THE FACE OF THE 90s?

Hewson's Hour
REASON FOR THE REASON.

"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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Calling the Tune

For some it will always be the Beijing massacre, but most will remember it as the Tiananmen massacre. No matter by which label it is remembered, the event will remain, if it remains at all, in the popular mind as the senseless slaughter of an unspecified, but large, number of innocent students who gave their lives for the cause of democracy. These are imperfect perceptions, but they have become cemented as the 'facts' of the occurrences in Beijing two years ago this month.

To be sure, some students were killed or imprisoned, but it was for the Chinese workers who participated in the protests that the authorities reserved the harshest penalties. It is the traditional role of students to protest, and the Chinese Communist Party feels no threat so long as the demonstrations are confined to students. When workers become involved, the dangers of industrial unrest and economic damage loom. Although the CCP leadership issued directives as early as 21 April 1989, these went largely unheeded. Political rivals at the highest echelons used the growing unrest to jockey for the upper hand in affairs of state. It was only after party secretary Zhao Ziyang and other 'reformers' were thoroughly out-maneuvered that the conservatives, ranged behind the public face of Li Peng, began the crackdown which culminated in the bloody events in the early hours of 4 June.

Certainly there were calls for democracy, but far more numerous were the cries of outrage at official corruption and the fall in living standards. For at least two years before the events of 1989 there had been an ideological tug-of-war between reformist and conservative leaders over the direction of economic reforms. At its core were the questions of how tightly the economy should be controlled and how to deal with the phenomenon of inflation which, by 1989, was officially put at 18%, but was actually running closer to 40%. Reformist leaders favoured almost total decentralisation, leaving market forces to direct the economy. It is said that they insisted that economic reform could not proceed without political reform. The conservatives favoured a closely supervised economy: they said the economy could be as free as a caged bird. It was an indecisive shuffle which took the economy nowhere. The conservatives held sway in August 1988 long enough to implement their policy of price reform, which led to rampant hoarding and public outcry before fizzling out a few months later.

In the two years since Tiananmen, the Cold War has ended and communism is said to have died. Yet China has scarcely noticed. Under the conservatives the economy has been consolidated, though even the conservatives are said to have conceded limited decentralisation. They feel sufficiently in control to have again introduced price adjustments for some basic items like cooking oil and grain. There are signs, too, that the economy is heating up.

Some moderates, like the erstwhile mayor of Shanghai, Zhy Ronji, are again being appointed to senior positions of state. All in all, while there has been a bit of tinkering at the margins, the basic problems remain, and it is only a question of time before the CCP is again locked into bitter dispute over how to resolve the impasses of economic reform and mounting public discontent. For all the tough talk of Western governments since Tiananmen, China has hardly lost out in international markets. Despite appearances to the contrary, Australian trade—excepting wool—with China hasn't really suffered. If anything, the trade advantage has shifted to China's favour. (In 1987-88 it was running to Australia's advantage by $430m; in 1989-90 it favoured China by $30m.)

However, there is one storm cloud on China's trade horizon. The US trade deficit is running in China's favour to the tune of $10.4 billion, and it's for this reason that the US is now threatening to remove China's most favoured trading nation status. This is the most serious threat that China has faced since opening its doors in 1978. As a measure of its desperation, China is prepared to go to the unprecedented length of allowing an Australian delegation to investigate human rights. Nobody, except possibly a public Gareth Evans, seriously believes that the delegation will be able to view the dirty linen, but China hopes that the exercise will be enough to hoodwink the US into extending its MFN status. The exercise really shows that China still knows what tunes to call and how to call them.

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They say it's the toughest job in politics, "they" being the ones who have taken it on and failed. Leaders of the opposition exist, after all, for only one reason: to work themselves out of a job by becoming Prime Minister.

For the first half of our federal history, their record was pretty good; most succeeded in the task. But in the post-war years a worrying trend has developed. Four—Robert Menzies, Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser and Bob Hawke—made it. Six—Bert Evatt, Arthur Calwell, Bill Hayden, Andrew Peacock and John Howard—did not.

After their final losses, both Evatt and Calwell got out of sight rather than serve under other leaders. But the more recent losers have taken a very different approach. For each, the inevitable period of outrage when their parties replaced them was comparatively shortlived, and each was prepared to continue in parliament, albeit with somewhat reduced ambition.

Snedden went on to become Speaker, a position in which he positively revelled; Hayden leapt into foreign affairs. Now, of course, he is at Government House which he rather sadly regards as the apotheosis of his career. It is also hard not to believe that Hayden always basically saw himself as a pick and shovel man rather than foreman material. Like

Which brings us to Hewson's place in the hierarchy of opposition leaders. On the surface, he seems destined directly for the winner's circle. The opinion polls have him as a shoo-in. And certainly his background puts him well ahead of most: merchant banker, academic, restaurant owner, Ferrari driver. None of the cultural deprivation which may have affected Snedden, Hayden and Howard, and enough solid achievement to overcome the dilettante image which eventually hamstrung Peacock.

But despite all the optimism on the conservative side of politics, Hewson remains, for the present at least, unclassifiable. He has simply not been around for long enough to be tested. Even Hawke had a couple of years in parliament before he felt ready to thrust greatness upon himself, and was only opposition leader for the period of the 1983 campaign proper, which may have been just as well for him. A leader is a great deal more exposed than a shadow minister, even one as prominent as Hawke.

Hewson was seconded to the leadership with not only less parliamentary experience, but far less training in the knock-'em-down-drag-'em-out school of politics in which Hawke and Paul Keating excel. So far, this has been an advantage: Hewson is seen as fresh and honest, if a bit naive. He has had an easy run, partly because the government has been in more or less constant confusion since the last election, and partly because parliament has not been sitting much. There is an irony in this, as parliament is traditionally the opposition's best chance to score off the government; in recent years it has become more a place where governments destroy opposition leaders by portraying them as the disciples of the negative; as whingers. In opposition, it is an easy tag to get and a hard one to shake.

Oppositions simply cannot put together a comprehensive plan for the nation overnight and, even if they try, the government is sure to label it an irresponsible wish list. So far, Hewson's whinges have been muted, and his wish lists tentative, but with up to two years before the next election, the honeymoon cannot last the full distance. Sooner or later, Hewson will find out whether he really has the toughest job in politics. If he survives it he will need nerve, luck, and the continued reassurance of the polls which have given him his big early kick along. If he does not, he will, like the other losers, blame the media. If only we were so important.

MUNGO McCallum observed several opposition leaders come and go from the vantage point of the parliamentary press gallery.
Rubberly figures

So it turns out that the NSW budget deficit is likely to be at least as great as that of Victoria. And still, the NSW Labor Party runs an election bumper sticker that slags John Cain. Not Brian Burke, mind you. Nor John Bannon. But John Cain, whose real sin is that he doesn’t play with the big boys.

My friends in Sydney have been astounded by the revelation. Mostly, I gather, because Cain and Victoria provided a reassuring joke when conversations about Sydney real estate turned teary. And the editor of this august journal assures me that Sydneysiders have taken extraordinary comfort from the fact that the NSW economy is genuinely superior to that of Victoria. While St Petersburg is besieged, Tinseltown bustles on heroically.

Personally, I can’t understand the fuss. Anyone with a hint of how budgets work would have known that the weakening trend in Victoria was likely to appear elsewhere, and certainly in NSW. But somehow Premier Nick Greiner managed to keep people believing that NSW was immune. Well, good luck to him.

The tedious detail is, to some extent, revealing. Still, it says more about the falsity of recent claims to managerial excellence of certain politicians than it does about economics. I suspect, actually, that NSW Opposition leader Bob Carr has no one who can add up. Either that, or Labor is more keen to rubbish its internal dissidents than it is to pursue its political task of opposition.

On 1 May, Nick Greiner had a memo from the deputy secretary of the NSW Treasury, Michael Lambert. The stated issue was an assertion by Professor Bob Walker of the University of NSW that, properly compared, the NSW and Victorian budget deficits were roughly the same. Lambert told Greiner that they weren’t, because of the State Bank Victoria (SBV) fiasco. But I’ll come to that later. He did (almost) confirm Walker’s estimate of a budget deficit of $1178 million. Lambert forecast $1175 million. And that, apparently, is news to NSW.

The reason for this is that the comparisons people have used are quite different. On face value, the original NSW budget had a surplus of $34 million. Victoria’s had a deficit of about $600 million. The trouble is that the original NSW budget actually had a deficit of $635 million; it was just expressed differently to that of Victoria.

As things got worse, NSW did what Victoria had done. It borrowed more. The Lambert memo notes $100 million of transport borrowings and $40 million for housing. And it slipped another $400 million in for the collapse in revenue since the budget was framed. So, it seems, the emperor’s new clothes have been revealed to be a touch out of date. Victorian even.

Really, you can’t blame Greiner for that. Sure, he’s made the most of the camouflage. But what do people expect? And what was the Opposition doing? Plainly, they weren’t talking to any Victorians. If they had spoken to Victorians, Bob Carr and his mates might have gleaned a few useful facts. Like the budget difference. But, of course, there was the titanic disaster of Pyramid and the SBV. And that, really, is what has Victorians down.

Michael Lambert told Nick Greiner that Victoria’s deficit was actually around $2555 million, not the $1103 million calculated by Professor Walker. Lambert added in $1455 million, which he calculated to be the net debt added by selling SBV and keeping the “assets” of the failed Tricontinental merchant bank.

Now Lambert’s numbers might well be right. And no one doubts that the SBV has cost Victorians a lot more than ownership of their one-time piggybank. But this is not a fair cop on a number of counts. First, if you compare like with like, the deficit on normal budget outcomes is likely in fact...
to be worse in NSW than in Victoria. Time will tell. But that is how it looks. Second, the failure of SBV is an issue subject to a royal commission. Without wanting to pre-empt anything it might find, the evidence before the royal commission has, so far, tended to finger poor management, weak directors, doubtful audit practices and curious business. No one has said that Cain or his colleagues knew of, or did anything to support, the practices that led to SBV's sinking.

On the contrary, every witness who has been asked - and they often would have found comfort in blaming anyone else - has said that the government did nothing at all to affect bank policies. Maybe they should have. But that's another question.

Now, to get back on the track, it is true that SBV will add a huge debt that will plump up the budget's interest costs. So will the underwriting of Pyramid building society deposits. Yet neither arose from government mismanagement.

Still, Nick Greiner can say fairly that on the facts of life amid fantasies of wealth his annual report has been moved, especially in this climate, to make too much fun of those who hit the wall and crumbled ambitions. All of us have known that SBNSW is not in quite the crack shape that is presented. And while, from this distance, it is hard to read events in NSW, there are a few signs that things might not stay that way. Broadly, it is true that Victoria slumped first. The signs are that NSW has followed. We also know that a lot of the 80s problems take time to emerge. So Greiner should be on guard. Then there is the State Bank of NSW.

Cynical people have put about rumours that SBNSW is not in quite the crack shape that is presented. And I hear whispers that the balance date for its annual report has been moved, curiously, from June to September. And there are bankers who will tell you that the troubled Chase-AMP bank would like SBNSW as a merger partner. Straws in the wind, of course.

All of this is largely secondary. The recession has come. It has revealed facts of life amid fantasies of wealth and crumbled ambitions. All of us will pay for it. It is unwise of politicians, especially in this climate, to make too much fun of those who hit the wall first.

MICHAEL GILL is a Melbourne finance journalist on the Financial Review.

Serb Apart

Like most of Belgrade’s nightspots, the Jazz and Blues Club usually comes to life around midnight. But this evening the dimly-lit bar is packed by 7 pm. Through a haze of cigarette smoke the young people crowd into the tiny room.

Since the March anti-government demonstrations here in Serbia, the night club has functioned as the Serbian student movement’s de facto headquarters. One bespectacled student breaks the silence: "The situation in Serbia is a catastrophe. Over a year after every other country in eastern Europe overthrew Communism, only Serbia doesn’t have real democracy. We’ve become isolated from Europe".

On this point the students all concur. The goal of the Forum of the Terazije parliament, as the students call themselves, is authentic democracy in Serbia, Yugoslavia’s biggest republic. At the same time, the Forum must remain true to its original principles: no formal structures, leaders or political ideology. "We see our movement as something like what New Forum was in Germany or Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia", says Zoran, a 23-year-old biology student. Though led by Belgrade university students, the Forum includes intellectuals, actors, journalists and high school pupils.

The nascent democracy movement has set itself clearly against the ruling Serbian Socialist Party (SPS), the renamed Communists, and its autocratic leader, Serb president Slobodan Milosevic. Their main demands: an end to media censorship and the resignation of the Interior Minister, responsible for the crackdown which ended in the army’s occupation of central Belgrade in March.

During the day, students staff petition tables in front of the fountain on Terazije Square, conveniently across the street from the new McDonalds. The sea of chic outdoor cafes and posh boutiques in central Belgrade attests to a society which was never part of the Soviet bloc. A Serbia so politically out of step with even its Balkan neighbours is for the proud Serbs a source of acute embarrassment.

During the March demonstrations, the students awakened a critical consciousness in Serbia that the conventional opposition parties had left dormant. "The student protests marked the onset of democracy in Serbia", notes civil rights lawyer Sergei Popovic. "Politics in Serbia has finally begun. Until now public discourse more resembled a battle between warring tribes."

In contrast to the frenzied nationalism which had already brought the Yugoslav peoples to the brink of civil war, the students’ common sense politics sounds eminently reasonable. "The nationalism has begun to lose its effect", says Mina between mouthfuls of her Big Mac and fries. "The government has hidden from real democracy by blaming our countless enemies -- the Croats, the Slovenes, the CIA. People have stopped buying it."

At the same time, the nationalism that won Milosevic the students’ hearts three years ago has left its mark. The same worn cliches about Serbia’s great suffering, its lost glory and legendary military prowess continue to reinforce an identity that implicitly works against supra-national reconciliation.

"We aren’t openly driving for the government’s overthrow", says Alexander, a medical student. "But opposition will grow naturally if we can open the space for a new political culture in Serbia." It is the blocked channels of information and dialogue which maintain Milosevic’s rule, he says. "With those channels free, Milosevic’s fall would be inevitable."

PAUL HOCKENOS writes for ALR from central Europe.
Hearts of darkness come two a penny these days. 'The horror, the horror' that both Conrad and Coppola strove to suggest has now become 'the hype, the hype'. So you want to delve deeply into the putrid imaginings of murderers, rapists and torturers? You want to rip open the fleshy underbelly of 'the way we live now' and watch the blood and guts slowly ooze out? Well, feel free. After all, as good old Jim Morrison sang way back when, "This is the end, My friend".

If it's dismembered bodies you are after, forget the Gulf. Get yourself to the movies. Curl up with a novel. Watch Twin Peaks. The new psycho-killers are everywhere and they make Norman Bates look adorable. After the air-brushed whimsies of last year - Ghost and Pretty Woman - Hollywood has got horrible. But the slasher at a teenage slumber party has grown up. The 90s villains are slick, sexy and sophisticated. What more could a girl want than a serial killer? Anthony Hopkins as Hannibal 'the Cannibal' Lecter in Jonathan Demme's The Silence of the Lambs is "witty, charismatic, artistic and, in a twisted way, a little gallant". It's a pity that he also happens to eat people.

Patrick Bateman, hero of Brett Easton Ellis' American Psycho, is also described as 'handsome, sophisticated, charming and intelligent'. He just gets kicks out of sex with severed heads and putting rats in women's vaginas. Patrick Bergin, recently seen beating up Julia Roberts in Sleeping With The Enemy, also stars as a serial killer in Love Crimes. And in case you should think that this is a peculiarly male or even American psychosis, you will be glad to know that David Lynch's daughter Jennifer is directing Boxing Helena, which stars Kim Basinger as a woman who is cut into pieces and put into boxes by another loony man.

Helen Zahavi's radical feminist/radical revenge novel, Dirty Weekend, in which the much put upon Bella spends a couple of days killing men, is to be made into a film by that well known radical feminist director Michael (Death Wish) Winner. The novel, endorsed by Andrea Dworkin and Julie Burchill, was described in The Observer as "more offensive than pornography".

So what are we to make of all this? Is it all some terrible fin-de-siecle decadence, a sign of immoral times, proof that we have become so desensitised that anything goes? Probably not, though the 'ban it and burn it' brigade would like to have us think so. Yet I do think that the lack of critical debate, never mind critical terms in which to discuss these things, is severely limited. For a start the attention paid to these films and books reflects an enormous critical snobbery. There are and always have been far worse novels and films around whether you call them exploitation movies, trash novels or genre fiction. It's just that they don't get reviewed in the pages of the newspaper supplements.

We know American Psycho is Literature with a big L because Norman Mailer has publicly defended it. The Silence of the Lambs is not some teen horror flick, it's an artful film by an arty director. In other words, it is only when these things enter middle-brow culture that we begin to make a fuss about them.

But the fuss we make often boils down to little more than an argument over good and bad art. If American Psycho works as a novel, is well written, then maybe its scenes of sadism are excusable. Defenders of Ellis offer us aesthetics over politics - the right of the artist to force us to look at intolerable material in whatever way he or she pleases. Those who would ban the book, such as the American National Organisation for Women, care

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Bobby and Mike brood violence in Twin Peaks.
Cambodia's Saddam?

The Vietnam war is over. Relocated to the Gulf, America's 'Vietnam syndrome' has finally been vanished.

But the Cambodian War seems never-ending. The remnants of three previous Cambodian regimes have combined forces to oppose the current one, Hun Sen's State of Cambodia. Its main opponents are Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge forces, backed by China. Pol Pot's two non-communist allies, Prince Sihanouk and Son Sann, are backed by the US.

Last year the USA and other members of the United Nations Security Council proposed the latest peace plan involving disarmament of all parties and free elections. But it is not close to implementation, for two reasons. Firstly, it insists on a 'comprehensive solution' of all issues and with the agreement of all parties. These include the Khmer Rouge, who killed 1.5 million urban and rural Cambodians before Vietnamese troops drove them from power in 1979. The UN plan seeks to give Pol Pot's forces "the same rights, freedoms and opportunities to take part in the electoral process" as any other Cambodians.

By contrast, the Hun Sen regime refuses to drop the charge of genocide against the Khmer Rouge. Further, it would disarm its own forces only if the Khmer Rouge do so. Pol Pot's forces could take advantage of the UN plan by caching their weapons and hiding their troops. Pol Pot foreshadowed this in 1988 when he told his commanders that, in the event of a settlement, "our forces will remain in the jungle for self-defence".

