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PAYMENT Please enclose payment by cheque, money order or credit card. Credit card payments need to include HOLDER'S NAME, CARD NUMBER and EXPIRY DATE.

POST TO ALR Subscriptions, Freepost 28, Box A247, Sydney South, NSW 2000.

Permit numbers: Northern Territory NT 1313/90, ACT TP 90/1532, NSW TC 90/3806, Victoria 90/2568.
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AUSTRALIAN LEFT REVIEW : 125 FEBRUARY 1991


MANAGING EDITOR: David Burchell. PRODUCTION EDITOR: Kitty Eggerking

ADVERTISING: Ros Bragg. ACCOUNTS: Hilda Andrews (Sydney); Olga Silver (Melbourne).

DISTRIBUTION: Internews, 1 Seddon Street, Bankstown, NSW 2200

DESIGN: Jim Endersby. COVER GRAPHIC: 'Port Guards' by Liu Yi

TYPESETTING: Gloria Garton. PRINTER: Spotpress, 105-107 Victoria Road, Marrickville 2204.

PUBLISHED BY: Australian Radical Publications, 635 Harris St, Ultimo 2007.

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CORRESPONDENCE: ALR, PO Box A247, Sydney South 2000. PHONE: (02) 281 7668; (02) 281 2899. FAX: (02) 281 2897.

ALR welcomes contributions and letters. Contributions must be typed, double-spaced on one side of the paper only. They will be returned if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. A style guide is available on request. Arrangements for electronic transmission of articles - either on disc or by modem - can be made. Ring the ALR office for information.

Views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the editorial collective.
War Of Words

Our new editorial column will feature a range of guest writers over coming months.

The London Guardian’s Hugo Young recently observed that the debate over the Gulf war in Britain was fatally impoverished in comparison with the vigorous war of opinions in the United States that preceded Congressional approval for the use of force in the Gulf. Young is on record as supporting the US position in the Gulf. What concerned him was the prevention of the very possibility of debate about the vital issues involved by the bellicosity of the British media.

In Australia, of course, there has been another impediment to a real debate over the Gulf crisis: the existence of a Labor government in Canberra has stifled the possibility of partisan discussion in the parliamentary arena. Yet it has to be said that the electronic media—ironically, perhaps, because of its reliance on packaged news grabs from the US networks—has been less bellicose than in any recent conflict (if one can distinguish bellicosity from sentimental patriotism about ‘our boys in the Gulf’).

Of course, this has not been a universal phenomenon. Talkback radio has been its usual splenetic self. And the ‘quality’ dailies such as The Australian and the Sydney Morning Herald have given full rein to their conservative think-tank ‘commentators’ to rationalise as huffily as possible what they take to be the motivations of the White House. At the same time, however, the supposedly crass and populist commercial networks have been giving full vent to the very public unease which has become our own homegrown, if belated, public debate on the Gulf.

One notable characteristic of this debate in Australia, as elsewhere, is that while the pro-war party has espoused a reasonably consistent perspective, the anti-war lobby is extraordinarily divergent in its views. Of course, this diversity is in many ways a good thing. Yet it needs to be admitted that not all of the arguments put forward by people in the anti-war lobby are congenial to those with a concern for consistent Left principles in international affairs.

The strongest sentiment in the anti-war camp has been a sincere and thoroughly sensible horror at the destruction of human life and the environment wrought by war. This has led many in the anti-war lobby to stress horror of war in general as the central tenet of the anti-war case. Yet, particularly on the Left, such arguments only go so far. Few on the Left would countenance, for instance, urging the ANC or the Filipino NPA to give up their admittedly bloody armed struggles on pacifist grounds.

Again, many in the anti-war lobby stress the unloveliness of the Kuwaiti regime and the arbitrariness of political boundaries in the Middle East to lessen the ‘problem’ of Iraq’s annexation. Yet by the same logic the entirety of Eastern Europe, other than the USSR—none of whose states had any real legitimacy other than as colonies of the USSR—could have been regarded as up for grabs by Western military power over the four decades after 1945.

Nor are Middle Eastern states somehow any less legitimate than nations in general, as often seems to be implied. After all, colonialism has determined the national boundaries and political heritage of nearly all of Africa, much of Asia, and most of Latin America—probably of two-thirds of the population of the world, in fact. Or again, if it is the undemocratic nature of the Kuwaiti regime which is seen somehow to lessen its legitimacy, could not this equally serve to justify another US adventure against Cuba?

Finally, some in the anti-war lobby seek to refute the US position by downplaying the integrity of the UN’s role—arguing that it has become a ‘tool of US interests’. To veterans of the 1930s who remember the great struggle by the Left behind ‘collective security’ to repel the advance of Hitler’s war, this has a bitter ring. In fact, there has never been such diverse and wide-ranging international support behind any effort to repel national aggression, ever. The real problem isn’t that this was an ‘American crusade’; rather, that the tenuousness of that international alliance behind sanctions strengthened the hand of those who supported expulsion through war sooner, rather than by sanctions later, lest the alliance collapse.

Why was the alliance tenuous? Ultimately, because of the lack of a community of interests between the Western and Arab members of the coalition, other than a dependence of the latter on the former. In short, the Arab governments alongside the West in the Gulf do not have support on the streets for so doing.

A real and durable international alliance against the annexation of Kuwait and in favour of sanctions would have required, among other things, a new deal for the Middle East in which Western behaviour in the region and neo-imperialism were not perceived as synonymous. This, of course, is more than the US will currently stand for. It would, however, provide a better and worthier goal for the anti-war camp than some of the arguments which have, from time to time, been mouthed in its name.

DAVID BURCHELL is ALR’s managing editor.
Women’s Electoral Lobby, Fatin is acutely aware of now losing touch and takes great pains to maintain contact with feminists, greens and other groups outside parliament.

Doorknocking during the 1990 election campaign, she was shocked at the level of voter disdain and cynicism with federal politics and she vowed there and then to try to improve relations with the grass roots.

Despite demands on her time, she also stays in touch with reading. Some of her formative influences in politics were Germaine Greer and Gough Whitlam and now she says she gets a lot of stimulation from reading women writers such as Margaret Atwood and Elizabeth Jolley, as well as the writings of Judge Mary Gaudron. And she wants very much to make headway on issues like domestic violence which affect large numbers of women who are outside the women’s movement. Other priorities are child care, equal pay, and women’s education, training and health.

Despite the pressure for conformism, Fatin has somehow managed to keep an idealistic aura around her and she is an unfashionable optimist. One of her top priorities is for the feminist movement to redefine its agenda for the 1990s, to avoid what she calls the “yuppie pessimism” about the women’s movement in the 1980s.

Instead of being bogged down in doubts about whether women really want a larger slice of the cake, she thinks the prevailing economic orthodoxy of the level playing field should be subjected to sophisticated feminist analysis.

Fair enough, but she is still somewhat theoretical about just what the new women’s agenda should be.

Fatin has long been seen as one of the more promising female ministerial contenders and back in 1987 was pressed by her Left colleagues to throw in her hat for a position. Declining then for personal reasons, in 1990 Fatin beat her factional colleague Jeanette McHugh to get a junior ministerial spot.

She thinks that women now have the edge over men in electoral popularity because they are seen by voters as being less aggressive and gladiatorial than men.

Although she decries the still small number of women in federal politics, she says the ALP’s affirmative action policy of the 1980s did change things as women gradually began to be more involved in the party organisation which controls pre-selections of candidates.

She joined the ALP in 1972 just before Whitlam was swept to power, mainly because of his promise to end the Vietnam war, against which she had been fighting for some time.

Since then she has been active in the party organisation, including a stint on the West Australian branch executive. She also worked for John Wheelond, Minister for Repatriation in the Whitlam government, before winning the seat of Canning in 1983 with a huge swing. In 1984 she won the new seat of Brand.

And her future? Much obviously depends on the prospects for the government’s and her re-election. But one thing is for sure: she will always be a gradual but persistent reformer—either in or out of government.

Louise Dodson.
They cheered, the 30,000 who converged on Melbourne's Bourke Street on the first Friday of January. Danny Johnson stood on a platform and they cheered when he said interest rates should be reduced by four or five or six percentage points. They screamed "No!" when Danny Johnson asked they if they wanted Paul Keating to be the next Prime Minister.

How did this happen to Danny Johnson? How did he get to the point where he was introduced to the adoring, teeming throng by Australian Small Business Association national director Peter Boyle? How did he get to the point where he was able to lead a march that included placards warning of the Fabian Society conspiracy and one that read: "Armed forces against inept government"? How?

Demolition Danny, the little feller from Warracknabeal in western Victoria, a small businessman. All he did was send a letter to his local paper denouncing the Kirner and Hawke governments. All he did was give voice to the pain and frustration of all the "little people" and the people in the bush.

The angels visited Danny Johnson and they were draped in the pages of Rupert Murdoch's Herald-Sun newspaper. Danny Johnson, the sort of person that newspaper editors would normally snub at a social function, became very useful. In the quiet news time before Christmas, he was perfect front-page news for the Herald-Sun which, under its new editorial management, could not be accused of
Johnson was calling on Victorians to stand up and be counted, to destroy the Kirner government, to destroy union bosses, to denounce all politicians, to march on Melbourne, the home of this evil.

For the Herald-Sun, anxious to tap into anything that makes Labor look bad, Johnson—bald, bearded and in his 40s—was beautiful. It was one of the great partnerships; the Herald-Sun provided the publicity, anti-Labor groups of all shades did the organising. But they were almost too smart for themselves. After the Melbourne rally on 4 January, there was virtually nowhere else, in political terms, to take the protest.

Certainly, the Herald-Sun made the most of the impressive turnout. (One of its journalists, a former radio talkback host, penned a glowing piece, claiming that the march was made up of "ordinary" Australians, that the "rent-a-crowd elements were on holiday". Where do they go, and do they get concessions for travelling in a group?) A couple of television journalists the following day, reporting on Johnson's claim that unnamed people had urged him to enter politics, even likened him to Lech Walesa.

But, in truth, the so-called Save Australia rally—and whatever similar demonstrations the Small Business Association can organise in other capitals—will produce nothing of lasting benefit. Everyone knew that Joan Kirner's government commands little more than 30% support (that is, most Victorians hate it). What it showed was that many of the people trying to point out the problem probably be pointing to themselves.

Let's share some of the thoughts of Danny Johnson, as told to an Age reporter. "I am not clever enough to say we want this or we want that. I need people to help me say what we want as policies. I am not qualified to do it all myself," he said. He hoped the rallies would attract people with answers. He did not know what the right policies were. On whether the "right" policies would be painless policies, he said: "I just cannot answer that. I would hope so, but I don't know... All I want is just a better deal for Australia and Australians." He blamed the Kirner government for not fighting harder to reduce interest rates. On how to cut interest rates without adverse trade effects, he said: "That's a very hard question for me to answer... If they can run a great country as America at 10% (rates), then surely something can be done here."

Mr Johnson blamed the federal government for the national debt. At the suggestion that most of the debt was private corporate debt, he said: "Who lets big corporations borrow more than they can ever hope to repay? I don't know what the answer is. All I am saying is there have been so many disasters, so many people burnt, that it's got to be looked at. "I just want good honest representation, sensible policies, not squandering taxpayers' money... All I want is a government who can just implement the correct policies to restore the economy. I don't know why you keep hammering at me when you obviously know I have not got the answers. I am exactly what the papers say I am: a demolition contractor. All I want to do is wake people out there who can give you answers."

As the Americans say, 'there is no there there'. Not one idea. Sorry, there was one idea; that was to tell the world he had no ideas. The Labor cause is very ill in Victoria. The political wheel has turned and looks fixed to favour the conservative forces for many years. But the Save Australia rally was a politically unrealistic, futile exercise. The marchers have petitioned the Victorian governor, Dr McCaughey, to sack the Kirner government, but their attitude towards the only person who can replace Kirner—Liberal leader Alan Brown—was a disgrace. They told him they didn't want him at the rally but made certain he had to turn up. Then they abused him. Alan Brown is by no means a lovable figure, but the television pictures of him being harangued by one marcher were enough to make you want to send the Liberal leader a 'Best Wishes' card. That's how bad things can get in Victoria at the moment.

SHAUN CARNEY is a journalist with The Age.
return of the proto-fascist movements which menacing labour in Victoria and New South Wales during the Depression.

As is now well-known, thousands of ex-soldiers and "loyal citizens" joined vigilante outfits to protect Australia from communism, most of them convinced that violence might be necessary if Australia were to be saved from the socialism of the Lang and Scullin Labor governments.

In the Riverina, a populist leader named Charles Hardy held the national headlines for a few weeks. He was hailed in the mainstream press as "the Cromwell of Riverina" - a revolutionary title if ever there was one.

Like Danny Johnson, he talked of Anzac, lower taxes, an end to politics and the evils of Labor. In his efforts to "save Australia" he called for the secession of Riverina from Lang's New South Wales and for the creation of a provisional government of experts, supported by local branches set up on quasi-fascist lines.

But how far do the parallels between the two periods extend? And what are the differences?

Then, as now, world commodity prices were falling. Banks were foreclosing on debts, unemployment was rising and farmers were blaming Labor governments, trade unions and socialists for their difficulties. And then, as now, rural people were bitter in the knowledge that city folks and city politicians seemed to have no idea of the hardship of life in the bush.

The secret armies were not the only conservative response to labour during the depression. While the militia enlisted in private, a public organisation, the All for Australia League, began signing up "citizens". It appealed to patriotism, decency and male pride.

On 2 March 1931, the All for Australia League was introduced to Danny Johnson's hometown of Warracknabeal. The organiser was a Mr F M Thompson. In words that Danny Johnson was to echo 60 years later, Thompson explained that the new organisation was "a non-political organisation". It was "the voice of the people...a plain organisation of Australian citizens, formed for patriotic purposes". In short, he declared, it was "an Australian political vigilance committee".

Now clearly, there is a menacing construction which could be placed on those final words. Thompson was well aware that secret, paramilitary units of the so-called White Army had recently been formed in country towns throughout that region. But Thompson was one who saw the dangers of vigilante violence and who believed that the Labor governments could be ousted by conventional political pressure. In fact, he warned off White Army members, telling them that:

All over Australia meetings are being held by serious, sensible people, talking of rebellion and secession. This should not be going on in a country such as this.

In my book on these events I've told the story of how the White Army actually mobilised throughout the Mallee-Wimmera on 6 March, only four days after Mr Thompson's speech.

The mobilisation was probably a mistake, a sign of the indiscipline inherent in the militia's decentralised structure. But the scale of the stand-to indicated how widespread were the fears and misapprehensions which induced conservative men to resort to extremist action.

Since the early 20s, paramilitary citizens' groups had been used as strike breakers. But, as we now know, they never intervened in the political process itself. Mr Thompson got his way. The All for Australia League transformed itself into the United Australia Party - the non-political party.

When the conservatives finally forced elections in New South Wales and Canberra, they were able to mobilise the disaffected "citizens" behind the conservative cause. They won an election by depicting Labor as a bunch of liars, criminals and traitors, and unionists as the dupes of communists. Plan B - the plan to mobilise the secret armies - proved unnecessary.

In my view, those who talk of a re-emergence of the secret armies are guilty of sensationalism. The farmers of Victoria are not about to fix bayonets and march on Spring Street. And if some did, they would achieve nothing. Too many of the objective conditions which provoked the male citizens of 1931 to enlist in covert militias are absent. Their Australia was divided by racism, by industrial unrest and by the immeasurable trauma endured by returned soldiers and the women who cared for them. Throughout the 20s, ideologues of both the Left and Right attacked liberal democracy. There were acolytes of both Stalin and Mussolini who advocated violence as the sole road to salvation. Each was an incitement to the other to use force.

These preconditions are far less evident today. But that is not to say that the forces which assembled for the march on 4 January can be written off. They overtly challenge the attempts to create a just, pluralist society which has come so far since World War Two. As the banners of the marchers made plain, the politics of respectable thuggery are still capable of stirring loyalty and passion. If the conservatives were able to turn this kind of 'me-only' patriotism into votes, the result would be the politics of red-neck 'commonsense', a politics which viliifies concern for wage justice, the environment, women's rights and multi-culturalism as so much tomfoolery - or as something worse.

MICHAEL CATHCART is the author of Defending the National Tuckshop (1988).
Gulffest

By now the media — and everybody else — have woken up to the fact that the anti-Iraq war is a TV war. "The first war ever to begin on live TV," as one reporter gleefully put it. It has worked wonders for the ratings of the debt-beleaguered Ten network and established once and for all the supremacy of CNN's style of coverage, forcing the other US networks to imitate it.

But while the media fill in the dull patches by reporting about the media reporting the war, we are entitled to ask whether the usual liberal soul-searching about war, censorship and the media really goes far enough. As television entertains us with the Pentagon-controlled pool footage, perhaps we should entertain the hypothesis that the media have become a dangerous weapon in war rather than its liberal conscience.

As the black CNN reporter in Baghdad with the unlikely name of Bernard Shaw and a magnificent baritone voice said: "Wherever you are in the world, ask yourself, 'why are the governments of Iraq and the US allowing this report from Baghdad to get out of here to you'?'

TV was implicated in the process which led to war. In competing with each other the US networks fought to implicate themselves in the diplomatic endgame towards war. American ABC's Ted Koppel dined with the Jordanian royal family, then secured an exclusive briefing from the Iraqi foreign ministry to pass on the message he had elicited from Jordan. Not to be outdone, Dan Rather went after and got an exclusive interview with Saddam for CBS. The political talking heads followed news-anchor celebrities into the fray. Bush sent Iraqi TV an eight-minute video tape putting the US position; Saddam replied by sending US TV networks a 90-minute video. On the eve of the US counter-invasion of Kuwait, James Baker, George Bush and Iraq's Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz all appeared live, while pre-recorded Saddam was beamed from Iraqi TV. When a diplomatic letter can take three days from out-tray to in-tray, why not go live on CNN and blast off a diplomatic retort and a propaganda release for the general public simultaneously? New media technology is reducing the time between diplomatic moves and counter-moves, not to mention the time between diplomatic gambits and publicity stunts.

The Pentagon has also found out how to use TV as a weapon. One wonders if it is any accident that the US airstrikes seemed to be timed to make the US east coast evening news. Peter Smark in the Sydney Morning Herald and other veteran journalists have begun reminiscing about how in Vietnam journalists 'told the truth' about the war, thus hastening its end. Which just goes to show what a slim grasp on history much journalistic writing displays. Only a few independent journalists stood against the tide of imperial opinion. Just to be on the safe side, the Pentagon has greatly restricted media access to its dirty little wars — not to mention the complete lack of coverage of those fought by the CIA.

Given the multinational nature of the anti-Iraq force, an office called the Joint Information Bureau (JIB) has been set up, whose purpose is to manipulate what we see from the Gulf. To my knowledge only John Pilger, writing in the London Guardian, has acknowledged its existence and its purpose. That the JIB would use the media to convey an 'acceptable' version of the war was evident even before it began. TV news showed pictures of hundreds of military transport aircraft landing in the Gulf. The fact that in this hastily prepared invasion planes were being despatched half-full was not mentioned.

The politicos and the military fight too to present their chosen images. The Bush campaign was stage managed by Sig Rogich, a former Las Vegas advertising man with interests in property and casinos. Rogich had a set specially built at Dhahran for Bush's pre-war warm-up visit, complete with neat rows of F-15 and F-16 warplanes lined up in shot as a backdrop. Rogich stage-managed images of Bush walking tall against desert sunsets, Bush the war veteran talking man-to-man with the troops. Given that last November US polls showed 50% of the US population were opposed to the war, this expensive spectacle had its uses — support for the Bush war went up to 60%.

In going in to battle with each other for ratings, the media happily surrender to the demands placed on them by the military machine. Even when they firmly believe they are shooting in the cause of liberal good sense and free speech, they violently defeat that objective by turning the moral need to know into sheer fascination. Meanwhile we flip channels from the tennis to the news and back again, to keep track of the score.

McKENZIE WARK regularly writes a column on the media for ALR.
The recession has left one of Labor’s proudest claims, job creation, in tatters. But did it have the impact the government claimed? Peter Saunders argues that a new strategy of job creation is needed to attack the new poverty of the 90s.

The post-war welfare state was premised on, and for three decades flourished within, an economic context of full employment. The high levels of unemployment that followed the oil shocks of the 70s and continued throughout the 80s put an end to that. Welfare capitalism was in crisis and the power of vested interests portrayed that as a crisis of welfare rather than a crisis of capitalism.

With increased unemployment came increased poverty among working-age families and its derivative, the problem of child poverty. Along with evidence of increasing rates of poverty in the 80s has come renewed doubts about the impact of welfare state programs. The New Right have seized upon those doubts to argue the case for the dismantling of the entire apparatus of the welfare state and for an end to such forms of social engineering. Yet the economic backcloth of the 80s and 90s differs substantially from that of earlier decades.

One aspect which has particular relevance in the current context relates to the changing role and nature of the labour market. The relationship between work and welfare has always been central to the interface between the state and market sectors of the economy. But the implications for welfare of the changing nature and patterns of work have not, until recently, been given much attention by welfare specialists.

This is somewhat surprising, given the one clear finding to emerge from decades of poverty research in Australia and overseas is that joblessness is a major cause of poverty. The preferable way to avoid poverty, or to escape poverty for those affected by it, is through joining the waged labour force. In the absence of any form of guaranteed income arrangement, paid work is the best means by which people can achieve financial independence and adequate living standards.

All of which suggests that the employment record of the Hawke ALP government ought to have made major inroads into poverty in this country. Why is it, then, that
welfare groups and religious leaders have emphasised that poverty has been on the increase in recent years, a perception which, according to a recent opinion poll, appears to be widely shared in the community? If the economic downturn sparked by the oil shocks of the 70s caused poverty to increase through unemployment, how can the 80s have been characterised by both rising employment and rising poverty?

While not actually claiming that poverty has fallen, the government has not been backward in emphasising that the extra jobs created since 1983 have had major positive effects on social justice in general and on poverty in particular. In the 1989 report Towards a Fairer Australia, Social Justice Measures, Economic Statement, the government argued that employment growth since 1983 has been "...a major achievement in advancing social justice and removing people and families from poverty". A similar point was made a year earlier in a report by the Office of EPAC: "Since 1983 over one million new jobs have been generated: employment growth of this order yields major benefits in poverty alleviation."

Certainly, growth in employment under the Hawke government has been impressive, in both historical and international terms. Between August 1983 and August 1990, for example, total employment (full-time and part-time) increased by over 1.5 million or by more than 25%. In proportionate terms, the growth in employment in the seven years since 1983 has been the same as that achieved in the 16 years up to 1983. In fact, there is no seven-year period since 1960 that has produced anything like the rate of job growth experienced in Australia since 1983.

Australia's employment record has also been impressive in international terms. Between 1983 and 1989 - the latest
year for which comparative data are available - employment grew in Australia by 3.4% a year on average. The corresponding figure for all OECD countries was 1.2%, little more than one-third of the Australian growth rate, and only in six countries was average employment growth 2% a year or more. On this dimension at least, Australia tops the OECD league table.

Of the new jobs created in Australia since 1983, around 43% have gone to males and 57% to females. Almost 38% have gone to married women, about which more later. Close to two-thirds (just over one million) of these new jobs have been full-time, with the remaining one-third part-time. There has thus been a continuation of longer-term trends in the structure of the waged labour market—a rise in the importance of female workers in general, of married women in particular, and of part-time as against full-time work.

The relative importance in the waged labour market of full-time male workers has been of declining importance for some time. In the mid-60s, over 67% of all workers fitted this category. By 1983, that percentage had declined to below 60% and by 1990 it was below 54%. Furthermore, while only 760,000 wives were in paid employment in 1966, this figure had doubled by 1983 and then accelerated to approach two million by 1990. Many of these women had husbands who were themselves employed. Characterisations of family working life as comprising a male breadwinner with a financially dependent wife confined to domestic duties are becoming increasingly irrelevant to most couples. Since 1983, the number of families in which two or more members were in paid employment rose by just over half a million. In contrast, the number of families with no member in paid employment also rose, albeit by only 32,000.

These figures point to the accelerating growth of the two-income family and also suggest that those who have been excluded from the paid workforce have not enjoyed their share of the fruits of the job expansion since 1983. In fact, despite the increase in employment of 1.58 million between 1983 and 1990, the level of unemployment fell by much less, from 687,000 in August 1989 to 590,000 by August 1989, rising again to 587,000 by August 1990. In broad terms it has thus taken the creation of almost three extra jobs in order to reduce the ranks of the unemployed by one.

The employment record under Hawke has not resulted in significant inroads into the ranks of the unemployed. Instead, the extra job opportunities have attracted new entrants into the labour market and helped to absorb the growth in the population of working age. Far more jobs have gone to workers from families who were already able to rely on a regular wage, than have gone to those whose families were without any wage income. These observations suggest that the impact of employment growth since 1983 on poverty (and other dimensions of economic and social inequality) may well have been far less than has often been claimed by government ministers and bodies like EPAC.

Research I have been undertaking recently tends to confirm this suggestion. Briefly, what that research attempts to do is to estimate the impact of changes in the labour market since 1983 (including the growth in employment) on the number of families in poverty. I took as my measure of poverty the Henderson poverty line developed by the Poverty Commission in the mid-70s and named after its chairperson, Professor Ronald Henderson. A family's poverty status was determined by whether or not its after-tax income was above or below the Henderson poverty line. In order to estimate family incomes in 1982-83 and 1989-90 I relied on the income distribution model developed by my colleagues Bruce Bradbury, Jennifer Doyle and Peter Whiteford (see ALR No. 117). The model, based on the 1986 Income Distribution Survey undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) simulates the distribution of income in other years by taking account of the patterns of changing demographic structure and labour market participation, and of changes to income levels (including social security pensions and benefits) and income tax payments.

