Australian LEFT REVIEW

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Joh's March on Canberra?

Early in February the Murdoch press was first to herald signs of a drive on federal politics by Queensland's seventeen-year premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen. One "exclusive" phone-in poll in the Sydney Telegraph claimed that 70 percent of Australians wanted Joh in Canberra: later in the month, more reputable polling methods reduced this figure to only 60 percent.

It was one of the great symbolic moments of media reporting: soon enough it was impossible to tell whether the media was leading Joh on, or Joh was leading the media on. Not since the Philippines state television station had formed the strategic battleground of Cory's "revolution" twelve months earlier had the interrelationship of the media and mass politics been so evocatively represented. Some on the left chose to interpret this in conspiratorial terms: we were being "brainwashed" yet again. Rather, it was a case of the electronic media in particular, with its instinctive populist touch, coming to embrace with Australia's greatest populist politician.

By mid-February, Joh's campaign which, at first, the "quality" press had treated with amused contempt, was definitely to be taken seriously. The leaders of the official Opposition responded with escalating threats (federal National Party leader Ian Sinclair recalled Germany in 1933). Then federal National MPs met and appeared to endorse Joh's crusade against (among other things) their leader. Thereafter Sinclair, as if stricken by some dreadful irrational disease, was treated by the media as a doomed man. Soon, Queensland National MPs were coerced into putting a unilateral end to the Coalition: at the time of writing (early March) control of the National Party, and thus of the future prospects of the Coalition, hung in the balance.

Of course, it still remains unlikely that the entire structure of the party system will split asunder to provide Joh with the Prime Ministership — although it is far from an impossibility. Indeed, were Joh's "impossible dream" to begin to take more tangible form, his popularity as a "maverick" might suffer in consequence. But in his primary objective — the refashioning of the climate of politics at the conservative end of the spectrum, in the run-up to the next election — he has been spectacularly successful. And, in the process, the whole arena of political debate has taken another great lurch to the right.

There are two distinct aspects of the current political situation which have helped to create this astonishing political phenomenon. One we could call a "crisis of representation"; the other a crisis of popular appeal, or of mass politics — which follows from the first.

In early February the ABC television program *Four Corners* ran a detailed report on the Bankstown by-election in Sydney, where support for the ALP (and, interestingly, for the Coalition too) ran at an historic low. The camera crew interviewed suburban families, groups of young people, and pensioners: the overwhelming message was that the Labor Party and, in fact, parties in general, no longer represented its electorate; the ties of appeal between party and passive supporter had become unprecedentedly slim.

This is hardly a uniquely Australian phenomenon: indeed, it has been noted by social observers abroad for some years now. But, in the Australian case, it was concealed for quite some time by apparently undisturbed "traditional" conservatism during the Fraser years. The impetus has rather been the Hawke government's restless search for a role as a "natural government" of the crisis, arbitrating between the various social actors but actively representing none. As we all know, this has now led to the ALP's "traditional" constituencies becoming perilously unstuck. It is by no means clear any longer to the government itself, let alone its electorate, exactly what it "stands for". But the official opposition has proved itself singularly incapable of fashioning itself a constituency or constituencies on this alienated ground. Where the "New Right" in Britain articulated popular discontents around the welfare state, and the American New Right has manoeuvred on the ground of the crisis of the family and traditional values with aplomb, their Australian cousins have talked of market forces and the sovereign right to manage: hardly inspiring stuff.
Into both of these historic vacuums Joh has leapt as into the breach. On the one hand he demonstrates his disdain for all of the traditional parties — including his own. He has set about single-mindedly breaking up the forces of representation on which the conventions of parliamentary sovereignty are supposed to rest. He talks of the Coalition as of a passing phantasm, or as an obstacle rather than a vehicle to mass appeal. And, most strangely of all (particularly for the “quality” press), the public opinion of the fragmented parties rises with every blow.

On the other hand, he brushes aside the purported “responsibility” of the political slogans of the orthodox right. Where Howard speaks the impoverished rhetoric of economic “rationalism” (a telling phrase), Joh has amassed a potent repertoire of populist images — strong-man politician and father-figure, a commitment to a “traditionalist” morality, a vivid portrayal of the average taxpayer as the put-upon “little man” (sic), and a deep reservoir of implicit racism. This is all the more effective precisely because it is an unarticulated (and thus apparently inarticulate) ideological appeal: Joh’s popularity lies in fact in the very ambiguity of his political appeals, in the true populist tradition. In the same way, Joh’s notorious inability “to talk clear English” is, in itself, a part of the contradictory, unformed character of populist rhetoric.

The precise nature of populism (if that is not a contradiction in terms) is something which has always been something of a worry to the left. Movements like fascism, which genuinely articulate popular currents, but in extreme reactionary directions, have always seemed difficult to reconcile to our conceptions of their class basis. Joh’s particular brand of populism is, in addition, something rather new to this country. We have had our populist “charismatics” before — Jack Lang is the prime example, and perhaps the closest but rarely in such a transparently anti-rational guise. If the Joh phenomenon demonstrates anything, it is that we are dramatically lacking in empathy and imagination about how what we think of as “ideology” actually works. The only problem is that Joh may not lie down in time to become a convenient case study.

David Burchell
The Wages Turmoil

The Conciliation and Arbitration Commission's March national wage decision is an attempt to further erode the living standards of Australian working people, and to weaken the trade union movement ideologically and organisationally. The decision, and the arguments used by the government in advocating it, represent a final and complete break with the commitments given under the Accord.

A central feature of the Accord was the agreement that both the trade union movement and the ALP in government would argue in tripartite consultations, and before industrial tribunals, that full cost of living adjustments be made to wages and salaries.

This approach was in part abandoned in 1985 when the government gained an agreement with the trade unions for a two percent discount of wage and salary increases. However, that agreement was not achieved without concessions to the unions in the areas of tax cuts (equivalent to the 2 percent discount), and support for superannuation claims.

In 1986 the government did not even bother to negotiate an agreement with the union movement openly. Treasurer Keating baldly announced in the 1986/87 Budget statement to parliament that an additional two percent discount would be sought in the coming national wage case. Keating cited the need for wage increases to be compatible with those of our major trading partners, and for our international competitiveness to be maintained on "favourable terms with the rest of the world".

This reshaping of wages policy is consistent with the government's moves to deregulate the finance sector, and to expose the Australian economy to all the pressures of international finance and productive capital. The era in Australia's economic development when foreign capital was given guaranteed domestic markets, and domestic capital (in partnership or alone) gained similar benefits, is now well and truly over. The corresponding changes limiting government involvement in the marketplace, and interventionist support or protection, have been carried out with a speed and efficiency that the Coalition parties would have had difficulty in matching.