The Khmer Rouge were defeated by the Vietnamese army in 1979. But since then they have staged what is being called a "remarkable comeback", especially since Vietnamese forces withdrew in 1989. Their key asset has been the continuing international recognition of the Khmer Rouge as Cambodia's "legitimate government". Pol Pot's ambassador still runs Cambodia's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York. This brings massive UN aid to Khmer Rouge forces on the Thai-Cambodian border.

They also get $100 million a year from China, and $50 million from sales of Cambodian rubies in Thailand. Though they could expect at best 20% of a popular vote, the Khmer Rouge have rebuilt a powerful army. Two superpowers' support for their return to Cambodia enables them to wage civil war there. A new military regime in Thailand now looks set to help them some more. This 'Lebanonisation' of Cambodia is an international creation.

Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge's only Cambodian opponent, the Hun Sen regime, is denied international aid. A decade of US and UN embargoes has limited the Western aid presence to far more interesting than asking about their anonymous victims or looking at the everyday and collective violence that surrounds us. Yet, as Ellis says, we are prone "toward fantasy, but it's often a mean-spirited horror-show fantasy", and such fantasies have little time for real moral conflict or ambiguity of any kind. How we regard such fantasies, though, does not have to be so simple. The choice is not between aesthetics or politics - any judgment we make, for we are all critics here, has to include both. Because this stuff isn't going to go away - never mind Safe Sex, welcome to Safe Death.

SUZANNE MOORE is a British freelance writer and film critic. This piece was originally published in the May issue of Marxism Today, and is reproduced here by arrangement.
agencies like Church World Service and Oxfam America. That presence is now more precious than ever, with Soviet aid cut by 80% this year.

Despite calling for a "comprehensive solution", Washington embargoes only one side. It is aiding the allies of Pol Pot to the tune of $20 million this year. They are now building their own little 'liberated zone', a slice of Lebanon on the Thai border. They recently attacked a civilian refugee camp in Cambodia, murdering nine people, including a pregnant woman and an elderly man, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross' representative there.

Meanwhile in Thailand, 300,000 Cambodian refugees wait in hopelessness. They are not allowed to leave the camps of the opposition factions who control them. A proposal by Thailand's last elected prime minister for 'neutral camps' to which the refugees would be free to move and to choose their future, was opposed by the US. More of Lebanon in the making.

It is high time to bite the bullet. Peace in Cambodia should not have to wait until Hanoi is prepared to force Cambodians to have the Khmer Rouge back, or until Hun Sen is obliged to drop the charge of genocide, or until those responsible for the genocide feel ready for a ceasefire. The Khmer Rouge must be brought to justice, not to power. Expecting Cambodians to ignore Khmer Rouge crimes is a recipe for unending civil war.

Instead of deferring a ceasefire, the US should insist on one. The West should move to expel the Khmer Rouge from the UN, end US aid to Pol Pot's allies, and resume aid to Cambodia's long-suffering population. Washington's current policy winks at the Khmer Rouge.

And if Saddam Hussein deserves a war crimes trial, Pol Pot should go before the International Court of Justice for breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention.

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The union movement had no choice but to reject the recent National Wage Case decision but there will be little or no joy for low-paid workers out of the coming industrial battles in the field. In the current environment, even the traditionally strong unions will find it difficult going.

And, of course, this is why the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) made such a rotten decision. Believing the shackles of a recession would hold the union movement in line, they felt able to toss the Accord into the face of the unions and the federal ALP.

As the ACTU's response has indicated, they may have overestimated what the unions would swallow - yet in one sense their assessment was correct. Most workers are just happy to have a job when so many of their kind are consigned to the dole queue. Achieving the aims of the Accord package in the field will be a difficult and drawn-out exercise for many unions who have been itching for such an opportunity since the boom times of the 80s. And the longer it takes the strong unions in the metals, building and transport sectors to achieve their package, the longer low-paid workers will wait for any flow-on pay rises.

One of the major reasons why the ACTU was so keen to reject this IRC decision is that it flew directly in the face of its strategy for Accord Mark VI. A central motivation of the package negotiated in the boom period of early 1990 was the need to satisfy a widespread demand in the union movement for "a good old fashioned pay rise". That's the one where you put your hand up, say "me too", and your members receive a flat increase to compensate for the previous year's inflation.

Accord Mark VI was designed to provide just this and, in addition, allow scope for the strong unions to negotiate more for productivity increases. At the time of its negotiation Accord Mark VI delicately juggled all the major concerns. The low-paid would be protected, the strong would have scope for more but without the threat of a wholesale wages breakout, and the federal ALP could claim to be the only party capable of running a coherent wages policy.

By bringing down a decision which is percentage based, and therefore directly hits the low-paid—and, more importantly, is tied to further award restructuring upon application on an award-by-award basis, and only for those workers who have finalised their second phase 3% increase—the IRC was saying loud and clear that the low-paid were not its concern.

The reason why the low-paid are already low-paid is precisely because of their lack of bargaining power. Under the IRC decision the low-paid were only to receive a pay increase (equivalent to less than the flat $12) if they had received the previous one. Submissions to the National Wage Case from the federal government showed that, in August last year, only 54% of workers had received the 3% from the second tier of Accord Mark V. Even if that number has increased since, a large proportion of workers would still be totally ineligible to receive anything from this decision. And, of course, the low-paid, without industrial muscle will be disproportionately represented among those who haven't received the second 3%.

In addition, payment of the 2.5% across-the-board increase proposed by the IRC would only be considered for low-paid workers when what amounted to further trade-offs were agreed. And, significantly, the current round of trade-offs specifically includes modes of employment. In effect, the IRC is proposing that if unions
agree to greater part-time, casual and temporary work, and trade on award conditions, their members can receive the minimal 2.5% increase.

For those unions such a wage rise was not based on any concept of genuine productivity improvements; no member would be better trained as a result; rather, it was a question of what hard-won conditions they were willing to trade.

The award restructuring process is an important one, and it must continue. However, there is a difference between award restructuring and straight trade-offs where employers are too narrow-minded to seek mutual benefits and instead simply aim to reduce the price of labour rather than help create and foster a trained and effective full-time workforce.

The ACTU's rejection of the IRC decision will mean forgoing any pay increase this calendar year for many low-paid workers. For the unions in this area, however, this is seen as the lesser of two evils.

On an historical analysis it is most likely that the union movement will move back under the IRC umbrella when this current wages round is over (the pilots will most likely opt out at this stage). While there has been harsh criticism of the IRC from the labour movement, there have not been calls for the complete abandonment of a centralised wages system from the union movement.

The federal ALP has been very careful in its criticism of the IRC. It had no option but to reject this decision because not to do so would mean the end of the Accord process and the destruct-

Bill Kelty, ACTU Secretary

tion in one swoop of what it believes is a key policy difference with the Liberals. But the waterfront agreement and comments from Hawke and other ministers clearly indicate that they view this rejection of the IRC decision as confined to this National Wage Case.

Nevertheless, whether unions return to, or remain outside, the centralised system, the next few years could be very bleak for the industrially weak, as indeed for the whole union movement.

If the Coalition wins the next election—as seems highly likely—the trend towards enterprise bargaining will accelerate. John Howard has claimed that they will call a double dissolution if their industrial agenda is blocked by the Senate.

And, of course, Howard's conception of enterprise bargaining is radically different from anything the ACTU or the IRC currently talk about. It is designed so that unions will have only a minor role to play—preferably none at all. It is aimed at ensuring that 100% of the workforce don't receive a union-won pay rise when only 40% are unionised.

By dismantling the award system and leaving in place a token minimum wage, the vast majority of the workforce, and especially those without a strong bargaining position, will be significantly worse off. For employers it will, in most cases, be enterprise bargain-hunting.

Of course, John Howard argues that workers will be better off under the Liberals’ enterprise bargaining—even in the context of the current recessionary environment. Yet how could unskilled workers conceivably negotiate a better package for themselves when there are hundreds willing to take their place? Without award protection, workers would be forced to accept jobs with low wages, without penalty rates, long service leave, superannuation, reductions in annual leave, sick leave and so on. And if one worker decides to fight for better conditions, the next (who will not be entitled to any unemployment relief after nine months) may gladly accept the position on the conditions laid down by the employer.

Skilled workers who are members of strong unions will survive any radical change like this in better shape than the low-paid because market forces will persuade employers of the logic of granting pay rises. Even under Thatcher's industrial relations regime in Britain in the 80s, well organised, skilled workers managed to win good pay rises. As long as their bargaining power is maintained they always will.

However, as standards of living continue to decline, it will be those who are in the worst position to cope and respond who will bear the full brunt of any conservative onslaught.

GERRY KITCHENER is an industrial officer with the No. 2 Branch of the Victorian Health Services Union.
A year ago Lindsay Tanner opened our discussion on the future of the ALP. Here he surveys the debate and proposes more unsettling thoughts. Labor's malaise is not just a crisis of membership, he argues. Rather, labourism itself is in its death throes, and it has no obvious successor.

The public debate on the future of the Australian Labor Party's structure and organisational approach is now over a year old. It is set to reach a crescendo at the party's centenary National Conference in late June. At that conference, four interconnecting themes will dominate a debate which will be critical in determining the party's future.

In my June 1990 ALR article "Labor's Turbulent Tribes", which helped set off that public debate, I commented: "Divisions within existing Labor factions are becoming as significant as divisions between factions". Subsequent events, particularly in Victoria, have made this comment seem almost prophetic. A few years ago the prospect of the Hard Left splitting from the Left in an open and organised way and doing a preselection deal with the Right would have been almost unthinkable. The fact that it has occurred in Victoria is a symptom both of the organisational decay of the Labor Party and the gradual erosion of the existing factional landscape.

The emergence of the Pledge Unions group in Victoria is illustrative of the increasingly dominant axis of division within the Labor Party—a division which straddles factional boundaries. The division is between those who may be described as "rationalist" and others who may be seen as "traditionalists" (or in each other's opinions, "sellouts" and "troglobytes"). It is seen on both Left and Right in the Labor spectrum, and is reflected in the catch-cries surrounding
the debate on structures, such as "returning to our traditional base" or "adapting in a changing world".

The rationalists in both Left and Right are keen on the Accord, still generally enthusiastic about the importance of being in government, supporters of award restructuring and union amalgamation, and strongly influenced by developments in other Western countries. They have substantially relaxed or even abandoned their commitment to certain articles of Labor faith such as public ownership, non-intervention in other people's wars, and day-to-day maintenance of workers' living standards. The Rationalists tend to be corporatist, managerial and "modern" in their approach, and are often highly educated. The ACTU leadership, the Centre Left and the Socialist Forum group in Victoria are prime examples of this tendency. It is also manifested in the Right through Ministers such as David White and Neil Pope in Victoria and Simon Crean federally. Rightwing Rationalists are seen as people whom the Left (or, rather, the Rationalist Left) "can work with", and vice versa.

The Traditionalists are either suspicious of or openly opposed to the Accord, disillusioned not only with current Labor governments but in some cases even with the concept of trying to govern, wary of award restructuring, generally opposed to union amalgamations as envisaged by the ACTU, and much more autarkic in their general outlook. Their commitment to key articles of faith remains largely unaffected by recent experience of government and
international change. Traditionalists dislike the corporatist approach of the Rationalists, and are usually suspicious of the highly educated. The ALP Right in New South Wales is strongly divided, essentially on Rationalist-Traditionalist lines, and in Victoria there exists a similar division within the Right—although the Rightwing Traditionalists do not differ quite so starkly from the Rationalists in their group. The NSW Electrical Trades Union disaffiliation from the ALP is a clear illustration of a Traditionalist perspective in action on the Right. The Labor Unity/Pledge Unions preselection deal in Victoria is another good example: although obviously engendered by a number of factors, this deal was primarily an alliance between Traditionalists from different parts of the political spectrum.

These generalised descriptions inevitably span an extremely diverse collection of groupings and individuals. Other axes of division such as Left-Right are obviously still very important. However, political divisions while rooted in history are always fashioned and redefined by contemporary events. The big issues of the day facing the Australian Labor movement are producing more polarisation between Rationalist and Traditionalist than between Left and Right. This Rationalist-Traditionalist polarisation will be at the heart of the June National Conference debate, and will cut across factional boundaries. This is already occurring; ACTU President Martin Ferguson has come out in support of reducing union influence in the ALP against strong opposition from much of both the Left and Right.

In the longer term, both forces have to confront the fact that most of the structures on which traditional ALP faith has been founded—protectionism, conciliation and arbitration, high living standards and trade union strength—are in the process of being drastically weakened or destroyed by international forces beyond our control. The ALP can develop a Rationalist or Traditionalist response to these changes: neither outcome is likely to be particularly palatable.

The second theme which will underpin the National Conference is the culture of Labor politics in Australia. Unfortunately, the ALP is saddled with a political culture dominated by arrogance, exclusivity and intellectual rigidity in an era in which these characteristics are alien to most ordinary people. Reforming this culture is inextricably linked with reform of party structures.

The popular images evoked by Labor politics in Australia—macho aggression, harsh conflict, and upward mobility into the ruling class—are out of date. These images are no better represented than in the persona of Paul Keating. Keating’s admirers may feel that he represents a new policy approach for the 90s, free of outdated Labor shibboleths, but in style and approach he is really a Labor politician of the 40s. The arrogance, the aggression, the Bankstown boy making good among the toffs are essentially antiquated images which no longer strike a chord among ordinary Australians.

Labor’s traditional arrogance towards non-Labor forces on the left of the spectrum and its unspoken assumption of a divine right to rule at least half of that spectrum have left the party in an extremely vulnerable state. The ALP’s membership is tiny and the resources devoted to its education and development are minimal. The union base is eroding, and financial support from business is drying up rapidly. If the Liberals win the forthcoming federal election, public funding will be abolished and compulsory voting may likewise be scrapped. Most community organisations naturally sympathetic to Labor have been alienated, and in the Green/Democrat/Independent axis they have an emerging practical alternative.

And yet, despite these grim signs, the arrogance and complacency lives on. The Labor Unity/Pledge Unions preselection deal in Victoria involves imposing candidates on "safe" Labor seats who neither live in the area nor have any involvement in the local community. The Treasurer talks about the "recession we had to have" as unemployment rates past 10%. And Bob Hogg says that "National Conference is run in a pretty relaxed manner" (ALR, April 1991). In fact, with its plethora of television cameras and lights, dark-suited businessmen and diplomats, and arrogant ministers pouring contempt over dissenting delegates, National Conference is about as accessible to the ordinary ALP activist as a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly.

Labor’s culture and approach is in need of radical overhaul. And, contrary to the objections of those who respond to any proposal for structural tinkering, changing structures is an essential element in reforming culture and approach. Existing structures are the most concrete manifestation of existing culture, and therefore an ideal place to start a reform process.

The issues of political culture which must be addressed have been fairly well canvassed in the debate over the past year: integration into the community, democratisation of processes, softening of style, and genuinely equal participation of women are some of the key mess. Moreover, we must acknowledge, albeit reluctantly, that exploration of such issues leads inevitably to reconsideration of the very basis of the ALP itself, labourism.

The ultimate factor which shapes and sustains the features of a major political movement is the self-image of those who actively support it. The Labor Party was founded by and is still notionally based on ordinary people who see themselves as workers and whose lives are dominated by their participation as employees in the production process and the various consequences of that involvement.

Increasing living standards, shorter working hours, improvements in transport and communications, diversification of economic structures and relationships and changing family structures have seriously eroded the strength of the labourist ethos in popular consciousness. The collective self-image of Australian workers is radically different from and much more complex than that of the 40s. The ready identification with "labour" as a reflection of one’s own basic existence is nowhere near as prevalent as it once was. The 25-year-old secretary—a very typical Australian worker in the 90s—tends not to see herself as a
or Labor voters. Those who aim to maintain a union-based political party with a powerful presence in mainstream Australian politics (and I am obviously one) ignore this fact at their peril.

The proposal from Bob Hogg to reduce the ratio of union to branch involvement in ALP decision-making from 60:40 to 50:50 is an unintentional diversion from the real issue. The true choice we are facing is 60:40 or 0:100.

There are numerous reasons why the institution of union affiliation is under threat. Apart from the decline of labourism and the fact that ordinary workers are not very enthusiastic about it generally, the gap between the interests and obligations of the two wings of the movement has progressively widened as Australian society has diversified. Can anyone now envisage a situation such as that which prevailed in Western Australia until the early 60s where the state ALP branch and the peak trade union body were one and the same? ALP-affiliated trade unions now only represent about 25% of Australia's workers, and are overwhelmingly blue collar. The decline and now demise of the Communist Party has meant that non-ALP union leaders are in general much less committed to the institution of ALP affiliation than their predecessors of previous generations. And most importantly, the union-ALP link will be targeted for destruction by future Liberal governments. If things remain as they are at present, their task may not be too difficult.

The challenge for the Labor movement is to revitalise trade union affiliation to the ALP—and very quickly. If the nexus is not restructured such that it is genuinely supported by affiliated trade union members, it will probably wither and die. The actual proportion of union power in party decision-making, 60:40 or 50:50, is a pretty marginal consideration. The key change which is required is a shift in the centre of gravity of trade union participation in ALP affairs away from union hierarchies and more towards the domain of trade union activists and members. The prospective creation of "super unions" through amalgamations will increase this need: the fewer hands in which union power within the ALP is held, the more vulnerable the entire institution of union affiliation will become.

Any real attempt at preserving the union-ALP nexus may require consideration of some rather startling options, such as permitting affiliation only on the basis of union members' interests and obligations of the two wings of the movement has.

The fourth and perhaps most obvious theme which will dominate the National Conference is how Labor's national decision-making processes should be structured. The inevitable conflict which is brought into focus by this issue is that between democracy and short-term organisational interests.
It is clear that the balance between these essentially competing interests is now so heavily weighted against democracy that it actually also threatens short-term organisational interests such as staying in government. How far the present imbalance needs to be corrected is a matter for debate. Those who assert the literal supremacy of party conferences over governments need to consider just how far such a supremacy should go. In reality, it can only ever be a moral supremacy, no matter how much it is inscribed in stone, because elected MPs owe obligations to their electors as well as to their party. This fact has been starkly exposed by the behaviour of recent Labor governments. The true impotence of the party organisation has been exposed—and what can members do about it? Tearing the party apart through expulsions or removal of preselections is no real solution, because members may find it very difficult to put the pieces back together again. There is no genuine solution other than to work on restoring moral supremacy while acknowledging that the days of a relatively homogeneous and well-disciplined Labor movement in politics may well be over.