Results from the model indicate that, when measured using the Henderson poverty line, the overall poverty rate rose from around 10% of families in 1982-83 to almost 13% by 1989-90. The poverty rate among children also increased slightly and was estimated to be over 15% in 1989-90. So much for the 1987 promise to end child poverty by 1990.

But perhaps the more interesting results arise when the model is used to estimate what the poverty rate would have been in 1989-90 if labour market conditions had remained exactly as they were in 1982-83. A comparison of these results with the actual poverty estimates for 1989-90 provides an estimate of the impact of labour market change on poverty over the period. Such a comparison shows that, despite the impressive growth in employment described earlier, the impact on poverty has been small—far smaller, I must admit, than I had expected when I started this work. The results suggested that less than 40,000 working age families have been moved out of poverty purely as a result of labour market changes since 1982-83.

Admittedly, the model and methods used in this research are very much in their infancy. The estimate is thus best seen as no more than that—an estimate. But while, as always, there is uncertainty as to the precise magnitude of the impact, it seems unlikely that the estimate is widely inaccurate. If that is the case, then it seems that the employment record of the Hawke government has indeed had only a marginal impact on poverty among Australian families of working age. And if that is true, it raises a number of interesting issues for the social security system and its interaction with the labour market.

It is useful first to spell out the factors leading to the weak associations between employment and poverty implied by the estimates just described. One matter that needs to be emphasised at the outset is that while labour market status is characteristic of individuals, much of conventional poverty research treats poverty status as a characteristic of families. Issues relating to the distribution of power and
resources within the family are thus ignored in mainstream poverty research—a limitation which feminists have been quick to criticise. While the distinction between individuals and families may be relatively unimportant in a world in which each family has only a single (normally male) labour force participant, it clearly assumes far greater significance when more than one family member becomes attached to the waged labour force. That indeed is what has actually occurred over the last three decades as the number of families with multiple wage earners has increased. Jobs that go to people in families already able to rely on a wage have, in the vast majority of cases, no impact on poverty among families. This phenomenon thus provides one explanation for the weak association between employment and poverty.

But it is not the only one. At least two other factors are worth noting. The first is the continued growth of part-time work, which may have resulted in families who have to rely on a single part-time wage income not having sufficient resources to leap the poverty threshold. The second factor is the existence of low wages themselves which again, particularly for larger families, may mean that wage incomes remain below poverty levels. Both explanations are disturbing, in that they suggest that an increasing number of families may be moving from a life of poverty while out of work and receiving social security to a life of poverty while in work and receiving low wages.

It is also worth noting that the weakening association between employment and poverty will operate in both directions. Just as a high rate of employment growth will have a relatively small impact on unemployment and hence on poverty, so too will a far lower rate of employment creation. Some workers who lose their jobs as employment falls will belong to families containing workers who will continue to remain in paid work. The impact of the current recession on poverty may thus be less severe than is implied by previous recessionary experiences.

The problem of the working poor—the group, incidentally, at whom the family assistance improvements introduced by Brian Howe in 1987 were mainly directed—may thus be increasing rather than declining. Indeed, some have argued that the increase in family allowance supplement (FAS) payments in the last few years has allowed employers to cut wages to the low paid and has thus contributed both to more inequality and to increased poverty. That may be true, but such evidence as we have indicates that the take-up rate of FAS is quite low, with perhaps as few as one-third of eligible families actually receiving their FAS entitlements. This in turn suggests that any major impact of FAS on the level of wages seems unlikely, although there is a need for further research in this area.

To argue that the increased waged labour of married women has weakened the association between employment and poverty is, of course, not to take any normative position on the desirability of this development. I am certainly not suggesting that this trend is undesirable, far from it. Indeed, we know from the research of feminists like Jane Millar that were it not for the wages earned by married women, poverty among families would be considerably greater than it actually is. The argument is rather that the kinds of reasoning and policy design that might have made some sense in an essentially patriarchal labour market have little relevance in today's labour market conditions in which two-income couples are increasingly common. In such a world, previously established links between employment and unemployment and hence, recalling that unemployment remains a major cause of poverty for working-age families, between employment and poverty, may simply no longer hold.

To illustrate some of the consequences for social security policy of these developments, I will consider two examples. The first relates to the increased prevalence of part-time work, the second to the labour force behaviour of the wives of unemployed men. The general trend towards part-time work has already been noted. Between 1966 and 1990, the proportion of all jobs that were part-time increased from 10% to over 21%. In proportionate terms, part-time work among males increased faster than among females, although part-time work is still dominated by female labour with females accounting for almost 80% of all part-time workers, well over half of them being married women. The latest ABS Labour Force Survey also indicates that the vast majority of part-time workers actually prefer part-time to full-time work, with less than 28% of males and 16% of female part-time workers indicating that they would prefer to work more hours if they could. It would, however, be of interest to know how many of those currently working part-time are doing so through financial necessity rather than as a matter of choice. This would require information on whether part-time workers would prefer (or could afford) not to work at all.

Our tax system still tends to encourage part-time work, primarily because the progressivity of the rate structure means that a lower proportion of income is paid in tax at lower income levels. For single people, it is mainly the tax threshold which provides such encouragement, this becoming of increasing relative importance as taxable income declines. For couples, the tax system still provides a slight financial incentive for both to engage in part-time work as opposed to having one full-time worker. This now also results primarily from the progressivity of the rate scale and not from the tax threshold, because the gain arising from having access to a second tax threshold in two-income

"Despite the impressive growth in employment...the impact on poverty has been small."
families is virtually offset by the loss of the dependent spouse rebate. Overall, however, the tax system certainly does not discourage part-time work, and may encourage it in the case of couples who wish to share domestic tasks and responsibilities.

The same cannot be said for the social security system. Hence the existence of poverty traps tends to discourage part-time work relative to full-time work. Benefits are withdrawn dollar-for-dollar over a large range of income, which means that extra earnings have no effect whatever on total income and may, in some instances, actually reduce it once account is taken of taxation and the loss of fringe benefits. It seems that the advantages that many couples have of being able to choose packages of paid work and domestic work arrangements which suit them best are denied those who are forced through joblessness onto the social security system.

The second issue relates to the incentives influencing the paid-work decisions of the wives of unemployed men. Despite the trend towards increased participation of married women described earlier, the participation rates of the wives of unemployed men are well below those of the wives of employed men. The latest ABS figures, for June 1990, indicate that over 64% of the wives of employed men are themselves are employed, while only 21% of the wives of unemployed men are in employment. The unemployment rates of the two groups of wives are also vastly different, at 2% and almost 17% respectively. One does not have to search far to discover that the culprit is again the structure of income support for the unemployed, specifically the operation of the income test.

The way in which the income test on unemployment benefit discriminates against couples was brought out in a paper by Jocelyn Pech presented to last year's Family Research Conference at Ballarat. She argued that:

A couple who are both looking for work are offered no tangible encouragement by the social security system to do so. They are paid no more in benefit than a couple with only one jobseeker and are subject to the same income test. Their benefit entitlements are structured according to the model of a sole breadwinner with dependent spouse, although such a structure now reflects the reality of only a minority of couples' working lives. They are treated as a single labour market entity, when most couples demonstrably do not operate as a single entity in the labour market.

Even more worrying than this is the fact that often when the husband becomes unemployed, the wife also leaves the labour market, in part because the income test causes their combined income to fall only slightly as a consequence. But that in turn makes the prospect of the husband finding a job which is sufficiently well paid to compensate both for his loss of benefit and the loss of the wife's earnings even more unlikely. What starts as a temporary setback for one partner can thus become a permanent financial disaster for both members of the couple. A cycle of deprivation is established and becomes extremely difficult to break out of.

It is certainly true that the Social Security Review has succeeded in some areas in providing the basis for reforms which have improved the integration of the social security system into the labour market. The examples just discussed illustrate, however, that there is more to be done in this area if our social security system is to better reflect changing social values and patterns of labour market behaviour. To overcome the kinds of problems just discussed will, of course, cost money. In the current climate of continued fiscal crisis and impending economic recession, they seem an unlikely prospect. But even if that were not the case, such examples raise fundamental questions relating to the underlying assumptions about financial dependencies and the efficacy of increasingly income-tested payments which strike at the heart of the principles on which our social security system is based.

The estimates described earlier suggest that general employment growth has not proved to be a very effective strategy for targeting employment opportunities to the poor and jobless. For a government in which targeting has been the driving force behind social security reforms designed to trim the welfare budget, there is a need to face the contradictions between the rationale for these reforms and the apparently poor targeting achieved by its job growth record. But the issues raised by these contradictions go deeper than that. They raise fundamental questions about how the changing nature and role of paid work should be reflected in the provision of support for the jobless, as well as for the role of labour market policies in the fight against poverty.

None of this is to deny that labour market programs designed specifically for the unemployed, the disadvantaged and other marginalised groups might not meet with more success. Indeed, the consensus from overseas research on specific labour market programs is that they can work and, in the right circumstances, that they do work. But those circumstances require a commitment of effort and resources necessary for success. They also require acceptance of the view that such interventions are necessary and rejection of the view that the market will resolve such matters automatically. Without these, labour market programs will continue to serve at best as a palliative rather than a cure of the underlying problems associated with joblessness and marginalisation.

Most important of all, if labour market programs are to succeed they need to be consistent with contemporary social values and work practices, not based on out-dated conceptions of what constitutes work or dependence. Employment growth since 1983 has not made a major inroad into the size of the reserve army of poor working age families, the need to introduce new labour market initiatives designed specifically for the jobless is all the more urgent. Paid employment may be the ultimate solution for these people, but many seem to have missed out on the extra jobs generated since 1983.

PETER SAUNDERS is director of the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW.
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Politics of DESPAIR

The Gulf war is causing massive devastation. But the Gulf crisis has already remade the region. ALR assembled a roundtable discussion of experts before the outbreak of war to speculate on the new face of the Middle East.

Bob Springborg teaches in politics at Macquarie University; Michael Humphrey teaches Middle East studies at the University of Western Sydney; Clive Kessler teaches in sociology and Asian Studies at the University of NSW; and Ralph Pettman teaches in government at Sydney University. The discussion was chaired by Stan Correy, a journalist with ABC Radio's Background Briefing.

Whoever wins in the confrontation between the allied forces and Iraq in the Gulf, how will the Arab world be changed by the invasion of Kuwait?

BOB: In the first place, a new alliance structure has been formed between Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia, an alliance that will try to draw within its orbit a variety of the weaker Arab states. On the other hand, the Iraqis have been able to solicit some support from weaker, more marginal actors—the Yemenis, the Jordanians, and the Arafat wing of the PLO. But that group really doesn’t have anywhere to go if Iraq doesn’t come out of this in a strong position. Various countries are watching and waiting to see what exactly happens, and will to a greater or lesser extent throw in their lot with the Egypt-Saudi-Arabia-Syria triangle, assuming that they come out of it in fairly good shape.

That will further distance the Arab regimes from their publics. It would be an alliance backed up of course by the United States. It will therefore further exacerbate domestic political tensions within those countries and between the rich and the poor Arab states.

I’ve read comments that the Arab world now is very much as it was at the end of the Ottoman Empire.
Looking to the future: (left to right) Stan Correy, Bob Springer, Clive Kessler, Ralph Pettman and Michael Humphrey

just after the First World War. Is the whole region up for grabs?

MICHAEL: I think talking in terms of a new conservative alliance probably gives too much solidity to the relationships between states. The consequences of the present conflict are a huge Pandora's box. The irony is that it is totally built on American and European military and economic power. Despite all the previous alliance structures in the region, none of these states were able to defend themselves in military coalitions, so there will be a strong underpinning of American military backing in any Middle East alliance from now on.

So the Americans are a bit like, say, the British and the French after the First World War?

MICHAEL: No, I think the national identities are much more discrete now than they were at the end of the First World War. Whatever the arrangements of the states and boundaries and decisions about future national identity, the reality is that the Pan-Arab movement has been eclipsed by the nature of military, technological and economic arrangements in the region, which emphasise local national identities over Pan-Arab ones. Kuwait in particular had internationalised itself, both in terms of its foreign and increasingly non-Arab workforce, and in terms of its downstream marketing of petroleum products.

RALPH: I think it’s important to look at the larger context. What we’re seeing overall is the privileging of the state, and the ideology of statism, by both sides in this conflict. This is a long-term process. Behind statism is nationalism, the attempt to create that organic ‘we’ feeling that’s supposed to inhabit these odd and arbitrary territorial lines on the map, and which Hussein has been busy building up behind his paper ramparts.

The paradox, then, is that behind all this statemaking you have the dramatic internationalisation of the world economy. We can say on the one hand sovereignty is dead, but on the other it seems all the more important on a day-to-day basis. So you get these curious fault-lines run-
ning across the world. And in addition you get people on the margins, the periphery, trying to fight back against this monolithic statemaking.

CLIVE: Whatever the outcome of this crisis, what's happened already has changed the pattern of both international alliances and domestic politics in the region. Think of what the possible outcomes might be. If Saddam Hussein prevails, this will give a tremendous boost to those who have supported him and have a massively destabilising effect on many of the regimes in the region. The consequences throughout the region of his defeat in war would be enormous. You would then have a radicalisation not of optimism or hope, but a radicalisation of despair, such as we saw in the Middle East after 1967.

Michael: "To maintain the status quo, it would be much better not to have a war."

Is one of the difficulties for an Arab solution to the problems of the region, and for their desire to have control over their destiny, the fact that they have 60% of the world's oil resources? Whoever wins, that fact still remains and makes the region important to the world economy.

MICHAEL: Phrasing the question in terms of 'the Arabs' is part of the problem, because 'the Arabs' in general don't have the oil. Particular states do, and their arrangements in terms of maintaining their own regimes' stability and their control over those resources are not with other Arab states; they are with the international economy and international military alliances.

One of the slogans from the anti-war camp is 'No Blood for Oil'. Yet a lot of blood has been shed over oil. And presumably one of the key questions that people have to consider is what can the Arabs do about this problem.

MICHAEL: The Middle East remains a dependent region. You could describe the states as rentier states. And they are hardly able to embark on development and industrialisation programs for which they cannot use the oil money as development capital. Therefore they remain dependent on those international alliances.

RALPH: You may have to call them state-makers rather than states. But you're looking at a small elite in each state who relate either to each other or to the world economy as a whole. That's where this language becomes a bit of a trap. What lies behind the term 'Iraq'? There's one man, Saddam Hussein, but there are many millions of Iraqis who are very diverse. They don't all agree with Saddam Hussein—though a lot of them do.

BOB: We should see this as part of a 200-year history of Western intervention in the region and, in the course of that involvement, it has always been the case that various parties, groups, tribes and now states have attached themselves to those external actors to enhance their power at the expense of their neighbours. As a result of the economic dependence that Iraq incurred during the eight year war against Iran, America's assumption was that Iraq would then be subordinate in the same way that Saudi Arabia or Kuwait or the United Arab Emirates or Egypt were. But Saddam Hussein rejected that and decided to adopt the radical and mobilisational power of Pan-Arabism to try to challenge that inevitability. And that's why the United States has reacted so strongly to him and so now they have to try to destroy him. They would prefer not to destroy Iraq, because the oil has to be sold. Iraq has a large outstanding debt; it is in a subordinate position; it would simply be another Saudi Arabia if Saddam Hussein was not there.

Will there be any payoffs for the Arab states who've come to the party with the West? Can a linkage be made with the Palestinian question, for instance?

BOB: Yes, there will have to be, because Israel has become an obstacle for the West in the subordination of the Arab states. Regardless of how the conflict with Saddam Hussein ends, there is going to be some effort to confront the Shamir government and the threat it poses to the West's conceptualisation of the proper Arab order.

Can that be done? Can you defuse Yitzhak Shamir and can the Israelis be brought to the party to defuse the problems in the Arab world?

RALPH: They don't seem to me to be in a very compromising mood!

CLIVE: They definitely aren't. The continuance of the Shamir government has indeed become an obstacle to the US pursuit of its own policies and interests in the Middle East. And the embrace of Syria by the US as part of the anti-Iraq coalition changes things considerably. There's the question of how well King Hussein in Jordan manages to walk the tightrope between the Palestinians in Jordan and the Israelis. Israel will come under pressure to make some kind of gesture toward reconciliation with the Palestinians. That would then bring home the inevitability of a Palestinian settlement both to the Shamir government and to Israelis more broadly.

MICHAEL: The power of the state in the Middle East is much more solid than we often allow. But if we look at the Middle East, one of the distinctive things has been the continual emergence of social and political movements
against the state and across state boundaries. Neither a colonial nor a decolonial solution has not been effective. US intervention in the world has not been markedly successful since the 60s in securing its alliances and the loyalty of its allies by military means. And that’s been nowhere more dramatic than in the Middle East. On the occasions when it has directly intervened—and specifically in Lebanon—it’s just turned and run away, because the costs are so high. Only six or 12 months ago we would have been looking at Islamic fundamentalism as the major threat of the region. But the reality is that since the attempted mobilisation of Pan-Arabism by Saddam the key feature of the region is again the mobilisation of social movements by Pan-Islam. We cannot assume that because an alliance emerges between the Saudis and the Egyptians—and the Egyptians get paid off by grants and additional development funds—that this is anything but a temporary solution.

Given that the Americans have now established a military presence in the region, and given their past record in dealing with their ‘colonies’, can America actually cope with this new colonial role? What is the view from Washington of what to do once this crisis has been settled?

BOB: This crisis has underlined the reality of two Middle Easts—there is the Gulf, and there is everything else. The Gulf was declared by President Carter as an area of vital strategic interest for the US, and now we have the fruition some ten years later of the policy of incorporating the Gulf into Europe as a vital area of American strategic interest. As far as the rest of the Middle East is concerned—the periphery, if you will—the US doesn’t care very much. They wrote off Lebanon and Libya; they have written off Saddam. Most of the periphery doesn’t have oil. It means that Israel now has to accommodate itself to a subordinate role, because there is no place for Israel in the security structure of the Gulf. The Americans want the Palestinians finessed out, too. The settlement is going to be between Israel and Syria, and Israel and Jordan, and ultimately Israel and Lebanon. And the US is going to seek to broker a series of bilateral deals of that sort. But it is going to ensure that the Palestinians remain subordinate to these state-to-state relations.

So they aren’t really serious about changing the boundaries: they want to keep the states as they are?

CLIVE: The history of this goes back to the 1920s, when the principal player in the Middle East was Britain. In the emerging politics of Palestine there was a very complicated triangle between the emerging Zionist movement, the British and King Abdullah of Transjordan. And all of them had at least tacit agreement to sort out the relationship between the Zionists and the Palestinians as a matter of states, in which the Palestinians would be a people but not a state; they would be spoken for by others. And that has been a constant theme in the Middle East ever since. So long as people go on trying to find a solution to the Palestinian problem without a Palestinian state of some sort, the problem will not go away. And eventually Israel is going to be compelled to find a solution that disengages the Israeli-Palestinian problem from the game of states now played between it and the other existing Middle Eastern states — a game which previously worked to Israel’s advantage and now works to its disadvantage. The question is whether Israeli politics is going to allow such an option to emerge and allow it to prevail.

RALPH: Bob’s strategic map of the region is a convincing one. But when you look at it you have to say: where do the Palestinians go? They’re really not going to go away. You can politely organise these bilateral deals between state-makers and hope to stick a Palestinian state in somehow. But it’s tantamount to stuffing jellyfish into pigeonholes. People fight back in all kinds of ways, not just against the tyranny of statemaking as we’ve seen it practised in the Middle East, but also against that modernising logic that’s built into capitalism worldwide - that quartet of key values: individualism, rationalism, centralism, materialism. But people don’t necessarily want to live like that; they also want to be communal, idealistic, divine. How do we read these things into this very convincing strategic map? This is why the map will ultimately not be the clear reading of the conflict you would like.

Every other region of the world has now had its perestroika. Can there ever be a perestroika in the Arab world? It seems to me there were a few experiments with political difference - elections in a few places—but that’s been stopped now by events, particularly the Invasion of Kuwait.

BOB: No, because the Americans now see this as the key to unlocking many of their ambitions. The liberalisation of South America is vital to American national interests there. Likewise in the Middle East it is very important for the legitimacy of their presence. The regimes under their umbrella now are seen as fragile and transient: much better to liberalise. From the other end, of course, there’s a tremendous desire for liberalisation on the part of the Arab masses. How you get these two ambitions to work together, and at the same time preserve the regimes that are in control of the various states: that’s the difficulty. The regimes want a token liberalisation; the Americans want one that goes rather further; while those on the ground want a fullblown one.

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There is another problem. The Middle East is the lagging part of the world, both politically and economically. If we look at developments in Latin America and Asia, we see that the Middle East still has the second highest birthrate in the world after sub-Saharan Africa. Its rate of industrialisation again is greater only than sub-Saharan Africa. Its levels of political democracy are near the most backward. The Middle East, which was one of the most developed parts of the world at the turn of our century, is now one of the least developed.

Clive: "The greater the setbacks in the region, the more people are driven to a politics of identity."

Are the Arabs themselves to blame for that? Or is it because of the Western presence over the years? Can Arab political culture actually deliver that kind of liberalisation?

Clive: The impulses towards liberalisation, modernisation, participation and a politics of citizenship appropriate to the region are important, but they're only half the picture. The other half is that the greater the setbacks and reversals of modernisation, and the more adverse the consequences of the subordination of the Middle East in the world political order, the more people are driven to take refuge in a politics of identity, of authenticity; a politics that invokes some notion of Arab unity which is powerful precisely because it doesn't have much reality. One of the consequences of this process is that this Islamic politics of identity has not had as its only adversary the West 'out there': it has had a closer adversary in the Westernisers within. And the whole cause of modernisation, secularisation, the redefinition of Islam in ways that modern Muslims would see as being authentic, but which are displeasing to traditionalistic Muslims—that whole process as gone backwards, particularly over the last 30 years. And this is something which is characteristic not only of the Middle East but also of large parts of the Islamic political world. I am not confident of the prospects of the revival of an Islamic politics which sees the essential Islamic message as egalitarian, activist, participatory, emancipatory—all of which is what modern Muslims claim the Islamic political project has been, going back to the time of Muhammad the Prophet. That interpretation of Islam, and that basis for Islamic politics, has had the ground cut from under it. And to the extent that the creation of such a culture is to some extent in the interests of the United States, I think the US actions in the current crisis may well have been self-defeating.

Some revisionist Arab intellectuals are very critical of the sorts of pan-Arab slogans which have dominated Arab political discourse for the past ten or 20 years. They talk about the need for a new political language, one which would replace Pan-Arabism and its various slogans. What do you think of that kind of call?

Michael: Even if you wanted to argue that pan-Arabism is bankrupt, or has no mobilisatory potential, the reality is that the nature of the region make ideas such as pan-Arabism and anti-Israeli sentiment very potent forces. And that is part of the distinctiveness of the Middle East. When Saddam Hussein says he will lob chemical weapons at Israel, it actually causes rumbles within the conservative Arab states in the international alliance against Saddam. So we have a big problem in imagining the possibility of another discourse without Pan-Arabism. Pan-Arabism still has a mobilisatory potential in this region which, say, pan-Africanism or Latin-Americanism have never had.

So you disagree with the revisionists who call these things empty slogans?

Michael: Pan-Arabism certainly hasn't achieved any specific institutional or political reforms in the Middle East. But it still has great power, and it won't go away, for the same reason that Palestinian nationalism won't go away. So this attempt to deal with the problems of the region by recourse to military and political alliances between states runs in the face of these incredibly destabilising elements. That's the dilemma and the terrible danger of the situation, because this is such a highly militarised area. One big problem in discussing the liberalisation of politics and the state is that these rentier states are built around economies which have injected huge amounts of money into militarisation, to a large part generated by the relationship between Arabs and Israel. And they are not inclined to liberalise, but rather to command through military institutions and alliances. I don't see a potential for liberalisation. You can look at the developments within Iraq and its confrontation with Kuwait as part of a logic of state development fuelled by and running along the tramlines of oil revenue and militarisation. And Iraq achieved its current level of militarisation by means of the war with Iran.

Bob: What's hindered political debate in the Arab world is lack of success. The Arabs cannot point to any great success that gives them confidence in a particular model. I'm not going to argue that the state system is going to sweep all before it. Nor am I going to argue the opposite proposition, that the Arab masses through mobilisation by Islam or some other ideology are going to redraw the borders of the Middle East. I think the success of one or other of the models that are available will then breed further success, and ultimately one will triumph. In the end we come back to economics. What's standing in the way of Arab economic development is the phenomenal net drain
of capital out of the region since the great oil boom of 1973. And this is because the major oil-exporting states with small populations—the chief example of which is Kuwait—have invested vast sums of money overseas. It is inconceivable that the Middle East is going to develop while there is such a major capital outflow. And the West wants that export of capital.

RALPH: The Americans are a black hole in the world economy, sucking in funds from all over the world because of their massive deficit, accumulated from printing money to pay for the Vietnam War and their own domestic welfare programs. They need all the capital they can get, from the Middle East, from Latin America. So what you’re seeing is America colluding with particular national elites to keep this kind of arrangement going.

MICHAEL: I agree that the question of retaining capital in the region and limiting the outflow is important. But part of the problem is that one of the key industries that has been associated with this export of capital is armaments.

RALPH: You might actually have the local elites asked to produce some real development for ordinary people in these countries!

CLIVE: It comes back to the curiously ambiguous character of the Kuwait crisis. On the one hand, for better or for worse, we have an international order of states, within which people are not being entirely hypocritical—though they may be self-serving—when they protest that one member of this order shouldn’t be able to march in and obliterate another. But if you want to uphold in a realistic worldly way the sanctity of states, Kuwait is a very poor state through which to defend this particular principle.