It is for these reasons that the government now commands the support of significant sections of domestic and foreign capital, and that, despite the threat of the New Right, the traditional conservative political parties are in disarray.

The threat of the New Right is also skilfully used at the ideological level to create continued support for the ALP among trade unionists and in the community at large, while Labor proceeds to reshape and refashion its policies according to an agenda generated by the right. This manoeuvring also contains attempts to dampen down working class expectations on living standards.

The effective wage cuts achieved through the commission's decision is the latest initiative in this direction, and it is the government's intention to follow it with further cuts in the social wage and public sector cutbacks, either in the May economic statement, or the 1987/88 Budget, or both. For many workers, the commission's decision means a $10 a week increase to compensate for 9.8 percent inflation over 1986, and roughly 10 percent inflation over 1987, with little prospect of another increase until the first quarter of 1988.

A significant number of unions have reacted sharply to the decision. At the Special Federal Unions Conference in November, most public sector unions rejected the proposed change to the two-tiered wage system. Others gave it critical, conditional support.

It would seem impossible at this point in time to turn around ACTU strategy, and the ACTU Congress in
September will be the first real opportunity to do so. This means that, over the coming months, unions will have to test the new principles to the limit in an effort to achieve gains beyond the $10 a week mark.

Some unions will abide by the decision, their leadership unable and/or unwilling to offer any challenge to the government or decision, their leadership unable and/or unwilling to offer any "restructuring and efficiency" principle, or modified work value principle.

The new principle is designed to leave many workers "on the shelf" in terms of wage movements unless they are in strong bargaining positions or can engage in a militant industrial campaign with serious prospects of success. It is also another signal of the end of the Accord, since it ties wage fixation to industry development — two matters dealt with separately under the Accord. And, by limiting additional increases to workers directly involved in technology and work methods changes, it seeks to divide workers and unions.

The commission also clearly favours enterprise level negotiations, in order to weaken unions' traditional concerns to deal with the interests of all workers across particular sections of industry.

The trade union movement is without doubt in for a difficult period. The dominant economic and ideological approach of the ACTU leadership is in line with the worst of Australian labourist development — it perceives the working class and trade unions as being almost entirely dependent on the developmental processes of capitalism, and as necessarily being compliant with its demands and profit needs. This position is challenged somewhat by communists, socialists and others in trade union leadership, but they are not influential enough to reverse or moderate the existing trends, except in isolated areas of the movement.

The commission's decision will further impoverish hundreds of thousands of Australians, and may precipitate further economic crises through under-consumption and over-production. Any attempt to reverse this decline in living standards will require a reassessment of overall trade union strategy, and this needs to be argued for from the shop floor to the official level in all unions.

Trade unions remain the principal base for organised responses by Australian workers in defence of their interests, and this role needs to be reasserted in the period ahead.

Warwick Neilely

After Cory's Constitution

Twelve months after the February "revolution" in the Philippines, Cory Aquino has won a landslide victory in the vote on her Constitution and, more directly, for her presidency until 1992. She has been lionised as "Time's (Wo) Man of the Year" and become the idol of western politicians, the mass media and of many who wish the Philippines only well.

With such near-unanimous world-wide endorsement, one would think that Cory's task in reconstructing the Philippines after 14 years of the most savage rape by the Marcos clan and its cronies would be now well under way. But the Filipino people know differently. Unemployment and poverty have escalated greatly in the past year. Children are now dying of starvation on Negros and infant mortality remains high.

The generous praise heaped on Aquino by the USA has not been matched by a generosity in economic aid. On the contrary, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have tightened the screws. With the enthusiastic support of Cory's economic ministers, handpicked for their monetarism, the IMF and World Bank have demanded and won even further economic "liberalisation". Protectionism is being dismantled and today the USA and EEC (and Australia) can dump their surplus rice stocks at below-cost prices in the Philippines. It is ironic that, as protectionist barriers are raised in the advanced capitalist countries against Filipino imports, these same countries rightly demand that the Philippines lower its trade defences.

The Aquino government continues the same policies as Marcos in relying on agriculture and having no concept of industrialisation. In the name of dismantling the monopolies, Marcos handed over to his family and cronies, the Aquino government is proceeding with a rapid privatisation of the economy. And the cronies' monopolies are being sold off to Japanese and UN investors at bargain basement rates, being offset against the country's huge overseas debt.

With about 60 percent of the country's exports going simply to service that international debt, the whole nation is caught in a modern form of debt slavery. Aquino's ministers have insisted on a better deal, along the lines won last year by Mexico, for repayment of the debt, but have come up against a brick wall of the biggest US banks. In the longer term, this subservience to international capital and the failure even to contemplate an industrialisation program will be the downfall of the Aquino regime, and of the neo-colonial system.

The Philippines is but one of the many Third World nations which desperately need a new "Marshall Plan". In the case of the Philippines, such a multi-billion rescue plan alone can stop or substantially halt the rapid progress of the revolutionary forces. Such a "Marshall Plan" therefore is the logical way for imperialism to save the country from revolutionary change. Yet there are many factors which impede such a rescue operation, above all, the danger such an example would set elsewhere. There is also the ever-present danger that any annulment of the international debt...
or even giving substantial concessions on the debt, could bring the whole house of cards crashing down.

The related question of land reform is perhaps the most immediate one facing Aquino. The international media, and her close adviser Cardinal Sin, are unanimous in calling for real action on this front. After all, land reform is not contradictory to capitalist development: indeed, it is essential for it. Aquino would only carry out a token land reform, with substantial compensation to landlords. To finance that, her economics ministers recently approached the World Bank for $US500 million. The bank refused and now Aquino must go cap in hand to the Asian Development Bank.

The Philippines left, after the experience of the two-month ceasefire and the referendum is now evaluating a year of Aquino rule and its future evolution. The underground left grouped in the National Democratic Front, and the major above-ground left in the unions (KMU — May First Movement) and the Peasants Movement (KMP), are united in seeing the “principal contradiction” as between the “people and reaction” — with Aquino very much in the camp of reaction. A minority both in the NDF and particularly in the urban-based above-ground left, see the principal contradiction as that between fascism and the people — in which Aquino is defined as an anti-fascist.

The danger of a “fascist” coup remains, although much lessened now compared with previous months. The Aquino government remains unable to control the military or prevent it from massacring and brutalising the peasantry, among whom support for the NDF is now widespread. Aquino and her army chief General Ramos are united in seeking, by all and any means, to destroy the revolutionary forces. In this they are at one with the Pentagon strategists who advocate “Low Intensity Conflict” (LIC).