Taking this view and obvious numerical realities into account, Bob Hogg’s proposed mechanisms for national ALP decision-making merit some support. Separating out the genuinely administrative functions of the National Executive and vesting them in a small National Administrative Committee is a sensible move, provided that this body concentrates on actually running the party as an organisation. A 250-member National Conference meeting every three years and electing a 40-member National Executive which meets annually in between, is also reasonable. The extension to three years has already happened by default—the last full National Conference was in June 1988. In the light of the existence of factional divisions, a 40-member National Executive with some National Conference-style powers would be little different from the present National Conference of 100. The really worthwhile feature of the proposal is the expansion of National Conference to 250: at last some genuine rank-and-file party activists will get a chance to participate in top-level decision-making. As it is unlikely that a more democratic and participatory model will be adopted, the Hogg proposal deserves support because it is a significant improvement on the status quo. In considering this issue, the Left should be careful to look at the real status quo (governments either determine National Conference decisions or ignore them) rather than just what is written in the rulebook. Hopefully the combined pressures of declining membership and electoral support will generate further democratic reforms in ensuing years.

The debate at the 1991 ALP National Conference will set the scene for further debates on these vital themes throughout the remainder of the decade. Inevitably, much of it will focus on an apparently immutable status quo or a mythical and glorious past. The real value to be obtained from such a debate, however, is a serious consideration of the future which faces us all. For there can be no doubt that the next ALP National Conference will be confronted by a world radically different from the one we live in now.

LINDSAY TANNER is secretary of the Victorian branch of the Federated Clerks Union.

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**Reason and Imagination in Modern Culture**

The early modern period fragmented the world of experience - and ways of conceptualising this experience - in three directions: the aesthetic, the rational and the ethical. But underlying this fragmentation is a broader and deeper division between reason and imagination. The aim of this conference is to present competing contemporary perspectives that explore this division and its impact on modern culture.

Speakers include:
- Cornelius Castoriadis, Ferenc Feher,
- Agnes Heller, Axel Honneth,
- Peter Hohendahl, Martin Jay,
- Niklas Luhman.

**Dates:**
Tuesday 6th - Friday 9th August, 1991

**Place:**
Sir John Monash Business Centre,
5th Floor, 253 Flinders Lane
Melbourne.

**Registration:**
$90, $45 (students, unemployed)
Send to John Rundell
Department of Anthropology and Sociology
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Australia
The WA Inc fiasco has highlighted the dearth of clear principles for government in Australia. In their absence, the style of government in WA degenerated into a semi-secret society of mates. But Gary Wickham argues that the great ideologies of the twentieth century offer little by way of such principles. Perhaps moderation and toleration, rather than the One Great Cause, are the key.

The controversy surrounding the Royal Commission into 'WA Inc' raises many questions about processes of government, including questions about corruption. The Commission, or at least the way it is being reported, is generating a strong impression that the Burke WA government was devoid of principles, regardless of whether any charges of corruption actually emerge.

Unfortunately, the Commission and the media coverage are avoiding direct discussion of the role of principles for government. The sorry tale of 'WA Inc', as we've heard it so far, highlights the ease with which principles for government can be ignored.

Government can go on with or without principles, so there is no need for us to panic. However, it is much more difficult for government to be consistently "good" government (by whatever criteria for judging good) without clear, consistent principles to guide it, so there is some cause for us to despair: Australia definitely lacks clear consistent principles for government at the moment.

In this article I want to reject a variety of oft-touted candidates for the title "clear, consistent principle for government in Australia"—socialism, social democracy, liberalism, the free market principle, agrarian socialism, and environmentalism. I propose instead four principles which have in fact been around for quite a while but never as "clear, consistent principles for government": government itself, civilisation, moderation and toleration.
To consider this issue carefully we need a solid working definition of government. By government I mean the processes whereby a certain target population is defined and then subjected to various forms of regulation in line with some or other aims.

In this way government can go on at many levels. Target populations for government can be defined at the level of the nation, the region, the city, the district, the institution and even the family. All these targets are governed. They are subjected to various forms of regulation in line with some or other aims—better health, more efficient workforce, greater military capability, less inflation, more respect for grandparents, cleaner bathrooms, less polluted beaches and so on.

If this technical definition of government is our solid working definition, you might well ask, surely clear, consistent principles for government are impossible; surely the target populations and the aims for regulation are too diverse to make it possible?

The answer is, "No, but a little bit of yes". There is enough operational overlap between the levels of government—governing the nation overlaps with governing the region, they both overlap with governing the institution and the family, and so on (not a hierarchy of government, but a tapestry)—to suggest that clear, consistent principles can have at least some effect on them all. But the fact that the reach of principles is not automatically total must be seen as a limit on the effect of even clear, consistent principles.

In this article I’m talking mainly about principles for governing Australia’s national population, though I’m not thereby rendering all other levels of government subservient to this one. The effects of the different principles I’m discussing on the other levels can only be assumed up to a point. Ideally, they are the subject matter of separate careful consideration. Let’s now see why each of the various rejected candidates for “clear, consistent principle for governing Australia’s national population” does not measure up.

Socialism, in a variety of forms, has been touted as a principle for Australian government by a wide range of organisations, including the ALP (or at least some factions of it), different Australian communist parties, some unions, and some student groups (to name just a few). I’m rejecting socialism here not just because of the recent spectacular collapse of many of the world’s more notable experiments in socialist government (though that’s surely reason enough), but also because socialism has never worked in the sort of clear, widespread manner I think necessary for a principle to be called a clear, consistent principle.

Socialism has always relied on ill-defined shibboleths like “promoting the working class” and “eliminating obstacles to equality”. Even on the occasions when these sorts of rallying cries have informed policies for national government, through the ALP, their almost mythical qualities have led to policies as diverse as the White Australia policy and government funding for non-government schools, and to a style of government which appears little more than a semi-secret society of mates.

Social democracy appears to be more workable as a principle for government, especially by the ALP. By social democracy I mean the principle whereby socialism is explicitly tailored to suit modern, pluralistic Western democracies. This principle is ostensibly the main principle for government in several prosperous Western European nations, including Sweden and France. Up to the present time in Australia, though, it is no clearer or more consistent than socialism. It too, seemingly, can involve just about any policy and it too, seemingly, involves a most unclear style of government by mateship.

Liberalism looks for all the world like a clear, consistent principle for government. In certain 18th and 19th century hands—particularly, following Locke, those of the utilitarians and J S Mill—I think it was. The trouble is, under late 20th century Australian conditions, it’s not really alive.

Ironically, the Liberal Party seems determined (and, indeed, has done since its formation in 1949) to rid itself of all traces of liberalism, expelling personnel and policies which come close to reflecting it, in favour of those more closely aligned with the free market principle. Political liberalism is sometimes mentioned by the Liberal Party in the same breath as the free market principle, as if there were a natural link between the two; this is more a matter of convenience (part of a hasty search for principled clothing for blatant self interest), than it is a matter of historical fact.

I must conclude that although Australia has a major political party with the name Liberal, and although there are organisations other than parties (like civil liberties associations, for example) promoting it, and although it is quite closely related to one of the principles (toleration) I am advocating in this article, liberalism does not provide a clear, consistent direction for governing Australia’s national population—something a clear, consistent principle should do.

It might be said to be too early to tell whether the free market principle is a clear, consistent principle for government or a smokescreen for the usually unclear, very inconsistent pushing of self-interested barrows which is an inevitable part of government (it has to be inconsistent as there are so many barrows.) I don’t think it is too early, though neither do I think the free market principle is the devil some people on the Left suggest it is.

The idea of the free market is not a principle for government, even though it is currently being judged as such by both major parties in Australia. It is no more than a tool for describing some activities of the national population awaiting government—the barrow-pushing I referred to above. To call this a principle for government is to sell the idea of government short, it is to rob Adam Smith of his crucial moral dimension, to sloganise a fraction of his work while ignoring the more difficult (but more serious for government) remainder.
It should be noted that I am not arguing that its existence as an aspect of social life is no reason to treat it as a principle for government and, moreover, that as its existence as an aspect of social life takes so many and varied forms, it could never be a consistent principle for government in any case.

In dismissing socialism as a possible clear, consistent principle, I am also dismissing agrarian socialism, a version of it which relies on ill-defined shibboleths about the virtues of rural life and production over urban life and production. The mythical qualities of these rallying cries ("Australia riding on the sheep's back" and the rest) have, like those associated with other socialist rallying cries discussed earlier, informed policies for Australian national government on occasions. Indeed, because of their central place in Country Party/National Party thinking (rarely acknowledged by the name "agrarian socialism", but what else could it be?), they have been much more influential than other socialist rallying cries. Like the policies associated with other socialist rallying cries, however, these policies have been very far from consistent and the style of government involved has been far from clear: policies as diverse as providing subsidies for rural producers and taking away subsidies for urban producers, and a style of government along the lines of a rural mafia.

Environmentalism is not so much a principle for government as an aim of government: a particular device to justify and guide the regulation of a population. In the case of Australian federal government, environmentalism is being touted most loudly as a clear, consistent principle by organised Greens and by the Democrats. They often appear frustrated and angry that the ALP government will not treat environmentalism as a clear, consistent principle. Their frustration and anger is understandable but misplaced.

The Hawke Labor government did much before the last election to convince the Greens, the Democrats, and their supporters that it saw environmentalism as a principle for government. Perhaps some members of the government even believed it. After all, as I've suggested, Labor in government has no clear, consistent principles, so it's not surprising if some members of the government were genuinely tempted by the apparition of a principle for government that is not only clear and consistent, but also popular. However, after the election and faced again with the realities of governing, the Hawke government was soon treating environmentalism as one aim among many and not as a principle at all. It had no choice.

So much for the oft-touted candidates for "clear, consistent principle for government" I am rejecting. I want to make one final point about them as a group before turning to the four principles I am proposing.

In rejecting these various candidates, I stress I am rejecting them as principles for government. I am not interested in them as principles for opposition. Political parties and other groups potentially involved in the process of national government in Australia find it very easy to pretend they have clear, consistent principles for government when they are not faced with the tasks of government.
In proposing my four clear, consistent principles for Australian government in the late 20th century, I want to offer some remarks about certain widespread conditions of late 20th century government, conditions which must serve as conditions of late 20th century principles for government.

First, the conditions of government are limited by time. Principles for government cannot seriously be proposed as eternal, despite attempts to do so throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. I am proposing four principles for Australian government in the 1990s. I am suggesting they work in this limited temporal domain. Beyond that I am making no claims.

Again, the conditions of government include geographical limits. Principles for government cannot seriously be proposed as universal either. I am proposing four principles for government in and of Australia. I recognise Australia as a nation state with a national population and with certain international commitments—diplomatic relations, trading agreements, military agreements, and so on. I am suggesting the four principles work in this limited spatial domain. Beyond that I am making no claims.

The conditions of government are often technically very complex. Principles for government are a guide to government, not a substitute for it. One cannot simply wave principles at problems of engineering, problems of administration, problems of law reform, or problems of economic reform in order to solve them. Far too many political activists, of all colours, refuse to recognise this condition of government and of principle (a point well made by Colin Mercer in ALR 126).

These remarks involve the point that principles for government and pragmatism are complementary, not contradictory. For too long, government at all levels has been forced to operate under the burden of the mistaken but widespread belief that to be pragmatic is to be unprincipled. Those who sing songs of purity have been allowed to sing too loudly.

The four principles I am proposing—government itself, civilisation, moderation, and toleration—work as clear, consistent principles for government only as a package. I will describe them separately then discuss their operation as a package.

It may seem strange to propose government itself as a principle for government, but I think it is crucial for two reasons. First, it is the foundation for any other principles for government. Second, as I pointed out in discussing the so-called free market principle, the idea of government is being sold very short in Australia at the present time. The first of these reasons needs no expansion.

On the second reason, in proposing government as a principle I am saying that the very idea of utilising processes whereby certain target populations are defined and then subjected to various forms of regulation in line with some or other aims, is indeed a clear, consistent principle for these very processes. This idea of government, as a principle, is necessary for good government.

For those involved in governing our nation and our firms to argue otherwise seems to me to be hypocritical, dangerous and downright stupid, but those who push magic "invisible hand" deregulation ideas do precisely this. Social life as we know it is only possible because target populations are constantly defined and constantly subjected to regulation in line with some or other aims. No one could run a business, use money, read books, watch television, receive an education, move around other than on foot, for instance, if this were not the case. This alternative to government is not a utopia of advanced unconstrained human activity, despite the anarchistic fantasies of both right and left, it is a return to the chaos and violence of primitive unconstrained human activity where kill or be killed could be the only principle for living. This is not—very fortunately, I think—a serious alternative.

Of course, in proposing government itself as a principle for government I must be proposing the government of economic life as part of this principle. This is not to say much, as the process of governing economic life includes systems as diverse as laissez-faire capitalism and central, state-control communism. I am not going to argue for it here (see my arguments in ALR 122 and those of Grahame Thompson in ALR 124) but I am assuming that the most suitable system for governing economic life in line with the four principles I'm proposing is the sort of "mixed", sensibly regulated system which emerged as dominant in Western Europe and Japan after World War Two.

"The idea of government is being sold very short in Australia"

By civilisation I mean modern, Judeo-Christian, Western civilisation. In this way, I mean a civilisation alongside or even in opposition to other civilisations, like Islamic civilisation. In proposing modern Western civilisation as a principle for government I need at least a working definition of it (though I can hardly discuss it in detail in an article of this size). Thus modern Western civilisation is that mode of organising social life in which modern statecraft has emerged on the back of the rule of law (in some form of parliamentary arrangement), assumed a dominant but not repressive role in church-state relations and fostered a day-to-day situation in which individuals and organisations (and of course organisation are increasingly important in modern statecraft) learn or are forced to regulate their own behaviour in line with more or less tightly defined social goals.
I am thus allowing the adoption of a technical definition of Western civilisation—one I have borrowed largely from Norbert Elias' Civilizing Process—to the decidedly non-technical task of proposing principles for good government. I am not, though— it should be noted—allowing this technical definition a teleological dimension. As Elias acknowledges, Western civilisation is not an inexorable march forward; it is a development which can just as easily be reversed (the "decivilising process" is thereby a sort of anti-principle for government, something government should guard against).

Moderation is the crucial ingredient in giving a technical definition of modern Western civilisation a normative dimension. Moderation means the various actors of modern social life—the individuals and organisations of our civilisation—learning or being forced to regulate their own behaviour away from excess.

Giving the regulation of behaviours this direction involves a vast array of checks on behaviour—for example, the development of definite codes of good manners for keeping decorum in interpersonal relations, the development of the tendency to obey laws without direct policing, the development of the tendency to limit the number of organisations legally permitted to use violence as part of their normal operation (military organisations, the police, the prison service), and the development of the tendency to control the use of violence by even these organisations.

This is a principle which, like all principles for government, not excluding the other three I'm proposing, rarely works in practice as well as its abstract definition suggests it should. Remember, principles are guides for good government, not guarantees of good government (and as I suggested at the outset, "good government" can only be defined relatively, not absolutely).

Finally, toleration is the principle whereby tolerance—that is, the recognition of, respect for, and commitment to preserve, the diversity of historically emerged forms of social life—meets government. Toleration is tolerance converted into workable arrangements for government, traditionally arrangements to promote (relatively) free speech, other expression and assembly.

Tolerating should not be confused with democracy, as it so often is. Democracy is not a principle for government; it is a means of organising government. Democracy may or may not be the best means of organising government in line with the principle of toleration, but in any case it should not be thought that democracy guarantees toleration or that toleration is not possible within other means of organising government.

This understanding of toleration owes a great deal to Locke, Bentham, James Mill and J S Mill, well known political theorists in the liberal tradition, as I acknowledged earlier. It also owes a great deal to the lesser known theorist Pierre Bayle. Bayle was a French Protestant who fled France in the face of the repression of Protestants which followed the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. In Rotterdam, among a thriving emigré intellectual culture, he developed, among other achievements, propositions whereby different faiths (he maintained his faith in the face of intellectual scepticism) could co-exist peacefully within systems of effective government.

These four principles, as I said earlier, work as clear, consistent principles for government only as a package. Separately they may be neither clear nor consistent. For example, toleration is possible as a clear, consistent prin-

"These principles... may very well involve government by 'muddling through'"

These four principles, as a package, can be a clear, consistent guide for good government even in these difficult situations. It is good government not to tolerate intolerance, though only if the intolerance involves excessive behaviour. It is good government to go to war to defend modern Western civilisation, though only if the war is conducted in line with codes of moderate military behaviour (the Geneva Convention and so on) and only if the clearly stated aim of the war is a situation of greater or equal toleration than that which existed before the threat to civilisation arose. And it is good government to force individuals and organisations to comply with more or less highly defined social goals may be considered less than consistent with toleration.

Yet, taken as a package the four principles can be a clear, consistent guide for good government even in these difficult situations. It is good government not to tolerate intolerance, though only if the intolerance involves excessive behaviour. It is good government to go to war to defend modern Western civilisation, though only if the war is conducted in line with codes of moderate military behaviour (the Geneva Convention and so on) and only if the clearly stated aim of the war is a situation of greater or equal toleration than that which existed before the threat to civilisation arose. And it is good government to force individuals and organisations to comply with more or less highly defined social goals, though only if it is done in a moderate manner and only if it is done with a clearly stated aim of increasing or maintaining toleration among the wider population.

These four principles, as a package, will never work easily or automatically. They require care and vigilance to work. All principles do.

These four principles are not as passionate as communism or fascism, but given the excesses to which the passions associated with these so-called principles have clearly led, principles without too much passion are surely desirable. They may well involve government by "muddling through" more than they involve government by force of conviction. Again, though, isn't this the best type of government we can hope for?

GARY WICKHAM teaches in the School of Social Sciences at Murdoch University.
A Flexible FUTURE?

Eighteen months ago enterprise bargaining was a labour movement heresy. Now, suddenly, it's become orthodox. Clare Curran talked to the controversial authors of a new book which argues that the Accord is now dead and buried. Their provocative views raised the ire of the union Left. Now, however, they might well consider themselves vindicated by Bill Kelty himself.

They were described at the time as "de boys". They were "brash, inseparable, irreverent and opinionated". They were also in hot water. Their crime was to criticise the state of the labour movement and provide some radical suggestions for change, in a controversial document leaked by them to the media in December 1989. The result was the sack for one of them and public embarassment for their boss, Michael Easson, secretary of the Labor Council of NSW.