Ralph: The writing on the wall. And that’s why they want a war which destroys all of this. They want a very bloody war, that’s long-lasting with high consequences. And that’s what they’re going to try to facilitate. And the Americans certainly don’t want that.

BOB: But as I mentioned earlier, the US has found its new alliance structure in the Gulf, and within it Israel will play no role. This makes the Israelis as nervous as hell. They see the writing on the wall. And that’s why they want a war which destroys all of this. They want a very bloody war, that’s long-lasting with high consequences. And that’s what they’re going to try to facilitate. And the Americans certainly don’t want that.

A number of times in the discussion we’ve come back to this point. Military action is not going to solve any of the key problems of the region. But there is a crying need for massive economic action. Should that perhaps be the starting point of any negotiations which result from this conflict?

CLIVE: I disagree with Bob to some extent because I feel that economics, while important, is not fundamental to the situation. If there is to be an alternative to war, then it will only be if people begin to create the circumstances in which alternatives can be pursued. That involves economics, but the primary requirement is some kind of social and cultural transformation of the nature of those political entities, of the notions of political action and participation and citizenship. Only within that context will change take place.

MICHAEL: It could well be galvanised by war, however. The irony is that to maintain the status quo, it would be much better not to have a war. A war could generate dramatic political transformations, though in a chaotic and unpredictable way.

BOB: I think these transformations could well be a setback. For example, I think the Arab-Israeli conflict is an enormous red herring. A conflict will rekindle that issue and encourage everyone to think that if that issue is resolved then the whole problem of the region is over.

MICHAEL: On the question of the Arab-Israeli conflict, I agree absolutely that it’s not central, and that its resolution is hardly going to solve the problems of the Middle East. But the political and diplomatic reality is that the Arab-Israeli conflict has been the core around which militarisation has occurred in the region, and around which alliances have been formed. I don’t think you can ignore this question of the regional balance of power.

BOB: That’s right. There’s even a point of view that the US set Saddam up for this. Whether it’s true I don’t know.

RALPH: I want to believe Bob, because it’s so plausible. This strategic chess game is a very attractive metaphor. It’s intriguing: you do this, and then that happens, and then you’ve lost your queen, check, checkmate. But it has its dangers, too. All these plans seem to make sense from a distance. We’re pattern-makers; we want to see clarity. I don’t think the resolution of this crisis is going to be as clear as that, either. Some Americans are trying to achieve one thing; some are trying to achieve another. You get momentary resolutions of their own conflicts in a policy. We put it all together and we call it world affairs. And we think we’re clever about it.
The sudden departure of Margaret Thatcher has stopped British Labour's revival in its tracks. Its desire to rid itself of the past has left Labour's policy cupboard bare, argues Mike Ticher.

Eleven years in opposition have done extraordinary things to the British Labour Party. Following the bitter splits of the early 1980s and electoral humiliation in 1983 and 1987, Neil Kinnock has imposed internal discipline, overhauled the party's marketing strategies and jettisoned many of the Left's most cherished policies. Unilateral nuclear disarmament and withdrawal from the European Community are well and truly off the agenda. With the debacle of the 1979 'Winter of Discontent' in mind, Labour's union links are no longer stressed.

Until Mrs Thatcher's demise, the leadership concentrated on keeping its head down, not making mistakes, and relying on the unpopularity of the government to see them through to a victory which the polls suggested was not entirely improbable. The party's image was fundamentally negative. It was obviously not Mrs Thatcher. But few people could say with any confidence what the essence of the new party was, or how it would behave once in power.

This essentially reactive strategy was undone by the tumultuous events in the Conservative Party in November. Labour's lead in the opinion polls was shown to have been a chimera, a reaction against Thatcher rather than for Kinnock. Now the realisation has dawned, with less than 18 months to go before the next election, that the party has to define and explain its policies and values if it is to convince a sceptical electorate that it is a credible alternative to a Major-led government. "We need no longer to be the party of negation and can take the occasional risk of a party on the offensive", said Shadow Health spokesperson Robin Cook.

During the Tory leadership election, the opinion was expressed on many occasions that a victory for Michael Heseltine would be a disaster for Labour, because his outlook would be perceived to be too close to the Labour agenda. Since his 'policies' amounted to not much more than a half-baked commitment to review the poll tax, and a vague espousal of intervention in the economy, this did not say a great deal for Labour's own clarity of thought or presentation.

Labour's dilemma, however, is not simply a question of 'left or right'. It has unambiguously rejected the old dogmas of the Left, but needs to find a radicalism of a different hue if it is to escape incorporation into a new, essentially Thatcherite consensus, not to mention further ignominy at the polls. The most concise expression of the form this radicalism might take is the aspiration to be a modern, European, social democratic party. But of course this means different things to different people.
The proposals contained in Labour's most recent policy document, 'Looking To The Future', reflect some recognition within the party that Britain has become at best a thoroughly second-rate European state, at worst an embarrassing anachronism to its EC partners. Its strong emphasis on education and training is one example - the participation of British 16-18 year olds in the education system stands at 35%, compared to the European Community average of 85%.

However, it is constitutional reform which is shaping up to be the biggest battleground within the party as it works out the meaning of being 'modern, European and social democratic'. The salience of the issue has been dictated by two factors: firstly, the growing significance of Britain's relationship to the EC; secondly, by Mrs Thatcher's fiercely centralising administrations, which allowed her to strangle local government (or, in some cases, simply abolish it), ignore regional dissension (most notably in Scotland) and trample opposition within the parliamentary system.

The fundamental question for a Labour Party contemplating power in the 90s is whether it should seek to exploit this huge power of the centralised executive to force through its own reform program, or whether it should aim to change the very nature of British government—through decentralisation, devolution, a written constitution, the introduction of a second elected chamber to replace the House of Lords, commitment to institutionalise individual rights and the introduction of a proportional voting system. Put simply, the first option takes a confrontational approach; the second seeks a new consensus, economically between management and labour, and politically through a new centre-left alliance.

The pressure for such reforms has come largely not from the parliamentary party, but from such quarters as the cross-party organisation, Charter 88, the liberal intellectual journal Samizdat and the pages of the New Statesman & Society and Marxism Today. Their efforts have been reflected to a certain extent within the new Labour program. A parliament for Scotland and assemblies with lesser powers for Wales and the English regions are now firmly on the agenda. The House of Lords will go. In comes a Freedom of Information Act, although no general Bill of Rights, largely because of fears of giving too many powers to the judges in Britain's antiquated legal system. Proportional representation, despite a large move in favour of it at the 1990 Party Conference, is still shunned by the leadership.

One of Labour's fiercest critics on these issues is Paul Hirst, Professor of Social Theory at Birkbeck College in London. He firmly links Labour's half-hearted approach to constitutional reform with its ambivalence over Europe: "There is an ideological vacuum at the heart of Labour's program, and therefore their approach to policy is piecemeal. Labour has now committed itself to European Monetary Union, but if it's going to do that it should also commit itself to a program of political union. One of the reasons why Labour is pulling its punches on this is that it's obsessed with power at Westminster. Despite the proposals for devolution and regional government, it really doesn't have a strategy in which greater regional autonomy, greater European political integration and the powers and functions of Westminster are meshed together."

Certainly many Labour MPs do retain their faith in the power of the central executive to push through a radical Labour agenda. Left-winger Chris Mullin sees no need even for a second chamber of parliament: "The trouble is that the more democratic you make [any replacement for the House of Lords], the more you take power away from the House of Commons, which we've struggled for the last 11 years to get control of." He decays the fact that "control of a part of the economy has been surrendered to the EC", and is equally lukewarm about power moving away from Westminster in the other direction, to local and regional government: "There is a commitment to decentralisation, but history does record that when people inherit power, they rarely give it away voluntarily. The only example I can think of from recent history is Mr Gorbachev, and some would argue that it hasn't done him much good."

Where Labour has adopted measures which would mitigate central power to some extent, its attitude towards them has been characterised by grudging acceptance of the inevitable rather than any urgency to push the debate forward themselves. So while the leadership's position on European integration has essentially been to stay one jump ahead of the Tories, there has been no real debate in the
party on the principles underlying Britain's long-term involvement in Europe, despite widespread dissension from a fully integrationist stance. Hence Chris Mullin's rather reluctant pragmatism on Europe, an attitude which is by no means confined to the Left: "The party as a whole was against entry into Europe, but that's a fait accompli now, people accept that, like it or not, we've got to work out how to live with it, but I mustn't pretend that I'm happy with the way things are going."

Scottish devolution is another prime example of how the party has had to be prodded into action, rather than taking the initiative. With Labour holding some 49 of the 72 seats in Scotland, it is clearly a vital area to them electorally. Yet their very dominance becomes a problem when Scots persistently vote overwhelmingly Labour, only to find themselves subject to a succession of Tory governments. The disillusion with Labour has occasionally surfaced in spectacular fashion, such as at the by-election in the Glasgow seat of Govan, which the Scottish National Party (SNP) took with a 33% swing against Labour in November 1988.

Paul Hirst sees the issue as a microcosm of Labour's general unwillingness to embrace wholesale reform: "It's quite clear that the Scots are absolutely determined to secure a large measure of national autonomy. If Labour fails to deliver, they'll try to find somebody who can, and that somebody will probably be the SNP. So even from the most narrow point of view, bankrupt party self-interest, they ought to see the need to put constitutional reform upfront. But Labour is scared about Scotland. Scotland is well to the Left of Britain, and it's now solidly nationalist. From a Westminster perspective this just appears as a problem, rather than a bonus. Scotland hasn't sunk into being a declining province of Westminster, dominated by a dependency culture and low aspirations, which would have guaranteed it as a Labour bailiwick for ever. It's actually undergone a political and cultural renaissance. Labour cannot see that as a positive thing, they can only react to it."

Those who share the 'Westminster perspective' of Chris Mullin have been tagged by David Marquand (author of The Unprincipled Society and a former member of the SDP) as the "power-hoggers" of the Labour Party. Marquand maintains that "the party as a whole may be social-democratic in aspiration, but it is not yet social-democratic in mentality...It does not yet realise what support for further European integration entails [nor] has it abandoned the traditional Labour reverence for the bankrupt institutions of the central British state."

One who might be expected to show less reverence than most, is Labour's spokesperson on Local Government, David Blunkett, a former leader of Sheffield City Council. He takes a historical view of the current tension: "The first majority Labour government in 1945 inherited highly-centralised war-footing powers, and that was quite a contrast to Labour's program prior to the Second World War, when its strength lay in building from the bottom through the development of constituency parties, trade unions and local councils. The party was diverted from its historic roots in local institutions when people felt there was a necessity for speed of action to create the welfare state, to overcome the impact of poverty and degradation by acting from the centre. With the resurgence of local government as an issue in the last ten years — ironically because of Mrs Thatcher's assault on it — has come an enormous fear from some parliamentarians, a very great suspicion as to whether it can be trusted. I think at the moment we're on the very edge of whether a Labour government is willing to decentralise and whether it's willing to enter a new relationship with Europe."

Paul Hirst seizes on the "myth" of 1945 to berate the "power-hoggers": "[Deputy leader] Roy Hattersley's arguments, for example, are that constitutional reform, and proportional representation in particular, would prevent the great reforming Labour administration, like 1945. Now, what the Labour Party did in 1945 is interesting, precisely because it had been prepared in a bi-partisan manner. It took on board the radical liberal ideas of Keynes and Beveridge and there was a broad, long-prepared social consensus in favour of certain changes. The idea that an ordinary Labour administration, without some massive sea-change of opinion in the country is going to act as a decisive government is sheer bloody baloney. So this argument for defending the existing structures depends absolutely either on traditional hard Left Labour illusions, or on an entirely cynical manipulation of the myth of decisive government by the Right."

(Continued after the China supplement)
It is tempting to describe the 1989 protests in Tiananmen Square, culminating in the bloody massacre of 4 June, as the spark that lit the wick of the bomb that eventually exploded Eastern Europe and ended the Cold War.

As far as the communist world goes, China hasn't done too badly. It has had its economic reforms—its open door policy—for the last ten years, and for a time even talked about political reform. But still, like all the other Stalinist regimes, the Chinese leadership has lost its way and popular support. Tiananmen was not a triumph for the Chinese leadership but rather a watershed.

In this special supplement on China we examine the positions the leadership has adopted in ideology, economics and foreign and social affairs since the massacre. A major theme running through the pieces is that the leadership is running out of ideas; it looks to the past for solutions for the future. The attempts of the ancient leaders, and their younger protégés, to appear united, firm and confident are working for the moment, but are fooling nobody. Most know that the handful of old men—Deng Xiaoping, Peng Zhen, Wang Zhen, Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, Yang Shangkun—are holding on to power by a thread, and that events will move rapidly upon their deaths.

In some ways Tiananmen has meant the eclipse of Deng Xiaoping. Where Deng was once hailed as the author of economic reforms, it is now ‘Chen Yun Thought’ that is credited. Chen Yun finally controls economic policy; he thought it would be sufficient to ‘cage’ (plan) the ‘bird’ (they call it a commodity economy, but it bears an uncanny resemblance to a market economy), but fundamental problems like inflation, unemployment and supply of raw materials remain.

Certainly the austerity measures introduced in September 1988 eased these problems, but cannot provide permanent solutions, especially when the leaders are keen not to fuel discontent among the people. In the past year the economy has begun to grow again, but growth has annoyingly occurred in the private sector, the very area the government had wanted to kill.

In the area of international relations, too, China seems devoid of initiatives. During the Cold War era, China was the “third force” that balanced the superpowers, a position which afforded it a measure of respect and prestige on the world stage. Until Tiananmen, China was perceived by the West as being scarcely communist at all, and everyone was eager to do business. Now China, while still wanting to convince the West that its ‘door is open’, wants to persuade the remnants of the communist world that it, perhaps alone, holds the true faith. Last year it dismissed the changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as “serious setbacks in the development of socialism”.

If only affairs of state were a game of wei qi (go), the old men could play to their heart’s content. In the meantime China waits while the old men fiddle.

— Kitty Eggerking
In the wake of the dramatic events of June 1989, the reshuffled leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has moved to reinforce its tarnished legitimacy through breathing new life into the official ideology, marxism-leninism and Mao Zedong thought.

In doing so, the triumvirate of Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng and Jiang Zemin has not so much had to formulate new ideological themes as resurrect slogans, values and concepts which were already part and parcel of Chinese marxism, but whose influence had declined as a result of the pragmatic economic policies pursued throughout the 1980s.

These economic policies witnessed in agriculture a return to a household-based production system and the dismantling of the communes; in industry increased prerogatives to managers and an emphasis on profitability, the encouragement of private ownership, and the opening of the Chinese economy to investment and technology transfer from the capitalist West.

There can be no doubt that the retreat from socialism in China in the economic realm, and the ‘get rich’ mentality fostered by the CCP, led to a high level of cynicism among the population at large and among many intellectuals and party cadres towards the party’s rhetoric on ideological issues, and it is in the face of this cynicism that the party leadership is now pushing the need for political and ideological education to counter the unhealthy tendencies which its own economic policies have engendered.

These exhortations to renewed ideological rectitude are premised on the formulations contained in the resolution on party history passed by the sixth plenum of the eleventh central committee in June 1981. This resolution, while commenting negatively on the policies and ideas of Mao Zedong during the last two decades of his life, reiterated that marxism-leninism and Mao Zedong thought remained the guiding and official ideology of the CCP. Mao Zedong thought is the “crystallisation of the collective wisdom of the Party”, “a scientific system” to which many of China’s leading revolutionaries, especially Deng Xiaoping, have made a significant contribution. In Deng’s hands, Mao Zedong thought has been employed as legitimation of an economic reform program which Mao himself consistently opposed during his own lifetime.

To achieve this, Deng has stressed the importance of “seeking truth from facts” (a slogan which Mao endorsed but which can be used to justify any set of policies, depending on which ‘facts’ are emphasised), and the establishment of a form of socialism with Chinese charac-
teristics (again, an open-ended conception which can be redefined to suit the policies of the day).

The notion of Mao Zedong thought as a developing system of thought to which other Chinese leaders can contribute has allowed it to be readily mobilised by the current leadership in defence of its actions in the wake of the events of mid-1989. In particular, the current leadership has drawn on those themes within Mao Zedong thought compatible with a continuation of the economic reforms and a stress on social stability and party leadership. In other words, despite some flirtation with increased centralisation of the economy towards the end of 1989, Li Peng and Jiang Zemin have made it clear that the general thrust of the reforms of the 1980s, including opening China to the world, will continue. What will alter will be a tightening of party leadership, an increased emphasis on political and ideological work, and the inculcation of values which will reinforce the social stability which the economic reforms themselves threaten.

This can be seen clearly in the sort of values being promoted. One of the most significant of these is patriotism. Li Ruihuan, a member of the standing committee of the party's Politburo, emphasised the importance of patriotism in a major speech in May 1990 on political and ideological work. He commented: "Under the present new historical situation of building socialism in China, our emphasis on the importance of ideological and political work is intended to inspire the people to cultivate a dedicated and profound sense of patriotism for our great motherland and enhance their national pride and confidence." Education in patriotism is to be carried out in primary and middle schools, in organisations such as the Communist Youth League and Young Pioneers, and in party cadre schools; and this emphasis on patriotism, particularly among Chinese youth, is clearly intended to undercut the appeals to patriotism expressed by students of the pro-democracy movement prior to June 1989, a movement now roundly condemned as counter-revolutionary and not at all patriotic.

It is also very clear that a conscious attempt is being made by party leaders to link the idea of patriotism with the concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics. To achieve this, the Chinese populace is being reminded of the virtues exhibited by the party and the sacrifices it made during the anti-Japanese War of 1937-45. The Yan'an spirit incorporates the values of patriotism, frugal living and hard struggle, self-reliance and a willingness to sacrifice oneself for the collective good, party discipline, and a commitment to the study of marxist theory and to its integration with the realities of China's revolutionary struggle. Party cadres are also being reminded of the importance of the mass-line, a principle for party leadership formulated by Mao during the Yan'an period, which insists on close contact between cadres and masses, something which the present party leaders admit has been neglected during recent years. A further experience from the Yan'an period to be revived is the party rectification campaign of 1942-44, during which cadres underwent intensive education in the party's history and policies, and in the sinified marxism endorsed by Mao. The push for the study of marxist theory sanctioned by this earlier campaign is being reproduced in the context of the current party consolidation campaign in which cadres are exhorted to study marxism and to rectify bad styles of work.

The Yan'an spirit has thus been used as a multifaceted model for emulation over the past year. Another model from the Maoist past which has had new life breathed into it is Lei Feng (see box).

The struggle against 'bourgeois liberalisation' has been one of the most evident aspects of the response of China's leaders to the events of 1989 but, as with exhortations to learn from Lei Feng, the current leadership is resuscitating an already existing campaign rather than launching a new one. 'bourgeois liberalisation' is perceived as an ideological trend which is hostile to socialism and excessively symb...

**Lei Feng**

is reputed to have been a young soldier whose life in every respect constituted a model of socialist probity: his thoughts, recorded in a diary, demonstrated boundless devotion and loyalty to Chairman Mao and the party; his actions, from the most menial to the ultimate sacrifice of his life in the people's cause, represented the ideal of subjection of self to the pursuit of the collective good. Mao Zedong launched the first 'Learn from Lei Feng' campaign in 1963, and since then the model hero has been trotted out from time to time. While the campaign proceeded fitfully and without much apparent success during the 1980s, it has moved into top gear since June 1989 as the party leadership has attempted to counter the negative influence of bourgeois liberalisation, a trend of thought within Chinese society which it regards as primarily responsible for all the deleterious ideological and political manifestations which culminated in the "counter-revolutionary turmoil" of mid-1989.
The 'four cardinal principles'

involve keeping to the socialist road, upholding the dictatorship of the proletariat, upholding the leadership of the Communist Party, and upholding marxism-leninism and Mao Zedong thought.

pathetic to Western concepts of freedom and democracy, a trend which has become increasingly pervasive during the 1980s. As Wang Renzhi, director of the party's propaganda department, complained in a speech in February 1990, "advocates of (bourgeois) liberalisation began with concocting and peddling all kinds of reactionary views gradually to erode and seize extensive ground in the realms of theory, literature and the arts, journalism, publications, and education".

What is interesting about Wang's analysis of 'bourgeois liberalisation' is that he attempts a class analysis of its origins; the 'middle class', generated by the increased prosperity brought about by China's economic reforms, is the social base from which this ideological trend has sprung. Consequently, not only should the phenomena of 'bourgeois liberalisation' and the 'counter-revolutionary rebellion' of 1989 be looked at with a "marxist class viewpoint and using a class analytical method", it should be countered through the use of class struggle. In suggesting the need for class struggle to combat 'bourgeois liberalisation', Wang and other leaders have reiterated a formula coined by Mao in 1957 at the time of the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign: while the large-scale class struggles of the past have by and large come to an end, class struggle will continue to exist "within certain limits for a long time to come and many even grow acute under certain conditions". It is somewhat ironical, however, that while Wang recognises that the economic reforms of the 1980s have had an impact on China's class structure, producing what he describes as a "middle class" responsible for generating the ideological trend of 'bourgeois liberalisation', neither he nor any of the other Chinese leaders has challenged the essential thrust of those reforms, choosing rather to combat the unrest and dissatisfaction the reforms have caused through increased ideological and political education, and tighter party control over political and cultural life.

If 'bourgeois liberalisation' has been roundly denounced as all that is negative, the 'four cardinal principles' have been projected as the fundamental and unchallengable values which will safeguard socialism in China. These principles had been a major theme in the speeches and writings of Deng Xiaoping throughout the 1980s, and had been employed previously as a counter to the negative impact of 'bourgeois liberalisation', although they were progressively honoured more in the breach than in the observance. However, the threat posed by the democracy movement of 1989 has seen a stiffening of resolve on the part of China's leadership to ensure that they do in fact represent the guiding principles which govern political life in China. Consequently, Deng Xiaoping's past writings on this topic have appeared continually in the Chinese press, and virtually all pronouncements on ideological matters contain reference to the centrality of the 'four cardinal principles'. They have clearly become the touchstone by which affairs in the realms of art, literature, education, journalism and politics must be conducted and will be judged, and anyone deviating from them runs the risk of being branded guilty of 'bourgeois liberalisation'.

The upheavals of 1989 and the crushing of the pro-democracy movement have thus resulted in a return within the ideological realm to what are regarded by China's leadership as the fundamental truths of marxism; and these truths are being disseminated through a major campaign to study marxist theory. Cadres and soldiers are once again obliged to undertake political education, and to study the works of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and the classics of marxism. Similarly, because there has been much concern over the ideological standard of tertiary students, political education classes have been reintroduced to the curriculum, and at Beijing University first-year students are now obliged to undertake a year-long course in military and political training before embarking on their specialist courses.

However, one wonders how effective in the long-term this pressure by the party's leadership to study marxism-leninism and Mao Zedong thought will be. The root cause of the ideological trend of 'bourgeois liberalisation' which it finds so threatening can be traced back, in my view, to the climate created by its own economic reforms of the 1980s, a climate in which corruption flourished, in which the values of competition and consumerism were endorsed, and in which increasing inequality was accepted as a necessary price to pay for economic modernisation; opening to the capitalist West and the destruction of collectivist institutions and ethos were similarly rationalised by reference to the imperative to expand China's productive forces at whatever cost.

The contradictions and tensions generated in the economic realm were inevitably reflected in the ideological realm, and gave rise to a deep dissatisfaction with the party's political and ideological leadership. It remains to be seen whether the party can, for any sustained period, persist with much the same mix of economic policies while insisting on its ideological rectitude through appeals to marxist theory. If the party manages to do so, it will be through its increased reliance on coercive measures, for the greater the gap between its economic policies and its ideological rhetoric the more it will be compelled to resort to repression to compensate for its loss of legitimacy in the realm of ideology.

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Despite careful stage management, China presents many faces. Here, Beverley Hooper explores the contradictions.

Within barely a week of 4 June, Beijing newspapers announced that normality was returning to the city after a short period of anti-government turmoil. Buses and subways were operating as usual and citizens were going about their everyday business.

By early July, visitors—both Chinese and foreign—were again being photographed on the Tiananmen rostrum, snack-bars were reportedly doing good business and cinemas were claiming rising attendances. This marked the start of the social masquerade which has officially been perpetrated in China since the events of May-June 1989.

But the veneer of social normality has been a thin and sometimes transparent one, barely disguising widespread popular disaffection which has prompted the post-Tiananmen leadership also to present a second—and contradictory—image of China in the early 90s.

In Beijing the surface image of everyday normality and even of continuing socio-economic liberalisation is so pervasive that it is sometimes difficult to conceive that this is where 'it all happened'. True, there has been an official assault, as in the earlier campaigns against spiritual pollution (1983) and bourgeois liberalisation (1987), on pornography, bars and their euphemistically-named 'hostesses' (acknowledged as a front for prostitution), and the more suggestive Western films.

But there has been little more than a hiccup in most of the familiar—if sometimes frivolous—barometers of post-Mao liberalisation: private markets, tea houses and coffee shops, evening fairs, disco competitions and fashion exhibits. On television there's the American Dynasty-style soapie, Falcon Crest, British drama with The Professionals, and a modern version of an old Chinese custom: TV Matchmaker.

Popular magazines such as Culture and Life, The Young Generation and a host of women's magazines have continued to feature the consumer-oriented and increasingly individualistic society of the post-Mao reform era. There are articles on the latest bedroom furniture, leisure activities and, above all, love and romance (though rather less on sex than in the first half of 1989). These themes are matched in full-page advertisements for everything from inner-spring mattresses to Princess beer and a host of beauty products: guaranteed to make you look younger and more attractive.

