least it shows Morrison was as much an enigma to Densmore and the other Doors as he was (and is) to millions round the world. Snide comments about the occasional sixth-grade nature of Morrison's lyrics aren't going to make a blind bit of difference to this particular runaway gravy train.

Another point of interest: both books feature photographs of the star with the author/band member; they're both saying, "Yes, I was there!" Redding has his head in Hendrix's armpit; Densmore is peering over Morrison's shoulder. Dare you doubt their claims?

The 60s are everywhere—and not just in the revived Hair stage show. They are the cuckoo in the 80s/90s nest, but they also provoke for many a (probably unfair) evaluation and re-evaluation of music, and other arts, today. Few of the people who bemoan the conservatism of music today really appreciate that the reason music got so exciting in the late 60s was the fact that it was an attack on a much, much deeper conservatism everywhere in that decade. But now, paradoxically, borrowing a 60s theme or look gives a project an 'innovative' theme—Australian band Third Eye springs to mind, with their highly colourful video presentation and 'trippy' concepts (and name), none of which seems even slightly out of place today with their very hi-tech electrodisco. Tie-dyed shirts, ultra-long hair, a thriving drug culture, 'happenings'—our contemporary ultimate in 'non-meaningfulness' dance music, has taken on all of those trappings. There's even nostalgia for 70s/80s groups like The Jam and The Sunnyboys who were themselves resurrecting a version of what they understand by 60s rock.

A lot has been made (and a lot of money has been made, for that matter, when the entrepreneurs finally caught on) in the last couple of years of the re-emergence of 'the 70s', as though the entire decade was a huge retrograde and tacky gross-out. However, now 'the 70s' too are being re-evaluated and regurgitated into the music, fashion and culture of the 90s, in both subtle and outrageously blatant ways, just as the 60s and hip-piedom was reviled in the late 70s then rediscovered in the 80s.

The important thing is to keep an eye on the reality of times gone by in the midst of the nostalgia hype. Or rather, the important thing is to remember that there is no objective reality, only hazy and messed-up recollections, when it comes to summarising an era. Every generation will be looking back at their adolescence with reverence and emotion. Hopefully, even today's 40-year-olds will get over theirs soon. After all, how much longer can radio DJs and middle-aged newspaper columnists keep telling us with awe that "it was twenty years ago today"?

DAVID NICHOLS is 26.
For McKenzie Wark the 60s revival is much ado about not much.

On my way out of Sydney's Martin Place subway the other day I came across two plush-faced teenagers sitting cross-legged on the pavement cradling beat-up guitars with peace stickers all over them. They wore headbands, and took turns choosing tunes from the Bob Dylan songbook. They played with such naive earnestness that, for a moment, you could forget that the songs had ever existed before.

This wasn't the first time lately I'd come across this 60s nostalgia. At peace demos during the war against Iraq you could spot little clusters of teen-hippies, all straggly hair and multi-coloured tie-dyed T-shirts. They seemed really to believe that the 70s simply never happened. Of course, the 60s imagery recalled in this wave of 60s nostalgia, of which these are just two examples, never happened either. But that doesn't make it any less real to the young people so intent on reliving it.

Every pundit who can brandish a word processor has been busy deducing what the 60s revival 'means' in carbon-copy columns in the smart magazines. There are two fundamental mistakes in this line of thought, however. The first is assumption that here is a 60s revival, the second is that it could actually have a meaning at all.

It's a cliché now: "If you can remember the 60s you weren't really there." It's meant to mean that you would have been whacked out on bad acid or too hyped up on spurious activism to notice. That, presumably, is what the 60s were all about. But if someone were to ask you what the 90s were all about, what is there to say? Well you could say that in the 90s there was a 60s revival, but that wouldn't help much. There always seems to be a 60s revival of some sort going on. The British pop pundit Julie Burchill even devoted an essay to the difference between early and late 60s, and how preferable the former was to the latter.

In short, just as '90s culture' appears a diverse and meaningless miasma of contradictory and unreadable elements, we can safely assume that the recent past was probably pretty much like that too. The 60s only look like the 60s because a carefully selected series of images makes it so.