Now, NSW Labor Council organiser Michael Costa and ex-council staffer Mark Duffy (who became public scapegoat) are about to make waves again, this time by releasing a book elaborating on their controversial ideas—this time reportedly with the blessing of the Labor Council. They argue that the Accord Mark VI is a "nonsense", the ACTU's policy of union amalgamation is fundamentally flawed, and the union movement has become irrelevant, existing within an artificially-protected market niche. They say the manufacturing model of award restructuring "just won't work" if imposed on other industries, and instead advocate a dramatic change to a market-oriented, free bargaining style of unionism that promotes diversity and flexibility.

How would this work? The finer details are a bit hazy. But they strongly advocate the only relevance for the union movement lies in its ability to adopt a service approach to its consumers, operating in a free labour market.

This book is radical, but there are signs that its reception will not be all hostile.

Their case will be published this month by Federation Press under the title Labor, Prosperity and the 90s - Beyond the Bonsai Economy. It is understood Michael Easson will write the foreword.
Michael Costa works as an executive officer at the Labor Council of NSW. He has been an active member of the labour movement since his mid-teens. He has worked as a trade union official, ironworker and locomotive engineman. He later studied economics at university and has been to Harvard University. Now 33, he was the ALP candidate for the seat of Strathfield in the NSW State election.

Mark Duffy used to work at the Labor Council of NSW until December 1989 and his controversial sacking. Now 33, Mark is a past president of Australian Young Labor (South Australia) and currently works as a senior industrial relations consultant with Macquarie Consulting. Mark has degrees in law, economics, a Master of Arts and has completed a program at the London School of Economics.

Would you say that the substance of the original leaked article formed the basis of the book?

Costa: No, not at all. I think it formed the basis of one section of the book—the section which aims to provide a critique of union amalgamations and the Accord. There are a number of things you can trace back in a very unpolished form to that article, but really it’s only one section of the book.

But at the time there was a lot of controversy around the article, Mark Duffy got the sack, and yet now, you’re bringing out a book and developing these ideas.

Costa: You’ve got to put that matter in context. First of all, the document was leaked as an early draft, put together reasonably quickly for internal discussion. But more importantly, you’ve got to consider what was occurring at the time, a run up to a federal election, pressures and strains on the industrial relations system and the article went into some of those issues and was obviously very topical at the time. The book is a much broader critique of where the trade union movement’s going. It traces the historical development of the dominant labourist tradition, and provides a contemporary analysis of both the Accord, award restructuring, union amalgamations, industry policy, and also the forms of enterprise bargaining.

Would you see the release of your book as likely to result in the kind of internal reaction that the article received?

Costa: That’s hard to judge. I expect this book to be controversial, but I do not expect it to receive the sort of reaction in terms of hostility to the authors, and calls for dismissal and so on. I certainly think that the Left’s reaction was a disgrace. We had Left unions calling for our dismissal because we had impure ideas.

Duffy: The Left said that we weren’t entitled to “think” the ideas let alone speak them or write them. Now, of course, the union movement is absolutely cantering down the road of enterprise bargaining and condemning the Commission for not giving them the enterprise bargaining that we were suggesting in November 1989. There’s an enormous amount of hypocrisy involved in the response of sections of the Left, in particular senior officials of leftwing unions.

Costa: I certainly think that some of the institutions of labourism, particularly sections of the senior leadership of
the ACTU may well feel uncomfortable, because the book certainly raises questions about a strategy they have been largely responsible for formulating.

Does the book have the endorsement of the Labor Council? I ask that question because the original article was produced within the Labor Council and it received such a reaction within the Labor Council.

Costa: The book is not the Labor Council's policy document, nor ought it be. It is the views of a section of the trade union movement in general rather than a section of the Labor Council; it's put forward as very much a book for discussion.

But in this book there is a fair amount of criticism levelled at ACTU policy.

Costa: Yes, there is also a fair amount of criticism levelled at the union movement in general. I am not exempt from that criticism, neither is Duffy. We believe that while you may be implementing that policy that doesn't stop you from discussing whether or not that policy is correct or incorrect. There seems to be an attitude in the union movement that the only place to discuss policies is at congresses or appropriate forums. I believe that every moment in the day is appropriate.

Is it only you who has these ideas, or do you believe there is a group, a movement developing these ideas?

Costa: Certainly within the trade union movement there are a number of people who are concerned that there is frank and open discussion at all periods of the industrial calendar, rather than just the period of the congress. I think that's also been expressed by a number of people in the Labor Party—people like Bob Hogg.

You say that the union movement is in crisis and that 'new Protectionism' isn't the answer, and you criticise award restructuring, union amalgamations and the ACTU's policy on industry intervention. But you also argue there is a new relevance for the trade union movement. What is it?

Costa: I don't think it's as simple as that. All the way through the book we argue there is no one strategy applicable to every sector of the trade union movement. In fact, one of the difficulties we have with the ACTU strategy is that it seeks to impose on all sectors one model for development, and my view is that the amalgamation process may well be rational in some sectors.

Are you saying there is no one model, and that the manufacturing unions backed by the ACTU have tried to impose one model for workplace change?

Costa: No, I wouldn't even say impose. I would say that the logic of the Accord process has meant that the most developed sector is the one that sets the standard. People follow that model, either intentionally or as a consequence of the system itself. People have got wage increases by going forward with a particular model and all the other unions have tended to follow that model because it's established, it's set a criterion, it's in the logic of the centralised system. The book traces this and argues it is one of the negative points of the centralised wage system because it encourages uniformity, a lack of innovation, and tends to force people towards the lowest common denominator to satisfy a set of artificial standards that were set by an institution, rather than what's required by both unions and workers in that industry for their own well-being and the growth of the economy. So it's much more complex than just saying we're critical of the ACTU because of the Accord or that we're critical of industry unionism or because of a model of award restructuring intervention. The strongest criticism I would probably have is in the area of interventionism. And we reject that largely because there is overwhelming evidence that it doesn't work.

Duffy: The industrial needs of employers and employees in different industries are quite different; so if, for instance, this sort of approach suits the metal industry, then it should be entitled to have an agreement between the metal unions and the MTIA to run their industry with what we would call a meso-Accord. But the problem we have is that this approach has been imposed on almost everybody else. So the rural sector or the mining industry or other parts of white collar industry find a manufacturing based philosophy towards pay and career structures totally foreign to them and quite difficult to implement.

Duffy: "The Left said that we weren't entitled to think these ideas"

What is needed?

Costa: When one looks at the Australian economy it is very much structured around comparative advantage. If people think that we can somehow alter our economy to develop the structures that will sustain the cutting edge of human resource practices and post-Fordist work organisation, how do we actually get there? No one's going to argue that a strong manufacturing industry is not desirable. But is it achievable? Nobody's arguing or putting forward evidence to say that it is achievable.

Duffy: Our technological advances are very often focused on primary industry and we've come up with some pretty stunning technological advances such as biotechnology. But we've never captured those in ongoing export manufacturing because we've gone for a very broad-based manufacturing industry in clothing, textiles and motor vehicles which is unsuitable for Australia given our wage rates and our population base and what's going on in Asia. There is no way that we can sustain a clothing, textile and
footwear industry in Australia except to fulfil a niche market.

Can we get back to the relevance of the union movement. How can the union movement change?

Costa: Firstly, we have a difficulty with the argument that the union movement has to change. There are two things to consider. First: how you become relevant. You have to work out precisely what are the requirements of relevance and whether those requirements differ from sector to sector. We need more analysis and more understanding. What we've tended to do is say "Okay, we're in decline, what we've been doing must be wrong, therefore we must have change. What is the best way to change?" Let's look at the ACTU's industry amalgamation model!

Duffy: Although it is merely accidental if any of these amalgamations end up creating what people would regard as an industry union.

Costa: It's not realignment or structures that give you a relevant trade union movement; it's policies, it's activities. We seem to be focusing just on structures in the hope that at some point after we've got our structural realignment in place we will be able to recruit members. I think the real question is of marketing products, marketing services, marketing unionism, rather than recruiting for an idea. It means you've got to start looking at the quality of service of your union, and you've got to start treating your membership as almost customer-based. You have to do all the things that successful service organisations do to ensure that they remain loyal to what you're offering.

Do unions have the capacity to offer these sort of services?

Costa: Well, they have the capacity to offer services that are appropriate once they target what they are. The assumption in the ACTU strategy is that you have a coming together of 20 large industry groups, and somehow that generates economies of scale. That is a dubious assumption. Where they have focused on products they've mainly looked at extensions of existing products, such as credit cards, which actually other people provide more professionally than we ever will.

Duffy: This is one of the difficulties people might have with our book. We're not saying there's one model. We shouldn't be dictating what the model is, but we should be facilitating the capacity for different models to develop. And while we reject the idea of picking winners by government, or by employers or trade unions...

Would you agree that American unionism is similar in its makeup to your model?

Costa: I'd be foolish to do that because we argue against cultural models of transferability. What we are arguing for in Australia is the development of a unique form of unionism. If that form of unionism is going to survive in a period of hostile conservative government, it has to be based on the real value it provides for its members. Those people will stay within the union structure because of the services provided rather than because an institution requires them to. That's been the historical role. The conservatives have indicated that they will deregulate the labour market. Two models have been advanced: one at state level in NSW which is a much more passive, less radical model - the other at federal level. But either model has the potential over time to undermine existing trade unionism.

We're arguing for dynamic trade unionism where people belong to trade unions because they believe they gain value, rather than belonging because they have no choice, or because it's the only mechanism under the current system because of the way the system's structured to protect themselves and receive representation. And I think that's the core difference. The ACTU industry unionism model only makes sense if you adopt the strategy outlined in Australia Reconstructed, largely based on the Scandinavian model where you have significant portions of your welfare system run through the trade unions, you have active labour market programs, interventionist industry policy, and you have all those things reinforcing a high level of participation. The reality is that the Labor government has rejected parts of that model with its March industry statement, so the model is doomed.

You seem to be arguing for a free market approach to unionism.

Costa: No, I think we are arguing a 'more market' approach. But that's consistent with the evolution of socialist thought. In fact, the movement away from the centralised structure in Eastern Europe to a much more mixed economy is the most dramatic argument. But there is also a huge debate within the mixed economies over precisely what role the market plays and whether socialism traditionally confuses ends with means. The means being the socialisation of industry, to an end - which was in my view equal opportunity for all.

Duffy: I think that if the labour movement - including the Labor government and trade union movement - support deregulation of the financial system, deregulation of the dollar, and also deregulation of the product market, they are also making the strongest possible commitment to the idea that markets are fundamental to running the state. The question then is how it can be that there is one market sector left which some sections of the trade union movement say is off-limits to market involvement.
Costa: At the same time there has to be a social safety net for people: and that’s where we talk about regional minimum rates. Because the current system not only provides a minimum rate system but also provides a maximum rate system then overlaid with over award payments and so on, then at a national level it in fact perpetuates inequality.

We were recently described as being of the Right. I reject that. I don’t know what Left and Right means. I think there are probably two approaches; there are the conservatives and essentially radical reformers. I certainly see myself in the radical reforming tradition - and the unfortunate reality is that some who call themselves Left are in the conservative tradition.

One of the confusions I have is that while you are advocating deregulation of the labour market, you also support the federal government’s economic strategy. Yet has not the Accord and the Kelty/Keating relationship been the linchpin of the federal government’s industry strategy?

Duffy: Would there have been any difference without the Accord? Given that all the results people point to from the Accord in Australia - reduction in wages and reduction in industrial disputes - all those changes have also happened in Europe and essentially across the world. The real question is, what brought the union movement in Australia in 1983 - as also the union movement across the world - to the position where they’re prepared to sit down and do all those things? Is it the external conditions, or did they just decide to be nice? The evidence suggests it is a trend across the world.

Do you think the time has come to move away from the Accord?

Costa: I think there is nothing wrong with the Labor government and trade union movement having a relationship at a peak level. An Accord is nothing more than a relationship. What is a problem is the national bargaining process and the way that bargaining outcome is transferred via a centralised wage fixing on to all of the participants irrespective of their specific requirements.

Duffy: The forces that you unleash by opening up your economy to the international market - whether you agree with that or not - flow right through the economy, and they’re now knocking on the door of the labour market and saying “hey, everything else is responding, but you’re not”. And the pressures upon you to respond become enormous, and that what’s happening in the labour market now...

Do you think the ACTU is starting to respond to those pressures?

Costa: It is responding in its own terms, which are consistent with its influence over national outcomes.

What about in terms of the ACTU’s recent rejection of the Commission’s wage decision?

Costa: As one who believes that structure is no longer appropriate in its current form, I still think it’s totally inappropriate to criticise the Commission for coming down with a decision which was effectively framed in the very terms of the previous submission that both the government and the ACTU put to the Commission. I think they’ve been very unfair, and it’s absolutely ludicrous for the ACTU to engage in a process of enterprise bargaining at a time that the Australian economy is in its most recessed state since the Great Depression. It should have been done 18 months, two years ago. There’s an element of inconsistency – that is the mildest term I can find – in the way the approach to enterprise bargaining is evolving.

How much do your ideas on enterprise bargaining differ from the Greiner government’s approach to enterprise bargaining in NSW?

Costa: Totally different, because the NSW version supports statutory closed shops. I’ve always opposed that. The NSW government legislation is more conservative than what currently exists in NSW, even more conservative in a lot of ways than what John Niland proposed. I think people are under an illusion that a lot of the enterprise bargaining provisions introduced by the NSW government are radical, when they’re not. The only areas where there is innovation is the ability to form works councils, or works associations. The actual bargaining processes are consistent with Section 115 of the Federal Act and are more regulatory.

But they rejected what we advocate - the right to strike. You can either have a tribunal model of industrial relations, or a bargaining model, in which case you have to allow the parties to engage in a proper bargaining, with the ability to engage in strikes and lockouts.
You advocate that?

Costa: I would advocate that if we are to have enterprise bargaining it should be in a form where people are able to sit down and bargain genuinely. That doesn't preclude some form of voluntary arbitration, or some form of compulsory arbitration if you want it.

Doesn't that mean chaos with a whole lot of systems operating simultaneously?

Duffy: It means you can have a system of voluntary arbitration available if people want to use it, but we expect that they start focusing on the capacity to resolve their own issues in a mature way.

But are they mature enough?

Duffy: That's the most important point the Commission makes. After 90 years of an arbitration system, the employers and unions are still not mature enough to talk to each other. You could see that as an indictment in itself.

Costa: This doesn't necessarily have to be a question of maturity; it might mean a different level of development. I think that ultimately there is no choice but for Australia to go down this path. You can either do it under the current system where it's a matter of one step forward and two steps back, but where you ultimately get there because there are external pressures forcing you down that path, or you choose to do it quickly, dramatically and in a manner that allows diversity and a new relationship to emerge early in the process.

So you advocate the quick dramatic approach?

Duffy: We're not talking about deregulating the labour market in the way that the H R Nicholls Society would talk about it. What we are saying is that we should be looking at a set of rules in which the bargaining process operates. The Commission said that everyone is mouthing off at the idea of enterprise bargaining, but no one has any agreement on the procedure in which that enterprise bargaining will work. We are saying there needs to be a set of rules for a more free bargaining system.

In a more diverse world, the unifying, centralising structures of the past are not appropriate. There's nothing revolutionary about that: the Right's saying it, the Left's saying it, the centre's saying it, the real question is how do you get there. And also what her people have the maturity to take another look at the means which they have traditionally rejected as being inconsistent with their ends—which is, I think, what has to be done with the market—and try to decide whether those means can now be reshaped to achieve those traditional ends. And I think that's a question that does require maturity.

Do you see yourselves as in the vanguard of change, showing a way ahead?

Costa: If we saw ourselves in those terms we would be guilty of all the things we criticise others for.

Well, how do you see yourselves? What are you hoping to achieve with this book?

Duffy: We want to open up the debate.

Costa: I totally reject any notion that any one individual or group of individuals has the sole ability to have the knowledge to develop the labour movement's strategies.

What about the role of the Labor Council and other peak union bodies?

Costa: I totally reject any notion that any one individual or group of individuals has the sole ability to have the knowledge to develop the labour movement's strategies.

CLARE CURRAN is a member of ALR's editorial collective.
Rajiv Gandhi's assassination marks the end of an epoch in Indian politics. The postwar creed of secular liberalism is threatened by the rise of communalism and caste warfare. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that the conflict goes to the heart of conceptions of ethnicity in modern political culture.

India will soon have been through another round of general elections proving that, even if its economy is not so well at the moment, its democracy remains functional. However, the elections have been marked by a bout of violence and aggression, culminating in the death of prime ministerial aspirant Rajiv Gandhi in May. The basis for this violence has been the conflict between Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Backward and Scheduled castes—all those multiple identities that one associates with India and that have recently given rise to passionate conflicts in the country. It is these conflicts and their history, particularly those around issues of Hinduism and caste that I want to focus on as a key to the spectacular instability which has thrust Indian politics into its recent turmoil.

The decision last year of V P Singh's coalition government to reserve about 50% of jobs in the public sector for the lower castes, who comprise 85% of the population, led to a series of tragic suicides by upper caste youths in many Indian cities and, eventually, to the downfall of the government. Then came a climactic point in the agitation, festering since 1984, by some Hindu organisations and political parties to rebuild a temple at the holy city of Ayodhya in north India, a temple that they claim was demolished and converted into a mosque by the Muslim emperor Babar in 1528. This temple movement has now become part of an attempt to build up a strong, aggressive and militant sense of unity and self-respect among the Hindus. The people who feel most threatened by this development are the Muslims of the subcontinent. The coming years in India will see people discuss the question of identity with strong and divisive passions. As an Indian character in The Satanic Verses says (and I imagine here the Indian shaking of the head and a heavy upper-class Delhi accent): "Battle lines are being drawn in India today, secular versus religious, the light versus the dark. Better you choose which side you are on."

There are serious problems, as we shall see, with the way Rushdie's character frames this question of choice. For what we see in India is nothing short of contemporary ethnic intolerance or what, in popular parlance, we often
The last 15 years have seen an explosive combination of democracy and demography.

In focusing on the theme of ethnic intolerance, I will argue that the experiment of nation-making in India has a significance that goes far beyond the boundaries of that country. For it is a story which tells us how modern problems of ethnicity cannot be separated from modern means of government and communication. My emphasis, in other words, will be on the way the development of a modern public-political life in India has called into being constructions of both Hinduism and caste that do not admit of such simple binary distinctions as Salman Rushdie's character invokes: secular/religious, liberal/fundamentalist, nationalist/communal.