In their portrayal of post-Tiananmen social normality, officials and the media have consciously utilised particular social groups. Young children, one of the most pervasive propaganda weapons in the PRC, were most cynically and blatantly used in the immediate aftermath of
4 June. Front-page newspaper photographs featured happy well-dressed youngsters welcoming the occupying soldiers with watermelons, enamel bowls and even violin recitals. Since then they have been a regular object of media attention, enjoying themselves at summer camps, boating with their families on Beihai, and studying enthusiastically in their classrooms.

The use of foreigners for both domestic and overseas propaganda purposes has only substantiated the arguments used by some governments and individuals against continued visits. Within days of 4 June, Chinese and English-language Beijing newspapers featured photographs, allegedly taken after the suppression of the protest movement, of tourists chatting and laughing with soldiers on the Great Wall. By late July foreign tourists—who were much rarer than the media suggested—were reportedly making such statements as “Beijing is as normal as the capital of any other country.”

Over the past 18 months, not just tourists but foreign business people, teachers and students arriving in China have received heavy media coverage to illustrate both the alleged return to normality and the persistence of China’s ‘open door’ policy.

Glamorous young women have been a major vehicle for portraying images not just of social normality but of continuing socio-economic liberalisation. A world removed from her baggy-clothed, fresh-faced predecessor of Cultural Revolution days, the fashionably dressed and well-groomed glamour girl of the post-Mao era—whether as cover-girl or advertising model—has served the interests of modernisation and consumerism instead of those of revolutionary fervour. Despite the assault on so-called bourgeois liberalisation, the use of cover-girls on popular magazines and glamorous models advertising everything from eye makeup to washing machines continued unabated after June. Some of the most striking ‘cultural artefacts’ of post-June China, indeed in the history of the PRC, were the 1990 calendars featuring glossy colour pin-ups and disco dancers. These were on sale not only in private markets but in branches of the official New China Bookstore, strung up wall-to-wall like dazibao (large character posters) in the Cultural Revolution. This was social distraction par excellence.

A major aspect of the portrayal of social normality and liberalisation has been the persistent focus on Tiananmen Square. Far from attempting to distract attention from the square which, in most people’s eyes, had become a powerful symbol of both popular protest and official brutality, China’s leadership has taken pains to reclaim it for itself. Once again, children have been heavily utilised. Barely two weeks after the bloodshed, 10,000 Young Pioneers held a ‘love the Party, love the socialist motherland’ theme meeting in the square which, according to media reports, had been refurbished with over 2,700 square metres of lawns and 175 metres of hedgerows. The cover of the October issue of the magazine Chinese Children featured a highly stylised drawing of two saluting Young Pioneers against a backdrop of Tiananmen. The continuing official campaign to reclaim the square as a focus of social normality has included the staging of everything from a mass ‘paint-in’ (on 400 metres of paper) to a group balloon dancing competition featuring 3,000 dancers.

It is somewhat ironic that the people of Beijing, of whom a substantial proportion had become personally involved in the protests from mid-May 1989, have themselves contributed to the social masquerade. In the aftermath of 4 June, they once again donned the mask of public compliance, reverting to a situation that has been more ‘normal’ than unusual in post-1949 China. Some of the older generation had learnt the lesson of removing the mask during the 100 Flowers movement in 1957, at that time in response to official pressure, only to find themselves denounced and incarcerated as ‘poisonous weeds’. During the Cultural Revolution, the public mask—sometimes even when communicating with one’s own children—had become essential to survival. It was only in the heady years of the 80s that people tentatively began lifting the mask and not until May 1989 that such large numbers, carried away by the sheer
ment, discarded it completely. Their bravado was short-lived as state authorities reasserted and they had little alternative but to mask their private thoughts once again.

This time, though, the mask of public compliance has been almost visibly transparent. The inhibitions that most Chinese had during the Mao era about revealing their private face to foreign colleagues, for example, have largely evaporated—in all but the most ritual official situations—in an atmosphere of almost total contempt for the current regime. Academic colleagues and their relatives, for example, eagerly tell personal stories of corruption throughout the system, most particularly at the top. They discuss not just whether the Communist Party has any future but whether it has really been beneficial to China. Most of all, they express their sense of despair about China's present and even its long-term future, and expend a great deal of energy—as well as money—on personal efforts to obtain jobs or scholarships for themselves, and particularly for their children, in Western countries.

Faced with such sentiments, China's so-called hardline leadership has resorted to making sustained efforts to instil 'correct socialist principles' among the population. At a time when communism elsewhere has been disintegrating, China's ideological clock has been turned back to the 60s and early 70s. This has resulted in the incongruous juxtaposition of the discredited ideological stereotypes of the Mao era against the consumer-oriented images of socio-economic liberalisation: model socialist workers against pinup girls; thrift and clean living against advertisements for colour TV sets, washing machines and cosmetics.

Anyone with memories of Mao's China cannot help but have a strong sense of déjà vu as, one by one, the old 'socialist spirit' slogans that were drilled even into foreign students in China—in 1975 we learnt to recite them off by heart—have been revived. CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin has urged the revival of the Yan'an spirit of self-reliance and arduous struggle that officially characterised life at the communists' pre-revolutionary base in north China. Mao's call for industry to 'learn from Daqing,' China's model oilfield, has also been revived, along with a campaign to revive the Daqing spirit of hard work and self-sacrifice.

The past 18 months have also seen the re-emergence of the model socialist worker, with well-publicised ceremonies being held in the Great Hall of the People to present awards to citizens ranging from a 16-year-old Inner Mongolian acrobat to an 84-year-old university professor. According to Premier Li Peng, the award recipients are 'national heroes, the backbone of the people, the mainstay of society and the prop of the People's Republic.'

Even that most model socialist of all, Lei Feng, has been recycled, despite the ridicule that accompanied his previous reincarnation in the mid-70s. Since March last year, when a three-day 'national forum on learning from Lei Feng' was held in Beijing, a fresh generation of Chinese youth has been told about the virtuous young soldier (see box on page 25).

The major targets of ideological revival, however, have not been school children or marketing assistants but intellectuals, a group regarded as ideologically suspect throughout most of post-1949 China; the younger echelon, of course, dominated the 1989 protest movement. (In China, the term 'intellectual' basically describes anyone who has graduated from senior high school, although it is also used more narrowly in terms of academics and professionals.) Since Tiananmen, academics and students, in particular, have again been attending regular 'political education' sessions where they are enjoined to 'realise that the leadership of the Communist Party and the socialist system are indispensable to China's prosperity'.

'Participation in labour'—another familiar slogan from Maoist and particularly from Cultural Revolution days—has also been revived. Television broadcasts feature smiling intellectuals, including party cadres, strengthening their ties with the masses. Bemused peasants watch their urban brothers (and occasionally sisters) helping with the grain harvest and no doubt recalling earlier days of the unpopular 'down to the countryside' movement.

The official rhetoric of success is as dated as the slogans. Predictably, the media claims that those people who had temporarily been led astray by Western culture and ideology, as well as by the likes of Fang Lizhi ('the scum of the Chinese intellectuals'), have realised the error of their ways and are now 'firmly adhering to the four cardinal principles of maintaining the socialist road'. Students who previously could not keep their hands off books by Sartre and Freud have reportedly returned to Marx. Privately—and sometimes not so privately—intellectuals and students tell a different story, dismissing the outdated rhetoric as the ramblings of a bunch of geriatrics stubbornly clinging to power for themselves and their family entourages.

As China enters the 90s, the social images portrayed are probably more contradictory than at any time since 1949. The dramatic juxtaposition of images of the post-Mao reform era and those of the Cultural Revolution decade makes one realise just how far Chinese society, at least in some respects, has changed in the course of little more than a decade. What the conflicting images reflect more than anything else is the present leadership's lack of direction and complete ideological bankruptcy. But the images are probably too incompatible to co-exist for very long. The question is, of course, who will win out: the model socialist worker or the pin-up girl?

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A small matter of truth

During the heady 80s historians raked China's rich past, unearthing many surprises. Now, as Geremie Barmé suggests, official histories again prevail.

An historian friend of mine once remarked: "History's like a whore: anyone in power can screw her!"

—Zhang Zhenglong.¹

After some two decades as a People's Liberation Army (PLA) propagandist and writer, Zhang Zhenglong, an army officer in the Shenyang Military Region, undertook a study of the War of Liberation in the north-east of China, the bloody civil war that led the Communist Party to power in 1949. White Snow, Red Blood, a 600-page, often-emotional account of the party's north-eastern campaigns, appeared in late 1989. The shocking revelations it contains about the party and army—including details of PLA officers' involvement in opium smuggling—caused an immediate sensation, and it is said to have sold particularly well in Beijing. In mid-1990, however, according to an army source, Zhang was put under investigation and the book sparked a purge of the army publishing industry.

Zhang had been in an ideal position to investigate the story. As a trusted member of the armed forces in the north-east he found many local old military men and civilians willing to speak to him. Years of writing reportage, a form of investigative journalism popular in China since the mid-1980s, gave Zhang a confident and fluent style. And the boom in publishing of the late 80s that led publishing houses to search out new and sensational books encouraged him to believe—he like so many others—that he enjoyed a new freedom of expression. An official imprimatur was given to the project when the PLA Publishing House included his book in a series on the revolutionary wars.²

White Snow, Red Blood presents an historical account of the party's army that conforms entirely with what the population learnt about the PLA in June 1989. For many army people the most controversial aspect of the book is the detailed account of the martial feats of the 'renegade' Lin Biao, the military commander of the campaign (who was later designated Mao Zedong's chosen successor, only to die mysteriously in 1971), and an objective description of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist army. However, for the average reader the most devastating section of the book must certainly be Part 14, "City of Death", which describes in chilling detail how, in 1948, the PLA laid siege to Changchun, the provincial capital of Jilin, and starved it into submission. An estimated 150,000 civilians are said to have died in this stand-off between the Communist and Nationalist forces that was previously described as a "bloodless victory".

Despite the explosive nature of the material and the author's provocative anti-war commentary
throughout the narrative, the book continued to be sold for some months surviving for a time the general purge of the publishing industry initiated by the party in August 1989. Even the leading pro-government apologist 'intellectual' He Xin praised the book in conversation with this writer and cited its continued sale as proof that the cultural purge was aimed at specific "turmoil-related" elements only. Then in August 1990 came the rumours of Zhang's work being subject to internal review, and the detention of the head of the PLA publishing house for questioning. By November the Hong Kong and Taiwan press reported the rumours and published excerpts from the book.

Zhang was fully aware of the danger of pursuing independent historical research in China. Some of his informants were all too mindful of the explosive nature of their knowledge. Zhang, however, was anxious to get them to speak before it was too late. "Time is no longer our friend" he reflects in his introduction, written in February 1989. He compares some of the reticent old soldiers (some reveal that they have the information he wants, but they can't possibly tell him) to the black box or flight recorder in an airplane disaster. "Imagine that after incredible difficulties you actually manage to locate the black box only to discover you can't open it!" While many other writers were attracted to historical topics as a kind of escapism, Zhang says, he had found in history numerous "forbidden zones" and "dangers lurking at every turn". "Sometimes I just wanted to run away." He even speculates about the need for "political insurance" for China's reportage writers, if indeed any insurance company would sell such a policy.

By revealing so many unsavoury details of the supposedly most glorious chapter in the PLA's history, Zhang has so tarnished the image of the party's 'Great Wall of Iron' that no amount of insurance could have kept him safe.

Historical writing and research in China enjoyed a period of unrivalled development in the 1980s. Many saw a key to understanding and dealing with the dilemmas of contemporary China in the past, especially in the history of the last century. Although the party presented its own definitive view of post-1949 history in a document released in 1981, a body of works that constitutes the basis of a 'parallel' history gradually appeared throughout the 1980s.

One reason for this is that many older cadres and party apparatus who survived the party purges or reappeared after years of ignominy were not satisfied with merely having their names cleared, or having a lifetime of effort affirmed solely in the vague and abstract formulations of a Central Committee document. They wanted to tell their own story. While state-supported publications were soon filled with the often lugubrious and elliptical memoirs of these elderly worthies, publishing houses forced to rely on book sales to survive produced volumes claiming to reveal fuller and more intriguing versions of the recent past. Mao Zedong's personal life and tales of 'court' intrigue during the Cultural Revolution were among the richest veins mined by publishers in the late 1980s.

Developments in the Soviet Union also had a crucial impact on attitudes towards history. As Wen Yuankai, a leading Chinese thinker, said in January 1989: The bold measures which Gorbachev has taken since assuming office have had an extremely profound and subtle effect on China. Nearly all the reforming socialist nations are presently re-examining their own histories, including the great Stalinist purges. Every day new details are revealed, not only in the Soviet Union but in other countries as well, including China. This has made China reflect deeply on its own past.

With the increasing publication of documentary materials and personal recollections, autonomous views of the past began to emerge, confounding the party's interpretation of events and even challenging its legitimacy as the sole source of historical truth. Investigative journalists, previously interested predominantly in contemporary issues, also began to delve into the past, and from the mid-1980s produced some of the most widely-read works. Of these writers, the woman journalist and fiction writer Dai Qing is perhaps the most outstanding.

Dai produced long investigations of two "historical mysteries" which involved the silencing and eventual death of outspoken intellectual critics of the party. One was Wang Shiwei, the main object of attack in the ideological struggles in the party's wartime guerrilla base of Yan'an in the early 1940s. Dai uses this case—the first cultural purge carried out by the party—to dissect the nature and style of such campaigns, revealing in the process that Wang was beheaded in 1947. The other was Chu Anping, a journalist and famous liberal who spoke out against the party's monopoly of power in 1957. He disappeared in the early days of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Both remain un-rehabilitated. Dai's writings, part of a longer series of historical investigations, had one main thrust. As she put it:

...I'm writing for the sake of the present. If it weren't for this I wouldn't bother writing about these cases. In my opinion the situation is exactly the same today; that's why I wanted to tell the truth about these incidents; so people can read about them and think: how come nothing's really changed, why hasn't there really been any progress?
Dai was also involved in collecting data on the Cultural Revolution with Su Xiaokang, a journalist who was one of the main script writers of the controversial 1988 tele-series *River Elegy*, and now an exile in Princeton. Some of this material appeared alongside Dai's study of Chu Anping in early 1989, although the magazine in which it was published was banned in August of that year.

History-related works that have been outlawed since the massacre range from the serious, such as Dai’s writings, to the sensational such as Su Xiaokang’s account of the Lushan Conference of 1958, which many see as the prelude to the Cultural Revolution, and even the sacrilegious such as *Their Struggle—From Marx to Hitler*.

Independent historical writing both contributed to and profited from the ideological collapse of China in the 1980s. On 13 May 1989, a petition signed in Shanghai by a group of poets and literary critics declared publicly that writers had a “right to history”. Different from any of the other appeals supporting the student demonstrators in Beijing, it read in part:

Writers must have the freedom to analyse, explain and publish their views on all aspects of Chinese reality both historical and present, in particular political incidents. For a party official to use his position or administrative powers to restrict or interfere with writers or deprive them of their freedom of expression or publication is not only an abuse of power, but illegal.

The rewriting of history has been an important feature of the party’s efforts at self-justification since June 1989. The official description of the carnage of the Beijing massacre as a riot by hooligans is the most obvious case in point. The media has also been used extensively to prove the ‘historical necessity’ of party rule and socialism in China. The most notable example of this has been *On the Road*, a four-part documentary series first screened in August 1990. Glossing over the “errors” of party rule, it affirms that China’s salvation lies in socialism. There have been other such programs, like *Love for the Republic*, which deals with the commitment of scientists to the motherland, and *The Spirit of China*.

Old war films from the early 1950s have also been shown in prime viewing time as part of the revolutionary re-education of the youth of the nation. Much publicised newer films include a tale about Deng Xiaoping’s youthful military career (*Bose qiyi*), and an epic-length extravaganza on the founding of the People’s Republic (*kaiguo dadian*).

As 1990 was the 150th anniversary of the first Opium War, much was made of the blood shed by patriotic martyrs and revolutionaries for the cause of national independence. The message is simple: the blood debt of the past is so great, no citizen today has the right to reign on the final choice of history for China: marxism-leninism.

The response to the sprouts of independent history writing that appeared in the late 80s among orthodox party historians is perhaps best reflected in comments the leading ideologue Hu Qiaomu made on 8 March 1990 at a national meeting on party history. Hu, the man directly in charge of overseeing the production of an official party history for the 70th anniversary of the founding of the party this year, said that “...the study of party history...is not oriented to the past; it is to confront the present and face the future...Like other areas of the party’s ideological work our endeavours are concerned with supporting the leadership of the party, it is part of the struggle for the socialist enterprise in China.” In other words, the task of history or historiography is didactic; history is to be used to illustrate, not to establish, the truth.

In that speech Hu Qiaomu attacked the activities of feral historians like Dai Qing and Su Xiaokang in a classic passage of double-think:

> Our struggle is that of science against anti-science, the struggle of truth against lies. Originally the true face of history was like this, but inimical forces are dead-set on obliterating, distorting and slandering the truth about the past revolutionary struggles of the party and the people. It is for this reason that we must use a scientific attitude, scientific methodology and scientific proofs to elucidate the various basic questions of our party’s history.

Hu has been an active practitioner of the “science” of history since the 1940s. It is said he helped compose the key 1945 resolution that outlines the life of the party from 1921 which one observer remarked is little more than a “history of Mao Zedong”. He also had a guiding hand in the 1981 document with its highly fictionalised view of post-1949 history. Taken together these documents now form the basis for the official party history. Hu’s general attitude to inconvenient historical source material is illustrated by his instructions to archivists some years ago to buy and hide away the memoirs of Zheng Chaolin, a famous trotskyite jailed from 1952-1979. The book, published for limited circulation in China, contained personal details of the lives of revolutionaries now enshrined in the party’s pantheon.

Hu Qiaomu has also been one of the architects of the party’s “creation myth”, the “Yan’an spirit” which is still touted as the bedrock of party rule. In Yan’an, now referred to as the “holy land of the revolution”, the party evolved a Chinese version of the stalinist political purge and solidified a hierarchy under Mao Zedong which, despite the vicissitudes of the past 40 years, has remained essentially unchanged. The eminent elders who still rule China are cadres from the Yan’an period.

The party leaders have taken a number of steps to ensure that Yan’an traditions—notably self-reliance and hard struggle—keep the nation hamstrung. To help promote the deadening spirit of the past, a new Yan’an Spirit Research Institute was established in Beijing in mid-1990. In late 1989 “Awards for the Elite of Useful Old People” were also created, not long after the Beijing massacre. These awards are to ensure that “the older revolutionaries who have been through the baptism
of fire will live happily...and continue to contribute to the society”. At the same time “golden citations” for “Good Children who Revere the Aged” were also established. To vouchsafe the loyalty of its young people the revolutionary party that took as its cause a total break with the crushing traditions of the Chinese past is in its own old age relying increasingly on “ancestor worship” and filial piety with socialist characteristics.

In the summer of 1988 Zhang Zhenglong, who was writing White Snow, Red Blood, was inspired by the news from the Soviet Union that high school history examinations were being cancelled and texts revised. He reflected on the relationship between the makers and inheritors of history in China:

That final war [of 1948] laid waste to the black earth of the north-east. But since then what has continued to defile it? As it’s the grown-ups who’ve thrown the family chronicle into chaos, how can we ever hope that our children will continue it?...If you expect sincerity from your children, you must be honest yourself.

The dissident historian can thus be as threatening as the political activist or pamphleteer.

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2. A number of other books in the series have come under a cloud, and it has been reported that other semi-fictionalised accounts of pre-1948 party and army history have been banned or named during the purge of army publications.


4. Some of the most popular writers of this genre of ‘history’ are the ‘entrepreneur writers’ Ye Yongle, Quan Yunchi and Liu Yaxiu.


6. The fourth issue of the magazine Dongfang jishu, produced in Nanjing, was listed in the Index of Books and Periodicals Banned from Sale (Jinzhai xiaohou shuhan muhu) compiled by the national News and Publishing Authority and published in Beijing by the Municipal News and Publishing Bureau in August 1989, p.11.

On the tenth anniversary of the Khmer Rouge accession to power in Cambodia, Deng Xiaoping shocked those who saw China’s foreign policy as determined by a fear of Soviet encirclement. He said the USSR may “still retain the bases provided by Vietnam”—the former US military facilities at Cam Ranh Bay—if Moscow stopped supporting Hanoi in Cambodia.

China had outlined its priorities. Beijing’s policy was less defensive against the Soviets than forward-looking, aimed at Southeast Asia, and locked in rivalry with Hanoi. Thus, after the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in February-March 1979 (in which Beijing lost 60,000 killed and wounded), Deng proclaimed that it is wise for China to force the Vietnamese to stay in Cambodia, because that way they will suffer more and more...”

The German China specialist Rudiger Machetzki has pointed out that from 1977 to 1980, only 5% of China’s anti-Soviet commentaries appeared in domestic Chinese media. Even in 1980, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, all but 40 out of 2,400 Chinese condemnations of the USSR were for foreign con-
sumption only. By 1982, no more than one-third of the Chinese army was deployed facing the long Soviet border.

China had put three conditions—‘obstacles’—on normalisation of its relations with the USSR: Soviet troop reductions along China’s northern border, withdrawal from Afghanistan, and an end to support for Hanoi in Cambodia. In 1982, however, China made clear its priority demand: “the first signs of a Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia would be sufficient to facilitate progress in Sino-Soviet talks”. On 17 April 1985, Deng again suggested Moscow first remove the Cambodian ‘obstacle’, the only one of the three not bordering China.

During the October 1985 Sino-Soviet normalisation talks in Beijing, the Soviets proposed to withdraw and demobilise some of their troops on the Chinese border. Beijing was barely interested. “In response the Chinese side said it would like to see some Soviet action in restraining Vietnam in Cambodia,” reported the Far Eastern Economic Review in 1985. Hanoi’s April 1989 pledge to leave Cambodia by September smoothed the way for the May Sino-Soviet summit.

China is preoccupied with Vietnam because it sees Southeast Asia as more vital than West or North Asia. In the South China Sea, for instance, China far extends its claims to the Paracel and Spratley island groups there. Beijing has described that ocean expanse as its own ‘territorial sea’, legally equivalent to an inland ocean expanse as its own ‘territorial sea’, legally equivalent to an inland sea, legally equivalent to an inland expanse as its own ‘territorial sea’. Beijing sees Southeast Asia as more vital than West or North Asia. In the South China Sea, for instance, China far extends its claims to the Paracel and Spratley island groups there. Beijing has described that ocean expanse as its own ‘territorial sea’, legally equivalent to an inland sea, legally equivalent to an inland expanse as its own ‘territorial sea’. In the South China Sea, for instance, China far extends its claims to the Paracel and Spratley island groups there. Beijing has described that ocean expanse as its own ‘territorial sea’, legally equivalent to an inland sea, legally equivalent to an inland sea, legally equivalent to an inland sea, legally equivalent to an inland sea.

Beijing’s attack came a decade after China had ended conflict over its eastern maritime border, agreeing with Japan to shelve the issue of sovereignty over the disputed Diaoyutai islands. There, moreover, China has claimed no vast ‘territorial sea’. The contrast with its South China Sea claim is striking.

Only in 1990, after Hanoi had proved difficult to drive out of the Spratleys, and China’s international position had been weakened by the Beijing massacre, the Soviet withdrawal from Cam Ranh Bay, and the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia, did Beijing offer even to negotiate over the Spratleys. It proposed that all parties jointly develop them, ending Hanoi’s military dominance there, while maintaining a non-negotiable Chinese monopoly over the Paracels. If published in the domestic Chinese media at the time (it was not), the proposal might have signalled a first step towards abandonment of China’s claim to the whole South China Sea. But it would also advance China’s current position the most, while requiring the most concessions from Hanoi, to whom it directs claims by the Philippines and Malaysia.

Anthony Barnett has suggested that China has its own Monroe Doctrine. Beijing eyes a Southeast Asian ‘backyard’ replicating US hegemony in Latin America. Referring to Vietnam as ‘The Cuba of the East’, China (like the US) is frustrated by a former pet gone feral defending its doorstep.

From early 1977, Khmer Rouge forces attacked undisputed Vietnamese territory, massacring over 10,000 Vietnamese civilians and causing hundreds of thousands to flee their homes. Hanoi’s account, corroborated at the time by both US intelligence and Vietnamese refugees fleeing abroad from the war zone, has since been documented from both sides of the border. Before Vietnam had responded to these attacks, China informed both sides that it supported Pol Pot’s Cambodia. In 1978, Vietnam offered to negotiate a ceasefire and settlement under international supervision. Pol Pot refused, and the war continued; his Chinese support continued after Hanoi overthrew his regime in 1979.

“I do not understand why some people want to remove Pol Pot,” Deng Xiaoping said in 1984. “It is true that he made some mistakes in the past but now he is leading the fight against the Vietnamese aggressors.” A Chinese diplomat concurred: “One should not talk of compromise’ on Cambodia. Beijing may see the Khmer Rouge as their two allies (Norodom Sihanouk and Son Sann) replacing China’s own World War II anti-Japanese struggle, when the Chinese communist-orientated front tactics also gave bourgeois allies two of ‘three-thirds’ of coalition posts. Sihanouk himself has attacked China’s willingness to “fight to the last Cambodian”.