Certain icons accumulate condensed layers of significance. A 'young Elvis' picture is 50s, but Diana Ross and the Supremes are (early) 60s. Through the process of editing and recycling images come to stand for 'the times'—something which can have no meaning without this process of fabrication, arbitrary though it is.

'Signs of the times'—let's take The Doors as an example—can feed back into pop culture in seemingly nostalgic revivals. To some extent, the meaning arbitrarily assigned to such an image in the media might actually become 'real'. Young people now are encouraged to identify with The Doors and to associate a certain sexy, transgressive yearning for the sacred with Jim Morrison. Of course, there is nothing really '60s' about this; it is a commonplace of Romantic aesthetics. Morrison probably culled it from Rimbaud or Byron. He simply had the nous to combine it with the music technology and dress sense which were also floating aimlessly around at the same time. As for the music, steal-
ing a few things from the blues might be typical of the American music business, but hardly of the 60s. It is he coming together of equally arbitrary, equally unmotivated borrowings and permutations from this or that corner of the pop cultural landscape, haphazardly stitched up in a neat, libidinal package that makes a certain ensemble of images 'typically 60s'.

Of course, this line of argument doesn't account for why The Doors and 'the 60s' should come back now, in the early 90s. Some argue that 60s nostalgia signals some sort of cultural 'shift'. They then marshal dubious anecdotal evidence of the sort I mentioned earlier to prove that some general 'spirit of the times' has emerged.

Some suggest that, since the 80s were a revival of the 50s, then the 90s will be the contemporary equivalent of the 60s. Here it is usually assumed that decades which are self-centred and materialistic are followed by spiritualised or radical ones when people wake up to themselves. This 'instant karma' theory is on to something, but misses the point in assuming that there has to be any actual meaningful content in the patterns of these revivals. Pop culture these days seems to work by juxtaposing and recombining different but equally arbitrary bits of style jetsam and image flotsam to each other. At any given moment, young people will be borrowing little clusters of image, come from the media's wake, and forming little group identities out of it. They might then set these little collections of cultural drift against each other: mods versus teds, punks versus skinheads, and so on.

This also happens temporally: each new style distances itself from its predecessors, often by inverting their styles. Hippies wore their hair long, so punks decided they had to shear the whole lot off. "The only good hippy is a dead hippy", we used to say. This is why I look on the new age hippy teenagers in Martin Place with such ironic bemusement—I'm an old remnant of one of the subcultural styles they are turning the tables on!

As to why the 60s, specifically, are big in the 90s, this is simple enough. It has to do with this empty, meaningless, purely structural logic rather than the inner meaning of any particular image or style-point. Quite simply: none of the 15-25 year olds alive now and listening to The Doors could possibly remember them from the first time around. This is the first and only law of pop culture nostalgia waves. They will hit the first generation which missed out on them the first time. So stay tuned for the big 90s revival some time in the next millennium. By then, it will be crystal clear what 'these times' are (or rather were) 'really' all about.

Rather than look for meaning in any particular symptom of 60s revivalism, it makes more sense to look for the structural logic which churns the enormous ocean of signs and icons around. A significant factor explaining the apparent increase in very short-term recycling which has occurred in the last 20-odd years is the enormous proliferation of media vectors. Everyone today who has grown up in the TV world (and that means practically everyone in their early 30s on down) has a huge image-bank in their heads, all of it potentially rechargeable with new meaning.

Dredge poor, old, dead Jim Morrison out of the TV image data-bank, connect him up with a few 60s stock shots of long hair, demos, freaky behaviour and so on, hint broadly at a few tedious contemporary anxieties against which these pristine, shining images can be juxtaposed, and hey presto! A 60s-style revival. Young people today who hear The Doors on the radio, or see Oliver Stone's film about them, will make of it what they want, but it will have nothing to do with the 60s. It has nothing much to do with anything. That's the way things are with us TV babies. It's all just a cut-up video clip, dancing in our heads. We no longer have roots, we have aerials. So we make up the past, like everything else, as we go along.