This is not to deny the evidence that exists of religious conflicts in India before the Europeans came to the country. But something has fundamentally changed about both Hinduism and caste since British rule and particularly since the beginning of the 20th century. If I may put it simply by using the example of caste, the change may be crudely described as this. Earlier, one probably had two kinds of castes. You were one caste when you got married, and there was always the question of what caste your neighbours thought you were. But now you also have to think what caste you are when you apply for a job or when you run for a seat in parliament. And your answer to these three questions will often not be the same. In other words, caste and religion now feature prominently in Indian public life. The concepts and institutions that make up the public sphere—free press, voluntary associations, avenues for free debate and inquiry in the public interest—are modern Europeans' intellectual gifts to the people they...
considered less fortunate than themselves and at whose doors they arrived as raging, mad imperialists. My point is that modern problems of Hinduism and caste are inseparable from the history of this modern public life in India that the British instituted and the nationalists preserved in what they thought were the best interests of the country.

British rule in India lasted a little short of two hundred years. The most far-reaching and fundamental innovation that the British introduced to Indian society, in my view, was the modern state. One symptom of its modernity was that its techniques of government were very closely tied to techniques of measurement. From surveys of land and crop output to prospecting for minerals, from measuring Indian brains (on behalf of the false science of phrenology) to measuring Indian bodies, diets and life-expectancies (the foundations of physical anthropology and modern medicine were laid in India), the British had the length and breadth of India, her history, culture and society mapped, classified and quantified in detail that was nothing if not precise even when it was wrongheaded.

The most dramatic examples of this governmental concern with measurement were the decennial Indian censuses, the first of which was published in 1872. Since the British did not go to India in search of pure knowledge, all these studies were produced in the cause and in the process of governing India, and it is this pervasive evidence of marriage between government and measurement that I take as something that belongs to the deep structure of the imagination that is invested in modern political orders. Without numbers, it would be impossible to practise bureaucratic or instrumental rationality.

It is not that premodern governments had no use for numbers (one only has to recall that the word ‘census’ is of Roman origin). But as the history of the discipline of statistics tells us, systematic “collection, classification, and discussion of facts bearing on the condition of a state or community” (to quote The Shorter Oxford Dictionary) is something that only modern governments do. Such measurements, one could argue, were central to their idea and practice of distributive justice whether in the sphere of political representation or that of the economy.

The British, as the representatives and the inheritors of European Enlightenment, brought these ideas to India. While the British would never take the step (until 1947) of granting India full self-government, they were often concerned about being ‘fair’ to the different competing sections that, in their view, made up Indian society. And these sections the British had defined quite early on in religious and caste terms. Categories based on caste and religion dominated the censuses that the British undertook in India. At every census, people were asked to state their religion and caste. This was in marked contrast to what the British did at home where religion was never an important category in the British censuses for the period 1801 to 1931. Counting Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Untouchables, however, became a critical political exercise particularly in the 20th century as the British began to include Indian representatives in the legislative bodies in very measured doses. What made the census operations critical was that the British, in trying to be fair referees, made the process of political representation ‘communal’: seats in the legislative assemblies were earmarked for different ‘communities’ (defined by religious/caste categories) in proportion to their share of property and population.

Nationalists like Nehru and Gandhi abhorred this process and the ideology that governed it, ‘communalism’—a word that still leads a stigmatised existence in India and works as a surrogate for ‘racism’. Political leaders of the Muslims and the Untouchables, on the other hand, felt much happier going along with the British-devised arrangements until the final decade before Independence when negotiations between Indian leaders became as important as those between them and the British. Of particular importance in the Indian story is the category ‘Scheduled caste’, which the British created (and the government of India has retained) in 1936 and which was so called because it referred to a schedule of castes officially recognised as disadvantaged. Being on this list made these castes eligible for special treatment in respect of political representation under the Government of India Act of 1935. Other kinds of affirmative action were to be undertaken in favour of these groups in the future.

Observers of modern India agree that these processes created new definitions of collective identities in the public and political spheres. In their everyday lives, in the sphere of what we would now call the personal, Indians, like human beings everywhere, live with senses of identity that are highly situational. Yet the very existence of administrative categories of ethnicity—whether one is looking at the inter-national level or at developments within a country—creates a public sphere for ‘ethnicity’ (a ‘national’ identity being its highest form). It is, of course, within this sphere that the identity of being Indian or Hindu or Muslim or Scheduled caste takes on a new political meaning which resides alongside, and interlaced with, the more everyday sense of community.

The censuses and other similar reports then reconstituted the meaning of ‘community’ or ‘ethnicity’ and gave Indians three important political messages, all of which are entirely commensurate with the idea of liberal political democracy. These messages were:

* that communities could be enumerated and in numbers lay one’s political clout

* that the social and economic progress of a community was a measurable entity, measured in the case of Indian censuses by their share in public life (education, professions, employment and so on), and

* that this enabled governments and communities to devise objective tests for the relative ‘backwardness’ or otherwise of a community.

Indians were quick to learn the art of participation in this public sphere. They learnt—just as we all do when we want to take advantage of equal opportunity legislation—that modern governments have rather limited intelligence; that
their principles of distributive justice require simple, homogeneous, all or none identities, the kinds that passports bear. When we look back now at India in the 1870s and 1880s, it becomes clear that the era of modern, competitive, governmentally defined ethnic identities familiar to us in liberal democracies, had already arrived. The peculiarity of colonial Indian history lay in the fact that these identities were based on religious categories because of, as I have said, a certain degree of reification of these categories by the British. By the 1890s, Hindu and Muslim leaders were quoting census figures at each other to prove whether or not they had received their legitimate share of benefits from British rule (such as employment and education). The rise of modern caste consciousness shows a similar concern for the measurement of ‘progress’ in public life. The famous anti-Brahman ‘manifesto’, produced in Madras in 1916 by the non-Brahman castes who formed a new political party, owed its rhetorical force to social categories and statistics the government had used in its internal deliberations. Demography was now pressed into the service of such newly-redefined ethnic jealousies and competition.

But if India was simply a place where ethnicity was contained within the liberal structure of competitive pluralism, it would not have made news and this article would not have been needed, as our contemporary Australian experience of ethnicity would have been quite adequate as a guide to understanding Indian developments. Ethnic strife in India, however, has spilled blood in large amounts at different points in her history from the 1890s onward. Recent problems in Assam, Punjab, and Kashmir have been particularly glaring. What then is the difference, say, between our experience of ethnicity here in the 1980s and 90s, and what is happening in India?

The important difference, it seems to me, is largely this. Modern ethnic consciousnesses in India have been fashioned under historical circumstances where people have been under intense pressure to pursue and emphasise their differences from one another. The important point is that the question of Indian political unity has never been settled beyond all doubt and disputation. The British cobbled a political India together for reasons of administrative convenience. The nationality question was muddled from the beginning. In the public sphere that the British created, there was no one, universally agreed-upon ‘Indian’ ethnicity. The struggle to produce a sense of cultural unity against the British made mainstream Indian nationalism culturally Hindu. The Muslim search for Pakistan emphasised Islam. The lower castes’ struggle for justice produced anti-Brahmanism.

The last 15 or 20 years have seen an explosive combination of democracy and demography. The population of India has almost trebled since Independence. The growth and diversity of the middle class may be judged from the fact that while at Independence there was consensus that the number of important languages was 14, there are now daily newspapers published in more than 78 different languages. This middle class has tasted consumerism which has increased the sense of competition in urban life. The secessionist aspirations in Kashmir, Punjab and parts of Assam have gained in strength in recent years. Caste, particularly the Indian policy of positive discrimination in favour of the lower castes, has become an extremely contentious issue in public life (in the context of both a sluggish economy and an ever-widening awareness of their ‘legal rights’ on the part of the lower castes). And lately there has been the movement, led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (a modern Hindu political organisation), for the restoration of the temple on the place where the legendary god-king Rama was supposed to have been born, the Ramjanmabhumi. This agitation which aims to convert Hinduism into a strong, monolithic and militant religion has given many Indian Muslims understandable nightmares.

Fundamentally, like the Soviet Union, India remains in part an imperial structure held together by strong tendencies towards centralism. Unlike the Soviet Union, however, these centralist tendencies exist within, and have to work through, a democratic political structure. Indians have an investment in democracy which was proved in the unpopularity of Mrs Gandhi’s two-year emergency of 1975-77. Indian democracy thus holds together a system that can survive as a unity only if it has a strong centralising and unifying ideology as well. And this is where there have been some very significant changes.
Once this centralising tendency was most powerfully re-presented by the ideology of Jawaharlal Nehru and stood for some kind of consensus among the political elite. This ideology, known in India by the name of secularism, drew heavily on the Western liberal heritage to argue for a separation of religion and public life. This tenet never described the actual culture of political practice in India where a religious idiom and imagination had always been very strongly present. But so long as the national leadership lay in the hands of a tiny elite reared in and respectful of the British traditions of politics, the everyday religiousness of Indian political culture could be kept separate from the decision-making elite at the highest levels of the government. The custodian nature of this elite was reflected in the unity of the Congress party where Nehru always remained a Bonapartist figure.

The combination of demography, democracy and economic growth in India has now ensured that the political elite is no longer tiny. There are no Bonapartist figures in India today. Nehruvian secularism, a close cousin of Western liberalism represented now by Marxists and the left-liberals in India, is on the defensive (recall Salman Rushdie’s character talking about the battle lines), and for some very profound reasons.

Liberal political structures and institutions in the West are supported by certain tenets of individualism that pervade both private and public spheres of life. Most Indians grow up in entirely different family and social structures and while they are perfectly comfortable with the idea of Western-style technology and creature comforts, the prospect of adopting post-industrial family relationships does not gladden their hearts. Students of political sociology have demonstrated time and again that the cultural dynamics of Indian institutions are quite different from those that one might find in the West. The sophistication of Indian culture lies in very different directions.

This is where I locate the current conundrum of Indian political culture. On the one hand there exists a structure of pluralist and democratic political representation which, as history has shown, is valued by the Indian ruling classes. On the other hand, a centralising tendency constantly asserts itself on the political scene precisely because the question of Indian unity has not yet been settled. The political geography of India keeps evolving. This is the context in which the new political Hinduism has assumed importance. What gives the Hindus’ message urgency now is the freedom movement among the Muslims in Kashmir. The avowedly Hindu parties make hatred of Muslims the focus of Hindu/Indian unity.

What are the prospects and problems of this new attempt to define Indianness with a conscious Hindu content?

First of all, its strengths. A most important source of strength of this movement is its capacity to speak with many different voices. Its leaders at the parliamentary level sometimes speak the prose of pure liberalism. We are all equally Indians, they say, then why should the Muslims receive any special treatment as a constitutionally-recognised ‘minority community’? At the grassroots level, how-ever, the mobilisation of support is achieved by preaching hatred toward the Muslims. The internally diversified rhetoric of this movement points to the many different constituencies that it is seeking to capture.

Its weakness lies in the fact that Hinduism does not lend itself very easily to the manufacture of a monolithic version of it. The Hinduism that the Hindu parties try to project have so far reflected a predominantly upper-caste, Brahmanical imagination. It is difficult to see how the lower caste people could welcome this Hindutva or wholeheartedly identify with it. Pushing the cause of the so-called scheduled and backward castes, however, could cost this movement the support of the upper-castes on which it has until now depended. This may in part explain why the movement is mainly confined to certain regions of north India; the ruling Hindutva of south India has for long been anti-Brahmanical. As far as I can see, the neo-Hindus have not yet succeeded in bridging this caste divide.

One ironical aspect of this movement derives from the global context in which this attempt develop ‘one Hindutva’ is being made. The Indian diaspora to the developed countries—the highly skilled professional Indians who have always constituted a large part of the international market in ‘brains’ since World War Two—has increasingly become an important source of financial and moral support for this neo-Hindu, semi-fascist movement in India. The irony is that an important section of this emigré community—the Indians who now live in the United States—successfully lobbied in the recent past to get themselves classified as a special ethnic community in order to qualify better for the benefits that flow from the American equal opportunity legislation. Yet the question of giving ‘minority’ communities back home some of the same privileges seems to cause a lot of political heartburn among their leaders in India.

India is no doubt at an interesting point in her history. It is unlikely that monolithic Hinduism will emerge victorious through the democratic process, though its pull will remain an important factor. Nor is there any evidence that economic growth by itself will necessarily revive and spread the spirit of Nehruvian secularism. Some Indian intellectuals wistfully look to the memory of Gandhi in search of a non-modern/non-Western model of political order. But Gandhi in some respects was a very special case made possible by the operation of colonialism. Most powerful Indians, as an American journalist once said, find Gandhi ‘inspiring and irrelevant’. International developments, on the other hand, particularly those in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, must affect the way the nationality question will be discussed in India in the coming few years. Can there be a recognisably Indian variety of ethnic or religious tolerance in the public sphere now that is, at the same time, in harmony with other institutions in the country? The future will tell but that question defines for me the challenge of the historical juncture at which India now finds herself.

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The collapse and integration of the old East Germany into a greater Germany is now history. Yet still, amid the triumph of the West German dream there is a sense of unease. And now the ‘Ostis’ are discovering the harsh realities of their choice. John Milfull reflects on an extraordinary and disturbing 18 months.

History repeats itself as farce: Marx’s old intuition may well prove the best key to the understanding of the last eighteen months in Eastern Europe. In hindsight, it has become obvious that the Gorbachev faction not only tolerated but forced the pace of change in the governments of its Warsaw Pact allies—less, perhaps, from philosophical conviction than from the strategic calculation that the successful achievement of reforms in the rest of the "socialist empire" would present the hard-liners in the Soviet Union with a fait accompli from which they could not resile.

The climax and turning point of this tragic farce was the extraordinary administrative bungle, back in December 1989, in which, with one news release, Egon Krenz and Günter Schabowski, the Laurel and Hardy of a reeling GDR leadership, blew themselves up along with the Berlin Wall and destroyed the possibility of a transition to democratic socialism in East Germany and Eastern Europe for the foreseeable future. The likely end of the farce: the fragmentation of the Soviet Empire into a number of crypto-fascist, warring states, the total economic and political dominance of the Homogenised Republic of Germany, and the shrinking of the heartland of the Russian Revolution to the borders of 1919.

I suspect it was no coincidence that in the last days of Nikita Krushchev rumours were rife of an approaching accom-
modation with the Federal Republic of Germany; the "German question", with varying signs, has dominated the entire history of the Soviet Union. One can only agree with Trotsky that a socialist revolution in Germany after the Great War would have had a profound impact on the course of the Soviet revolution and that the defensive isolation which was the breeding ground of stalinism would, of necessity, have been replaced by a broader international perspective, for good or ill. What is clear to me is that the collapse of the GDR and of any cordon sanitaire between the ailing planned economies of Eastern Europe and the rapacious market economies of the West signalled the end, before it had even begun, of the realisation of Gorbachev's vision of "democratic socialism" and a common European home. It was not the passing into history of the Warsaw Pact as a military alliance, but the removal of a leading player, the destruction of Comecon and the internal market between these countries which made fragmentation and total dependence on the West inevitable. Those commentators, across the political spectrum, who argued before 1989 for stability in Europe as the prerequisite for democratisation and reform, have not been proved wrong; they will, I think, be increasingly vindicated by a process which, in the name of democratisation, liberates some of the less attractive ghosts of the Eastern European past and turns the Warsaw Pact countries, to borrow George Markus's depressilng phrase, (in ALR, May 1990) into the Latin America of the EEC. 

Precisely for these reasons, it is important to understand what happened in the GDR, in the course of this "licenced revolution", sanctioned and encouraged by the imperial power in Moscow. There is little doubt that, without this sanction, the undoubted courage of those tens of thousands of East Germans who took to the streets to demonstrate for democratic reform would have found difficulty in manifesting itself—a further farcical element which would have given Marx grim pleasure. The power which, at crucial stages in the East German development, had implacably blocked even the most timorous attempts at reform, was now their advocate. Just as, after 1945, the movement for an independent path to socialism had rapidly been forced to accept the "superior wisdom and experience" of the Soviet exporters of revolution, the reformers of 1989 were compromised in advance by their dependence on the tolerance of the Big Brother against whose exported socialism they were protesting. One of the most distressing elements of the last years has been the unwillingness of the Soviet leaders to admit their own responsibility for the developments in Eastern European countries, and their willingness to blame their client states for not introducing reforms which they not only actively hindered, but opposed, at home. In the process, they have destroyed the last remnant of credibility of thousands of committed socialists who clung to the hope that they would one day be released from the constant interference and domination of their "Soviet brothers".

Was there a "revolution" in the GDR? If so, was it a "success" or a "failure"? What were its aims and origins? In retrospect, again, it is clear that two vastly different groups were involved, both exploiting the "winds of change" from Moscow, but in very different ways and for quite different ends. The "democratic reformers" who took to the streets were motivated, above all, by the desire to reform the existing GDR, to create an independent, democratic socialist state which might enter, at a later date, into a federative arrangement with West Germany, but whose primary role would be to act as a catalyst for the development of a "third way" in Eastern Europe, a course between market capitalism and post-stalinism. Their primary and overriding aim was the establishment of civil rights, the restitution of the individual freedoms for which the first bourgeois revolutions had fought, and which had been withdrawn or ignored by "feudal socialism."

As far as one can tell, their membership, too, was entirely typical of such "democratic protest" movements, ranging from representatives of an alternative youth culture to concerned older citizens committed to democratic reform. Centred around the meeting places provided by a Lutheran Church shaped by its own need to atone for the collaborations of the Third Reich, they developed a clearly articulated program of non-violent reform which shared many features with the undogmatic socialist and ecological movements in the West. Although I do not wish to broach the question here as to the extent to which class divisions persisted in the GDR, it seems utterly appropriate to describe this movement qualitatively as a "bourgeois intellectual" protest movement. Whether it can be described as "revolutionary" is another matter entirely; the overwhelming consensus that only non-violent strategies were appropriate to the situation in the GDR and the rejection of all chauvinist and aggressive tendencies certainly mark it off distinctly from other protest movements in Eastern Europe. If it was a "revolutionary" movement, one must say, with considerable sorrow, that it was an unambiguous failure; at the crucial moment, its aims, strategies and visions were pushed aside by developments over which it had no control. I will always remember the wry grin with which a student at the East Berlin theological seminary, who was trying to help me find someone from the New Forum movement for Bruce Petty to interview in December 1990, said sadly: "It won't be easy. Last year we demonstrated, this year we are studying. We have no choice."