Since the collapse in the 1980s of the pro-Beijing communist insurgencies in Malaysia, Thailand and Burma, the Khmer Rouge is China’s last international client force. Beijing will not be enticed to surrender them. Despite a previous undertaking to cut its arms supplies to them in return for Vietnam’s withdrawal from Cambodia, Beijing sent the Khmer Rouge a large shipment of weapons in mid-1990. China provides the Khmer Rouge forces with US$100 million a year, according to American intelligence. When given the choice, China naturally blocks the isolation of the Khmer Rouge. It also resists moves towards regional concord, preferring a balkanised Southeast Asia with ‘many roads’ to Beijing. Yet any agreement to isolate the Khmer Rouge between Vietnam and Thailand, if backed by ASEAN and the West, would be hard for Beijing to subvert. China would have to accept a bipartisan Southeast Asian settlement.

Precisely such a regional consensus—exclusion of the Khmer Rouge in return for the Vietnamese withdrawal—was shunted aside by the 1990 UN Security Council proposal for Cambodia. That weakened the Southeast Asian nations’ 1988 provision against “a recurrence of the genocidal policies and practices of the Pol Pot regime”. It now reads blandly: “Necessary measures should be taken in order to observe human rights and ensure the
non-return to the policies and practices of the past.” In effect, the UN has condoned genocide.

The UN’s Human Rights Sub-committee immediately dropped its agenda a draft resolution on Cambodia referring to “the atrocities reaching the level of genocide committed in particular during the period of Khmer Rouge rule”, and urging all states “to detect, arrest, extradite or bring to trial” and “to prevent the return to government positions of those who were responsible for genocidal actions during the period 1975 to 1978”. The sub-committee dropped this text, according to Agence France Presse on 30 August 1990, “after several speakers said it would render a disservice to the United Nations after the five permanent members of the UN Security Council issued a joint plan this week aimed at ending the fighting…”

China dreaded a successful Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia, leaving an independent regime not hostile to Hanoi. But it happened, and the result has been a Chinese demand, with the West willingly cooperating, for a unanimous ‘comprehensive settlement’ – i.e. subject to the veto of China and the Khmer Rouge. It involves outside constraint of the only Cambodian opponents of the genocide, Hun Sen’s Phnom Penh government.

In late November 1989, Australia’s Foreign Minister Gareth Evans launched his peace proposal for Cambodia, calling for a UN administration to replace Hun Sen. But Evans refused to take any initiative against the Khmer Rouge, insisting on a solution acceptable to China. The effect of this kowtow has now been revealed by China’s ambassador in London: from the beginning of January 1990, Beijing began sending tanks to the Khmer Rouge for the first time in 12 years. A witness reports five Chinese T-59 tanks were handed over to the Khmer Rouge near the Thai province of Trat on 21 June. A total of 24 had arrived in Cambodia by October, according to Jane’s Defence Weekly, which describes them as “the most significant increase in firepower the resistance to the Vietnamese-installed government has ever received”. Gareth Evans has denied this, claiming “there is no evidence available to the Australian government that the Khmer Rouge has recently received tanks from China. Indeed, the consensus among the experts is to the contrary.” No such consensus exists. While some debate whether Thai forces have yet delivered some of the tanks to the Khmer Rouge, the Chinese definitely dispatched them in January 1990 and the Khmer Rouge now have at least five and possibly as many as 28 tanks. Evans was played on a break.

In 1990 the Harvard Human Rights Journal obtained confidential Pol Pot speeches recorded in briefing notes taken by two Khmer Rouge commanders who defected in 1989. They show Pol Pot’s conscious use of the veto that Evans and the West have given him over the negotiation process, through their push for a ‘comprehensive settlement’. In 1988, Pol Pot secretly unfolded his plans to “delay the elections” until his forces “control all the country”, when his officials “will lead the ballotting work”. Khieu Samphan, his delegate to the negotiations, added: “The outside world keeps demanding a political end to the war in Kampuchea. I could end the war now if I wanted, because the outside world is waiting for me, but I am buying time to give you comrades the opportunity to carry out all the tasks... If it doesn’t end politically, and ends militarily, that’s good for us.” Here Pol Pot interrupted, saying that “to end the war politically” would make his movement “fade away”. “We must prevent this from happening.”

As I write, the Cambodian negotiations remain stalled, and the UN fears to proceed against Khmer Rouge intransigence. Armed with this veto, the Khmer Rouge have had a year’s valuable time to pursue their war aims. In 1990 they seized large areas of northern and western Cambodia. They are in a much better position now than in 1989 both to disguise their military forces and to control the outcome of any elections. There is no assurance that the UN is serious about disarming the Khmer Rouge and ensuring a fair election in Khmer Rouge-controlled villages. As Evans himself puts it: “There can be no guarantee that they will not resume fighting after the transitional period with weapons which have been hidden from the UN monitoring process.” But, he claims, “China will have given an international legal undertaking to cease arms supply to the Khmer Rouge, will be under close international legal scrutiny to uphold that undertaking, and can be reasonably expected to honour it.” Given China’s broken promises in this regard, and the propensity of those promising ‘international scrutiny’ to cover for Beijing, no confidence is warranted here.

Pol Pot said in 1988 that, in the event of a settlement, “our troops will remain in the jungle for self-defence”. They are not prepared to lay down their arms. In the same briefing, Pol Pot defended having massacred the defeated Lon Nol regime’s officers, soldiers and officials in 1975: “This strata of the imperialists had to be totally destroyed.” The Khmer Rouge predict their return with this slogan: “When the water rises, the fish eat the ants, but when the water recedes, the ants eat the fish.”

Wringing Cambodia dry for Pol Pot, the world enforces its economic and diplomatic blockade. In November 1990, Gareth Evans did propose re-establishing an Australian diplomatic presence in Phnom Penh. But like the 1987 proposal to take Pol Pot to the World Court for genocide, this was rejected by Prime Minister Bob Hawke out of deference to China. If the Khmer Rouge returns to power, the Hawke government will share responsibility with China and the US.

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In a centralised economy, albeit one that contains a market sector, the twin problems of slack demand and rising unemployment are, to say the least, unusual. Until these problems emerged economic ‘wisdom’ had it that China has a suction-based economy that manifests scarcity, but provides full employment.

Today China’s economic planners find that they are faced with a situation where a significant number of enterprises are being merged with other enterprises or are closing, where an additional 130 million people will enter the workforce in the next ten years and, where economic policy must address the problem of a ‘vicious circle’ of over-extended enterprise circulating funds created by slack demand.

In an attempt in part, to unravel the current twin problems of a slack demand and rising unemployment I will begin by considering two factors - (i) the behaviour of advantaged state industrial enterprises, both during and after the decade of economic reform and (ii) the process of accumulation and investment that took place during the decade of reform, particularly in the rural sector.

During the decade of reform, China’s economic planners assumed that reform policy would increasingly result in competition between enterprises and that this would be competition for profit. Indeed, economic reform policy did create competition between enterprises, but, rather than competing for profit per se, they competed for access to scarce production resources, the same resources now subject to demand slackness.

Under China’s economic reform policy, enterprises increased production and economised on resources, as intended, but they also continued to measure enterprise ‘success’ by the size of production output. The latter is a characteristic of a suction-based economy where consumer demand does not inform production output, rather scarcity allows almost all products produced to find a willing consumer. As reform policy increasingly allowed enterprises to retain a significant portion of their profit, competition between ever-expanding enterprises took the form of competition for scarce production resources. In this situation a cycle of shortage was fed, and advantaged state industrial enterprises gained an ‘edge’: an ‘edge’ consisting of access to scarce producer resources through an ability

- to pay above the formal price for scarce resources,
- to barter for scarce resources,
- to cultivate favour advantages,
- to enjoy a relatively strong bargaining position vis à vis administrative authorities at all levels,
- to provide private infrastructural resources (i.e. a coal-burning electric plant), and
- to attract scarce technically trained labour-power.

Given their competitive ‘edge’, advantaged enterprises were in a position to reproduce and enhance their already favourable position and were generating a considerable call on funds over which enterprise management could exercise decision-making power unimpeded by the direct control of central planners. At the same time, state central planners, aware of above-price payment for scarce resources, aware that these prices were fuelling inflation and aware that fixed-asset investment was escaping state planning control, attempted to exert...
greater influence over the use of enterprise funds. In this context the advantaged enterprises came up with an economic innovation allowing them to tap funds that, like retained enterprise profit, lay outside direct central government control. These were the investment funds of township enterprises.

The advantaged enterprises' call on non-centrally controlled funds, then, led directly to the exploitation of township funds by state industrial enterprises. They were thirsty for ever-expanded production capacity (indicating enterprise 'success') leading to a need for more and more production materials to feed this capacity.

At the beginning of the decade of reform, central government policy was to close the 'price-scissors' - the process whereby rural production, through the price system, provided accumulation for urban industrial development. But in the last years of the reform decade, the advantaged state industrial enterprises significantly contributed to the undermining of this policy by effectively opening up a new channel for tapping rural accumulation for use in urban industrial development. This was done through gaining access to township enterprise funds, themselves drawn in turn from a combination of rural agricultural accumulation and Agricultural Bank and agricultural co-operative loans designated for rural sector development.

And, in time, the policy of tapping township funds did not stop at channeling investment from the rural to the industrial/urban sector of the economy (indeed, it was accompanied by an urban consumption bias on a 2:1 ratio). During the period of economic contraction that has followed the decade of economic reform, another legacy of this policy became all too evident: township unemployment.

Clearly, future township unemployment was unforeseen. When township enterprises provided funds for advantaged enterprises, they saw themselves as investing funds in return for scarce production resources. They could not have known that in the post economic reform climate of economic contraction and state anti-corruption control, advantaged enterprises would reduce their liabilities, not through reducing their core labour force, but through cutting their ties with satellite township enterprises. This has been a policy that has significantly contributed to the situation where three million township enterprises have been closed or merged and where there has been a corresponding decline in rural per capita income.

Under the economic reform policy the primary form of rural accumulation came to be private household production. This form of production provided funds for investment in the township enterprises, which most often manufactured industrial goods rather than processing agricultural produce. Some became satellite enterprises by entering into contract arrangements with urban based state industrial enterprises. It was, as noted above, a situation whereby township enterprises provided funding for a form of industrial development outside direct state control.

Current [1990-91] policy has had to recognise that rural accumulation, instead of funding investment in industrial production, could be better used to support agricultural production. By 1990 the State was investing more than twice the 1988 figure in projects aimed at increasing farm production and central planners' economic statements no longer glowed with accounts of China's richness in terms of rural labour power resources. The argument was no longer being made that:

It is of great importance to transfer a large portion of manpower away from farming to the secondary and tertiary industries and thus make full use of it to develop diversified rural economies.

The corresponding argument now used was that:

The surplus labour force in agriculture should be absorbed and digested within the scope of agriculture. Agriculture is the foundation of national economic development. So long as agriculture continues to develop, it will be easier to arrange the rural labour force, and the cities will also find it easier to solve their employment issue.

Planners are now recognising that rural industries are having a relatively "hard time". A 1990 survey of rural incomes showed that actual per capita income dropped by 4% and that for the first time cash income from township and town enterprises experienced negative growth. The survey showed that even such regions as Beijing, Jiangsu and Guangdong "whose economies have been developing rapidly at a high level" showed decreases in per capita rural income. In the course of this situation the Agricultural Bank of China has now been authorised to increase its lending to township enterprises by 11 billion yuan (§A3.5 billion) to be used as working capital.

China's planners are now arguing that "the rural contracted responsibility system, based on the household and with remuneration linked to output, [the form of primary accumulation promoted during the decade of economic reform] should be further consolidated and improved" but that, the next accumulation and investment step promoted by economic reform policy, i.e., re-investment of funds accumulated in the course of private agricultural production or borrowed from rural bank and co-operative sources, will be blocked. This, it is currently argued, is "because the capacity of township and town enterprises is limited".

Currently planners have had to come to terms with a situation where "a part of the labor force they
[township enterprises] hired...[is being] laid off and sent back to agriculture" and, a situation where, "with limited scope for jobs in cities", "a substantial number of surplus labor forces in the traditional farming industry" must be expected.4

Under the Eighth Five-Year Plan [1991-7], the focus has shifted from industrial development per se to developing agricultural production, especially any available rural export potential, together with 'basic industries' such as energy and raw materials. Current increased loans to township industries involved in industrial production may thus be seen as paralleling past subsidies of the price of basic foodstuffs to urban workers, in the sense that they are loans designed to dampen the social dissatisfaction expected to accompany loss of real income.

Even allowing for the focus of the argument presented above, it would be wrong to blame all current unemployment in China, or even all township unemployment, on the behaviour of advantaged enterprises vis à vis township enterprises during the decade of reform. Other important factors must be recognised, the most important being problems of slack demand.

Chinese planners' analyses of the cause of current slack demand fall into two categories. The first attributes the problem to the recent substantial increase in savings deposits. The second, beginning from the premise that "reducing savings deposits will not help...to liven the sluggish market", attributes it to a variety of inter-related factors. These include:

(i) harsh contractive measures taken in the early period of economic contraction;
(ii) greater screening and rectification of enterprise behaviour;
(iii) effective measures to cut back government institutions' purchase of consumer goods;
(iv) the current reduction in demand for materials for fixed asset development.

The second factor listed is, alone, recognised as having, by late April 1990, led to the closure or incorporation into other entities of more than 100,000 enterprises.

Policy consequent on such analysis has, since the third and fourth quarters of 89, been based on the view that the enterprise 'debt chain' that has arisen from enterprise inability to sell their product and so pay their debts, should be the first issue addressed. Bank loans have been used as a 'starting device'. Indeed, these are loans made possible by the current increased level of savings. It is estimated that "of the increased loans offered [to enterprises] by banks and credit cooperatives, two-thirds came from savings deposits".5

'The topics of conversation nowadays' are mostly about how best to approach the problem of slack demand. But, in practice, policy has not consisted of the most discussed policy suggestions of readjusting the product mix, increasing production of those items which are readily marketable and in short supply, and, cutting back production cost and promoting sales, especially in rural areas.6 Instead, it has taken the form of the bank loans noted above and, even more recently, a clearly defined period of enterprise debt clearance. The latter consisting of bank assistance extended to enterprises specifically for clearing accumulated enterprise debts of over 50,000 yuan ($A15,000) incurred between 1/1/89 and 31/3/90. It is assistance that carries with it very tight government control of enterprise funds.

A formal planning consequence of a decade of economic reform, followed by a period of centrally induced economic contraction, is an Eighth Five Year Plan that moves China's planning focus from rural industrial to agricultural development and seeks to use the current period of economic contraction as "an opportunity" to influence investment in order to give priority to urban and rural infrastructure. But another consequence of this same period is that Chinese planners, are faced not only with a situation of merging and closing enterprises, but also with the need to dampen the social effects of rising unemployment as well as trying to break out of the vicious circle of:

Overspending of circulating funds—less investments in fixed assets for economic sectors short of funds...—uncoordinated investment structure—unbalanced production structure—further increase in the spending of circulating funds...7

The slack market that has led to this cycle together with the accompanying unemployment are very unusual concerns within the context of a centralised economy. Indeed, they are so unusual that the established wisdom of the economists of centralised economies is unable to help. Clearly, new theses are needed. These will need to be informed by an understanding of the effect of interacting central and private economic sectors within the frame of a centralised economy, together with perceptive analysis of the effect of centrally enforced curbs on fixed asset investment and on the corruption that "oils" a centralised economy.

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2. Renmin Ribao, 25/6/90.
3. This policy is quoted in a speech delivered by Li Peng, see Xinhuas, 16/9/90.
4. Renmin Ribao, 26/6/90.
5. Renmin Ribao, 13/8/90.
6. ibid.
The force of words

China's police take up a new weapon — old words — against crime. Michael Dutton looks at the campaign.

Hollywood moguls are not the only ones to create the illusion of a time warp. The Chinese public security forces are proving to be something of a deft hand at this also as their latest production—the campaign against moral and economic crime—amply demonstrates.

In the Chinese production though, it is not Michael J. Fox who plays the leading rule but that 'unrustable screw', the boy scout of the Chinese Communist Party, Lei Feng, who gets star billing. Moreover, the Chinese production features no sophisticated futuristic machine to transport people across time. Instead, it is the technologies and mechanisms of the past which are being 'transported' into the present to create the illusion of a socialist transition.

In the post-Tiananmen massacre period, by a renewed emphasis upon ideological work and the purity of the past. It is this ideological purity which is now said to guarantee China's socialist future.

The utilisation of past models and mechanisms to deal with new problems is not confined to the realm of propaganda. As mentioned previously it has also featured prominently in Chinese police strategies. Long before the massacre, Chinese police were resorting to a combination of Maoist-style mass-line techniques and campaigns coupled with new draconian penalties to deal with a rising rate of crime which they blamed on the economic reform program. New criminal forms seemed to be taking shape and, in order to deal with these, a number of innovations were attempted, the most important of which were:

* harsher penalties for those crimes which were targeted by the police,
* intermittent large scale campaigns against these target crimes,

To redress the problem of city-based recidivism — said to have become serious in the economic reform period — a form of banishment was introduced: targeted criminals would be forced to remain at the prison site even after their sentences had been completed. While this policy was in itself nothing new, its more specialised use against certain target criminal activity was. In the early 1980s the targeted criminal group was the city-based recidivist. By 1984 a new target emerged — city-based criminals who had been rounded up in the 1983 campaign against street crime and, after the 4 June disturbances, political activists in Beijing were also reported to have been targeted.

Attempts to introduce banishment as a means of solving target crime, however, were invariably short lived. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, such measures were increasingly opposed by the prison
authorities themselves for such policies made the task of controlling the prison more difficult. After all, criminals targeted for this special treatment had little to gain from being model prisoners and instead quite often became disruptive. Secondly, for community police there was limited propaganda value in such measures. Because of their draconian nature and China's fear of international criticism such policies were never made public. As they remained secret the deterrent effect of such measures was limited. Consequently, for the community, police publicly promulgated harsher penalties for target crimes coupled with politico-educational campaigns around the issue as the way forward. It is this type of campaign style policing which was pursued throughout the reform period and has been a prominent feature of the post-4 June policing strategy.

At the 3rd plenum of the 11th central committee in 1978, Premier Hua Guofeng signalled the end of mass style campaigns. "Large scale turbulent class struggle of a mass kind," he said, "had, in the main, come to an end." In saying this, Hua was only partly right. Since the 'technology' of the campaign found a new home in the mass-line policing strategies of the Public Security Ministry. The best example of this large scale turbulent campaign style policing was the 1983 campaign against street crime. The 1983 campaign was predicated on certain legal changes designed to facilitate easier arrests, detentions and prosecutions of target criminal groups. Sections of the criminal code were suspended, the sentences for certain types of crime increased dramatically and the trial procedures speeded up. The right of defence and the right of appeal were limited. This campaign proved to be something of a model for later policing campaigns.

There are clear indications that similar sorts of methods have been adopted both in the campaign against the pro-democracy movement and in the long running campaign against corruption. While few details of the former campaign have been officially announced, the party has been too keen to highlight the scale and success of the drive against corruption. Consequently, the Chinese press reported that between January and June 1989, some 64,584 cases of corruption were investigated leading to over 10,000 convictions. In releasing such figures, the party hopes to demonstrate that it is actively campaigning against one of the central concerns of the pro-democracy Tiananmen demonstrators: cadre corruption. The anti-corruption campaign, then, is part of a party campaign to re-legitimise its role in the aftermath of 4 June. Thus, while the anti-corruption campaign appears as a policing activity, its political dimensions are never far from the surface.

Similarly, the campaign against 'the six evils' (liu hai) cannot be regarded as apolitical. This campaign against the evils of prostitution, pornography, trading in women and children, growing, using and trading in narcotics, gambling and engaging in superstitious activities should be seen as part of the party's attempt (along with the resurrection of Mao and Lei Feng) to reassert its moral leadership. By May 1989 the 'six evils' campaign and the drive against corruption were wed into a single and much bigger campaign; the yan da or severe strike campaign. This campaign is said by Amnesty International to be the "most severe crackdown on crime since 1983".

While there is little doubt that such campaigns signal the erosion of legal rights for the target criminal group there is much more doubt surrounding their long-term utility in reducing the crime rate. After all, the 'campaign' as a technique by which to mobilise and politicise 'the masses' clearly wasn't all that successful in the past. In hindsight, it is clear that the Maoist political campaigns of the past had little long term effect upon those within the party said to be 'taking the capitalist road'. Similarly, the campaign style of policing currently employed appears to be having only a limited, temporary effect on the target criminal group. More importantly, in relation to the current drive against corruption, it is debatable whether the campaign style of policing is even a suitable response to this type of crime. After all, the 'campaign' as a mass line technique drawn from the Maoist, populist past leads more toward the community than toward the higher echelons of the party. Yet it is precisely this latter domain that is most in need of policing if the popular complaints about cadre corruption are to be addressed. It is in this respect that one discovers the limits of the mass-line. Yet it is this mass line in policing which, in many respects, has become critically important in the period of economic reform.

There is little doubt as to the importance of the so-called mass line organisations in current policing strategies. The neighbourhood committees, their public security committees and public security small groups and pacts play a critical role in community policing. They are, in fact, the backbone of local community policing. An examination of China's policing figures explains why. China has an extremely low ratio of police to people: 6 per 10,000 in the PRC as opposed to Taiwan with 26 (1985 figures) per 10,000, the Soviet Union with 36, Britain with 25 and the United States with 28 per 10,000. The neighbourhood committee is therefore an important instrument by which to maintain social order in China. This was the case before economic reform and there are clear indications that, as a result of economic reform, the duties of these committees have actually increased.

As police workloads have increased and the nature of crime has changed, neighbourhood committees have been called upon to take over work previously the preserve of the regular police force. City based household registration is but one example; in many cities now it is the neighbourhood committees which more or less administer it. Apart from such mundane duties the neighbourhood committee has also been called upon to fulfil new roles. Now they are required by law to help maintain social order, help police the birth control policy and help educate the neighbourhood youth. One of the ironies of the economic reform process was that it resulted in the strengthening of the mass line organisations rather than their dis-
Maintaining the rage

A small voice of dissent can still be heard in China, and, according to Linda Joivin, it's becoming louder, without, it seems, the party cadres noticing.

There's nothing like rock 'n roll fever to warm up those cold Beijing nights. Last February, braving sleet and biting winds, fans packed the 18,000-seat Workers' Stadium two nights in a row for China's first rock festival. Performing were six of the best of the capital's 30-odd local bands: the all-female Cobra, the heavy-metal Tang Dynasty, Breath, Circumstances, ADO, and 1989.

When Wei Hua, lead singer of Breath belted out her signature tune, "Don't Even Think of Stopping Me", the audience exploded. As the former Central Television newsreader sang, tears streaming down her face, "I will find a way to cast off these ropes and take a hold of life; the sun will shine down on me," the crowd waved burning matches, cigarette lighters and even flaming programs in response.

There's no doubt about it, rock is hot in China. In a sense, yaojun (rock 'n roll) is to young urban Chinese today what 'misty poetry' was to Chinese youth of the early 1980s: a secret language defying comprehension by the adult establishment and a shared code for self-expression that implicitly rejects the values of official culture. Even in its heyday, however, misty poetry enjoyed a limited audience at best; rock reaches the masses. And you can dance to it.

Rock in China has come a long way since April 1985, when British pop group Wham staged the nation's first rock concert and the few brave fans who tried to dance in the aisles were dragged off by police. Few observers could then have imagined that, within a few years, China would boast a fully fledged rock scene, complete with home-grown bands, commanding legions of screaming fans.

Cui Jian, China's No. 1 rock star, a one-man phenomenon in faded army fatigue and work boots who writes songs with titles like "Rock for the New Long March" was one of the sparks that ignited the prairie fire of rock. A former trumpeter with the Beijing Philharmonic, the baby-faced Mr Cui appeared on Beijing's Central Television in November 1985 singing what is still an enduringly popular tune, "Nothing to my Name".

I want to give you hope
I want to help make you free
But all you ever do is laugh at me,
'cause
I've got nothing to my name.

A trend was born. Beijing quickly became the Jinggangshan of Chinese rock, a revolutionary bass area, if you will, from which the rock message was spread. While rock has reached many areas of the country, including Lhasa, it remains primarily an urban phenomenon. The secret of rock's appeal was hinted at in the 1988 short story "The Rock 'n Roll..."
Generation” by the army writer Liu Yiran. The story encapsulates the high-spirited mood of anti-authoritarian rebellion that suffused the air one year later when the students of Beijing took to the streets under the banners of democracy and freedom. In the story, breakdancing, sex and rock are the key to the young protagonist’s search for personal liberation and fulfilment. His irreverent antics at one point lead his relatively straight-laced girlfriend to ask him what was next—rocking into Zhongnanhai (the Communist Party’s headquarters)? He never made it there, but the participants in the 1989 protest movement did: during the protests, breakdancing, rock and sex were part of life on Tiananmen Square, at the doorstep of Zhongnanhai. By day the protesters chanted the International; by night, they grooved to Cui Jian.

Rock is, of course, a foreign import. Several of the most popular Beijing bands, such as 1989, even have foreign members. (ADO, Cui Jian’s original band, recently disbanded when its foreign members left China.) In the capital, expatriates may also play a major role in arranging gigs, such as open, multi-band, mixed-crowd dance parties staged at such surprising locations as the ancient Observatory Tower. For all that, however, yaogun is definitely rock with Chinese characteristics.

The Taiwan singer-songwriter Hou Dejian, who defected to China in 1983 and was shipped back to Taiwan last year, was the first to introduce traditional instruments like the suona to Chinese rock arrangements; it’s now almost a cliche. The films Yellow Earth and Red Sorghum sparked a fad for Shaanxi folk music which has since melded with rock to form a new, hybrid genre known as the northwest wind. But even when, musically speaking, Chinese rock is indistinguishable from its Western counterparts, its lyrics reflect the special problems, feelings and concerns of contemporary Chinese urbanites.