MCKENZIE WARK is waiting for the punk revival.
**Who’s Afraid...**

**Double-Wolf by Brian Castro, Allen & Unwin, $19.95, 1991**

If you are at all dubious about the merits of Freudian psychology, Castro’s latest novel *Double-Wolf* will probably do nothing to reassure you. While the title of Castro’s novel indicates the text’s particular concern with the Wolf-Man, Freud’s famous patient, the novel as a whole deals with psychoanalysis more generally as a combination of art, science and “bullshit.”

While Castro’s text is a highly crafted one, the writing polished and interesting, the reader may never get quite comfortable with the novel. I for one found myself oscillating between sympathising with and feeling alienated from Castro’s personalities (for they are more personalities than characters). I began more than once to think “OK, I can handle this guy” and then the jerk would go and do/think/say something totally repulsive — but perhaps that was only because I am a moral prude and hypersensitive feminist (if you are neither of these you may find yourself feeling really cosy with Castro’s male personalities — you may even be able to identify with them!)

Unsavory characters aside, the novel undoubtedly displays Castro’s skill as a writer. The traditional authorial voice disappears behind the narratorial voices of the Wolf-Man, Sergei Wespe, and the psychoanalyst, Arthur S. Catacomb. The story is told as a fragmented one; Castro makes the shift from one personality’s consciousness to the other’s smoothly; so smoothly, in fact, that one wonders if the separate personalities of Catacomb and the Wolf-Man are in fact speaking in separate voices. The Wolf-Man, reacting against “Old Sigmund [who] tried to slot me,” attempts to reconstruct himself through his own writing. But is the narratorial voice which tells of the Wolf-Man’s experiences the self-creating voice of Sergei Wespe, or has Catacomb succeeded in becoming the Wolf-Man’s double, his ghost-writer mediating and to some extent even creating (as did Freud before him) the Wolf-Man’s story? Lines of distinction become blurred and ambivalence becomes a definitive feature of the novel and its characters. The reader cannot be certain who is telling the story or stories and how much any of the stories are based upon fact and how much on fantasy, imagination, projection, distorted perception or just plain lies.

*Double-Wolf* is not always easy to read; like the Wolf-Man himself it sometimes confuses and, one suspects, deliberately so. “It is in classification,” Wespe is told by a travelling companion, “that we can make sense of the world” — it is indeed sometimes difficult to make sense of Castro’s text let alone the world it represents. Some readers in assessing Castro’s novel may find themselves echoing Freud’s response to Wespe: “What you’ve written is bullshit... I, as the reader am the detective. You the writer are the criminal... irresponsible, confessional, hiding in your text. You have a predilection for wandering. You tell a story without seeming to have a point... when you are actually evading the point”. Writing, like psychoanalysis, may after all be just an exercise in con-artistry.

*Double-Wolf* is interesting and thought-provoking, but it is not the sort of novel that will become everybody’s favourite book. Read it if you enjoy ambiguity and have a moderate to high tolerance level for male anal/phallic fantasies and Freud (the last two are naturally coupled).

*Moha Melhem*

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**Death in Denis**

**Larry Death by Denis Freney, Mandarin Australia**

Larry Death is forty, balding, overweight and en route to the dole queue. If the author were Desmond Bagley or Morris West, our hero would be plunged into deep intrigue and after a bit of biff and some raunchy sex, emerge as victor, a man renewed.

But Denis Freney is not Desmond Bagley. Larry’s greatest act of physical prowess is running for cover. And while there are several passionate moments, it’s not the uncontrollable male sex drive in operation but a deep and abiding affection - an emotion which recurs with surprising regularity.

Don’t get the wrong idea; machismo-free thrillers can still be absorbing. The murder of a political activist sends Larry Death speeding from his comfortable communal home in the leafy back streets of Sydney’s Glebe to the seedy squalour of Manila’s sex spots, into the Filipino jungle with the NPA guerillas and in front of a government death squad.

There’s the traditional quota of evil generals, devastatingly beautiful prostitute-subversives, thick-headed cops and eccentric criminals: at times they become predictable. But the hero himself is well-rounded and complex, surprisingly believable despite his obvious unsuitability for the orthodox hero-he-man role.