The LIC strategy does not mean less bodies on the ground, but it does seek to make the bodies more clearly defined as the “enemy”. It means also a much more “political” war and the construction of grassroots repression, building “anti-communist” militia in each barrio and shanty town to work with the military in “weeding out” the “communists”, selectively rather than by arbitrary massacres. LIC requires a more sophisticated, politically active military which is also able to provide some “civic action” benefits to those peasants and shanty dwellers who cooperate, and a certainty of harsh punishment if they do not.

Inevitably, it is the lumpen elements, the criminals and psychotics who become the spearhead of the
“anti-communist militia”. Under Marcos, such gangs — the Civilian Home Defence Force (CHDF) — operated as paramilitary auxiliaries and were among the most notorious for human rights violations. They remain untouched under Aquino. But the CHDF is not a model for LIC, not least because it exists separately from the people in army barracks. Other anti-communist gangs, including the recently created Alsa Masa in Davao City, Mindanao, are criminal gangs under another name, despite their claimed success and recruitment of former New People’s Army guerrillas. Critical to the success of LIC is a “democratic” facade, with a civilian president speaking the language of reform. Napoleon Duarte in El Salvador is a good example of the type of figure the US LIC strategy requires. While Aquino is not yet fully absorbed into the Duarte image, she is on the way to becoming so.

The Philippines military, on the admission of Aquino’s Defence Minister Iletto, is incompetent, poorly-disciplined and unsophisticated, and not a suitable instrument for applying the LIC strategy. In the provinces, it operates as a mafia, leading most criminal activities and extorting local businesses and peasants alike. If Aquino won a landslide endorsement in the referendum, it was essentially a vote for her liberal democratic trends against the military-in-place which is rightly identified as fascist. If the vote had been between the NDF and the military, then the landslide would have been for the NDF.

Thus, while the popularity and still-high hopes which the masses have of Aquino undoubtedly pose a problem for the NDF, it does not lessen their grassroots support in the face of the military and corrupt local bosses. The Aquino problem is much more acute for the NDF among the urban “middle forces” — the professionals, the office workers and small business people — who, although small in proportion to the population, wield great influence. It is a sign of the strength of the revolutionary forces that they now place great importance on their work among the “middle forces”, almost to the point of preoccupation. The grassroots work among the peasants and worker masses continues, but the challenge is to assemble their “allies” among the middle forces. These middle forces in turn can help the armed struggle reach a new phase, given their access to skills which are sorely needed.

The NDF participation in the ceasefire was, in large part, directed to the need to reach these middle forces, and was often reluctantly accepted in the guerrilla zones for that reason alone. It is equally significant that it is the left working among the middle forces which generally sees fascism as the principal source of the contradiction in Filipino politics. The NDF and the revolutionary left in the Philippines as a whole represents the most dynamic and sophisticated force in Asia today. Its internal democracy is impressive, while its flexibility in relation to tactics combines with a firmness of principle which has inspired many who have witnessed it. Imputations that it is the “new Khmer Rouge” are gross and even laughable.

Denis Freney
In the last few months the face of media ownership in Australia has changed dramatically. The Labor government's announcement that it was intending to change the TV ownership limits started some unprecedented selling of TV stations, at unprecedented prices.

The current broadcasting laws limit any company to only owning two TV stations. Over the last ten years the rules have been criticised as inequitable, since they equate stations in Mt. Isa or Kalgoorlie with stations in Sydney or Melbourne.

Since 1982, various Tribunal and Department of Communications reports have recommended changes to the ownership limits, so that they reflect the discrepancies in industry power between the owners of stations in the largest cities, and the owners of stations in smaller country areas. The options for change which have been proposed in the past, however, always suggested lifting the ownership limits in such a way that new limits allowed the smaller owners to increase their holdings. It was proposed by the Minister for Communications, Michael Duffy, that smaller TV owners should be allowed to expand up to the market level of the largest owners. The largest then were Packer and Murdoch who reached 43 percent of the national TV audience through their stations in Sydney and Melbourne. By owning more than two stations, in smaller markets, the smaller owners could work towards an equivalent total reach of 43 percent.
Duffy's proposal for a new ownership limit based on a ceiling of a 43 percent audience reach was clearly a policy which was designed to allow smaller TV owners to grow in size and strength in the TV industry to equal the size of Packer's and Murdoch's holdings.

Duffy's 43 percent proposal, however, and presumably the policy considerations underlying it, was swept aside in the surprising Cabinet decision to introduce a new, far higher ownership limit of a 75 percent audience reach. Under this proposal, any one owner, formerly limited to two stations, could hold TV stations in every capital city, plus some more in the country. The final Cabinet decision appears to be based on a policy of “let the biggest get bigger”, with no other analysis or strategy underlying it.

The government justified this deregulatory step on total ownership limits by also proposing the introduction of cross media rules — prohibiting any one company from owning a TV station and a newspaper in the same area. The cross media rules, however, won't force owners to sell off existing holdings. So Fairfax, for example, owning both ATN-7 and the Herald in Sydney, would be allowed to keep both media going and would not be required to divest. Companies with such cross media holdings can retain them until they choose to sell.

The announcement of these proposed new rules began a summer spree of buying and selling in the media industry. The fact that companies owning two TV stations could own more meant that the competition to expand was fierce, and the bidding would be high. The chance to buy an Australia-wide network of stations may not occur again for years.

In an early and massive billion dollar deal, the Bond corporation, which owned TV stations in Perth and Brisbane, purchased Packer's stations in Sydney and Melbourne to give it the first Australia-wide network. Bond is counting on the proposed changes getting through the parliament, despite murmurings of disquiet from the Democrats, and even the odd Liberal.

At the same time, and probably partly in response to the new ownership rule announcement, Murdoch made his bid for the Herald and Weekly Times (HWT) — the largest of Australia's media owners. He fought off or bought off counter-bids, first from Holmes a'Court and later from Fairfax, and now appears to have control of the media giant albeit a giant now reduced in size after some hasty asset selling.

Murdoch's takeover of HWT ran into considerable legal difficulties. Although there is no law stopping foreigners from owning our newspapers, the broadcasting laws prohibit foreigners from owning or controlling any Australian radio and TV stations. Murdoch was forced by similar US laws to become an American citizen when he purchased TV stations there in 1985.