As in the Soviet Union, rock is a forum for social protest that may have no other safe outlet. This protest may be elliptical, as in Cui Jian’s “Nothing to My Name” or it may be explicit, as in the raucous “Official Banquet Song”, a witty description of cadre gluttony that doesn’t miss a beat:

I’m a big official so I eat and drink, eat and drink. To the Mongolian restaurant we go for hot pot, To Quanjude for Peking duck. Anyway, it’s not my money, So eat and drink and all be merry!

The Communist Party of China hasn’t figured out what it thinks about the rock revolution. It’s done the twist a number of times already on musical issues. Having banned Beethoven and Debussy in the Cultural Revolution, it was forced to rehabilitate them afterwards. In the early 80s it proscribed the sentiment al love songs of Taiwan’s Teresa Teng, but a few years later attempted to get her to play Beijing. By the time disco became the rage in China in the mid-80s—long after it was dead in the West—there was such ideological confusion that it was declared either spiritual pollution or excellent exercise for the elderly, depending on the commentator.

Chinese disco reached its creative apex with the release of disco versions of the revolutionary model operas. Then Cui Jian, dubbed “the atom bomb of Chinese rock” by Taiwan’s China Times Weekly, burst on the scene. Almost immediately, ideologues and cultural conserva tives swooped in with criticisms of his “extreme individualism” and “bourgeois liberalisation”. His songs, they claimed darkly, had “negative ideological content”. It’s said that a high-ranking municipal official even denounced “Nothing to My Name” as absurd—how could a Chinese youth have nothing to his name when he had socialism?

Today, despite ongoing purges in other areas of cultural and intellectual life, the beat goes on. Some people in the party even seem to have concluded that if you can’t fight ‘em, co-opt ‘em. The latest revolutionary model television series, On the Road: A Century of Marxism, the party’s answer to the popular, controversial and now-banned River Elegy, features a little song sung by the rock star Liu Huan.

The lyrics are matched with images representing a short history of Chinese communism: Marx (“You’re a seed of fire…”), Lenin (“a prophecy”), Mao (“a banner”) and Deng (“you spoke the truth…”). Yeah, yeah, yeah.

As a result of this sort of thing, one Beijing punk rocker practically spits when he hears the word yaogun because “they use it now”. He makes no compromises himself. Spewing beer over the heads of his audience and beating up on his bass player, his head partially shaved and a snarl on his face, he sings songs like “We Live in a Garbage Dump”:

The place where we live Is like a garbage dump. We’re all insects Fighting and squabbling We eat our conscience And shit our thoughts... Is there anything we can do? Nope. Tear it down.

While Beijing remains the home of Chinese rock, even Guangzhou, where the mellow sounds of Hong Kong Canto-pop dominate the scene, has produced a major rock talent in Xie Chengqiang, composer of “What’s the 90s Gonna Bring?”. Mr Xie, a Shandong native who was raised in Guangzhou, comes complete with all the standard rock star equipment: black clothing, dark glasses and a voice that was raked out of the gravel. In the underground music video of “What’s the 90s Gonna Bring?” images of Sun Yat-sen, old people practising tai chi, a map of China burning, and Guangzhou street scenes alternate with visions of Mr Xie bound in red silk, tearing a soal of black tape from his mouth and smashing walls with his guitar.

What is the 90s gonna bring for Chinese rock? It’s anyone’s guess. As an article in the Chinese-produced English-language magazine Nexus observes, Chinese rock “like Chinese socialism, is still at its primary stage”.

LINDA JAIVIN is a Canberra-based freelance journalist. She is currently writing a book on singer Hou Dejian. This piece is reproduced from Asian Wall Street Journal with the permission of the author.
The fragmentation of opinion on both the Left and Right is interesting. Since the 1983 election catastrophe (when Labour, fighting on a manifesto heavily influenced by the Left polled just 29% of the vote), and the miners’ strike, ideological conflict in the party has largely subsided, with most of the Left either reluctantly falling into line behind Kinnock or (like former Greater London Council leader Ken Livingstone) completely marginalised. Mullin: “Labour has been very cautious, but it’s caution that has come about because a massive section of the electorate has been bribed, and they are not in the mood for radical change. One of the things the leadership has been trying to convey is that if we are allowed back into office, we won’t move the furniture around too much, and if there’s any silver left, we’ll leave it in the sideboard. Personally I don’t think that’s the right approach, but I understand it. Nobody wants to rock the boat.”

With the Left in this mood, divisions within the party have become increasingly and intriguingly cross-factional, particularly over the very issues of Europe and constitutional reform. Nowhere is the fault-line more jagged than on proportional representation. David Blunkett and Chris Mullin both reject it, though for slightly different reasons: Blunkett: “I think multi-member constituencies muddy the issue of accountability, democracy and identity very strongly indeed. I’m more against it on those grounds than I am about the question of coalition, although that too implies that there’s never a government with a clear mandate, and everything’s a fix.”

Mullin’s view is classically instrumental: “As far as I’m concerned it means permanent coalition government. Now if the alternative is permanent conservative government, then obviously that’s attractive. But I’m not yet ready to admit that the possibility of a Labour government is so remote; in fact I think it’s likely that we’ll win a clear majority at the next election. As regards the principle, I don’t think there’s any particular principle that I can think of which says that the Liberal Democrats with maybe 30 seats should be in government and should be able to choose which of the other two parties should be in government.”

But it’s precisely this idea of coalition and consensus, and not just in parliamentary terms, which is the very principle underlying much of the agenda of Charter 88 and other would-be reformers. They argue that any credible Labour program must have broad-based support, and not just the 40% or so which has sustained the Tories for the past ten years. Hirst: “Commitment to PR is an indication that you mean serious business in terms of political change, and the failure to endorse it means that you’re relying on this idea of a traditional Westminster style of government.”

For all their recalcitrance on PR, the policy shifts pushed through by the Labour leadership in other areas have been substantial and in many ways remarkable. On Scotland and Wales, for example, the debates seemed to be dead and buried after the failure of the 1978 referenda, while the abolition of the House of Lords had long been considered a pipedream of the Left. What is striking about this change, is that it has been largely unaccompanied by any thorough or wide-ranging intellectual debate within the party - so much so that David Marquand has characterised Labour’s approach as ‘the silent road to power’. The explanation is that Labour remembers only too well the disastrous effects of the infighting of the early 80s, and has no desire to wash any more dirty linen in public. Nevertheless, the absence of an intellectually rigorous grounding for Labour’s policies bodes ill for their coherence and stability if and when they finally get into office. As Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques noted in the December 1990 issue of Marxism Today: “intellectual revolutions are normally characterised by enormous energy,... modes of thinking are transformed overnight accompanied by enormous excitement, a ferment of ideas. All of this is missing from the Labour Party.”

It’s a view shared by David Blunkett: “I don’t think it’s in any way undermining unity to say that we should debate values and ideology much more, not as an alternative to saying and doing the right things to win votes, but as a method of underpinning that, so that we were more clear ourselves how our policies relate to each other and how they could be built on each other.” Paul Hirst goes further: “It’s fascinating if you think about it, that the old Communist Party of the 1970s and 80s was in a way far more of a thinking party of the centre-Left than Labour ever could be. The Labour Left just didn’t want to think, they had decided on what they were doing and that was it. And
Looking to the Future
A Dynamic Economy
A Decent Society
Strong in Europe

it's still true, the Labour Party simply isn't an intellectual party.

What Hirst and others fear is that even if Labour were to win power at the next election (which is very far from certain), a Kinnock government would very quickly founder, not because its individual policies were ridiculous — in fact many of them are eminently sensible — but because it lacks a vision of the sort of society it wants to create, not to mention a broad base of support for working towards that vision.

It's in the realm of economic policy, of course, that Labour will primarily be judged by the electorate — perhaps more accurately, by the small group of skilled and semi-skilled workers in key marginal constituencies who will effectively decide the election. What has Labour learned from its last experience of government? The short answer seems to be that it has ditched any thought of a statutory incomes policy ("it simply would not work", according to 'Looking To The Future') in favour of credit controls as its primary anti-inflation measure. What it has not learned is how it might go about creating the kind of industrial consensus which exists in other European countries (Germany being the obvious example) and which demands the re-education of both management and trade unions. For example, Labour's program for vastly improving the education and training of Britain's workforce depends crucially on the support of management, yet little thought seems to have gone into creating mechanisms for consultations between government, management and unions without going back to a style of corporatism involving only the peak bodies.

The failure to foster consensus on the economic front (huge task though it is) is absolutely in tune with Labour's timid stance on constitutional reform, which displays a gaping hole where there should be an overarching vision of new forms of co-operation in society. Labour talks a lot about the divisions caused by Thatcherism, but in reality the divisions are part of Britain's outdated political and industrial structure, and will not be healed by a party clinging to those confrontationist institutions and methods.

When asked what it is about Labour's program which is now genuinely radical, MPs tend to respond with specific individual policies, rather than an overall thrust of the agenda which might fundamentally reshape society. Chris Mullin highlights measures to control media ownership, to reform the judiciary and on the funding of political parties. David Blunkett singles out the proposal for a national minimum wage (another indication of the yawning chasm between Britain and the rest of Europe); measures which recognise people as consumers as well as workers; moves towards preventive medicine. "What I would like us to do," he says, "is to be much more radical on the industrial and manufacturing front. What's happened in Eastern Europe shows that there's no going back, we've got to look at new ways of social ownership and social involvement, ways of diverting resources into productive economic activity and not just service and financial centres."

But time is running out for this sort of new thinking to take root. Paul Hirst believes that Labour is too hidebound by its traditions to be genuinely radical: "What's crucial about the party is not that it be centre-Left, but that it be radical. Labour is not seized by a radical spirit. One of the reasons for this is fairly obvious: that the existing Labour Party had to get over the kind of Left sectarianism which by disengaging with the mass of ordinary people, condemned itself to be irrelevant. But having walked away from that kind of disengaged radicalism, it hasn't been able to revive itself as a radical party."

Labour has a huge responsibility not only to arrest the changes wrought by Thatcher if elected, but also to build a credible and cohesive agenda which will have a good chance of seeing it through to at least a second term of office. Expectations are currently low, and Kinnock himself commands no great respect outside the party. Few believe that Labour in power would be much more than a holding operation, dissipating some of the worst effects of what by then could be nearly 13 years of Tory rule, but unable to drag Britain into the European mainstream, where it so clearly needs to be if it is not to become even poorer, dirtier, worse educated and more insular than it already is. As David Blunkett puts it: "there is no doubt whatsoever that the decision was taken by the leadership of the party to approach things in a softly softly manner, to make sure that people are no longer scared of the Labour party. The consequence of that is that we are now seen in some circles as not having the kind of clarity and conviction which certainly I would like us to display." Certainly no-one is scared of the Labour Party. But the important question now is, is anyone inspired by it?

MIKE TICHER, a member of ALR's editorial collective, recently returned to Britain for several months.
Last March the environment was an electoral panacea. Since then it’s been pushed steadily to the political wings. Kitty Eggerking spoke to the ACF’s Phillip Toyne about the rapid change of fortune.

Recently various criticisms have been levelled at you. The environment movement has been called latter-day jeremiahs, the newest threat to social stability and is said to lack intellectual rigour. How do you respond to such claims?

Unfortunately, more and more of those statements have been coming from the ALP — certainly senior economic ministers in the government. They believe the facts. We have consistently applied intellectual rigour to the positions we put so that even our critics in normal circumstances have been prepared to acknowledge that the document we put to the government on sustainable development was the only serious submission to grapple sufficiently with economic and ecological issues. The government’s own discussion paper showed an abysmal understanding of the ecological imperatives that really need to underpin the question of how this country is going to earn its wealth without ongoing environmental degradation.

The attacks are politically motivated, by and large. We are seeing economic ministers who believe they have previously been rolled over by green issues now using the economic downturn as a good excuse for a backlash. Nobody who looks at the political debate of the last five years can argue that the greens have won so overwhelmingly that we are the major contributors to the economic problems. It would be flattering to think that we’d had that degree of influence but unfortunately the facts don’t bear it out. I suspect John Elliott, Alan Bond and Holmes a Court have had significantly greater impact on the economy.

So, to answer those critics, do you have an economic blueprint — a greenprint — for the future of Australia?

We’ve got a pretty good philosophical outline for the process of working towards an economic blueprint, and it’s unrealistic, I believe, to expect more at this stage. We’ve very vividly and professionally identified the level of environmental degradation. We’ve used economists to help us evaluate the current economic system and its accounting and show how they lead to an ongoing perpetuation of those problems. For instance, we don’t take into account the loss of our natural capital when looking at profit and loss equations in the national accounts. Nowhere in those accounts is found the fact that an average of 200 tonnes of soil is lost per hectare per annum. We have not depreciated the paddocks in the account books to have a clear understanding of what the production of our wheat crop, say, is costing us, as opposed to earning us. We’re very good at knowing what the profit lines are, but we’re not very good at realistically spelling out the cost.
We’ve gone to great lengths to try and understand the economics of the situation, to see where it works and where it doesn’t; we’ve tried to evaluate the economics of various industries, like forestry, which comes in with surprisingly awful economic returns on top of the environmental costs.

Can you be more specific on that point?

We’re seeing a forest industry that’s moving very dramatically from being a saw-log industry to a woodchip one because most of the pulpwood is for export — the lowest value end-use of the forest product, say $60 a tonne. We’re now importing papers from between $1500 and $5000 a tonne, and it therefore comes as no surprise that we’ve got a $1.7 billion a year deficit in forest products. Even if you evaluate the issue on the industry’s own terms — that is, with a myopic economic agenda — you come to a negative conclusion. But add the environmental costs on top of that, then there’s reason for concern.

Do you have an alternative economic model for industry and the future of this country?

Certainly we’ve been suggesting for some time that the national accounts ought to be expanded so that environmental degradation is built in as a component of the accounts. The Dutch are doing that; so are some of the Scandinavian countries and the Japanese are even factoring in some of those accounts now. Clearly we have to. We can’t use our capital as income without eventually becoming bankrupt, both biologically and economically.

Our document also establishes 13 principles, which we believe are fundamental to the redesign of a biological and economic system that will see us through in a permanently sustainable sense rather than the short-term one we’re running at present...

Is there any evidence of an Australian industry sector adopting new ways of thinking and behaving?

Not on a broad sector-wide basis. There is no industry that’s currently gearing up to a sustainable strategy, but there are some very encouraging indications within sectors that people are doing something. Twelve months ago there would have been roughly 50 land-care farmers’ groups around Australia; the number is now closer to 500. That’s exciting because even if the farmer is coming at the issue from an economic self-interest point of view he can see that ongoing substantial soil loss and increasing salinity are no good for his economic outlook. Farmers are therefore breaking new ground in their dealings with the conservation movement in a way that, say, the mining industry clearly isn’t. The Australian Mining Industry Council [AMIC] represents what I would consider the last bastion of the defensive, bunker mentality that has characterised the industry over the last two centuries. There is no indication that government or industry has resolved to move swiftly to new directions. If anything there is now a temporary backlash, a greenie-bashing exercise, which is meant to indicate that we’ve had our way too long, that the balance has swung too far in favour of the environment, that we now have to return to moderation, which means more economic activity unconstrained by environmental controls. There are more fragile farm lands being cleared and we know there will be soil loss as a consequence. There are more industrial processes in train that will result in pollution. For industry to suggest that everybody now wants a sustainable society and that everybody is environmentally aware, but then to match that with actions that amount to more of the same, is to make a nonsense of what’s being said about the greens at the moment.

You’ve pointed out in your submission that it’s no longer possible to take just an economics or an environment approach to planning, but rather that the two must go together.

We have rejected out of hand the idea of balance as the appropriate concept, which carries with it the political evaluation of who should get what. The greens win some, industry wins some — that’s the classic dispute-resolving mechanism that’s always applied to, say, industrial relations, where both sides put up an ambit claim; the conciliator is then forced to produce a middle course on which politicians will then glibly say ’it pleased no one and therefore it must be about right’.

If we endorse that approach for managing our environment, the outlook is disastrous. The challenge is to work out how to generate wealth, to provide an adequate standard of living for people in this community, but to do it in ways that no longer produce an ongoing decline in the quality of our life through declining environmental standards.

It must be enormously frustrating to you that industry keeps doing what it’s always done and nothing will convince it to change.

Things do convince it to change. They change if government regulations require them to change. It is equally true that industries change very dramatically when green consumerism comes to bear, and we’ve seen lots of good examples of this recently. A good negative example is how people’s understanding of aerosols contributing to ozone depletion has resulted in a continuing drop in the aerosol market share, despite the fact that aerosols are no longer propelled by CFCs. They’ve changed the gas, but not people’s perception. A positive example is the unbleached toilet paper market which was seen as a curiosity, a novelty niche, when it was first introduced. Now it’s grabbed an enormous market share — 20% plus — and suddenly the manufacturers have had to scramble to provide a product that people are clearly demanding. You only have to look at the supermarket shelves to know that manufacturers are cottoning onto the notion that there’s money to be made from environmental awareness.

That’s still traditional manufacturing. It’s not making a leap forward — to look at new technologies, at new techniques, at totally new products.

Yes, and I’d say that it also manifests another ongoing problem: that no one is seriously challenging the appropriateness of expanding consumerism. They’re not
saying consume less; they’re saying consume something that’s less environmentally damaging. I suspect that sooner or later as a community we’re going to have to consume substantially less per capita than we are now.

Some people who see themselves as progressive would argue that we have to continue to have economic growth so that all sections of the community can have an equal standard of living. That raises the question of how much we need for a sensible lifestyle.

It also throws up the specious argument that we have to be wealthy to protect the environment, that we have to have growth economies if we’re to achieve environmental targets, that we have to be a wealthy nation to have a clean environment. It is, to put it mildly, an extraordinarily self-serving proposition put by industry. There can be no doubt that abject poverty leads to environmental degradation and that overpopulation has got a link with poverty and therefore environmental degradation. There can be no doubt that raising standards of living in big populations has historically produced a slowing of population growth. These things are well documented. But at the end of the day if these people seriously suggest that the only way that we can meet our environmental problems is — for our current global population, let alone the doubling of it which will occur before the end of the century — to achieve a standard of living that we in the developed world enjoy, they have to be joking. We are clearly talking about an ecological consequence that is too awful to contemplate.

How then do we get an agreed-upon agenda, and quickly? Are the government’s sustainable development working parties going to help in that?

There’s one major flaw in the process — the government put up an inarticulate discussion paper and received several hundred responses to that. Instead of trying to assimilate the response material into a position paper, the government set up the sectoral working groups. They went immediately into a reductionist exercise of industry by industry discussions, when they’d left aside the question of broad principles that should be applied. What are the national issues? What changes to the economic settings are needed? What should the national accounts reflect? What is the effect of the current federal system on our environmental problems? After much lobbying we have finally got a reference to the National Population Council on an ecologically sustainable population level for Australia, and that is the only thing the federal government is doing to provide the big picture for the time the sectoral working groups are in operation. We’re in eight of the nine working groups because we believe we can’t afford not to be, in terms of trying to raise the level of ecological understanding. To simply stand aside is politically irresponsible.

I wanted to ask you why the Wilderness Society decided not to participate in the working parties.

It was, of course, a party to our submission, and that was the first time the big four national groups had ever come together for a policy paper. They decided after a lot of anguishing that they wouldn’t be in the working parties. They believe decisions like logging in the south-east and Gippsland forests are pretty clear indications that the government doesn’t have an understanding of or a commitment to sustainable development. They believe that their efforts are better directed at community awareness, but I must say that while I respect their decision I think it’s ill-conceived because we have made it a pre-condition of the working groups that an extensive community consultation mechanism be built into the process, and we’re committed to ensuring it’s not mere tokenism. We want to ensure that the government isn’t making major policy decisions in a vacuum, with a complete lack of community understanding of sustainable development.

Is it possible to go beyond the old economic summit model, the consensus model, to shift the thinking?

You’ve very clearly pointed out the different perspectives of the players in the game. The industry groups, the government representatives, see it as a collective bargaining mechanism. Because we’re not going to settle for an outcome that’s a pale imitation of what the process calls for, we’re likely to see a collapse of at least some of those working groups in the same way as the Salamanca agreement fell apart in Tasmania. The world view of the green participants carries with it a great urgency, a great deal of anxiety about what we’ve done to the planet. We’re not talking about whether 2% of some forest goes into a national park or whether Coronation Hill goes ahead or not. We’re talking about re-establishing the criteria upon which our economic plans are developed, so that the plans will meet a biological test.

In the last election it pleased people to be seen in your company. Are you anxious about the backlash and what do you do to rebuild that?

My anxiety does not go to whether we’re the flavour of the month in Canberra or whether cabinet thinks we’re the good guys. I wish they’d be honest enough to project accurately what our influence on the election was. We did influence the outcome but some people are choosing to lie about it. My anxiety is not nearly as acute as the situation might suggest in the sense that we have to have the longer view. There’s absolutely no doubt that changes are sweeping the globe, and we’re in the vanguard of these. They are irreversible; demands are being placed on governments and industry to be environmentally responsible. They will continue to exist and continue to be an election issue and at the forefront of community priorities. As far as winning back the battle, I suspect that we can readily get to people. Peter Garrett’s going to be a key player. His band commitments, which have kept him out of action for a year, are coming to an end, and he’s very keen to be right in there as ACF president over the next year or so. That will produce a dramatic shift. And we’re now doing things smarter than previously. The big national organisations combining forces is a clear indication of that response.
Some people would say: you've proved yourselves as lobbyists; when are you going to stand up and become a political party?

ACF never will. I've consistently said that ACF should be non-party political. Peter Garrett shares that view. So did his predecessor, Hal Woottton. That's because ACF has a role and function of its own. It's true that there's a growing disillusionment among environmentalists in the community and they will be looking to any option other than supporting Labor in the next election. Labor has to accept that as a result of the cynicism they've shown since the last election. Whether that translates into the establishment of a green party or an affiliation with some other progressive party or an involvement with the Democrats remains to be seen. The Democrats have certainly been very vigorous in their attempts to attract the environment movement, but that's been resisted. The Democrats are clearly picking up many, many votes from the disaffected in the community.

Some people would also say that there's a fundamental shift coming in politics. Do you share that view?

Environmental issues now occupy the centre place in the progressive agenda to the great disadvantage of Aboriginal, social welfare, social equity, women's and other issues. I suspect that is because environmental concerns strike a chord with everybody. I suspect that other issues will wax and wane, but environmental issues will stay with us. Whether that translates into a long-term viable base for a political party I don't know.

Were you surprised by the fuss that occurred before the government took the decision over emission level targets?

It reflected a couple of things. Industry ministers and industry clearly believed it had the potential to overturn their growth economic agenda. They want Australia to develop, get bigger, do more, produce more and therefore consume more energy and contribute more to greenhouse. What they hadn't done, and displayed a woeful lack of information about, was to look at the studies prepared for the Commonwealth by the likes of Amory Lovins from the United States, and Denny Green from Victoria, which showed that 20% reduction targets could be met on an economically cost-beneficial basis by saving energy. To save 20% is substantially cheaper than to generate another 20%. So the result was heavily conditional; it won't happen if it produces commercial disadvantage. The reason we didn't get steamed up is that we're more than satisfied that they can do it on a commercially advantageous basis. It's fairly clear that once you go beyond 20% to fiercer reductions you begin to get into the area of economic pain.

There's nothing in this whole mechanism that provides the broad overview, the long-term vision. I think the ACF is good at that. We have people who are specifically given the responsibility to maintain the long-term view. Our research and policy analyst is meant to be looking at what things will be like in 20 years time, not after Christmas. As this decade goes on, we'll be setting more and more of the agenda.

You've been working with trade unions. Has that relationship been fruitful?

With individual unions and Trades Halls, it has. We can always find areas of common interest, especially in areas like occupational health and safety, hazardous chemicals, transport-related issues. We got a joint submission up on the VFT. But when we deal with institutions like the ACTU the relationship is hostile and shows no likelihood of coming good. The union movement ignores the fact that nearly half of all trade unionists are now white collar workers. A huge proportion are teachers or public servants, and they constitute the largest membership group we have, yet their environmental concerns are basically ignored by the ACTU. They have consistently sided with industry on issues like forestry, pulpmills.

They consistently reject environmentalism as a middle-class wank, with nothing to do with the real gutsy workers' issues. They consistently ignore the fact that while their recruiting campaign targets women and young people it is these people that are joining our organisation. They are missing a major community seed change, and that's to their great discredit. Our relations have been quite hostile, and on their part quite vitriolic.

I suspect the ACTU will come around when it has its first woman president, when it has a substantial rethink of its role and constitution. There's absolutely no doubt that it's becoming marginalised. It's essential that we end up with the trade unions on side, where they don't treat economic growth as the underpinning of their objectives to the exclusion of everything else, where they start to address the issues that are relevant to their membership.

And what about other organisations?

We've now expanded our capacity to deal with Aborigines. We've got one Aboriginal woman working with us, and we're likely to have another one based in Queensland shortly. That's a vital link. It's critical if for no other reason than Aboriginal people are now the land owners of some of the most important nature conservation and wilderness areas in Australia. There can be no doubt that we are going to rely on them increasingly as sound managers of their environment.

We've got a clear interest in youth and youth affairs. Our youth delegation to the Ozone Conference in London this year is the high-water mark of my time at ACF. Young people are going to be immeasurably stronger environmentalists than we are.

Linking farmers through the rural liaison positions has been another vital breakthrough. It's given us the capacity to deal with farmers on a much closer basis and, given the conservativism of rural society, that's an essential element of the success.