*Larry Death* is thick with the detail that defines a good thriller, drawn in this case from Freney’s personal experience of Filipino politics and the struggle of the NPA. The exploration of gender politics may not be entirely successful, but Larry Death is a satisfying read.

*Meredith Man*
Bake My Way

From time to time in the glossier sections of the media (ie not Australian Left Review) my eye has fallen upon the puzzling phrase ‘New Age Man’. This appellation often appears beneath photographs of short-haired young men with round framed glasses and pleasantish expressions. These creatures, who all seem to be in advertising, talk earnestly about their emotional commitment to Gillian or Constance and their role in successfully raising little advertising people. One imagines them saying “clao” to their children as they drive away from the creche.

New Age Men seem to be to feminism what Vanilla Ice is to rap music—an easily digestible something substituted for something challenging. This media-created male ideal implies that wealth and the legitimacy of domesticity is rather like a new hobby taken on, not a response to a demand.

Nevertheless, the evolution of this creature from the dank swamp of masculinity is not totally without its positive aspects, if we are to accept that the New Man is a symbolic embodiment of certain questionings. (Just when you think you’ve worn off your English degree, out comes a sentence like that...). This supposedly New Man does not openly harass secretaries. He does not send pornography over the office fax. He perhaps knows one end of his baby from the other. And inevitably, proudly and publicly, he asserts his ability to bake bread.

Baking bread is so replete with notions of 1950’s style motherhood that it was bound to be a hit with those who have taken up domesticity as a choice. For men, baking bread is not problematic. Pastry-cooks aside, it is not replete with problems of oppression or forced presence in a kitchen. Pregnancy and bare feet do not loom screaming from the loaves as they burst over the top of the pan. Men are free to rise with the dough, with images of fecundity providing a pleasurable accompaniment to the magical yeast. Better still, excess testosterone can be expended in thumping into the nascent loaves, which beats taking it out on Constance.

“M looks so maternal in his apron, dusted with flour. Plus we save a lot of money in gym fees as his biceps get a good workout during kneading.” That’s how one besotted woman of my acquaintance described her partner for life’s yeast-infested skill. But the truth of the matter is that breadmaking talent definitely rates high in the New Age Seduction Platform, so long as any hippie vestiges can be eliminated. Women, poor creatures that we are, feel pathetically grateful at any sign of domestic skill in men. And, as comments such as “nice tis luv” are fairly impossible as invitations to dalliance (as I assume they always were), it helps the Confused Sex to have a few accomplishments up their sleeves. One of which is to roll them up and get your fist stuck into a big trembling lump of dough. Images of masculinity are changing. Let us imagine Clint Eastwood, sans gun, in an apron saying “Bake My Way”. Real Men, it seems, have a bun in their own oven.

My bread recipe comes from Doris Brett’s Australian Bread Book. This is a great book, except for the appalling jokes throughout—such as “things you knead to know” as a chapter title. Not that I can talk. The author describes this bread as “like Australian Rules footballers” because it’s a “high riser”. On the other hand, it is also “like Bo Derek” because it is “tasty, with a lot of body”. Obviously this bread is confused as to its sexuality, but I suggest you go right ahead and eat it anyway.

**Simple White Bread**

- 2 teaspoons (1 x 7g sachet) dried yeast
- 1.5 cups lukewarm water
- 4 teaspoons sugar
- 4 teaspoons salt
- 4 cups white flour
- 1 egg yolk to glaze
- sesame seeds for topping

**Quantity:** 1 large loaf, or 12 small rolls

Dissolve the yeast in 1/4 cup of lukewarm water with 1/4 teaspoon of sugar. Allow to stand 5-10 mins, until frothy. Meanwhile, in a large bowl mix 3 cups flour, salt and remaining sugar. Add frothy yeast mixture and remaining water. Slowly add the last cup of flour until the mixture is stiff enough to form a dough.

Remove the dough from the bowl and knead for 15 mins, until smooth and elastic. Brush dough lightly with oil, cover it loosely with plastic or a damp tea towel, and allow it to stand and double in volume. When dough has risen, punch it down and knead it again briefly. Shape into rolls or a loaf. Brush lightly with oil and allow it/them to double again, covered as before. When risen, brush with egg yolk, sprinkle with seeds and bake in preheated 200C degree oven for about 15 mins or until baked through (longer for the loaf).