The Broadcasting Tribunal had for some time been looking at whether Murdoch was in breach of the foreign ownership laws in relation to the Channel 10 stations in Sydney and Melbourne, with Murdoch relying on some fancy corporate restructuring which tried to distance him from control of the broadcasting companies, while still allowing him to reap the profits. The Tribunal's extensive and long running inquiry into the Channel 10s was on hold when the HWT takeover began, waiting for a Federal Court decision on the legal question of whether Murdoch was in “control” of the stations or not.

The Federal Court happened to deliver its decision relating to Murdoch's control of the Channel 10 stations, and the effect of the corporate restructuring, in the midst of his attempt to take over the Herald and Weekly Times. The Federal Court took a strong line that the purpose of the Act was clearly to avoid foreign control, and that corporate restructuring should not avoid it. They ruled that the way Murdoch had restructured his companies was not necessarily an effective way of removing him from control of the TV licences.

The Federal Court's decision put the ball back in the Tribunal's court, to then examine whether Murdoch in fact remained in control of the stations, thereby breaching the foreign ownership law.

As well as raising legal problems for Murdoch's ability to keep the Channel 10 stations he had formerly owned, the Federal Court decision raised some more urgent problems for his Herald and Weekly Times takeover. Since HWT owned both TV and radio stations, the steadily increasing News Ltd. shareholding in the company again raised the prospect that a foreigner was “controlling” broadcasting stations.

The final Cabinet decision appears to be based on a policy of ‘Let the biggest get bigger', with no other analysis or strategy behind it.

The Tribunal reacted to this new potential breach of the foreign ownership and control prohibitions by calling another inquiry. The timing of the inquiry was critical, since Murdoch's News Ltd. was daily buying more parcels of shares in HWT. The Australian Journalists Association (AJA), Actors Equity, and Free the Media argued strongly that the Tribunal should step in immediately and make orders to stop Murdoch from buying any more shares, effectively preventing him from proceeding with the takeover until the foreign control issue was resolved. The Tribunal adopted a far less interventionist stance, refusing to stop the Murdoch group purchasing HWT shares. The Tribunal only disallowed the registration of any shares he had purchased. During an adjournment of a few days within the inquiry, then, Murdoch's takeover of HWT was sewn up as he reached a shareholding level of well over fifty percent.

When the Tribunal's inquiry resumed in early February, it was clear that Murdoch already had a majority of shares, bought but not registered, and that Murdoch appeared to be in clear breach of the Act, as a foreigner then controlling the HWT stations. While News Ltd. doggedly argued to the Tribunal that Murdoch was no longer on their board, and had no authority to bind the company, the front page stories each day outlining Rupert's new deals with
various rivals undermined the credibility of claims that he was not personally controlling the takeover.

At this point, the Tribunal could have taken strong action. It had the power to examine the evidence of Murdoch’s personal involvement in the takeover, and to order that the unregistered shares be divested in order to “cure” the breach of the law which appeared to have occurred. Such an order would have stopped Murdoch’s takeover attempt dead in its tracks, and perhaps encouraged more serious analysis of the then rival Fairfax bid.

The Tribunal, however, chose not to flex its muscles and step into the takeover battle in such a spectacular way. It chose instead to adopt the approach that it was the responsibility of the HWT board to ensure that the laws prohibiting foreign ownership of its broadcasting stations were not being breached as a result of the takeover. The HWT board asked the Tribunal for an adjournment of the inquiry so that it could meet and attempt to resolve the legal difficulties itself. Clearly, the HWT board supported Murdoch’s bid for the company and would have been keen to avoid having the Tribunal take any steps to block the takeover.

The Tribunal gave the adjournment, and the HWT board, faced with the need for drastic action to resolve the breach of the law, then called its extraordinary auction sale of all its broadcasting stations. By selling the stations it could remove the problem of foreign control, and ensure that Murdoch’s takeover of the remaining print components of the company could proceed. Companies opposing Murdoch picked up some of the jewels from the crown —

and withdrew their opposition to the takeover. It was alleged in the daily press that Murdoch helped hand out the goods. Fairfax got HSV-7 in Melbourne, West Australian entrepreneur Kerry Stokes picked up ADS-7 Adelaide, and a number of radio stations and smaller press titles also changed hands.

The Tribunal, however, chose not to flex its muscles ....

The auction itself raised questions, however, as to whether the prince of print had himself been handing out the jewels, before he was allowed to join the HWT board.

The Tribunal, unfortunately, was not interested in pursuing the allegations of Murdoch’s involvement in the assets sale, although any such involvement could have been further evidence of a breach of the laws prohibiting foreign control.

The Tribunal instead decided not to intervene, and to accept the auctioneering approach of the HWT board as a lawful way to overcome the breaches of the law. O’Connor later, in evidence to the Senate Committee on TV Equalisation, referred to their approach as one of “licensee responsibility”, whereby the Tribunal throws back onto the licensees themselves the responsibility for ensuring that the broadcasting laws are not breached. In this case, however, it could be argued that the breach existed for some weeks before the licensee took steps to resolve it, and that the steps taken to “resolve” it in fact exacerbated the breach.

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Plus Kari Werner Brands on new social movements, Michael Bittman on Marx and Weber and an interview with Gayatri Spivak.

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The "resolution" in fact gave rise to further possible breaches, because the HWT TV stations were sold to companies which already owned two stations, Fairfax and Stokes, putting them both over the two station limit. Like Bond, both companies will try to wait out their breach of the two station rule until the new rules allowing ownership of three stations are introduced. The Tribunal will be examining the various transactions one by one in inquiries over the next few months. The new legislation may well be in place by then. Even if the new laws are not passed by then, the companies with more than two stations would be able to take advantage of the "period of grace" the current Act allows them for divesting excess holdings.

Murdoch's sale of the Sydney and Melbourne Channel 10 stations to Northern Star, which closely followed the HWT sales, backed by Westfields, again accentuates the concentration of ownership. Moreover, the media changes may not be over yet. Companies moving now to take advantage of the proposed seventy-five percent ownership limit will undoubtedly be wanting to buy as many stations as they can, as quickly as possible.

The break-up of the Herald and Weekly Times, and the other changes in media ownership over the past few months, have been spectacular. The corporate manoeuvrings attracting vast media coverage as news stories in themselves. Less coverage has been given to the long-term policy implications of the changes, the prospects for a vigorous and critical media under the proposed new rules, or the policy arguments against further concentrating our media ownership.
The last barrier to the Murdoch takeover was removed on 3 March when the Trade Practices Commission announced that it was satisfied that the News Ltd. takeover of HWT had not increased the concentration of ownership of the print media in Australia.