Kitty Eggerking is ALR's production editor.
Psychiatrists often treat women as inherently disordered. The latest candidate for female disorder, reports Denise Russell, is pre-menstrual syndrome. For some psychiatrists, PMS is the cause of everything from bank robberies to domestic violence.

Psychiatry has functioned in the past to support notions that women are somehow inherently disordered. While this function continues today, its focus has changed in keeping with developments in the theorising of female criminality.

Until the 1970s at least, women were viewed as disordered as a reflection of sex-role stereotypes. A mentally healthy woman differed from the adult (male) standard of mental health by being more submissive, less independent, less adventurous, less aggressive, more excitable, more emotional and less objective. Such a description amounted to saying that there is a logically necessary link between women and disorder. A slow erosion of the sex-role stereotypes has taken place, especially with the increased participation of women in the workforce—even into traditional male domains within the workforce—and, to a lesser extent, with the rising female crime rate. As the stereotypes break down so too does the basis for conceptualising women and disorder.

In the mid 20th century the diagnosis of depression really came into vogue as the mental illness that large numbers of women suffer from. Depression was usually thought to have a biological base, related to faulty neuro-transmitter functioning, probably with a genetic component. However, the genetic studies have come under heavy criticism, and the evidence for neuro-transmitter malfunctioning was only ever indirect. In the late 70s, studies pointed to social factors such as women’s marital and employment status. For instance, married women with no employment outside the home and parenting pre-school aged children ran a much higher risk of depression than other people.

Four very large longitudinal studies—in Sweden, Canada and the US—now suggest that men are just as likely to suffer from depression as women. The researchers attribute this shift to various occupational factors such as increasing male unemployment (Sweden), expansion of women’s participation in the workforce (Canada) and particularly in traditionally male-dominated areas (US). These studies support the earlier notion that depression is an artefact of socially-imposed restriction on the female role.

While there are still strong adherents to a biological factor in depression, a recent survey of biological psychiatry claims that identification of a biological abnormality may have no causal significance, and there is a growing caution in assertions relating to the biological base of depression.
Katharina Dalton, a major English theorist on PMS, claims that the term PMS covers a wide variety of symptoms which regularly recur in the same phase of each menstrual cycle followed by a symptom-free phase in each cycle. This phase may be anywhere from ovulation to four days into menstruation. She explains that the term PMS was chosen at a time when it was not realised the symptoms can occur at menstruation and ovulation. Dalton claims the term premenstrual tension covers only the psychological symptoms—depression, lethargy and irritability. PMS includes some and somatic symptoms, e.g. asthma, epilepsy and migraine. In the book, *Once a Month*, Dalton elaborates on the psychological symptoms. She says that the image of women as fickle, changeable, moody and hard to please and our periodic irrationality can be explained in terms of the "ebb and flow of the menstrual hormones".

Dalton claims that the symptoms of PMS are at their worst during the four days prior to menstruation and the first four days of menstruation. She used the term 'paramenstruum' to cover these eight days. These days are linked with low levels of progesterone, and she regards PMS as a progesterone-deficiency disease.

Judith Bardwick supports the view that depression, irritability and hostility form part of the PMS but says they are "predictable, normal, emotional states in women"—another variant of the theme that it is normal for women to be disordered.

If it is the case that depression is primarily a disease that women experience and if depression is also very common, then the assumption that women are inherently disordered seems to receive some support. However, if depression is experienced almost equally by men and women and if the rates are dropping for women, then support for the assumption about women's disorder is undermined. If, too, it is accepted that depression can be understood in relation to social factors rather than biology then the previous high rates of depression in women can be explained in terms of their occupations—almost exclusively housekeeper and child-rearer.

Some psychiatrists and doctors have now shifted their gaze to aspects of women's normal reproductive functioning—e.g. menstruation and menopause—and are claiming that these are linked to mental disturbances and that they constitute disorders or diseases of a psycho/physical kind. This is a variant of the old theme: that it is normal for a woman to be disordered, again according to a male norm. Men are more aggressive than women, so it is disordered to be submissive. Men do not menstruate, so it is disordered to do so. An attempt is being made to provide a general understanding of women's disorder then in terms of reproductive functioning. Depression has acted as a 'catch-all' diagnosis for those discontented with their lives.

In a 1985 survey of the literature and clinical experience concerning PMS, Halbreich and others state that "at least 200 symptoms and complaints have been reported to occur premenstrually" and some of the symptoms are positive, for example, increased affection and sex. They call this the Increased Well-Being Syndrome. To their credit, they use this finding to distance themselves from calling PMS a disorder. They prefer to talk about premenstrual changes.

Rubinow and others in another survey in the same year claim that over 150 symptoms representing every organ system have at one time or another been attributed to PMS and that there are no symptoms which are either necessary or sufficient for the diagnosis.

They offer the following operational definition of PMS: "a cyclic disorder with symptoms that are of sufficient severity so as to interfere with some aspect of living and that occur with a consistent and predictable relationship to menstruation" but they point to the wide variability of claims regarding which time is supposed to be relevant. The catch-all nature of the definition then starts to emerge. Thus, it is not surprising that some put the incidence of PMS at 100% of women. It is strange that PMS went undetected for so long, since it is not supposed to be a product of social circumstances but rather our biology. Dalton claims that "very few of the doctors in practice today had any training in diagnosing or treating what we now know is the world's commonest disease."

If the case that depression is applied to fewer women, another is announced, one that can only apply to women: the pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS). Most of the Western world accepts the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) system of psychiatric diagnosis, and in its 1987 revised classification PMS—technically called Late Luteal Phase Dysphoric Disorder—is listed as a mental disorder. Some psychiatrists are currently writing about PMS as 'the world's commonest disease', with claims that it is experienced by 80-100% of women.

Biological distortions are now more commonly used to explain women's criminality. Since 1980 the APA has classified all criminal behaviour—whether or not it is accompanied by mental disturbance—as a psychiatric disorder (including petty theft, truancy, vagrancy). It is not surprising then that new theories of women's crime should be linked to the rising importance of PMS (see box above).

Psychiatry provides women with opportunities to conceptualise their discontent in various ways and gives them hope for an answer. In the absence of other social forces offering solutions, it is likely that psychiatry will continue to be viewed as playing a positive role. There is complicity in the theory linking women's crime to PMS. The use of a defence on the basis of PMS has only very recently been
introduced into legal actions and it is the defence lawyers who medicalise the criminality. From a broader perspective this works against women's interests since the social/political motivations for crime are overlooked. I contend that the diagnosis of PMS has been introduced to strengthen the idea that women are disordered and to specify more precisely the biological basis of women's crime.

If PMS is a widespread biological fault, why is it only now being recognised, especially as some report the incidence to be 100% of women? Is it now being recognised or is it now being invented? I want to reject both those answers and argue that the high incidence of PMS is produced by a combination of factors:

* Some women do experience cyclical changes in mental and/or body states.

* The subjects in PMS studies do not constitute a random sample of women. Rather, they are women seeking the help of the medical profession or being tried in criminal courts. If the former, then they may have a psychiatric problem which is mistakenly diagnosed as PMS.

It is possible that the patient will comply with this diagnosis for a variety of reasons: acceptance of expert opinion, desire to medicalise problems to avoid other means of handling them, wanting an excuse for anti-social acts and so on. Women criminals may have an additional motive to medicalise their crime in the hope of a more lenient sentence.

* Beliefs and expectations may produce experiences of our bodily states which may differ with changing beliefs and expectations. Diane Ruble conducted studies in which she purportedly convinced one group of women that they were in their 'premenstrual' phase and found that they reported higher levels of menstrually-related pain than did those who had been told that they were in the middle of their cycle. This, coupled with the background assumption that we believe or expect the premenstrual time to be painful is taken to show that beliefs about the menstrual cycle can influence women's descriptions and experiences.

(I find the gullibility of these subjects hard to accept, but the general idea that beliefs and expectations influence experience is well supported in other areas—for instance the placebo effect. It is quite possible then that some women's experiences of PMS are produced by evolving cultural beliefs about the premenstrual time.)
PMS and criminality

Icard, writing in 1870, claimed disorders of menstruation gave rise to kleptomania, pyromania, homicidal mania, suicidal mania, lying, etc. Otto Pollack, writing in the book, The Criminality of Women, in 1961 also suggests a strong link between women’s crime and menstruation especially for shoplifting, arson, homicide and resistance against public officials. Dalton refers to these criminal categories and relates them to the premenstrual phase or to menstruation. She adds to the list: suicide attempts, citing a lecture given by Pollitt to the Royal Society of Medicine in 1976 where he said that the timing of suicide attempts helps to explain their failure: “Killing oneself is not easy, success requires careful planning. Women in the premenstrual phase show a marked tendency to be careless, thoughtless, unpunctual, forgetful and absentminded. This inefficiency at a time when they are more likely to try to end their lives may result in a disproportionate failure.”

Dalton also relates assault to PMS: “There are those cases of assault where in a sudden fit of temper the woman throws a rolling pin at her neighbour, a typewriter at her boss, or tries to bite off a policeman’s ear. There are the cases of baby-battering, husband hitting... and so on.” Theft, being drunk and disorderly and all crimes of violence are related, by Dalton, to PMS, and she claims that information from the courts and police in the UK, US and France support her view. The phenomena of ‘battered husbands’ seems of particular interest to her. She sympathetically reports the claims of two US researchers that there are 12 million battered husbands in the US, that it is the “most unreported crime”, affecting 20% of husbands.

Judy Lever in the book The Unrecognized Illness adds wife battering to the crimes of violence attributed to PMS.

This occurs when the wife provokes the husband by her own violent behaviour when suffering from PMS.

In two English court cases in 1981, Dalton gave ‘expert evidence’ that PMS diminished the responsibility of the women killers. The judge accepted PMS as a strong mitigating factor, and the women walked out of the court with no punishment. In other cases of arson and assault where Dalton appeared as an expert witness, PMS was accepted in pleas for mitigation of sentence. PMS has been used in plea bargaining in the US and is recognised in the French legal system as temporary insanity.

In the courts PMS has been brought in only to explain crimes of violence—and then only were the violence is out of character or atypical of stereotypical female behaviour. (A normal woman could not behave like this; she must be sick.) This suggests that the courts are adhering to male/female stereotypes that are breaking down in other areas. There is a trend to see violent criminal women as doubly disordered—by not complying with the female role and as suffering from PMS.

The apparent rise in the female crime rate has been one factor leading to the need to develop a theory of women’s criminality. Yet if the changed incidence of female crime is accepted then it would be reasonable to assume that such crime must depend on some factor which has changed rather than some constant factor such as biology. It might be relevant, for example, that more opportunities have been opened up by women’s changing social role for women to organise robberies. It is also worth noting that nearly all the crimes referred to by the PMS researchers involve aggression. Aggression could be taken as a protest against injustice. To medicalise it means that the injustice remains unquestioned; the woman is kept in her place.

* Nearly all the studies on PMS have used retrospective data. Yet recent studies employing prospective and retrospective data indicate that retrospective ratings overestimate symptoms experienced or that symptoms do not turn out to have any relation to the menstrual cycle. This suggests that data on PMS are produced by a particular method of collection, and if the method was changed the reported incidence of PMS would drop significantly.

* A spokesperson for the US National Women’s Health Network stresses that a lot of PMS is ‘iatrogenic’; that is, it is caused by medical treatment. It often appears for the first time after a woman has stopped taking birth-control pills, after tubal ligation or even after a hysterecomy.

* Some researchers claim that women experiencing PMS may not actually be aware that they are doing so. According to Judith Bardwick, “one seems to see the cyclicity of the affect response more clearly in measures which are less self-aware or conscious probably because people perceived themselves as being more consistent than they actually feel”. This perspective means that a great deal of scope is given to the doctor to read the syndrome into the woman’s experience and thus inflate the incidence rates.

Because of all these compounding factors in the diagnosis of PMS, we have no way yet of knowing how many women do suffer from a biological malfunction that is labelled PMS. It may, in fact, be quite rare. The popularity of the diagnosis cannot then be explained by appeal to biology, but there are ideological factors that make sense of it.

That there has been a move away from the diagnosis of depression in women and that attitudes about the mental health of women are shifting leads to a need to reconceptualise women and disorder—if you believe that women
Causation of PMS

Many theories concerning the cause of PMS have been advanced, the three main contenders in the psychiatric/medical area being:

1. A progesterone deficiency disease. The reasoning here is as follows: cyclical changes occur in women, they are worse when progesterone is low, hence it is progesterone deficiency that causes the cyclical changes. Dalton introduced this view before accurate measurements could be made of hormone levels, but she claims support for her view in observing the effectiveness of progesterone as a cure for PMS.

Recent developments in the testing of hormone levels have not supported Dalton's hypothesis. Women with high degrees of cyclical mood change have not shown any difference in progesterone level from women with low degrees of cyclical mood change. Also a fairly consistent finding is that progesterone is no more effective than a placebo as a therapy for PMS.

2. A surge of testosterone production premenstrually: Judith Bardwick and others attempt to link PMS with fluctuations in this androgen, a perspective which fits in neatly with recent psychiatric theories about male criminality. These theories attempt to explain criminal behaviour biologically by relying on a postulated relationship between aggression and crime. Some theorists further claim that the male hormone, testosterone, affects the level of aggression. The basis given is that castration seems to have a calming effect and that males are more aggressive than females.

There are many problematic features in this approach. Not all crimes committed by men are related to aggression, and it is not the case that all males are more aggressive than all females, even though all males in the reproductive-age group produce much greater quantities of testosterone than females. Recent more accurate chemical tests have not backed the theory that testosterone production is linked to PMS.

3. Neuro-transmitter malfunctioning. Many theorists suggest that psychotropic drugs may alter the neurotransmitter functioning. Although this package of theory and treatment recommendations is also adopted by many, no direct evidence has been found linking PMS with neurotransmitter-malfunction nor cures for PMS with psychotropic drugs.

None of these theories concerning the cause of PMS are well enough supported to provide a convincing answer to the appropriateness of the grouping of characteristics that are supposed to be a sign of PMS.

Halbreich and others writing in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry state: “An evaluation of the literature...leads us to the conclusion that at present there is no solid evidence for any of the hypothesised pathophysiological mechanisms of pre-menstrual condition.”

Rubinow and Roy-Byrne state in the American Journal of Psychiatry: “Despite 50 years of study there is still surprisingly little known about menstrually-related mood disorders; questions of etiology and treatment are largely unanswered.”

Both the major British medical journals have published editorials emphasising the doubt that exists about the scientific basis for claims made about PMS.

Comments such as these should not be taken as indications that psychiatry will drop the attempt to explain the disorder of women in terms of PMS. They would most likely be read as challenges for theoreticians to come up with more convincing causal theories. This has been a typical pattern in the relationship between papers in psychiatric journals and ideas propagated in psychiatric texts and through practitioners.

So the fact that there is no solid evidence for the cause of PMS will probably drive psychiatrists into new theoretical approaches and this theoretical activity, independent of the content of any particular theory, may have the effect of in fact bolstering ideas about the reality of PMS as a psychiatric disorder.

It defuses the political impact that women's crime might have had. It provides justification for women's unequal position in the workforce. Dalton asserts that “the cost to industry of menstruation is high” and then details the harmful effects in various industries in Sweden, the UK and US before recommending that employers handle these problems by giving women time off or assigning us to less skilled jobs. Employers might be encouraged by such reasoning not to employ women at all.

The diagnosis of pre-menstrual syndrome is carrying the ideological weight which the diagnosis of depression used to bear. The full impact of this shift has not been experienced in Australia. It would be heartening if, on this issue, we didn’t follow these overseas trends.

DENISE RUSSELL teaches in the Department of General Philosophy, University of Sydney.
Indian Summers

Australian cricket’s relationship with the Indian sub-continent has been marred by prejudice and mistrust. Rodney Cavalier spoke to the author of a new book on the subject.

After nearly eight hours at the crease, Dean Jones’ physiology was falling apart. The humidity in the Chepauk Stadium at Madras was draining the energy. The sun was blazing. The stands blocked whatever relief there might have been from a stray breeze off the Bay of Bengal. An open sewer ran right past the ground. Jones had accumulated a century by then, carried on past 150, and now he was begging to get back to the pavilion.

Throughout the innings, Mike Coward, one of the tiny Australian press corps, had trained his binoculars on Jones from the shaded but steamy pressbox. He was witnessing the prelude to the astonishing finish to this First Test against India in 1986-87. It was just another day too, a day spent watching cricket, writing and filing against deadlines made impossible for the Australian newsmen by the difference in time zones.

Coward had been reporting cricket full-time during the 80s in a career that began as a copyboy in 1963. Writing cricket was what he had always wanted. By the end of the West Indies tour of 1988-89, cricket had become more than he had ever wanted. Mike Coward was burnt out professionally, the summers had become endless as he followed the Australian cricketers across the hemispheres. Well before the West Indies tour ended, he had been telling colleagues the season was going to be his last.

He would endure one more Indian summer. He had a book in mind, a history of Australian cricket on the Indian sub-continent.

Even for a sport that deifies a scholarly interest in its arena, the project was pushing specialisation to new frontiers. Allen & Unwin, publishers, blessed with a certifiable cricket fanatic as its managing director, was offering every encouragement. The Sydney Morning Herald granted a year’s leave of absence. In June 1989 Coward took up residence in a fishing village 20 kilometres south of Madras, armed with a Brother EP22 typewriter and several reams of thermal paper. He might have written his book based on his extensive notes of past tours and interviews with the Australian players in each era. That was not the point.

“I wanted to do as much as I could in the environment,” he explained back in his inner-Sydney study. “It was a big house, bigger than I needed. I would try to discipline myself to start early because of the heat in the south of India. If I was having a run I would keep going: 8 to 10 hours would not bother me. Some days I could be pacing up and down and getting very angry, talking to the geckos on the wall or doing any damn thing. Of a night, if I had a good productive time, I went down to the beach and played cricket with the kids.”

Coward was particularly keen to search the files of The Hindu newspaper for details of Australia’s unofficial 1935-36 tour, of which little was known in Australia. “I had the help of everyone at The Hindu to go through the files. I wish you could see the library at The Hindu, it is just remarkable. It is a very, very old building; the old manila files piled high. They dwarf these six or eight men who sit around, some still with eyeshades—it is like taking a leaf from the midst of the Raj, filled by warm and fascinating people going at a tempo we have forgotten about.”

It was not until 1956-57 that Australia made its first official tour of India and Pakistan, and by the 80s three-Test series on the sub-continent were a regular feature of the overseas calendar. Between 1935 and the 1980s the knowledge of Australian cricketers on the sub-continent was limited to impressions gathered by short strolls in port cities and to perspectives formed in cricket fields, hotels and airports and the journeys between. The cricketers had firm preconceptions of local conditions before ever setting foot on the sub-continent, etched by dressing room lore, horror stories of wasting diseases that struck down players in their prime. Partly in reaction, well into the 1980s, the Australian authorities sent a doctor with the team. Now a lone physiotherapist accompanies the team, and team photos confirm that players are now more adventurous in their wanderings.

Coward’s book, Cricket Beyond the Bazaar (Allen & Unwin, $24.95) is a comprehensive history of the 12 tours by Australian teams to Pakistan and India, plus the one Test against Sri Lanka in 1982-83. Although he provides great detail of the matches, Coward’s real fascination is with the society that produced the cricketers and cricket supporters.

“There has been a shift in the sphere of influence in the world of cricket,” Coward says. “England’s influence is diminishing on and off the ground, year in, year out. Suddenly, the greater Asian cricket basin has emerged. I thought it an interesting and important time for the book to be written. There is no doubt that there is an unwillingness in this country to embrace the Third World. We are frightened by it, we are uncertain about it, it seems an alien culture. The cricketers reflect that. There has been a greater emotional maturity in recent tours.”

Coward reflected carefully before responding to questions about the alleged cheating of Pakistan umpires: “There is no doubt they have had some appalling umpires over the years. Yet I find cheating very hard to believe. You cannot get away from the fact that Indian and Pakistan societies...
are very different. There is corruption at all levels. There is corruption at all levels of our own society. Whether it extends to cricket, I can’t say. I’ve made five tours there, I’ve dealt a lot with the officials and the umpires, and I’ve had no reason myself to believe that there is corruption or graft at the top level of cricket.”

Why then did such avowed traditionalists as Australian coach Bob Simpson and manager Colin Edgar react as they did—by accusing the umpires of bias?

“I believe that they behaved as they would not have behaved in any other country. I don’t know why: Bob Simpson has been there before as a captain; he has had great success there. To me it was inexplicable. The most damning thing is that in 1982 the same umpires stood in the First Test and the Australians were so pleased with them that they asked for them to be reappointed.

“You ask yourself: this time there were exactly the same two officials, exactly the same secretary of the board, why did they not go to them at the end of the match and say that they were not satisfied with them, that they didn’t want them reappointed?

“Malcolm Gray, the Chairman of the Board, had flown to Brisbane before the Australians left and appealed to them to temper their remarks, to be thoughtful, diplomatic and caring because it was a sensitive time in the history of international cricket.

“This was ignored. It was a delicate time because the West Indies wanted extreme action for contact with South Africa.”

Coward possesses a fine narrative style: it is a considerable pity that there is not regular space in an Australian newspaper for him to reflect on the implications of modern cricket, here and overseas. He is, as well, a notable mimic and humourist, though he has restrained this bent here.

This is not a book of pretences; it makes no claim that cricket is a substitute for diplomacy or war. International cricket is not going to be the bridgehead for cultural breakthroughs. One incident says it all: Coward met a child at Peshawar, near the Khyber Pass, who recognised him as a person from “Border’s country”. The child had not heard of Australia.

RODNEY CAVALIER is a freelance journalist and cricket acolyte.
Fall of the House of Ten

Commercial TV is in the doldrums. Meanwhile, American TV has been striking out in new directions. David Nichols reports.

In July 1989, the Ten Network’s Sydney studios were the scene of a sumptuous luncheon-cum-press conference; print media representatives were flown in from all over Australia for one day at Ten TV Australia as it would be known from that day onwards. The occasion was, of course, new station manager Bob Shanks’ announcement of his revamping strategy to give the network stronger ratings and greater financial stability.

This reporter left half-way through the proceedings; the questions went on interminably. I don’t think I missed much - and, anyway, it was only a few months before Shanks’ lowbrow (he used a different term which meant much the same thing) reprogramming was deemed a failure.

At the time of writing, only two of Shanks’ changes remain on air. One is the inner-city soap E Street which he ‘glamourised’. The other is the Australian Candid Camera. And if Ten TV Australia was in a spot of trouble pre-Shanks, it is now in decidedly dire straits. Even the once top-rating Neighbours is now coming a sad fourth behind ABC News. The Lane Cove studios where Shanks’ pronouncements were so confidently made are now empty and about to be torn down for a shopping complex, or to be bought by Channel 9, which wants cheaper premises - depending who you believe.

More recently, in its city offices, Ten has seen even more upheavals. Director of programming Vicki Jones recently got the boot after her many attempts to implement an ‘entertain-

‘Quality’ is, of course, highly subjective, and this is reflected in the phrase ‘good TV’, usually taken to mean little more than ‘action-packed’ or ‘easily consumed’ TV. Many ALR readers would rarely stray beyond SBS or ABC when they’re looking for ‘quality’; and the idea of commercial TV featuring watchable shows in prime-time might seem ludicrous to them. Things are different in the US where there is no government network and ratings are the top priority for all stations. In a search for a new twist to the old routine, programmers found a new kind of TV: TV made for a nation brought up entirely on TY. Hence, It’s Garry Shandling’s Show, a sitcom about a stand-up comedian running a sitcom - that is, a show about a show about a show, or — more obliquely — Murphy Brown, a comedy about a current affairs news team, peppered with references to real events.

But the great success story of American TV in 1990 was The Simpsons, which Ten hopes to launch soon. The Simpsons are Married With Children’s Bundys taken one step further; they’re a cartoon family but they’re an adult cartoon family. One episode deals with mother Marge’s affair with her bowling instructor. Another has the Simpsons accept an Armenian exchange student who spies on the nuclear power plant where father Homer Simpson works. Another had a children’s TV clown become the centre of a mass witchhunt when he apparently robs a 7-11 store! The Simpsons was created by cartoonist Matt Groening, best known for his Life in Hell strips.

Comedy is the main area for bursts of TV originality because comedy’s already surreal and by nature allows easy ridicule of TV tradition. David Lynch’s Twin Peaks - another program Ten is hoping to use to recapture lost audiences - was described at its launch as “Blue Velvet meets Peyton Place”. Lynch directed only three of the first seven Twin Peaks episodes but the show has his particular vision stamped all over it. It’s a murder mystery that took America by storm.
with the question “Who killed Laura Palmer?” on everyone’s lips. There are a possible 20 or so suspects, each of them particularly weird and each involved as well in bizarre sub-plots. Leading the show is CIA man Dale Cooper, played with usual aplomb by Kyle McLachlan. Right down to its deliriously infectious theme music, Twin Peaks is the must-see event of 1991. One only hopes Ten can shake itself from the doldrums long enough to entice the Australian public into watching it.

On the homefront - where each station is required by law to screen a certain amount of local drama - Ten barely competes in the drama ratings these days, and the Nine network doesn’t even enter the running. The failure of Nine’s great hope Family and Friends leaves The Flying Doctors as its only regular production. Seven’s Home and Away is doing well despite large cutbacks, and A Country Practice, certainly the most liberal and informative soap Australia has ever seen, is still rating well after nearly a decade.

Seven was less lucky with its police drama Skirts: in fact, Skirts typifies what is wrong with the whole of Australian commercial TV drama. It was neither good realistic TV, nor was it good soap. In fact, for something that aimed for the pseudo-reality of English TV drama The Bill, the closest thing Skirts had in common with real life was its dullness. One almost got the feeling that its producers got scared while making it, and quickly ransacked some old Cop Shop scripts for the correct measures of cliche and tired storylines. Whatever the reason, Skirts’ cast did a good job with very uneven material. Not that the programming helped at all — Skirts (what a name!) was floundering in its timeslot.