At their demonstrations, the protesters constantly appealed to the other group, those who had already deserted to the West through the emerging cracks in the socialist alliance. "Come back", they cried, "help us build a democratic GDR together. Without you we will have no chance." The appeal was addressed, of course, not only to those who had already left, but to those who were planning to leave. Until the collapse of the Wall, this was a relatively defined group with weak social ties, largely un- or anti-political, whose motivation was primarily frustration with the economic stagnation and the greyness of everyday life in the GDR, contrasted with the images of Western influence with which they were constantly bombarded. They were little interested in socialism, or even democracy, but in the prospect of a better life in terms very similar to those in which the average citizen of Australia or New Zealand would define it. They were the vanguard of the silent majority which began to speak with one voice only after the collapse of the Wall and the realisation that it was ne
The breach that started a flood.

longer necessary to make the radical break with homes, friends and possessions the first refugees had taken on themselves. Unimaginably, the mountain—or should I say paradise with its houris—could and would come to Mohammed.

The silent majority and its vanguard were "bourgeois" in a different sense: they wanted, above all, the restoration of the right to individual affluence, to the good life, release from the constant restrictions and inefficiencies of GDR life, and access to the magic of Western consumer goods. Perhaps here I can counterpoint my images of thousands of East Germans thronging the streets of West Berlin in search of video recorders and stereos with a note from the archives of the dreaded state security service I found in Halle, and which seems to me to sum up, in its inimitable style, the drab resignation life held for these people before 1989:

[Comrade Otto Jacob] wished to inform me that he had been elected chair of the Trade Union Committee of the State and University Library despite 23 votes against him from the bookstacks. These seem to have resulted from an argument with A Hochheim from the Loans section, who took the fact that the lift was out of service (for nine months) as an occasion for politically negative comments in the 35th year since the foundation of the GDR. She doubts that things are improving in the GDR.
The juxtaposition of A Hochheim’s fury at a broken-down lift with the pompous party phrase “in the 35th year since the foundation of the GDR” is the farcical expression of the abyss between party rhetoric and the reality of everyday life to which Erich Honecker had fallen victim after a very disturbed 40th birthday party for the GDR, soon to be followed by his entire regime.

Sadly, it was not fear of the democratic protest movement which forced Krenz and Schabowski to open the Wall, but fear of the massive defection of the silent majority or its alliance with the democrats in street protests which would rapidly leave the earlier self-imposed limits behind. The GDR leadership could no longer afford the wave of defections to the West, economically or politically; it had left any move to liberalisation far too late, and was discredited both at home and abroad. After the opening of the Wall, in the form that it took, the democratic protest movement was doomed, their rallies broken up and dominated by the new voices of those who wanted the West to come to them as soon as possible. The process was irreversible, and the ignominious failure of the communists to come to terms with the situation discredited not only the ruling party, but any group which included even a passing reference to socialism in its platform. The debacle of the elections proved that the vast majority of the GDR population was simply not interested in political issues; all they wanted was incorporation in Western consumer society, and they cared little under what banner, and with which slogans, it was achieved. Kohl and Genscher needed no further program than this. How, when and if it will be achieved is another matter entirely.

A startled West German leadership began to realise in 1989 that the fossilised demands for reunification, which remained enshrined in the Republic’s Basic Law, but which had long ceased to be a focus for its real concerns, were likely to be translated into reality. It became clear that some rapid restructuring was necessary. Many of the Kohl government’s reactions were simply dictated by political pragmatism: it was evident from the beginning that any talk of German reunification would need to be embedded in the rhetoric of European union, given new impetus by Gorbachev’s vision of a wider Europe, if it were not to unsettle and alienate both West Germany’s EEC allies and her Eastern European neighbours. Kohl pursued this line without much subtlety, occasionally stumbling over sensitivities of which he seemed unaware, but with extraordinary perseverance and eventual success.

It is interesting and, I think, important to speculate both on the reasons for this single-minded pursuit of a goal which, from the beginning, had been something of a national fig-leaf for the Christian Democrats, whose West German regionalism and unambiguous loyalty to Western Europe was never really in doubt, and for its acceptance by West Germany’s allies and neighbours. Again, I think it is fair to say that these reasons were fundamentally economic and politically pragmatic, rather than being rooted in any deeply felt commitment to a German nation, however defined. There is little doubt that it rapidly became clear to Kohl that unification offered him a quite unexpected chance of reversing the ailing political fortunes of his party and retaining government. He was not slow to take advantage of this opportunity. In the longer term, the creation of a massive new arena for the export of West German products and expertise, for all the short-term disadvantages and “start-up costs”, was an offer too good to refuse for a government increasingly concerned about the stability of the world market and heavily dependent on its export performance to underwrite prosperity at home. East Germany was the key to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

This insight quickly communicated itself to the Federal Republic’s EEC allies and its Eastern European neighbours. The initial political reservations of France and England were soon replaced by the realisation that they could not afford to stand aside from this “sale of the century” if they wished to share in its profits and prevent Germany “going it alone”, with the consequent even greater dominance in Europe and the EEC that would bring. With even greater pragmatism, the Warsaw Pact states, with far deeper scars from a different German past, rapidly arrived at the conviction that the destruction of the internal market left them no alternative but to seek the assistance of the EEC—spearheaded and co-ordinated by the West German economic machine—to rebuild their collapsed economies. There have been a number of bitter diplomatic pills to swallow, but it has to be said that Genscher, and even Kohl, have shown an increasing ability to demonstrate the graciousness of the victor, even matching Vaclav Havel’s apology for the mistreatment of Czech Germans after the war with the acknowledgment that there were some reasons for this which led outside Czechoslovakia.

Nearly everyone has commented on the “national reticence” with which this extraordinary project has been carried out. Even the East German crowds’ slogan Deutschland einig Vaterland (Germany--united fatherland) was characterised less by passion than impatience: What do we want? Affluence! When do we want it? Now! I have pointed out that there were obvious pragmatic reasons why the West German government needed to play down any component of nationalistic fervour and cover it with a sugar-coating of Europeanism. Nevertheless, it is demonstrable that there was, in fact, very little nationalistic content, at least of a traditional kind, in the pill to be coated. It is surely significant that the ceremony in Berlin to mark unification was so unsure of its symbolism and purpose that it might easily have been mistaken for a church synod or an attempt to demonstrate the success of equal employ-
ment opportunity policies, had it not been for that quite extraordinary scowl on the Chancellor's face when an unbidden guest threatened to disturb the pre-ordained mix of calm, culture and boredom. The only real slogan that could be read out of the proceedings was business as usual; good business, and morally responsible business, it goes without saying.

Why then did I feel so acutely uncomfortable and sceptical in Oxford last year when a British colleague, projecting a not dissimilar middle-class self-satisfaction, tried to convince us that West German nationalism was a quantitatively negligible, that German nationalism had died with the passing of the Third Reich? I suppose he merely provoked the same scepticism I would bring to the proposition that the collapse of the empires after World War II brought with it the end of imperialism and the liberation of the colonised. It is a commonplace to observe that, just as one of the major reasons for the abolition of slavery was the increasing conviction that it was bad business, the exploitation of the previous colonies has progressed with far greater efficiency and an infinitely improved image since they ceased to be colonies in name. The latecomers to empire, Germany and Japan, have achieved through trade and finance a dominance which makes their earlier attempts to enter the club by military means appear coarse, misguided and thoroughly outmoded.

West German national pride is well aware of the taboos of history, and has from the beginning sought new forms to express itself. Some of these have a clear fig-leaf function: the claim, for instance, to be the best "Europeans" and the only really "modern" European state, which has freed itself from traditional baggage, asserts a position of leadership in an ingenious and sanitised way. But no one who has accompanied the West Germans through their post-war saga as long as I have will doubt that the major displacement of this national pride has been into the economic sphere, anticipating the lessons of the world's greatest treasurer before he even thought of them. Reconstruction and prosperity became (as they had once before, after the failure of 1848) the cherished national aims; as Peter Weiss formulated them in 1964, through the perspective of the Napoleonic restoration, "the right to enrich oneself in a process of happy mutual exploitation—every man his own Croesus". The political downside of this rather Darwinian ethic is heavily masked following Bismarck's insights from the Second Reich, by exemplary social welfare legislation which maintains the market and the social order. But there is no doubt anyone who criticises the shared myth of prosperity and social justice will provoke a response of panic, hysterical overreaction and intense aggression.

What impact will the homogenisation of Germany—I prefer the term to unification, which suggests some kind of growing together—have on this defensive, displaced, but nevertheless strong sense of national pride? It should first be pointed out that it is in many ways a specifically West German national pride, and will not easily extend itself to the brothers and sisters from the East who will be told by the owners of four bedroom villas and multiple Mercedes that they must learn to work as "we" do, if they want to share in the benefits of the German dream. After all the rhetoric about the liberation of the enslaved peoples of the East, there is remarkably little sympathy for the conditions under which they had to live and work, or willingness to help: they must be put through the cold shower of the market, must somehow repeat a West German post-war experience beyond the recall of most of those who advocate it, before they can be admitted on equal terms. It seems to have been conveniently forgotten that Eastern Europe shared a far worse post-war experience than West Germany, and that the same West Germans who condemn the inefficient work practices and laziness of their brothers and sisters in the East were the first to condemn a system which produced these attitudes. The moral rigour with which perhaps the least revolutionary nation in the world seems to require of its new fellow-citizens that they should have taken the path of active resistance when it was most dangerous to do so, is nothing short of astonishing.

And the Easterners, the "Ossis", to whom I feel such a strong bond? They are learning to understand economics. I went to a shoestring cabaret in Halle with my friends; one of the sketches summed it up nicely. "We have the right to do anything we like, to buy anything we like, but no money to do it with." I was reminded of one of the ironic slogans of post-war years: "Now we're democrats, now we can starve!" I suppose that, after a sufficient period of chastening, the Ossis will be admitted to the groaning table of West German affluence, but they will be made to feel their place for some years to come. The question that no-one can answer: will the inevitable breaking of Chancellor Kohl's promise that "no-one will be worse off", that homogenisation will cost no-one anything, revive that other shy, constrained and complex growth, East German national pride? How long will an unemployed and unequal population continue to accept that their efforts of 40 years were worthless, useless and somehow morally wrong? I suspect that there is a small bone hidden somewhere in the homogenised steak on which someone, before too long, will break a tooth or two. Forgive me for expressing such an unworthy doubt about the total and utter triumph of German know-how. As a friend in Munich said when I visited her last year: "If we pull this off, you'll really have to respect us." I had trouble with both the "we" and the "you", which are indefinite plurals of a kind of which I am deeply suspicious.

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DISOWNED

In our April issue, Bob Hogg put the case for an organisational revolution in the ALP. Here Bob McMullan responds with a view from outside the factions.

It is entirely appropriate that Bob Hogg and other interested party members should be initiating a fundamental review of the Labor Party structure in this centenary year. I support the need for such a review and welcome an opportunity to make a contribution on the its priorities.

We need to put the 'crisis' in the Labor Party into perspective. The party is at the end of its most successful decade in a 100-year history. It is true that being in government imposes great stresses on a party and these have reverberated in the ALP from the highest level to the newest member. But this is much more welcome than the problems of atrophy in opposition with which we had become too familiar.

Seen from this perspective, the party’s structure, which ALP members are seeking to reform, has been remarkably successful; indeed, the most successful structure in the history of the Labor Party and the most successful social democratic structure in any country outside Scandinavia during the 1980s. This is a reminder and a plea to others not to rewrite history by turning the current serious circumstances into a crisis created by flaws inherent in the structure of the party. This is not to deny that as society changes so the Labor Party must change and adapt.

For any political party, structure and organisation are not ends in themselves. They should be assessed against the party’s objectives. The long-term objectives of any party of social reform can be expressed in two parts: (i) to gain and retain power (ii) for the purpose of implementing social reforms in accordance with the platform of the party.

Beyond this is the question of making the contribution of members effective. This problem has been summarised in the phrase "loss of ownership". In other words, many members feel that they no longer play the significant role in the party which they once did. Whether Labor ever was a party truly owned by rank-and-file members is another question.

But it is essential that anyone who chooses to join the party perceives a special relationship with those in positions of democracy needs always to remember that the political process is ultimately about the struggle of ideas. In the long term, reform politics is only possible in an environment where there is broad-based community support reform. It can’t be imposed from above if it is to have an enduring impact. The implication of this is that we need a Labor Party that is open to the maximum input of ideas and viewpoints. Therefore, people must be able to join the party easily and, having joined, find it easy to participate and contribute effectively.

In many parts of Australia it is hard to imagine how the party could make joining more difficult. So many resources are put into keeping out the odd one or two 'undesirables' that the ALP turns away, or fails to encourage, scores of potentially constructive members. A membership process that is simple and open should be the first priority of reform. It is is only through such an open process that a wealth of ideas for future policy development will be available. After all, the Labor Party is not a debating society; winning arguments (or numbers) inside the party is not the purpose. The purpose is, rather, to see the result of the internal debates implemented as successful and enduring government policy.

The ALP has always prided itself on being a democracy but it has tended to be obsessed with structures at the expense of underlying values. Having encouraged people to join the Labor Party, it is important that the structures enable a diversity of views to be expressed and dissenting views to be tolerated.

In analysing the priorities for change we should look firstly at the fundamentals of the political process within which the Labor Party seeks to operate. A reform party in a
responsibility, a relationship not available to those outside the party. First and foremost this entails enhanced communication. Party members need alternative sources of information and regular detailed explanation of what has been done, why it has been done, and what is proposed to be done in the future. Members also need to be able to respond, to indicate what they believe the priorities should be and what contribution they can make.

Secondly, I have advocated for some time the development of what I call "open forums". By this I mean a report-back process at numerous and geographically dispersed meetings open only to Labor Party members. I don't envisage these meetings as decision-making bodies. The purpose, as I see it, is to encourage genuine dialogue and to give members the opportunity to hear an explanation from ministers of the party's recent program and an indication of where it fits in a longer-term program of reform. The final outcome is the exchange of ideas itself, not number-crunching.

A third issue is the development of a "clever" party. Over the last 20 or 30 years at least, the ALP has paid insufficient attention to the education and training of members and to their role in modern campaigning. As campaigning has changed, some of the older, more traditional functions have been reduced in significance. However, modern campaigning also requires people, even though their functions may be different. There tends to be a fascination with the high technology which can be applied to these tasks but it needs to be remembered that neither the objective nor the nature of campaigning has changed.

I should comment on the particular significance of factions in this process of reform. It is important, if trite, to recognise that factions are inevitable. In every significant organisation there will be people with divergent views about the role and the priorities for that organisation. Anybody worth their salt will seek to organise to ensure that their priorities and views are those which the party, organisation or nation adopts. This is not only inevitable, it is healthy. But there are two fundamental questions which need to be addressed. One is the increasing tendency for factional rigidity. My concern is that there is no potential for lasting reform in rigidity and ossification, only in diversity and open debate. If the secret of success is seen as never deviating from the factional line, then we will find conformity rewarded and originality penalised. That may be an acceptable criterion for selection in a conservative party (although I doubt it) but it is the deathknell of reform politics.

The second trend which causes concern is the all-too-common tendency to put faction before party. These two problems are exacerbated by the fact that, although factions dominate the leadership positions in our party at an administrative level, if not always at parliamentary level, they do not represent the majority of members. There are more party members who are not in factions than who are.

The current debate surrounding the review of rules has highlighted one key factor about factions: it has shown that the key divisions are not about ideology but about power. The debate about party reform is between in-factions and out-factions, not Left, Right and Centre. It is absurd that rank-and-file preselection can be a Left policy in Albury but not in Wodonga; that the collegiate system can be Left policy in Canberra, but not in Queanbeyan. It is more than coincidence that the greatest resistance to change comes from present office-holders in all states.

In this context the question of reducing the direct union representation at party state conferences from 60% to 50% will make no significant difference to the factional balance in any state. But the logical starting point for any discussion should be that all partnerships start from the presumption of equality, rather than defence of the status quo. The onus should be on those wishing to argue that the partnership between branches and unions should be other than equal to establish their case. The 60/40 ratio is a historical accident. To defend it on the grounds of damaging the status quo is as classical a conservative argument as Walpole or Menzies could ever have devised.

In a balanced party which encourages diversity and tolerance I believe the 50/50 balance is the appropriate preselection rule. If the union/party balance is not changed to 50/50 I suspect that more harm than good may be done by uniform application of the principle of equal partnership at the preselection level. Whatever system is to operate, it is important that there is some broad principle which enables the National Executive or some similar body to oversee the rules and their application to ensure that preselections are as fair as possible.

Individual members should be given a role in the election of a number of delegates to the National Conference, thereby reducing the capacity of powerful individuals and groups to determine the outcome of conferences in backroom deals.

Simply changing the ALP in order to perpetuate old myths is not reform. The Labor Party has never been a mass party; there have been very few times in its history at which it has had more members per capita of population than it has now. If we are going to bring about sensible change we have to proceed on the basis of reality, not myth.

If we start from the principle that we want to develop a party which is geared to gain and retain office to ensure enduring social reform and that we want a party capable of debating key ideas and concepts in the modern high technology society, then the questions of organisational reform will follow logically.

I congratulate Bob Hogg and the others who have initiated this process of reform. It will be a fitting outcome for our centenary year if historians are able to look back and see 1991 as a year in which change to regenerate the party was made while it was in office and that that change served as the basis for an enduring and reforming government.

BOB McMULLAN is parliamentary secretary to the Treasurer.
Just when you thought you had recovered from the delights and anxieties by attracting major corporations and sat through hours of film -- the festival turns 40 this year -- a time when conventional wisdom has it that cultural events turn into tired, less adventurous institutions. The festival has certainly become part of Melbourne's mainstream cultural landscape, attracting ever larger and wider audiences. This year, the organisers have even been relieved of their usual pre-festival financial anxieties by attracting major corporate sponsorship. Larger patronage has meant that audiences will be accommodated in the Village Cinema as well as in the much-loved Astor, the State Film Centre and the Valhalla.

Yet the offerings this year indicate that the festival has not been spoiled by its unrivalled success. Tate Brady, the film festival director for the last four years, has travelled to international festivals and sat through hours of film mediocrity to bring us the most exciting and interesting developments in filmmaking around the world.

Although Brady assures us that each film is chosen for its individual merits, he is confident that the end result is a program which reflects significant trends in independent filmmaking. This year continues the move away from Europe to South-East Asia and North America as the burgeoning centres of film innovation. Also, for the first time, low budget, independent Australian feature films make up a major part of the festival's program.