The commission's decision must be seen as a blow to those arguing for a greater diversity of ownership of our press. The Trade Practices Act prohibits takeovers which will leave one company in a dominant position in a market as a result of their acquisition of a second company. Although the takeover sees News Ltd. increasing its press holdings substantially from 28 percent of the circulation capital city dailies to 58 percent, the commission argued that HWT had been a prominent press publisher before the takeover, and that News Ltd. had not been allowed simply to aggregate its own holdings with that of HWT.

Instead of looking at the total percentage of influential capital city circulation in the control of the one proprietor, the commission focussed on the divestitures made by the Murdoch group.

The commission emphasised, in particular, the divestiture of West Australian Newspapers from the HWT group, and the sale of Murdoch's papers in Adelaide and Brisbane.

They took a market by market approach, analysing the ownership changes state by state, and ignoring the total picture of an unprecedented dominance in the national market.

While the Hawke government has shown its willingness to deliver the goods to friendly media owners ... Senate may yet have its day and decide to block the new rules.

Moreover, while the commission stressed the emergence of new competitors to News Ltd., the strongest of the competitors, Fairfax, has only 24 percent of the total circulation compared to Murdoch's 58 percent; other supposed competitors are very small and relatively insignificant press proprietors in national terms.

The Trade Practices Commission's blind eye to the increase in press control resulting from the takeover is the last link in a chain of decisions by government and statutory bodies which have facilitated the takeover.

The options from here are limited. Both the Australian Consumers Association and the Australian Journalists Association took legal advice on whether the takeover contravened the Trade Practices Act, and received a QC's advice that a breach had occurred. The groups applied for — and received — legal aid from the Legal Aid Commission of NSW to challenge the legality of the takeover. Although willing to take the risk of having to pay costs of some tens of thousands of dollars, the two groups were forced to drop the challenge when informed that the costs of the legal teams which would be ranged against them (and which they might have to pay if they lost) could be as high as $100,000. The legal process thus remains beyond the reach of even some of the larger union and consumer groups. While the controls and mechanisms of the law appear to have worked only in the interests of the major media owners, the average newspaper reader may have cause to wonder whether the processes of legal protection are worth the paper they're written on.

At the time of going to press, the Senate Committee on TV Equalisation is still hearing evidence covering many of the issues raised by the changes. The committee may well deliver a split report, possibly even with some strong opposition to the new ownership proposals. While the Hawke government has shown its willingness to deliver the goods to friendly media owners, and regulatory bodies like the Trade Practices Commission, the Foreign Investment Review Board and the Tribunal have not taken effective action, parliament, or more specifically, the Senate, may yet have its day and decide to block the new rules. Perhaps we'll then have some enjoyment watching the new media owners resuffle again, leaving them somewhat more wary in future about their confidence in the government's support.

*An earlier version of this article was published in Communications Update, the newsletter of the Media and Communications Council.

KATE HARRISON works at the Public Interest Advocacy Centre in Sydney.
DIANA AND SARAH: Images of Ourselves

Diana Simmonds

In Today's People the title of this epic was, inevitably perhaps, shortened to concentrate on Sarah and Diana, but the title is really "Sarah and Diana - images of ourselves". And by that I mean that I see them literally as images of "us" as in western women, Australian women, women of the late 20th century. They are true representations of ourselves and I believe that in looking at them we can see what has happened to "us" in the last ten or fifteen years. What is happening to us now. And what we can expect to happen to us in the near future - our future. And I'd like to think - and that we should all think - about what we can and should do about it.

I'd like to look over some of the events of the past six years in a kind of chronology - with some jumpcuts and flashbacks - to point up where and what I believe are significant matters for us all to consider.

In 1981, Lady Diana Spencer descended, fully fledged and virgin, on the British media and public. The then successful leftwing publishing house, Pluto Press, decided they needed a light-hearted piece about her in their next Year Book of world events. They asked me to do it. For some reason, it's usually me who's asked to do this kind of thing. I would never have been asked to write Hamlet.

The thing to bear in mind about Diana is that it had to be light-hearted in order to illustrate that we weren't taken in by the hype and weren't selling out to the running dog lackeys of increased sales and mass popularity. At the time, you may remember, Britain had just celebrated two undiluted years of Mrs. Thatcher and was in need of a lolly to take away the nasty taste. The "fairytale" princess, as she was inevitably dubbed, was made to order. Particularly for Fleet Street.

The warning signs for women came very early: Diana's uncle, one of the more toadlike Spencers of Althorp, went on national television to personally guarantee her virginity. This astonishing statement was taken as, FIRST of all, an unquestioned truth and, SECOND, a reasonable and unquestioned statement to make about a person. It didn't occur to the interviewer to ask how the old goat knew she was a virgin; after all, how...
DO you ensure a girl's virginity except by physical examination. And neither did it occur to anyone to be outraged that the state of her hymen was a talking point and, by definition, public property.

At the time, women on the left, feminists, were caught in a curious position: to be offended by Diana's treatment by the media and to voice a protest or defence somehow was transformed into a defence of the monarchy and of privilege and privileged women. Many women felt appalled and puzzled but nevertheless didn't say anything, me included. It was this line of male left thinking that held women's issues, that is, the kinds of things women wanted to place on the political agenda, to be distractions and unnecessary to the real work of promoting the revolution. The temporary paralysis and guilt it caused in women permitted the most spirited and imaginative leftwing attacks on the Thatcher government to rise to the heights of the demo march chant "Funk Thatcher". And also allowed this entirely dreary and sexist response to go unchallenged.

Indeed, on THE Wedding Day, the official alternative celebration in London was an outdoor festival of reggae and warm beer which went under the title "Funk the Wedding" and was closely accompanied by the standard "Funk Thatcher" rituals. The feminist magazine Spare Rib ran a more carefully thought out, and worded, campaign with their best selling "Don't Do It Di" badges, but it was predictable that, for many more millions of young girls and women across the country, the dream had become reality: the frog had been kissed and Diana had become a princess. They were all for it. Given half the chance and they'd do it along with Di, no worries.

Never mind that the frog remained a frog.

He was a rather pleasant frog by the standards of the day and unconscionably rich too. When they married I remember that someone did an estimate of his daily income as something like £8,000 sterling, which I always thought was probably an underestimate. Anyway, the point is that, in material terms alone, the rewards were incalculable and, probably even more important, just as Barbara Cartland had been predicting for decades in her romantic novels. Diana's fairy-floss step-grandmother had never stopped plugging away at the rewards of virginity and chastity and nuptial bliss despite Germaine Greer, Gloria Steinem and years of women's liberation.