Personally, I have never had much luck making bread, which is due either to an unconscious rebellion against patriarchal oppression or laziness. Homemade bread makes a lot of the packaged stuff look decidedly ill, and it’s well worth a bit of smugness from someone to get some, girls.

Penelope Cottier.
DEAR DR HARTMAN

Who Needs to Read?

Hello patients,
The topic for our consultation this month is coloured paper. It seems that when governments want to chat to the people in a democracy, they do it by writing a Green Paper. All the serfs are asked to read the paper and send their comments back to the summit of power. These comments are shredded and used for insulation under the lino in the Parliamentary Members Bar. Then the government issues a White Paper which tells the masses exactly what they were planning to do all along. This paper chase is called ‘democracy in action’.

This month the federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins, is due to release one of these White papers. It will be called something like The Language of Australia and its contents will shape the whole future direction of language education for adults in this country.

If you enjoyed those programs about adult literacy classes on ABC TV (which gave us some relief from Coronation Street Goes to London—alias The Eastenders), then you’ll be interested in the contents of this White Paper. The trouble is, of course, that many of the people who really need to know what the Canberra mandarins are up to, won’t be able to find out because they can’t read the thing. I guess that’s just one of the little ironies of writing policy about literacy.

Now, the world of adult literacy teaching is full of a lot of woolly-minded bolsheviks who cling to outmoded notions about ‘social justice’ and ‘equity’. They gleaned these ideas from the reform movements of the 19th century.

These teachers studied Modern History in high school. Some fool of a teacher let them read The Rights of Man and the American Constitution, and they actually took all that poppycock about equality seriously. TAFE Colleges and the Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES) are full of teachers who actually believe that people have a right of access to reading and writing classes. Given half a chance, these misguided enthusiasts will babble on about the importance of literacy in a democracy if people are to participate and understand the issues of the day.

These literacy zealots don’t just want the working class and the foreigners to be able to tick the right box on the ballot paper. They actually want the masses to be able to assess critically the complex range of information that is hurtling about in a multimedia society. These teachers have their students debating issues and ideas during their reading and writing classes instead of getting them simply to focus on phonics as they should.

Quite frankly, what these teachers really need is a month or two back with Year 7 in an overcrowded, under-resourced classroom on the outskirts of a capital city. With 30 or so teenagers from as many different countries in front of them, they might remember the fundamental importance of social control.

Thank goodness the contributors to the Green and White Papers don’t need to be reminded. Social control was clearly on their minds when they foreshadowed the New Start program for the long-term unemployed. If those bludgers want to keep getting a slice of my taxes, they now have to accept “appropriate education and training”. That should give them the incentive to learn how to read the application form for the dole!

When I say these youngsters have to ‘accept’ education and training, I should point out that it is all ‘negotiated’. Some whingers are claiming that to call this process ‘negotiating a contract’ is Orwellian because the unemployed have no power to ‘negotiate’ in a situation where they are so desperate for the money.

Quite frankly, this is rot and Orwell’s imagination wasn’t capable of predicting the full glory of the 1990s. ‘Powerless negotiation’ is something the worker bees in our social hive need to get used to as quickly as possible. Once the new deregulated industrial relations climate is established, every little bee will be talking directly to the Queen.

Critics of the White Paper are going to worry their little heads that more and more literacy lessons will be offered to workers in industry who need to be ‘cleverer’, like the Prime Minister. At the same time, fewer and fewer literacy lessons will be offered to women with young children, people with disabilities and older people in retirement who have finally got the time to learn how to read. These critics argue that literacy provision will become more ‘economically driven’ rather than ‘needs driven’.

Quite simply, their fears are groundless. The baby breeders don’t need to read to find out how to reproduce the little economic units of the future. I’m sure their men will explain it all when they get home from their literacy lessons at work. And if anyone wants to understand the important issues of the day, they only have to turn on the TV. Ray Martin can cover Republicanism and 60 Minutes can cover Multiculturalism. Who needs to read?

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