Some Anglo-Australians may still be secretly resistant to the reality that many of the best films in recent times have been made in Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia, India and Japan. Brady points out that there is no better way to come to grips with the different Asian cultures than through these films which deal with the particular complexities and contradictions of their own societies. Like some of the best Australian and American films, most of the features from the South East Asian region are not mainstream box office hits. They come from the margins of their own countries and provide critical and unusual perspectives on past and contemporary histories.

According to Brady, among the finest films in this year's festival is Song of the Exile, one of several Hong Kong made films, which deals with the difficult questions of Chinese identity and reunification with the mainland. This largely autobiographical film, directed by Ann Hui, concerns the difficult and fractured relationship between a young woman who was raised in China and educated in England, and her Japanese-born mother. As the film moves back and forwards over 30 years, it becomes clear that the history of the family is marred by a multi-layered process of exile and alienation. This personal story becomes an elaborate metaphor for the painful separation between the Hong Kong community and mainland China. It tells of the strong desire for reunification, despite the deep problems associated with this process.

Hong Kong is home to one of the most prolific film industries in the world, producing around 150 films a year in a wide variety of genres. Surprising as this may be to some, many of these films are subtitled and screened in Melbourne's Chinatown. They are already so popular in the Chinese community that no one bothers to advertise the screenings in the English language press. In making his selection, Brady hopes to introduce the incredible range found in Hong Kong films to a broader audience. He points out that even the wonderfully entertaining action and slapstick comedies are deeply concerned with the issues confronting present-day Hong Kong.

Among other highlights from the South-East Asian region are two films from Thailand, by director Prince Chatri. Brady tells us that his royal status had nothing to do with his importance as a filmmaker. In fact, he is considered to be Thailand's best, and strongly associated with the Thai social realist movement which goes back to the mid-70s. Both films are fundamentally concerned with corruption. Song of Chipari is a simple melodrama about a husband and wife team of sand traders who bring their goods down the Chipari River to sell in Bangkok. The drama begins when the wife is kidnapped into prostitution and the husband begins a seemingly impossible search for her in the unfamiliar and crowded madness of urban Bangkok.

A very different, and perhaps better film from the same director is The Elephant Keeper. Using a most unusual combination of documentary and crime thriller genres, the film takes on corruption and environmental carnage in the logging of the Thai forests.
For those of us who are used to casting a disdainful eye at anything North American, it is a salutary lesson to see the sheer volume of dissenting and creative power emerging from this country. The feature films and documentaries show independent American filmmakers excelling against often overwhelming odds, to produce critical, insider perspectives on many aspects of American society.

The underside of middle America and the traditional nuclear family is again under satiric scrutiny in Hal Hartley's new film Trust. His first film, The Unbelievable Truth, was a surprise success last year's film festival and enjoyed a season at the Valhalla. Trust is a much more biting look at the petty, routine existence and aspirations of the urban middle classes. The principal character, Maria Couglan, played by Adrienne Shelly, is about to follow along the same predictable life plan as her parents with baby and marriage to the local football hero when her plans are derailed by her boyfriend's refusal to play ball. The regroupings and reconciliations occur in unexpected ways that reveal Hartley's fundamental pessimism about the future of the most romanticised of family forms.

Jon Jost is arguably America's least known and most prolific independent filmmaker. Two Jost films will be screened at the festival. The first, All the Vermeers in New York, is described as an elegant film about the beauty of art, juxtaposed with the post crash, New York scene. In contrast, Sure Fire is a brooding drama, set in a Mormon influenced town in Utah. Jost uses this backdrop to explore the sinister and unspoken aspects of Christian Fundamentalism.

It is through political documentaries that the Americans continue to make their most outstanding contribution. One of the truly frightening films in the documentary category, Blood in the Face, continues the Christian fundamentalist theme, this time exposing the radical Right in all their dubious Christian glory. The film is a collaborative effort on the part of Anne Boylen (With Babies and Banners), Kevin Rafferty (Atomic Cafe) and Village Voice journalist James Ridgeway who has written a book on the same subject. The film follows the weird antics and racist philosophies of such well-known neo-fascist groups as the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations and the Euro-American Alliance. Without exception, all the leaders of the radical right are shown to have direct links with Christian Fundamentalist organisations. In keeping with the new anti-interventionist wisdom of documentary film-making, the film is entirely without commentary. The subjects in this documentary don't need any assistance to demolish themselves. Indeed, the power of the film lies in the apparent ordinarness of many involved in the radical right and in the violence of their racial hatred.

The ugly consequences of white supremacy exploitation is seen in Stephanie Black's first expose documentary H-2 Worker. The film investigates the deliberate loophole in American immigration policy which 'allows' Jamaicans into Florida to work for starvation level wages in the sugar plantations. Black shows in graphic detail how this H-2 temporary visa virtually holds prisoner 10,000 men in sub-human living quarters and gruelling work in the fields before they are forced to return to Jamaica.

It may appear remarkable that Black was able to gain such seemingly easy access to one of America's best kept secrets in exposing neo-slavery policies towards black workers. But as the film progresses, it dawns on us that the authorities were duped by their own sexism in not taking seriously this young female student making her first film. Sweet feminist revenge lies in the overwhelming success of
the film which has been widely screened and won prestigious prizes at the New York Film festival.

At last we have a film which exposes how our homophobic mass culture appropriates many of its most saleable images from the gay community. In Paris is Burning Jennie Livingston uncovers the origins of 'voguing' in the gay bars of New York. To most followers of the club scene, 'voguing' is merely the latest dance craze made trendy by Madonna. It combines break dancing, gymnastics, assuming attitudes and striking the poses of fashion magazines. But for Black and Latino gays, voguing is an integral part of achieving identity and creating a community within a hostile society.

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Livingston’s film is an eclectic collage on film tackling such diverse issues as sexual abuse and cross cultural confusion. The fortytenth anniversary of the festival also marks the first time that Australian features have been so well represented on the program. Brady says that this reflects the positive changes in the local industry. He says that while there are fewer films made these days, Australians are producing better, more interesting films which focus on our contemporary culture.

Of particular interest to Melbournites is Leo Berkely's first feature Holidays on the River Yarra. Berkely is better known as one of Melbourne's greatest film buffs. He never misses the festival and is reputed to be one of the few who trudges faithfully along to every film. Films from the UK is Strip Jack Naked, a semi-autobiographical film about being gay in London from the early 60s to the 90s. Made by Ron Peck, the film combines some wonderful old Super-8 footage with old photographs and archival material to provide a rare insight into gay history.

Two new feminist contributions have come from Canada. The Famine Within examines the debilitating quest for the perfect body while Five Feminist Minutes represents the ultimate in participatory feminist process. It is the end result of an invitation to women from the National Film Board of Canada asking for proposals which provide five minute snapshots of feminist perspectives on the world. Five Feminist Minutes is an eclectic collage on film tackling such diverse issues as sexual abuse and cross cultural confusion.

Fans of Elizabeth Jolley will be pleased to know that one of her most amusing short stories has at last been turned into a feature film. The Last Crop, directed by Sydney-born Sue Clayton, fulfills the fantasy of every true lefty, as a house cleaner and aspiring property owner literally takes the system to the cleaners.

Among the many more noteworthy films is The Ear by Karel Kachyna. It is the last of the Czechoslovakian Prague Spring casualties to surface after 20 years on the shelf and captures the terror of political repression under the Stalinist regime.

Of the dozens of films made about the 'German question', Brady has chosen Sybille Schonemann's Locked Up Time as the best encapsulation of the issues confronting the new German nation. Schonemann is an east German filmmaker who was imprisoned and subsequently expelled from her home country in 1984. Locked Up Time is her personal journey back into post-unified Germany to find the elusive 'culprit'. The film festival hopes that Schonemann will be one of this year's special international guests.

If this small sampling of the film offer is anything to go by, the 1991 International Film Festival will delight, entertain, educate and occasionally infuriate its ever-growing audiences. It is a wonderful opportunity to mix politics with pleasure. The festival starts on 7 June. Don't miss out.

MARTINA NIGHTINGALE is the women's officer for the Victoria Trades Hall Council.
Has the collective imagination of the West's filmmakers failed in the face of the depressing realities of life in the 80s and 90s? This admittedly provocative question arises from the selections made for the 38th Sydney Film Festival by its director Paul Byrnes. It would seem that a very high proportion of those from Europe and America have their roots in the documentary rather than in any sort of fantasy world—which may take the shape of Asian spirits (as in the Okinawan Unnamagiru or the Indian The Dwelling) or just pure comedy, for which Byrnes has had to go back to the 30s films of Ernst Lubitsch to rediscover.

Let's take America, a country which Byrnes represents as having more on its mind than the serial killers of The Silence of the Lambs and American Psycho infamy. There's pricks or cocks in Dick, a celebrated collage of women's views on the male member; and there's food galore in Henry Jaglom's unimaginatively titled feature, Eating—in which he asks women to talk about an alternative way to inner satisfaction, and gets answers like, "I've yet to meet a man who excites me as much as a baked potato" (and you thought Agent Cooper's preference for cherry pie over Audrey in Twin Peaks was a send up!).

Then there's one woman's view of Black gays in the New York cult film, Paris is Burning—which reveals the wildest of transvestism in Harlem's discos. And we escape from all this private politics into the public arena only to meet Guilty by Suspicion, which re-examines the House UnAmerican Activities Committee from the 50s with the help of Robert de Niro as a leftist Hollywood director, and Clint Eastwood probing another director, John Huston, in his film about the film African Queen--White Hunter, Black Heart.

Over in Europe, Paul Byrnes went out of his way to try to find the fruits of German reunification as represented by the cinema. He found only documentaries like In the Splendour of Happiness, in which directors from both sides of the old border got together to cast an ironic eye over their recent pasts, and Locked Up Time in which Sibylle Schonemann, a 1985 deportee from the East to the West went back to challenge her accusers.

There's clearly an economic factor at work. With the collapse of East German industry which resulted from the death of its government, there have been hundreds of sackings at the huge Potsdam Film Studios in Berlin, and no one's yet emerged to fund new films, or even to sub-title the old, suppressed East German films that impressed Byrnes so much at last year's Berlin Film Festival. But can one also discern an overwhelming of the im-
agitation by sudden freedom all over Eastern Europe? A Polish director has spun a fiction on a Jewish kid surviving the war by pretending to be Aryan (*Europa, Europa*), and a Hungarian has made a creepy tale from some *Dürrenmatt* stories (*Twilight*). But the real appeal from an area that used to throw up classic after classic lies in two long-banned Czech films—*The Ear and Funeral Ceremony*. Both examine the strength that ordinary people may find under oppression.

Perhaps the oppressed always make the best films. Certainly Paul Byrnes' four month long world-wide trawl of film festivals seems to have netted an unusually high proportion made by or about gays, women and blacks. Byrnes headlines, for instance, two of a likely 60 feature films—*Poison* and *The Garden*, both overtly gay. The former is a remarkable debut feature by American Todd Haynes, based on three Genet stories—which inevitably have a homosexual sub-text. But it's Haynes' overt showing of homosexual intercourse which has aroused a debate that's reached as far as American Cable News Network—erstwhile home of the Gulf War. The problem may be that *Poison* has escaped from the minority ghettos by winning the Grand Jury Prize at the important Sundance Film Festival, Robert Redford's repayment to the industry that made him, and where sex, lies and videotape was initially hailed.

*The Garden* is another offering from the man without whom no film festival would feel complete—Derek Jarman. Described as "a stunning dreamscape about the rage, sadness and pride of a gay film artist in the age of AIDS", it suggests that Jarman is retreating further and further up the blind alley of his own personal ghetto. But then, perhaps the English filmmaker hasn't got a Senator Jesse Helms to pressurise him into fighting for funds that, in America, are increasingly being tied to moral censorship. Todd Haynes has— as, presumably, has Jack Walls, the model and lover of the late gay photographer, Robert Mapplethorpe, who "speaks for himself" in the film *Eye to Eye*. That, by the way, forms part of a "Pink Panorama" evening of new gay and lesbian movies which is in addition to *Poison* and *The Garden*.

Is the bunching together, late at night, of these films itself a form of marginalisation? Paul Byrnes admits to some concern: "but I hope it serves to draw attention to them instead. One woman will be getting the works, though. Hopefully fresh from a triumph at the Cannes Directors' Fortnight (Cannes is still the arbiter of arbiters) Jocelyn Moorhouse, writer and director of the film *Proof* will launch the whole festival into motion. This Australian first feature by a younTV script-writer offers a remarkable synopsis which gives a few clues to th likely feel of the film. A man who's been blind since birth has never really trusted anyone' reports of the world. He relies on, of all things, photography to validate it — and has Andy as a mate to describe the photos to him. But an emotional triangle develops involving Andy and his devoted housekeeper. Whom can he trust now? Sounds like Paul Cox — and comes, inevitably, from the one place where the local film scene is happening, Melbourne. *Holidays on the River Yarra* is another Cannes-bound Melbourne movie — though Byrnes seems less enthusiastic about it.

Canadian women, too, get a go with their National Film Board compilation called *Five Feminist Minutes*, in which the 15th anniversary of its Women's Unit was celebrated by handing out $10,000 and five rolls of film to the country's finest, and screening all of the results. More concentrated will be the seven-film cycle of films from Canadian experimental artist Phil Hoffman. Byrnes believes that there's no one in Australia working in the same way to create their own grammar of cinema, and feels that his two-year search to find an appropriate auteur like this will be justified with the world premiere screening of Hoffman's just-completed cycle. Byrnes also sees the Lubitsch retrospective as an exemplar to Australia's struggling makers of comedy.

When it comes to race, though, there are few laughs. Two documentaries about Aborigines are placed beside two views of American white supremacists, the exploitation of a Pakistani migrant in Austria, a post-Spike Lee (he's now made it to Cannes) taste of Blacks and Hispanics on the streets of New York, and two slices of Black American music. As I suggested at the beginning, why write a script when life itself throws up so many nasties, oddballs and heroes? Even the increasingly manic German director, Werner Herzog, has found a madman fit for his imagination in a documentary on the Emperor Bokassa! It certainly makes *Paris is Burning* — with its woman director, Jennie Livingston, capturing the wild lives of Black gays—the essential film of the 170 on offer for $100 at this year's Sydney Film Festival. The 38th Sydney Film Festival is at the State Theatre, 7-21 June.

JEREMY ECCLES is a Sydney film and theatre critic.

White Hunter Black Heart Directed by Clint Eastwood

This compelling novel by Hanan al-Shaykh has been released in Australia just when world attention is again focused on the Middle East. This will most likely snare an audience curious about Arabic literature, especially a contemporary novel written by an Arab woman with an obvious insider's knowledge of the complex nature of modern Arab society.

This in itself is a good thing. Western readers have remained ignorant, for far too long, of an incredibly rich literary tradition. This includes Egyptian writers such as Nawal al-Saadawi--Nobel prize winner, Naguid Mahfouz and the Palestinian poet, Fadwa Tuqan, whose own traditional upbringing mirrors in many ways the women in al-Shaykh's novel. This book will be a rewarding experience for those venturing for the first time into the realm of Arab writers, especially those whose perceptions of Arab literature have been coloured by the Rushdie affair.

Hanan al-Shaykh is one of the foremost contemporary writers in Arabic. Born in Lebanon in 1945, she was educated in Cairo and then pursued a career in journalism including a sojourn in the Arabian Gulf. Because of the continued civil war in Lebanon, she has lived in London since 1982.

al-Shaykh unfolds a story of four women who have little control over their lives. Their own awareness of this and their struggle to find a sense of identity, a sense of "self" are brought out with sensitivity and compassion.

Her four main characters are imprisoned metaphorically, in an ill-disguised desert kingdom (read Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, or one of the Arab Emirates). It is a world of paradoxes, a world where women wear designer clothes and French perfumes hidden beneath their long black robes, or 'abaya', where men censor Western magazines and videos while pursuing foreign women with a lust verging on idiocy.

The suffocating, monotonous lives of her main characters, brilliantly recreated through the author's description of inconsequential, minor domestic rituals, are symbolised through a simple garment which, from puberty onwards, dominates their lives. This is the 'abaya' which tradition decrees they must put on whenever venturing outside the confines of their homes, or in the presence of a non-related male. This garment becomes an extension of their 'nothingness'--their invisibility.

Yet, while there is a common thread running through their individual stories, they are very different characters who find, or fail to find, the solutions to the psychological vacuum in which they're trapped.

al-Shaykh's style of writing is well-suited to her sensitive subject-matter and although essentially non-polemic in tone, her voice is frank as she relates the personal dilemmas the women face. The first story is told by Suha, a modern, educated Lebanese woman, unused to a restricted lifestyle. Although she identifies as a Muslim Arab, she feels no empathy with the local culture and alternates between feelings of anger and helplessness. Even after a year in her gilded cage she cannot adjust to the emptiness of life spent drinking coffee and eating cakes. Her attempts to find any meaningful work fail and she sinks into an almost hypnotic trance and an illicit affair with another woman, Nur. Although such a liaison is not approved it is condoned in preference to the far greater sin of adultery. Suha retains her determination, however, and finds a way of regaining her identity.

Tamr, in contrast to Suha, is a local tribal girl, uneducated and unsophisticated. Interwoven into her narrative is the story of her mother Taj al-Arus who lapses into occasional insanity and reflects on her marriage to a local sultan 40 years before. Although a secondary character, the mother is one of the most memorable women in the novel and when she finally looks back on her life and asks herself "Why?", we have reached perhaps the most moving episode in the book.

Tamr's fate will be different to that of her mother because, after a tremendous battle with her brother, she wins the right to education and a small measure of independence. al-Shaykh leaves us in no doubt that it is not Tamr's hunger strike which defeats her brother, but the shame of being reminded, by his own wife, that the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Fatima, could read and write. In case the reader overlooks this central theme—that women can challenge male authority and win—the author provides another two examples elsewhere in the novel. It is through challenging the usual interpretation of the Koran and Hadith that change may occur, that some element of choice may be possible for some of her women. Indeed, many Muslim feminists believe that a redefinition of Islam in ways that are seen as legitimate, may be the only viable way of challenging a male authority which uses customary law and traditional practices to subjugate women. al-Shaykh's writing indicates that she acknowledges this too, but she also has faith in education and outside employment as ways of forcing independence.

Through her introduction of Suzanne, at first glance an unsympathetic American woman--an ageing Marilyn Monroe of the desert as she appears to the many Arab men pursuing her—the author seems to suggest that the sexual emancipation enjoyed by Western women is hollow
and provides no answers. Suzanne who, for the first time in her life, experiences excessive male attention, is a prisoner of her own sensuality. She fights desperately to stay on and resist her impending deportation.