In HER books, every good girl lived happily ever after and that meant (1) that she was a virgin to start with, (2) that she kept it that way despite being crushed to the chest of the huskyvoiced hero in the first six pages, and that (3) she still kept it that way despite the temptations of passion and various different evil-intentioned lust merchants until, finally, between two and six pages before the end, she succumbs to the rising wave of ecstasy and desire and submits her will to his. But this definitely does NOT mean she surrenders her virginity, either before marriage, or before the end of the book. That vital epistemological break finally occurs in the imagination of readers, it does not sully Miss Cartland's pages, nor tax her creative powers; she does have two sons and several Pekingese dogs, but I think she actually got them at Harrods.

But, seriously, these books are worth examination. There are dozens of them, and again, quite seriously, you only need to read one as the plots are as entirely interchangeable as that precis suggests. It would be a mistake to dismiss them, though, and not least because those scores of books sell in the multi-millions. They've been translated into nearly every language except English, which Miss Cartland remains stubbornly and blithely unable to write — although I don't suppose either she or her bank manager care a fig about that.
Then again, despite, or maybe because of, the new realism of the '80s that we see in soap life like *East Enders* and *Brookside*, there is still a determination, by millions of young women, to continue to believe in the Cartland-style fairytale romance version of life. And when you consider the bastardry of daily life for the average working class girl in Britain today, it isn't surprising.

They've been translated into nearly every language but English, which Miss Cartland remains stubbornly and blithely unable to write ...

There are two arguments at work when it comes to the power of TV soap and the Mills and Boon romances. One says that people aren't stupid and that they know it's escapism and that they're deliberately choosing it for just that purpose. The second argument is that people identify with the soap characters or the situations to be found in penny-dreadful romances and that this is dangerously misleading.

The first argument is probably true when it comes to the images of things like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* which are clearly fantasy and enjoyed as such. *East Enders* and *Brookside* are the other side of the coin. There is nothing glamorous about the situations depicted in these two radical soaps and they attract mail by the truckload, most of which confirms that people see their own misfortunes and problems reflected each week on the screen.

By "radical soap" I mean that they've moved quite radically away from what we've come to expect of TV soap. *A Country Practice* and *Coronation Street*, for instance, have always been tagged on the realistic side of soap — real situations, real issues, real prime ministers, everyday life. Both a bit cosy though and quite unlike the two new ones which started for instance, have

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on into the actual social issues, like long-term unemployment, the plight of the aged, racism, and so on. There is no falsely rosy glow over *Brookside* Close or Albert Square, they do tell it like it is.

Which is where the Cartland school of escape comes in and can be seen in the light of the second argument against it. With the descent to earth of Princess Diana, the fiction was made flesh. For millions of young girls, she was living proof that living happily ever after was something to strive for, and was attainable, with effort. It has to be admitted, though, that *East Enders* is Princess Diana's favourite TV program and she is an avid reader of Cartland novels. So you could say that, as the theory said to the practice, "honey, it don't signify".

The conclusion of my book *Princess Di — the National Dish*, written in late 1982, was that Diana was destined to be the disastrous icon of the '80s. I don't think I was wrong. On the one hand, the issue of her virginity put women right back in the centre of male ownership wrangles. The Chief of the Tribe, the King, could not be seen to possess a lesser man's cast-off, or what would that say about their collective male pride and standing in the eyes of the world.

On the other hand, her appearance and the emphasis on her weight put pressure right back on women once again to Look Right. To strive to achieve the ideal Size Ten. For ten years, feminists had been arguing that a woman should not be judged merely by the way she looked, particularly when that look depended on artifice and self-inflicted torture. Dieting, as a legitimate and desirable occupation, had just begun to give way to notions of healthy and sensible eating when Diana came along and blew it all out of the window again. It clearly pointed up the impossible demands being made of young women. Diana was praised for her desirable "slimness" and "model girl" figure and then made to suffer the "has Di got killer anorexia slimmers' disease?" treatment.

The demands of polar opposites is the most common dilemma for women: the "good" girl is the one who is desirable for the purposes of marriage; on the other hand, the "bad" girl is the one the boys go for and "good" girls who stay that way apparently don't get asked out a second time. How does a girl win? As time went by, Diana further compounded the contradictions by

Like the original Virgin Mother, Diana really has been an impossible act to follow.

seemingly managing the impossible and incorporating the images of Virgin and Mother in the one perfect Size Ten body.

Like the original Virgin Mother, she really has been an impossible act to follow.

At this point I think it's worth considering where we get our roles of perfect images and ideal appearance. Advertising is the most pervasive and most influential source of Pictures of Women. None of us can go through a day without seeing, subliminally or otherwise, exactly how we are supposed to look. That some women know and understand the problems of these images doesn't seem to help break their power. Not least because many ads have now taken on the superficial trappings of feminism and neatly turned them around.

So increasingly we have images of apparently independent, even aggressive, young women who, nevertheless, on careful examination, look, and thus indicate, just the opposite. And that is: my aggression is only a titillating obstacle for the observer to overcome and my pout and stance actually mean I am available for sex and really telling the
observer of that availability, there are constant subtle reminders that, as ever, when girls say “no” they really mean “yes”.

And, of course, the girls in the ads are always always always slim to the point of androgyny and definitely not women with breasts, hips, thighs, autonomy and demands.

Princess Diana is an advertising image come to life. She is also a fashion page image come to life. That she is the mother of two children has not destroyed this. She is somehow above the sweat and toil of human undertakings — like sex for instance.

The furore that erupted when pictures of her, heavily pregnant and in a bikini, were splashed across the tabloids was actually not much to do with bad taste and an invasion of privacy (who on Fleet Street has ever cared a hoot for taste and privacy!) but was actually all about the horridly revealed evidence of her womanliness and impending motherhood. Any pregnant woman will know how people, men in particular, shy away from the great big fruitful belly. It is an awesome and fearful thing.

In 1977, Dame Edna Everage said to a reporter from the British Gay News that she felt the only difference between him and her was that although they both came from the same place originally, he was terrified of ever getting anywhere near it again.

This is neither a flippant nor a homophobic statement. It sums up the actual state of mind of many gay (and heterosexual) men and it is rarely, if ever, acknowledged.

One of the problems for feminist activists in the '70s, and for lesbian feminists, was, I think, that although we all knew and privately talked about the fact of gay hostility to women (and frequently, downright hatred of women) it was never taken up as an issue in any way for fear of appearing to be anti-gay in a social climate where such a possibility would be immediately seized upon by those who were anti-gay. Consequently, those gay men who are woman-haters have somehow always been granted the right to be that way. And heterosexual men have never had to think about it anyway, it really has always been their birthright.