Meanwhile, Ten’s drama offerings have been even less popular than usual. The most loyal of Neighbours fans would have to admit that the show these days is a complete bore. Recent storylines had Gemma being
sacked from her job in a dress shop and Ryan teased for wanting to become a policeman. Still, the South American con-woman hell-bent on marrying Paul to get citizenship was interesting, especially her closing speech after being unmasked; it carried reminders of the glory days of the time Helen was abducted and locked in a shed in the cemetery by an escaped prisoner posing as a priest.

Ten is hoping that its recent car bomb/gun-shot wounds/shipwreck storylines will work for E Street, for my money the best Aussie soap in many a moon. E Street has everything, in classic soap tradition. The love of the Reverend Bob for Elly as she recovers from gunshot wounds to the head; teenagers Harley and Tony crave constantly for each other's bodies (unfortunately this tends to mean falling off the couch a lot, but we can use our imaginations!), the religious virgin policeman Max and the high-on-life Alice...Well, they're my favourites. But, sadly, even E Street has been under constant threat of cancellation due to low ratings - here's hoping it finally 'takes off' (rather than 'gets taken off') in 91.

But, ultimately, what do people want from TV? Obviously the stations don't know, and perhaps viewers don't either. Whatever it is, it's certainly not more of the same. Perhaps the first step would be to ask them directly. Both Britain's ITV and BBC have developed intelligent, watchable shows on which members of the viewing public appear live or on pre-filmed segments to criticise programs shown the previous week. Often, they have the chance to take the program's director or writer to task; station management can get dragged into the argument, too. This is no ABC Backchat, with the snide Tim Bowden chuckling over viewers' letters read out in funny voices. This is genuinely accountable television.

But it's the high price of everything - programs, presenters, executives - that is causing Australian TV its major headaches at the moment. TV executive salaries are notoriously inflated. Or take Mike Gibson who, until his recent sacking presented the Sydney show on Channel Ten. He is reported to have defected to Ten from Nine for $5 million. Call me naive, but I can't see that anyone is worth $5 million to Australian TV. It's a huge gamble since Sydney didn't rate at all - it was one of the programs targeted by Vicki Jones for the chop.

Drama, too, has budgets far beyond the comprehension of mortals. Judging by the excellent films produced by Australian film schools every year on next to no money, the stations must be employing the wrong people. Maybe a desire to spend on a par with the US has overridden any reasonable consideration of what would make good (or funny or thrilling) viewing.

The one thing, of course, that no one has ever seriously considered is that many Australians are tired of sitting in front of the 'instrument' for most of their conscious lives.

Well, maybe, but it's been a remarkably loyal 34-year love affair. For most of us born after the mid-50s, television is the main source for cultural reference and identity. No. We're just waiting for something new on the screen.

DAVID NICHOLS is a writer for teen magazines.

What the readers said

If the results of our recent readership survey (ALR 122) are anything to go by, our readers, on the whole, are satisfied with the style and content of ALR.

The majority said that ALR's main strength lay in its features (66%) and that it was unnecessary to carry shorter items (67%), though the number of existing columns was adequate (60%).

Most found ALR's writing accessible (76%) and it wasn't a chore to read the magazine (74%). Only 28% perceived ALR's design as too conservative. On the whole, our sample of readers felt that the magazine did not pay undue attention to economic issues (80%) and did not want to increase "cultural" content over political (68%). They did, however, want to see greater coverage of environmental (43%) and Asian-Pacific issues (67%).

Rather interestingly, the sample (happily, 100) did not perceive the need for devoting additional space to women's issues, and did not categorise ALR as "a boy's magazine".

These findings are explained in part by the nature of the sample: 70% of the respondents were male - considerably higher than a cross-section of the subscription base as a whole.

From the sample emerges the portrait of the average ALR reader as aged between 21 and 40, unmarried, university-educated and working most often in the public sector. He/she is predominantly heterosexual and Anglo-Australian. He/she does not belong to a political party and has been reading ALR for less than two years. He/she often eats in a restaurant, buys a book regularly - most usually on politics or current affairs - and sees a film at least once a month.

Thanks to everyone who responded to the survey, and congratulations to David Mehan of Chippendale, NSW, the winner of the survey draw - $100 worth of books from the International Bookshop, Melbourne.
A Verdant Vigil

Waiting, directed by Jackie McKimmie. Opening in Sydney on 1 March at the Academy Twin and Walker St cinemas; coming soon to Melbourne. Reviewed by Jeremy Eccles.

Film-maker Jackie McKimmie and the actor and arts spokesperson Noni Hazlehurst can be assumed to be on the same wavelength when it comes to personal politics.

They've now made four films together—the award-winning short Stations, the almost unknown feature Australian Dream, a dramatised documentary on child abuse Breaking Through and, finally, Waiting. I've seen only the two features, and they have similarities in both being broad feminism, documentary on child abuse comes to personal politics. Given Noni Hazlehurst's increasing profile as a candidate for the Chair of the Australia Council, as a Keating Fellowship winner, as a board member of Film Australia and as a founder of Australian Artists' Films, one would have to say she was brave to take parts like Fran or the McKimmie pair which explore women's issues without necessarily following the approved path through them. McKimmie's films, for instance, are frequently funny!

Australian Dream, for instance, gave Graeme Blundell his best part on or off stage or screen for years as a Queensland butcher desperate to get National Party pre-selection for parliament. Noni, as his wife, doesn't simply see through his pathetic personal and political ambitions as a result of reading Germaine Greer (as happens in the play, Wallflowering) but is actually led astray by a spunky of a sex-aid salesman. The film ends with Blundell's dreams in tatters, and Noni in the back of a panel van with spunky John Jarrett, still unsatisfied, demanding, "Is that all there is?"

Noni's subsequent marriage to Jarrett and the birth of a son may have played more than gossip column roles in Waiting. For the gloriously pregnant mother was captured swimming naked for the film some two years before the script was finished and the rest put on celluloid. And Noni's summation from the earlier time that "you're away with the pixies for the last couple of weeks of pregnancy", certainly lies at the heart of a film that lays waste to such trendy theories as the open marriage, surrogacy without emotion, wimmin's film-making, and the joys of Nimbin-like rural hideaways.

Four old school-girlfriends are gathering for the last act of a nine-month long project which will see the birth by Clare (Noni Hazlehurst) of a surrogate baby for Sandy and Michael (sired by the latter—a willowy Frank Whitten—with some difficulty, but desperately desired by Sandy—a bossy Helen Jones), filmed by Therese (Fiona Press) as final proof of the superfluousness of male medical expertise, and witnessed by the trendily successful Diane (Deborra-Lee Furness). Unfortunately, Clare's rural hideaway is bogged in mud, her painting career has just taken off with the Moet et Chandon Award to spend a year in Paris, and a wandering boyfriend who may well have been the father anyway. Although contractions have started, the birth is psychologically delayed by the need to resolve at least some of the outstanding issues—such as Sandy and Michael's rocky marriage, and the arrest of their adopted kids for joyriding. But Therese has nicked her film equipment and needs to get it back by the end of the weekend, and Diane has brought along a lover, who, secretly, is a doctor!

Set-up scenes to establish this mélangé are frankly too brief and incomplete in detail. But much can be forgiven as director of photography Steve Mason makes the most of last summer's excessive wetness to capture the Hunter Valley in bellbirded mistyness. And around the chaotic house, one can't find a better description than Noni Hazlehurst's (in an earlier interview): "Jackie's always painting pictures. The camera may only glimpse in the background what is the message of any shot, while in the foreground she has the courage to put situations that you wouldn't think you'd believe". And by far the strongest belief to emerge from Waiting is Sandy's that motherhood is the only career she ever wanted, and her eventual loss of the 50% owned baby that she'd even been to pre-natal classes to prepare for feels like quite a tragedy.

Stand-out performances, though, come from Fiona Press as the 70s throwback film-maker, and her punk daughter (Noga Bernstein) who fights against the denial of femininity that her mum's imposed by dying to do the cooking! Good old Ray Barrett is wonderful, too, as the wry neighbouring farmer observing all and delivering the baby with aplomb at the end.

Will women see this film in which men are basically passengers differently? I can't see queues at the cinemas - but many will sneak a look when it comes on the ABC (who are co-producers) later.

JEREMY ECCLES is a Sydney theatre critic.

It is all the more unsettling today to look at the early Solidarity movement.

A decade after the radical trade union's first efforts to forge a participatory civil society in communist Poland, the recent presidential election ended in an embarrassing debacle for the country. Manipulating a brand of populist demagoguery only slightly less vile than that of his opponent, Solidarity leader Lech Walesa ensured himself a landslide victory.

How differently it all started. In his superb book Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics, political scientist David Ost chronicles the trajectory of the Polish postwar opposition from its roots in the fascist resistance to Solidarity in 1989. The author, a respondent from Warsaw during the 80s, astutely bridges academic disciplines, interweaving social theory with intellectual and political history to explain the underlying raison d'etre of Solidarity. While a number of excellent sources document the union's breath-taking debut on the world political stage in 1980, the Ost book goes a critical step further to address the movement's theoretical foundations. It is a step that is essential for coming to grips with the logic of the opposition movements throughout Eastern and Central Europe.

In all of the East bloc states, the 70s was a grim time for the democratic opposition. The Prague Spring crackdown in 1968 reverberated throughout the communist countries, putting an end to the opposition's hopes for a progressive socialist alternative to the single-party state. After decades of resistance and debate aimed at transforming the state structures, activists were finally convinced of the system's inherent unrefor-

mability. The "post-ideological" nature of the Eastern systems, said dissidents such as Adam Michnik, precluded Left arguments that tried to initiate change by contrasting real, existing socialism with socialist ideas. "The bond," wrote Michnik in the early 70s, "tying the revisionist intelligentsia to the party was definitely severed."

It was clear that the opposition had reached an impasse. The essence of the system was the monopolisation of public life on every level. The single party state's claim to the "universal" representation of its subjects' interests underlined all forms of pluralist social activity. Reform appeared impossible, opposition was outlawed, and yet, the dissidents knew, resistance was still imperative.

A new theory of politics was needed to bypass the entrenched bureaucracy. The answer to the impossibility of politics came in the form of "anti-politics". Led by 68-school educated intellectuals like Michnik, the opposition redirected its efforts toward civil society itself, the independent social space that the state denied. Rather than an outright negation of politics, anti-politics relocated the politics' public from the state to the social sphere. The strategy left "politics as usual" to the ruling elites, claiming civil society, or the "public sphere", as philosopher Jürgen Habermas has termed it, as the exclusive realm of the opposition.

The democratisation of societyfrom below, the oppositionists reasoned, would expose the State's ultimate illegitimacy, although not necessarily alter its inshrined stand. If conducted on a mass scale, the people could ignore the state, acting as citizens without its permission. "Every independent social initiative," wrote veteran radical Jack Kuron, "challenges the monopoly of the State and thereby challenges the basis upon which it exercises power." "Civil society" was the central category of the Left in the 70s and Solidarity in 1980. A "permanently open democracy", initiated by an inde-

pendent and self-conscious citizenry, charted a "third road" between the stalinist systems in the east and the parliamentary democracies in the West. For the young trade union, the goal was an alternative neither capitalist nor socialist, neither Eastern nor Western, but an original model that appropriated the positive elements of both systems. While the strategy blurred the classic left-right distinction, the goals of early Solidarity, argues Ost, perhaps a little too strongly, were solidly Left in their emphasis on self-organisation and participatory democracy.

The birth of Eastern Europe's first independent trade union, however, obviously breached anti-politics' strict division of the political and social spheres. "As soon as the [anti-political] program reached its fruition," writes Ost, "it became obsolete." The euphoric days of late summer and autumn 1980 were short-lived. Before long, Walesa and Solidarity abandoned the anti-political plan and were negotiating overtly political deals with the government.

While Solidarity continued to track the opposition through the 80s, the discussion of early Solidarity's roots constitute the study's most original and intriguing chapters. At the same time, the author leaves some key issues surrounding the nature of the Polish opposition movement unaddressed. What the book fails to provide is a socio-historical context for Polish political culture that might shed some light on the vast discrepancy between Solidarity's radical beginnings and the reality of political consciousness throughout post-communist Eastern Europe. Ost portrays the anti-political movement in Poland as one embraced by "millions of people" and the Polish autumn as the "kind of world that has always been close to the dreams of the left", comparable to 1968 Paris or Barcelona in 1936.

PAUL HOCKENOS is a freelance journalist in Budapest.
The unfortunate truth is that shocking and disturbing Eastern European writing ceases to shock or disturb after a while. In the West, we are all too accustomed to tragic stories about other people’s misery. It is our unique and privileged form of barbarism to look for something else. Wagner’s svelte little book manages to slip into the reader’s consciousness precisely by avoiding spectacular effects.

Wagner’s story, which has an autobiographical feel to it, concerns the last days in Romania of the poet Stimer. Stimer doesn’t realise it, but he is preparing to leave Romania, headed for the West. The striking thing about Stimer’s passage to the West is its complete lack of heroics or self-justification. Stimer is a man of principles and does his best to stick to them. All the same he dryly notes his own petty compromises, taking a line out of a poem to get it past the censor. He is a dissident of sorts, marginal but tolerated. His books come out in tiny editions on pulpy grey paper. He has no idea who reads them—perhaps only the police. He muses without irony on the conjecture that the entire print run of his book will be pulped and recycled, ready for the next difficult poet who will be printed and pulped again, unread.

Stimer does not want to be a tolerated dissident. He knows only too well that the dissident plays the same game as the official writers and ends up even more compromised. He ruminates with disgust on those cautious writers who slip vague anti-government allusions into their poems. Allusions so erudite and obscure that only their greatest fans and most diligent readers will detect their nuance and flavour. The most dedicated connoisseurs of dissidence are, after all, the police. Although they are an appreciative and remarkably attentive audience, they are not the audience Stimer craves. He wants readers who might sustain for him his own self-image as a writer, which is dissolving into nothing in his last days in Romania. We can only wait with interest to see if Stimer’s caustic miniatures on Eastern life are complemented with an equally astute reading of everyday life in the West.

McKENZIE WARK is on the editorial board of Editions.

Sybylla Press, the Melbourne-based feminist publishing group, plans to publish a collection of contemporary writing by women in late 1991.

The collection may include fiction and non-fiction in a variety of forms: stories, playscripts, poetry, critical articles, extracts and so on.

The focus of the collection will be on key stories, at particular times, inform people’s sense of identity. Sybylla is particularly keen to collect writing which challenges or rewrites traditional versions of personal and collective identity.

Our hope is that this collection will generate alternative and politically enabling ways of thinking about ourselves and social change.

Send your submission (and a stamped self-addressed envelope for return) direct to Sybylla Press, or write to us for further information: Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, 3000.

Submissions close 31 March 1991.

ALR : FEBRUARY 1991


The remarkable thing about Wagner’s novella about everyday life in Ceausescu’s Romania is its quiet, clear, matter of factness. Rather than attempt to shock or alarm the reader with tales of brutality, Wagner simply but clearly recounts life in its concreteness and inconsequence. Nothing is revealed and that is precisely why Exit is a terrifying book. It shows vividly the extent to which a barbaric regime can penetrate the very pores and fabric of everyday life, not by putting its totalitarian stamp on everything, but by fostering a festering culture of petty power, pointless principle and blank indifference.

The full horror of Ceausescu’s regime hangs heavily over this volume, but it does so precisely through its absence. Rather than offer the reader a revelation of the true story behind the lies, Wagner simply but clearly recounts life in its concreteness and inconsequence. Nothing is revealed and that is precisely why Exit is a terrifying book. It shows vividly the extent to which a barbaric regime can penetrate the very pores and fabric of everyday life, not by putting its totalitarian stamp on everything, but by fostering a festering culture of petty power, pointless principle and blank indifference.

Rather than attempt to shock or alarm the reader with tales of brutality, Wagner’s svelte little book manages to elicit the reader with tales of brutality, Wagner’s svelte little book manages to
Potatoes have been much on my mind (and in my mouth) recently. A friend virtually shrieked in a restaurant at finding them on her plate; such is the unfortunate reputation of this vegetable as a corruptor of the thin. Potatoes are often seen by those who seek to reduce themselves as on a par with beer and dripping, chocolate eclairs and pav.

It is time for lovers of the poignant and useful vegetable to speak out in its defence. It is a vegetable replete with goodness, both vitamins and minerals. In its unprocessed form, the potato is surely the most beautiful of vegetables, whether at a petite adolescent size or in the full, sprawling Rubens-like folds of a really big one.

I am not the only person to have been beguiled by the dimpled potato. Redcliffe Salaman devoted 40 years of his life to spudology, culminating in the definitive (ie, very long) The History and Social Influence of the Potato. This passionate book looks at the potato from all angles, from its origins in South America (some would dispute this) to a chapter on the Potato in the Realm of Art.

Salaman also looks at the use of the potato as a form of social control by the English in Ireland. The nutritious nature of the potato was used as a means for maintaining subsistence wages for labourers; Salaman shows that it was "designedly forced" on workers with a view to reducing wages. When the potatoes were hit by disease, English domination of the area got even more of a boost, and the use of food as part of colonial or neo-colonial strategy is with us still.

None of us is likely to be solely reliant on potatoes for our nutritional needs. Which is just as well when we consider how they are usually served up today. The round beauty of the potato which speaks of earth and dirt is sacrificed to packaging needs, so that "fries" greet us, and pre-cooked and fat saturated potato snacks await us in the freezer section of the supermarket. The vitamins have been washed away, and the price bears no relation to the cost of the main ingredient. Redcliffe Salaman would turn in his deep-hoed grave at what has been done to his beloved tuber.

I now present two recipes for the potato. One is healthier than the other, but both revel in the taste and texture of the wholesome spud. For if the shape of the potato is enough to make even the thick-skinned marvel, its taste and smell are surely portents of heaven's air-conditioning system.

The Healthier Recipe

This is one of my own, although not without precedent and in deference to the author of The History and Social Influence of the Potato, I have named it Redcliffe's Revenge.

Take four large potatoes and scrub/wash clean. Do not remove the skins. Bake, until quite soft. Let cool a little and then cut them in half. Using a spoon or fork, take out some of the flesh from each half potato and mash it about a bit. Mix with a small amount of ricotta or feta cheese (feta has a stronger flavour), some cooked and chopped silver beet or spinach and some pine nuts and lots of pepper. Fill the potatoes with the mixture, heaping it over the top. Put back in the oven until the stuffing is heated through. These make a great meal with salad or green vegetables and the wonderful bulk of the potato shines through.

The Less Healthy Recipe with a Difficult Name:

Dauphinois Potatoes.

First catch your dolphin. Seriously, folks, put that driftnet away, dig up some potatoes and peel them. You could leave the skins on, but the whole raison d'être of this recipe is to be unhealthy, like French royalty. Cut the potatoes into thin slices and arrange them in a well-buttered baking dish, in overlapping layers. Sprinkle with two crushed cloves of garlic, dot with butter, and cover with grated cheese and some ground pepper. Fill the pan with milk to the level of the top potatoes. Milk flavoured with cloves is quite nice, but you would have to do this beforehand. Bake the dish until it goes brown and almost solid. It is indescribably good.

Potatoes are cheap and delicious vegetables which can substitute for other foods, as in pies where they can take the place of pastry, or they can be the central item in a meal. Potatoholics like myself mourn the fact that many people wrongly malign this sweetest of foods. We should all be distressed by the sight of Australian farmers forced to plough tonnes of potatoes back into the ground because our government wants competition, but the "competition" is subsidised to the hilt. The souls of these potatoes, sacrificed on the altar of world trade are now with the angels, who are plump and prefer eating to harps. The eyeful, faithful potato beckons you to paradise, for a few cents a serve.

Next month: Gender and food—one-pot meals for the boys.

Penelope Cottier.
LETTERS

Too many myths

Your columns these days are full of references to freedom and democracy, and there is a distinct danger that the general public will actually come to believe in these mythical concepts. The freedoms to be unemployed and on the breadline, and the freedoms to exploit and manipulate are freedoms we ought to be resisting with all our strength.

The foundation of democracy is knowledge (of what is going on in society) and a population of voters that is so patently ruled by its media certainly takes the concept of democracy into the realms of mythology. It has been proved that deregulated business is a licence to rip off and exploit. Can some of your academic contributors now come down to earth and make it clear that the basic political issue is between conservative parties which will remove the power of government (and of the people) to control the exploiters, and those parties which still have a social conscience—however much members like Hawke and our king of the yuppies, Keating, may on pragmatic grounds feel it necessary to curry favour with big business (and the Americans) in order to retain office. Please let’s get the basics right.

Don Cochrane,
Penguin, Tas.

A political aperitif

Just a note of welcome to your new column “Correct line cooking”.

A little uncertain as to what I was about to read, I found on venturing in a neatly trussed parcel of (un)palatable points about food and politics and Australian society (or, at least, odours of the same).

I look forward to watching Ms Cotter guide us firmly but politely through her kitchen—and sharing her recipes with us—and suspect that the sweetness of her tones will be offset by some tart facts. I hope so!

Definitely not just another food column. I await the next issue: with ethical dilemmas about these matters so close to our stomachs jostling for space on the plate with the foodstuffs in question.

Peta Cotton,
St Lucia, Qld.
Hello patients,

I've been having problems with the nursing lassies lately. Actually the little bitches have been showing signs of restlessness for quite some time.

Last week I saw a sticker on a car in the staff section of one of my clinics. It said, “Nurses care - about wages”. I sacked the girl on the spot. A few days later, at a major public hospital, I saw a notice for a staff meeting on the Casualty noticeboard. It was addressed to the “rank and file nurses”. What next? Matron Norm Gallagher?!

As you can imagine I felt quite unnerved by this symptom of the socialist cancer within our midst, but a patient was expecting me, so I went into the ward. (I was treating this patient on a private fee-for-service basis, I can assure you.) As I lay my healing hands on the patient, who was lying in what was left of the public hospital system, the nurses treated me almost as an equal. We even shared the same tea room after the wards, with as little formal education as possible. I know medicine is very high-tech these days, and working in intensive care is like flying a 747. But we doctors can change the light bulbs on all those flashing machines. The nurses needn't worry their pretty little heads about them.

Mistake number 2: The standard of uniform has deteriorated. Interestingly enough, the Catholic Church made the same mistake when they let the nuns take up the hems of their habits and wear sandals.

It used to be so different. Just a few years ago I would walk briskly down the long hospital corridors, my shoe heels clicking on the highly polished floors. As I entered the ward to do my rounds, a young un-derling nurse would spot me approaching, and I'd hear her hushed, urgent whisper, “Doctor is coming!”

Suddenly there would be a flurry of activity. All would be tidied and washed before me. Unsightly body fluids would be removed, and the nurses and patients would line up for a military-style inspection. The 1st year nurse would have one blue star on her cap, the 2nd year nurse, two blue stars, and so on. We all knew where we stood. Everyone was secure.

What's it like today?

Why, now you're lucky if you can even find a Sister to welcome you onto the ward! And if you can find a “Sister”, there's every chance “Sister” will have a beard, because men do nursing these days. It's terribly unnerving. Yes, patients, nurses have changed. This is the result of a series of catastrophic mistakes; mistakes which must be rectified.

Mistake number 1: Too much education. Originally prospective nurses could leave school very early, and then learn their place on the wards. It was good clean back-breaking work and if prepared them for a life of selfless toil. Then the meddlers got involved, and the lassies were required to finish high school before we handed them a bed pan. This is where the trouble started. Now the situation is completely out of control, and we're sending them off to pseudo-universities to become mock cream professionals. No wonder they're getting ideas above their station!

Solution: Get them straight back into the wards, with as little formal education as possible. I know medicine is very high-tech these days, and working in intensive care is like flying a 747. But we doctors can change the light bulbs on all those flashing machines. The nurses needn't worry their pretty little heads about them.

Mistake number 3: The lack of role models for young nurses. Florence Nightingale is no longer appropriate. Historical research has shown that Florence was an uppity bitch who was over-confident in her organisational abilities, and who spoke back to doctors under fire in the Crimean War.

Solution: The nurses should look to the New Testament and adopt Mary Magdalene as a role model for young nurses.

Of course, in her early life Mary suffered from a dubious sexual reputation, but this is more in keeping with the average young woman of the 90s. In later life Mary embodied the spirit of the hospital, and Christianity. She never once questioned the healing methods used by the Apostles and Jesus. Remember that lovely image in Luke: Chapter 7, where Dr Jesus and the 12 Interns are sitting around a table. Nurse Magdalene approaches carrying an alabaster jar of exquisite ointment. Without a word, she kneels and washes the feet of Dr Jesus, using her hair to wipe the precious ointment from his feet.

This image should be displayed in every hospital across Australia.

Send your problems to Dr Hartman’s secretary, Julie McCrossin, care of ALR.
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Elizabeth Grosz

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Elizabeth Grosz is the author of Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists. Formerly senior lecturer in the Department of General Philosophy at the University of Sydney, she is currently lecturing in History of Consciousness, University of California.

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Michael Easson is the Secretary of the Labor Council of NSW.

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Mike Davis writes for LA Weekly. He is joint editor of the Verso series The Year Left.

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Rafael M. Antunes

Rafael M. Antunes is a sociologist at the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) in São Paulo and co-founder of the Instituto Brasiliano de Estudos Sociais (IBES). His book Versus the City of Quartz: Class, Politics and Development in Northern Brazil: APLA and the Popular Front in the Amazon was published in 1990 in Portuguese.

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