The fourth female narrator is Nur, a self-destructive local beauty whose husband is alienated because he longs for a wife with whom he can share his thoughts, not a woman whose life is one long party.

al-Shaykh’s powers of narration are awesome. She reaches her peak when describing the neurotic behaviour and hysteria which weave their way incessantly through the lives of the women in her novel. The hysteria she describes is no mere simulation, nor is it self-induced by idle, pampered women. She suggests that the condition triggering hysteria is women’s sexual vulnerability and oppression, portraying a male-dominated society and how it affects women psychologically, rendering them powerless and ineffectual.

al-Shaykh’s intriguing novel should assist in breaking down the mystique surrounding women’s seclusion in traditional Muslim countries. It is sure to be read by many Anglo-Australian feminists with a genuine desire to understand the lives of such women. Hopefully, they will resist the temptation to generalise from what they read. The lives portrayed are authentic and show us a particular reality but, of course, they do not represent the lives of all Muslim women.

HANIFA DEAN-OSWALD is the former deputy commissioner of Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs in Western Australia.

Essaying Doubt


The great Australian art critic Bernard Smith once called Meanjin "the greatest literary journal this country has produced". He went on to say that "only The Bulletin during the first quarter of its existence has had such a comparable effect upon Australian letters". A strong endorsement, but one written in defence of the journal in 1960 when Cold War intolerance threatened to shut the journal down.

One of the great strengths of this volume is that it shows the battles critical writers have had to fight in the country to create the spaces in which a living culture can survive. If The Bulletin was the journal which began the break with Colonial writing, as Sylvia Lawson contends in her marvellous book The Archibald Paradox, then Meanjin is the journal which builds upon that break the basis of a critical writing.

The Bulletin is famous for the democratic, nativist fiction and poetry it published, and Meanjin for the modern poetry which in part repudiated that tradition, and in part raised it to a higher standard. Yet the real strength of this anthology seems to me to be its essays rather than its creative writing. The non-fiction essay has something of a fugitive existence in this country—barely even recognised by the literary establishment as a genuine art. Yet this anthology shows that Australian culture was not born of mere ‘creative’ fictioning, but out of a critical and, at times, political reflection on the creative arts and on culture in general. Henry Lawson and Furphy are essential to the first phase of Australian cultural development, just as Judith Wright and Patrick White are a part of the second. Yet it is in critical reflection on their writings that they are made meaningful, generation after generation, according to the ‘temperament’ of the times.

The ‘case for critics’ that I am putting here is made in the volume by Kylie Tennant, writing in 1942. This brief and brilliant essay is about the critic’s role in transforming the raw material of creative writing into a key to understanding rooted in social and political contexts. Furphy’s sentences “were written by a word-intoxicated man, wallowing, positively wallowing, in print”. It is the critic who connects it to the times. "Until a writer learns to take punishment he hasn’t much stamina" says Tennant, with a typical author’s masochism in relation to criticism. Yet it is criticism which reduces the self-indulgent mass of fictions streaming off the press to a significant and workable corpus of culture.

If evidence were needed of the value of a literary forum for criticism, one not directly implicated in politics but connected to it, one need only turn to some of the essays in this book. Jack Lindsay on the ‘alienated intellectual’ brings the theory of Georg Lukacs to bear on Patrick White and, surprisingly, Frank Hardy. He found value in Hardy’s tough-minded realist novel at a time when cold war diktats were emerging ominously with high modernist literary indifference. Brian Fitzpatrick put the case for Aboriginal rights and autonomy in a 1958 essay which still needs to be heeded today. Humphrey McQueen’s acerbic essay on Queensland can now, thankfully, be read in the past tense. Arthur Phillips’ essay The Cultural Cringe is here too, and yes, it is the essay which gave Australia that expression. Together with “the lucky country”, the “cultural cringe”, as a critical concept gone vernacular, is a tribute to the power of the essay. Phillips’ piece is also an indication of the cultural
The heyday of the Meanjin essay seems to me to have been the 50s and 60s. This was a time when literary culture was defined and celebrated. The essay was the principle genre in this cultural labour; Meanjin was a principal vehicle in which it was achieved. H P Heseltine’s 1962 essay on “The Literary Heritage” is a signal document here, in its attempt to reinterpret colonial literature for modern tastes and times. In the late 60s, things seem to slip. Douglas Kirsner’s essay on new left politics is interesting now only for its stridency and vacuousness. Ian Turner’s Godzone looks like a tired and impotent rant. Only Craig McGregor seems to signal a way out. As media culture proliferated and became the cultural training ground of the nation, the influence of the literary, filtered through criticism, ceased to be the central forum for cultural debate. McGregor, in taking media artefacts seriously enough to engage in criticism of them rather than generalised broadsides, showed an escape route which, for the most part, was not taken. Meanjin remained a literary journal when book-based culture was increasingly inflected through the mass media, rather than through criticism. As Bernard Smith said of the Meanjin of the 50s, “intellectuals of different disciplines and different persuasions met on common ground”. The common ground of culture was, by the late 60s, a mass media culture, but intellectuals held themselves aloof from meeting on this ground, other than to denounce it.

If there is a sense of doubt hanging over Meanjin today, this is the cause of it. Its present editor, Jenny Lee, has laboured energetically to make it a critical and relevant forum. The fault lies today with writers. Academia is increasingly a place where the division of labour and increasingly scholastic criteria of ‘efficiency’ are forcing writers who might contribute to real cultural dialogue to opt for career-advancing ‘scholarship’. Added to this is the fact that the Labor Party persists in an anti-intellectualism which is both stultifying and obsolete. It is true that the days are gone when Chifley refused Commonwealth Literary Fund money for Meanjin because it was not something for ‘the workers’. Today’s ALP thinks more like Robert Menzies who seconded that refusal on the grounds that ‘culture’ should find its way in the market place along with capsicums, wine and pig iron.

As Meanjin’s founding editor, C B Christensen, wrote to Jim Cairns in 1973, “The labor movement should be doing everything in its power to strengthen the cultural/intellectual side of our national life... And until worker and intellectual join in close association, no restructuring of Australian society can be possible”. At present one has to wonder if such a project is even thinkable. One also has to wonder where the spaces are where the intersection of cultural work and democratic values, the key tenets of Meanjin, can be brought into dialogue with each other. Where today is the journal (rather than magazine) not tied to an academic definition of the ‘literary’ or a dogmatic conception of the ‘political’? To some degree Meanjin is still such a journal, but it maintains such a space with difficulty, and perhaps in the future only with increasing vigilance. This volume is a testament to several generations who kept such spaces open in our culture. Repeating the trick in the 90s might require quite a different temperament.

KEN WARK writes for both Meanjin and ALR.

Judy Horacecek

The French Government today apologized for the Rainbow Warrior incident & the tests at Muroroa Atoll...

Les bombes nucleaire sont super! Merveilleux!!

Boom!! Ha ha ha !!

Enore! Encore!!

and promised that nothing of the sort would ever happen again.

And now we cross to Stormin’ Norma for an update on the weather.
Lost Energies


The Painted Woman traces the possession and liberation of an artist daughter, Frances, by her artist father in a remote but genteel mountain setting.

As a child I remember being taken to the Blue Mountains when my mother spent a weekend there with her writing group. Sitting on the verandah out of sight, with a Virago book momentarily put to one side, I overheard enthusiastic discussions about theatrical performances using menstrual blood, interspersed with readings of poetry and prose. So artistic self-discovery in the Blue Mountains holds a specific set of resonances for me and I started reading Painted Woman with some expectation.

However, I found Sue Woolfe’s writing about the artistic experience disappointing. Her descriptions of Frances’ experience of the creative process reinforce the idea of the artist as godlike originator and creator - a conception which brings to mind Abstract Expressionist descriptions of work processes. Frances recites like Jackson Pollock “I’m in the painting.”

Statements of this kind are offered as if this is a universal truth about the artistic process and creation, rather than an interpretation, by a particular school of thought, about the art-making process.

Frances’ painting may be Expressionist but Woolfe’s writing is definitely mannerist. The repeated use of names on paint tubes, as poetic decoration for heavy prose, becomes boring. Woolfe cannot restrain herself when Frances’ painting is taken over by her father who wields a dramatic brush full of “Lamp Black”.

Perhaps it is unfair to compare Painted Woman, a first novel, with the work of more established writers. But reading The Painted Woman did bring into focus what I like about other women writers who have dealt with similar themes and material. A S Byatt’s use of the letters of Theo and Vincent Van Gogh in Still Life is a more imaginative use of artistic source material in fiction. Painted Woman has no lustre when compared with Annie Dillard’s inspirational description of artistic creation in The Writing Life, or the quirky and perceptive vision of an artist’s sensibility in Celestial Navigation by Anne Tyler.

Painted Woman highlights a problem common to many women writers in Australia. As a child eavesdropping on a verandah, I was tantalised by the energy and flow of ideas of women coming to terms with themselves and their creative power. However, that was 20 years ago and to hear echoes of these conversations revamped into muddling, dated fiction is disappointing.

Unfortunately there seems to be a trend in much Australian women’s writing to trot out ideas which were exciting and challenging 20 years ago in an unexciting and non-challenging way in order that they can be praised by peers in snappy little quotations on book jackets.

JANE SUTTON is a freelance writer based in Sydney.

War Torn

Still Murder, by Finola Moorehead. Reviewed by Susan Humphries.

When is a killing still murder? Finola Moorehead’s tale of detection is asking questions about bodies not usually asked by the writers of murder mysteries. The dead body is, of course, the fundamental ingredient of this genre. But Moorehead examines the body as a space. A space—living or dead—in which wars for control are fought.

Mixed up in Moorehead’s wonderfully labyrinthine plot are a group of Vietnam veterans. The reflection of one of them that there "Nobody declared war...therefore...I guess we were just murdering people" sees Moorehead introduce her central problem into the narrative. What is, and is not, murder? What constitutes warfare? And what status do those who kill and are killed by society’s guerrillas have?

At the centre of Moorehead’s book is the living body of the madwoman Patricia who is mentally inhabited by the woman-warrior Leni di Torres. Her connection to the body buried under the clump of marijuana seedlings tantalises throughout the book. But more interesting is Moorehead’s detection of ‘invisible’ killing of women’s minds and/or bodies in an undeclared gender war. Is Patricia “murdered or murderer”?

Moorehead’s book makes some neat reflections on its structure and concerns. Throughout the text, two characters piece together a jigsaw. Similarly, the newspaper clippings, diaries and personal files that make up the jigsaw narrative make for compelling reading. And as Patricia reflects, the fragments fascinate more than the order imposed by the finished puzzle.

SUSAN HUMPHRIES is a Sydney writer and an editor of Hermes, literary journal of Sydney University.
Hitting the S Spot

It's time to turn away from the heated debate section of ALR and snuggle into the heated bootie section. Here your only function is to taste, or to murmur gentle worlds like 'mmm' or 'yum'. Your tongue was not made only to form clever arguments or nasty putdowns. Relax and let Aunty Penelope take over.

Speaking of heated booties and other wonders of advanced consumer society, I wonder if anyone out there can explain a disturbing phenomenon which I have observed during my frequent trips to David Jones. I refer, of course, to the lack of Teasmades or is it Teasmaids? These wonderful inventions combine an alarm clock with a tea or coffee-making function which brews a nice cup of tea (or coffee) before the alarm goes off. The ingestion of caffeine can then take place without one's feet ever hitting the ground. Perhaps the makers of electric booties bought out the Teasmaid concept as the lack of cold feet affected their sales? I know not, but I have been forced to fall back on compliant lovers in order to get cups of tea without first shivering my way to the kitchen. Life is tough.

This is actually a sneaky and incredibly suspect way of introducing a book which I want to review; the New Internationalist Food Book, by Troth Wells. I expected a total lack of mechanical gadgets in its pages and, perhaps, constant reminders of How Lucky We Are. ("Walk three hours for your water. Forgot your firewood? Too bad, that'll be another half a day, and no, you can't wear your Reeboks"). I am pleased to report that The Food Book celebrates the diversity of food around the world, and that the world 'blender' does appear from time to time, although those Australians who do not possess such essential items will also be able to use the book.

The recipes given in The Food Book are modified for 'Western kitchens', which explains why one finds a reference to blenders next to a photo of a Zambian woman wielding a mattock (or at least I think it's a mattock, never actually having wielded one). Many of the recipes give alternative ingredients should a particular item be impossible to procure.

The recipes come from Africa, Asia and Latin America, or so the book's cover tells us. In fact, there is at least one recipe from North America, which is for Cornmeal pancakes, or Pone—a native American dish. Australasia is referred to once only—as a commercial producer of passionfruit. It may be pedantic of me, but the invisibility of a whole continent seems odd in a book which goes to the length of modifying its map of the world to exclude Eurocentric bias. This, I suspect, is connected to the treatment (ie, non-treatment) of hunter-gatherer cultures as a stage surpassed "about 12,000 years ago". A recipe book need not mention such things, but The Food Book is trying to do more than just give recipes and should therefore be more in tune with history. (Incidentally, the text is better on gender issues.)

The last paragraph has rocketed me from the realm of fluffy security into the cold hard world of analysis, and I apologise on bended knees. Let me spread the rug of humorous security back over your mind. I assure you that this book is well worth buying, and the recipes have given me much pleasure, as well as the occasional twinge of guilt as I decide whether to eat a dish from Mali or Haiti. Oh, what the hell, if it's Friday, why not try Burkina Faso? I should point out that okra are little green vegetables of a delicate tapering shape and I was delighted to learn they are also called lady's fingers. This is somewhat ironic given that the book makes clear that most of the world's agricultural mattock-wielding is done by women. You should be able to get okra quite easily. I could get it in Canberra, after all.

Fish Stew with Okra

Recipe from Burkina Faso (serves 4-6)

675 grams freshwater fish, cut into pieces, or equivalent amount of frozen white fish
3 tablespoons peanut or other oil
1 onion, sliced
3 carrots, sliced in rounds
6-8 okra, halved lengthwise
1/2 teaspoon chili powder
1 cup/100g tomato paste
1 cup/225g cabbage or spinach, sliced
2/3 cup/100g green beans
a little water
1 cup/200g rice
2 cups stock
salt

1. First heat the oil and cook the onion, carrots, okra, chili powder, salt and tomato paste for 5-10 minutes.
2. Then put in the fish, cabbage or spinach, beans and a little water to provide some moisture for cooking the vegetables. Cover and cook gently for 5 minutes.
3. Now add the rice, pour in the stock, bring to the boil and cook for 20 minutes, or until the rice is cooked as you like it, adding more stock or water as necessary to prevent the rice from drying out.

I understand the next edition of The Food Book will be totally vegetarian so as to help fat Westerners give up on meat which gobbles up so many resources (oh yes, and rainforest). This strikes me as a tad prescriptive, but I'm sure there are just as many good vegetarian meals in the world as recipes for carnivore fodder. The Food Book already has a number of the former, and they're worth trying. Have a look at the book if you see it around, or if you're really keen, get in touch with the New Internationalist. As winter closes in upon me, curries and chili hit the S Spot (stomach) most sweetly. With these recipes and my electric booties, even winter in Canberra seems less cold.

Penelope Cottier.
DEAR DR. HARTMAN

Drill Happy

Hello patients, Since I last spoke to you I have received a flood of mail in response to my remarks about the shocking psycho-sexual damage that can occur during the stressful process of buying your first home.

It appears many of you have also come across loan-happy bank managers who don’t know how to use the percentage button on their calculators, but do know how to sign you up for the personal equivalent of Victoria’s debt.

And when it comes to real-estate agents, quite frankly your remarks aren’t printable in a family magazine like Australian Left Review. Let’s just say that many of you appear alarmed and outraged by the chameleon-like nature of real estate professionals.

As one of my hysterical home-seeker patients put it recently, "I hate the way agents can be creepy-crawly slime-balls one minute, offering to lie down in puddles so you won’t get your feet wet, and then they spot a customer in a later model car and they knock over your toddler in their rush to shake the hand with the manicured nails!"

It would appear that some of you feel Dr Jekyll has a stable and consistent personality when compared to your average smiling agent as he or she supervises one of those ugly bargain-basement jumble sales which are euphemistically referred to as "inner-city, low price house inspections". According to the letters I’ve been receiving, "Ideal opportunity for the first home buyer" usually indicates a 15-year sentence to hard labour with no remissions. "Home renovations" are the owning classes equivalent of "weekend detention".

Actually, the whole process of home purchase, expensive and stressful as it is, pales into insignificance when compared to the horrors of renovations. (The Catholics who are reading this have just crossed themselves. The rest of you have held up garlic and wooden crosses to ward off the evil spirits.)

I think we are all familiar with the latest definition of a male sexual fantasy—being able to lie in bed on a Sunday morning and think about all the home renovations you’re not going to do. But I was offered a fascinating insight into the woman’s point of view in a letter received the other day from a distressed reader.

This patient-to-be had started to go to bizarre lengths in her attempts to lure her partner into fulfilling his conjugal obligations. For months her man had been "up and at it" by 6 am every Sunday morning "finishing the renovations to the kitchen" which he had originally promised would take only three weekends. She had reached the stage of desperation where the idea of a professionally-installed Knebel Kitchen seemed like a very positive and aesthetically pleasing alternative. So what could she do to attract her man’s attention away from the power drill and over to her love canal?

Of course she had tried the usual range of skimpy nighties and provocative sex toys, but he just brushed her and the toys aside as he reached excitedly for the latest junk mail from Black and Decker. Then she tried dressing scantily and hiding in the drum of his cement mixer so that when he turned it on he might notice her spinning around in the sand and cement and think about turning her on as well. But he just asked her to pass him another Besser Block.

Finally, she admitted defeat and asked her mother to look after the kids so she could get herself a weekend job at the local hardware store. At least that way she got to see him when he came in to buy the endless stream of "expensive little extras" which are constantly required by the inexperienced home renovator.

This sad story reflects just one strand in the complex ball of wool called "the modern woman’s experience". Needless to say, in the 90s I get just as many letters from women who’ve chosen a very different path. These are the "home renovator" equivalents of the feminist managers who have "targeted the top" in their professional lives. Quite simply, their slogan is "If you can’t beat them, join them". And so, on weekends, they take off their power padded shoulders and pick up their power tools, purchased from the Black and Decker ladies’ catalogue.

They spend their weekends standing up drilling side by side with their men. It doesn’t do much for their conjugal rights, but at least it keeps down the birthrate in a time of economic recession.

See you in my clinic.

Send your problems to Dr Hartman’s secretary, Julie McCrossin, c/- ALR.
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