And it should be remembered that Peter Sutcliffe was not a weird, freaky monster. Everyone who knew him said he was an ordinary sort of guy. Of course, it did come out that it was really his wife Sonia who was the catalyst for his rampage. It was really her fault. This may sound familiar.

Which brings us back to images of ourselves, and Diana and Sarah. Because they take their cues and clues from the same sources, just like us, but unlike us, the results aren’t made public to millions of people. In the main, public imagery of women is created, as I’ve said, by men. The briefest examination of those images will tell you that they are the creations of people who don’t like women very much. In reality, women are human beings who do not look like adolescent boys unless they’re of the tiny percentage whose bodies can be starved into submission — like Diana and the archetypal girl-boy, Twiggy. And they’re the tiny group of women who become fashion models and impose their bodies on the rest of us.

This image entirely denies full breasts, swelling hips, soft flesh, motherhood and thus, by association,
the hidden horrors that go with them: menstrual blood for instance, and the thing that the ABC will tell you is the most shocking, disgusting and vile word in the English language, the cunt. The fact that “cunt” is still the most derogatory and most viciously used swear word in our society is significant.

Feminist has also become almost a swear word. It’s definitely unfashionable right now, a bit like wearing flares.

Backlash, prefigured by the rise and rise of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and the New Right, has been upon us for some time and is growing in strength. Feminism has always had to contend with the “bra-burning women’s libber” or “smelly screeching lezzos” phraseology of the daily press. Derision Theology is a traditional method of preventing any new idea being taken seriously and is very effective. Unfortunately, the left isn’t too good at it — “Funk Thatcher” is proof of that. Then there’s the inside attack, unwitting or otherwise, which is invariably the most difficult to fend off. The most damaging knock at feminism that has occurred in recent years is also symptomatic of the reactionary times.

About three years ago, Chatto & Windus published a collection of women poets which was subtitled “post-feminist”. I think it was the first time that term was used. It has since entered the language as “post-feminism” has been taken quite seriously and is very effective. Unfortunately, the left isn’t too good at it — “Funk Thatcher” is proof of that. Then there’s the inside attack, unwitting or otherwise, which is invariably the most difficult to fend off. The most damaging knock at feminism that has occurred in recent years is also symptomatic of the reactionary times.

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Diana has actually taken the line of possible attainment, that is, where an ordinary woman strives for the unreal images of fashion/tv/movies, Diana has taken the boundaries of possibility right into fantasy land. She is indistinguishable from Sue Ellen Ewing or Krystle Carrington, except that she’s almost 30 years younger.

Sarah brought all that right back to earth again. As the papers were keen to tell us, she had a big bum, a bosom, ample thighs, was a bit of a plumpo and — ye gods — she had a past.

A past is Fleet Street’s euphemism for a busted hymen, of course. They didn’t exactly say she was a good-time gawdaboo foxy, but they did list all her lovers in minute detail. All three of them. At 27 she could be said to have given promiscuity a bad name. Nevertheless, as it turned out, her long-gone virginity didn’t matter half as much as her shape and her clothes — the way she looked. These became front-page national concerns in Britain, and also sent the fashion editors of women’s magazines scuttling for the archives to dust off the images of the ’50s, which was the last time women looked remotely like the real thing. Remote is probably the word, though, because gut-crushing girdles, mandatory 19-inch waists, cantilevered padded bras, pencil skirts and winklepicker stiletto-heeled shoes immediately cancelled out any truly threatening femininity.

Like Diana, only a few years before, Sarah had to endure endless public discussions of how to improve the way she looked — not dissimilar to how millions of young western women are treated by this society, except that her ordeal involved thousands of tons of newsprint and hours of television pandering. So, although at first it looked like Sarah was going to go her own way, be her own woman, thumb her nose at the image makers, kick up her heels at popular opinion and so on, it was perhaps inevitable that we would open the papers one morning to find ... The Sarah Ferguson Diet. You too can be like Fergie and trim away those unwanted inches.

Unwanted by whom? She had obviously been happy with her inches. Andrew had obviously been happy with them too. So who didn’t want her inches? At the same time, Linda Koslowski was undergoing trial by camera when she revealed a dimpled bum in Crocodile Dundee. It seems that cellulite — whatever that is — is the most offensive bodily characteristic a woman can display in public. I don’t know any man who prefers the skeletal androgyne to a woman who looks womanly (with breasts, thighs, hips, bum, curves, cellulite and all). Whenever there is a magazine survey of ordinary Joes they all say they like a cuddly womanly woman, that women feel nice and that the skinny minny boy-girl isn’t their ideal at all.

In other words, it’s Sarah who is closer to Everywoman, not Diana, who is a constructed icon, an image.

So what are the forces at work that compel a Sarah and millions like her to starve themselves into someone’s idea of acceptable appearance? By starving, I mean dieting. I’m continually amazed at
Along with the rise of the New Right is a resurgence in the idea that it is OK again to be a man.
STRIKING A CHORD:
Rock and Politics in the
Eighties

David Rowe

Rock music, like space, is big. Very big. It has a huge audience, is extremely culturally pervasive and is serviced by a vast leisure industry. Like that other great arena of popular culture, sport, rock has provoked controversy over the relationship between commerce and culture.

Put simply, there are two polarised positions on rock. At one end of the spectrum of opinion, rock is viewed as dissenting, liberatory and the authentic voice of contemporary youth. At the other end, it is regarded as being passive, repressive and the artificial product of scheming capitalists. In between is a chaotic swirl of intermediate positions which I will attempt to negotiate. In this article I will focus on three current issues in rock concerning Live Aid, tobacco (and other) sponsorship and Red Wedge’s political mobilisation of young people.

First, however, a brief background. Rock is a child of the ‘sixties. It is the product of a meeting between the musical forms which had been developed in the Fifties with the sensibilities which emerged within post-war “baby boom” youth. Rock was the generation gap, the anti-war movement, the sex and drugs push into music. Alternately, it advocated direct political protest and the indirect challenge of hedonism — “turn on, tune in, drop out”. By the early ‘seventies, things had changed. While rock ideology nominally retained its outsider status, the demise of both rock hippiedom and full employment led to a period of “me generation” introspection and a concentration on musical and technological virtuosity.

Until punk came along. Once again, rock was avowedly subversive, shocking and overtly political. Safety pins, bondage gear, swastikas, torn clothing, spiky haircuts, swearing on TV, and songs of urban deprivation all caused a new moral panic. But punk also joined the roll of faded rock styles and was replaced in public consciousness by fads and fashions variously described as “new wave”, “new romanticism” and “new pop”. Here there was an emphasis on smart
clothes and “easy listening” music. It appeared that rock had again been co-opted by the industry. However, the burst of idealism which accompanied Live Aid and some forceful expressions of leftist sentiments in rock music suggest that the pendulum is swinging back to a less apolitical, amoral and acquisitive rock. But these signs may be only mirages or smoke-screen. We can properly assess them only by looking beyond conventional rock hype and, in the process, establish some of the ways in which rock is simultaneously a product of the wider society and an important influence on the shape of that society.

It is now almost two years since a global audience of around 1.5 billion people from over 100 countries (almost twice the 1984 L.A. Olympics audience) watched Mick Jagger, Bob Dylan, Madonna, David Bowie, Paul McCartney, Sting, etc. all perform on behalf of Live Aid, raising over US$40 million in the process for African famine relief. “Saint Bob” Geldof, the organiser, is now a secular Sir Bob, while various documentaries and news reports have shown relief getting to some needy areas and struggling to reach others, crops regenerating after rain, and also continued famine in war-ravaged northern Sudan. Aid for Africa has been a mixture of success and failure — as we would expect — and reactions to it have been similarly varied. Responses to it tend to have fallen into two categories. First, there is the celebration of the whole affair, in particular, its communality and philanthropy. When a hard-nosed rock entrepreneur like Bill Graham describes Live Aid as the rock music industry’s “finest hour. By far” and a razor-penned critic like Julie Burchill acts as a self-confessed “unpaid publicist for Mr. Geldof”, then the forces in favour of Live Aid are considerable indeed. Most newspaper coverage was unabashedly well disposed towards Live Aid, with an oft-expressed pleasant surprise that the egoistic rock music industry had done something altruistic for a change.

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sixteen years that separate the two events. While Woodstock epitomised hippiedom — love, peace and drugs in a large paddock in New York State — Live Aid reflected post-hippie pragmatism, a self-contained fundraising event in Philadelphia and London linked by satellite technology. Marshall McLuhan would have relished the contrast between a happening (Woodstock) which television reported on from the

outside, and a phenomenon (Live Aid) which was principally a televised event in which the members of the live audience were screen extras rather than protagonists. If we compare like more strictly with like, the concerts for Bangladesh in 1971 set up by George Harrison were regarded by the organisers of Live Aid as points to how not to run a relief campaign. Where the former was well meaning but poorly administered, the latter was businesslike and tightly organised. George Harrison’s guru was no match for Bob Geldof’s millionaire rock promoter, Harvey Goldsmith, in bringing home the charity bacon.

Live Aid revealed two major qualities of contemporary rock culture. First, the sheer size of its constituency indicates that, when focussed, it is a very potent social force. Second, in the ‘eighties, it is apparent that rock is rather more respectable than in previous decades and is much less the voice of a generation or movement than a fragmented soundtrack of contemporary events. By way of example, it is clear that The Who’s “My Generation” expressed the generalised feelings of ‘sixties youth. In the late seventies, the punk band Generation X sang “Your Generation” as a riposte to what it saw as the indulgence of boring old hippie farts. After Live Aid’s success in tapping into a diverse audience with a considerable age span, the appropriate song might be “Whose Generation?”

Yet it would be misleading to deny that overt, youth-focused dissent has disappeared completely from the face of rock. But, again, it is much more systematic and hard-headed than in the flower-power era which is conventionally held to be the high point of rock’s social impact. It has coalesced around a recent movement in Britain called Red Wedge, although it must be acknowledged that there are some obvious local predecessors — Rock Against Racism, for example, or Midnight Oil’s involvement (along with other bands) in People for Nuclear Disarmament. Red Wedge is distinctive, however, because it is an organised attempt to help elect a political party. This is the British
Labour Party and it follows that we have to be cautious about the portability of the phenomenon to Australia which does not, as yet, have a radical right-wing government. Yet there are obvious parallels in the conditions faced by youth in both countries. High youth unemployment, lower youth wages, work-for-the-dole schemes, tertiary fees, and so on are all realities or pressing prospects.

Britain, with a youth unemployment rate approaching 30 percent and an uncompromisingly reactionary government, was ripe to produce Red Wedge in late 1985. Established rock artists such as Paul Weller, Billy Bragg, Sade, the Smiths and Lloyd Cole and the Commotions have banded together with the express purpose of ousting Thatcherism and installing a Labour government in Britain. The campaign was mounted through a series of concerts rather than through conventional rallies, with literature discreetly distributed and occasional encouragement from the stage in the form of “throwaway” comments or politically informed songs, such as Billy Bragg’s “Between the Wars” or Style Council’s “Walls Come Tumbling Down”. The emphasis is on the punk era notion of “serious fun”, but with a clearer purpose — a Labour victory in the next election.

The relationship between Red Wedge and the British Labour Party is a little ambiguous. The black soul singer Junior Giscombe describes Red Wedge as being “for, but not of, the Labour Party”. Initial funds came from the Labour Party and Labour office facilities have been used, but Red Wedge hopes to become financially autonomous. They are “mutually friendly societies” but Red Wedge is anxious not to be seen as simply an arm of the Labour Party and, in particular, PR for its leader Neil Kinnock. Rather, it sees itself as a broad alliance which is favourable but not beholden to the Labour Party, seeking influence by retaining the right to be critical. The tension between disciplined party politics and free-wheeling youth pressure group politics is apparent, for example, in Red Wedge’s uneasiness about the rooting out of Trotskyite Militant members of the Labour Party.

Now that some information has been provided about Red Wedge, we may attempt to draw some conclusions about its emergence. There is, first, the question of what kind of phenomenon it is. Like Live Aid, it has critics on both left and right. Nick Robinson of the Young Conservatives sees Red Wedge as “just an attempt by Neil Kinnock to present the Labour Party Youth Section without the influence of Militant which dominates the LPYS”. This is not a surprising position, coming as it does from a representative of the party that Red Wedge has sworn to eject from office.

But there has also been criticism from the “hard” left. X. Moore of the Socialist Workers Party and the Redskins band has argued that, while Red Wedge has been effective in mobilising musicians “it’s hamstrung to uncritical support of Neil Kinnock, it can’t rock the boat, it can’t criticise”, while Julie Burchill has argued that popular music is incapable of being effective in any orthodox political way: “The Young must learn to take their politics straight, like adults, and not like fidgety children who must be cajoled into thinking by concerts and singalongs ...” In addition to such criticisms is the suggestion that those young people who attend Red Wedge events are there to see their favourite rock stars and listen to music, and that the intended “message” goes through or past their ears. However effective Red Wedge may be in its aims, it is transparently the product of the predicament of youth in contemporary British society. Yet do the same conditions pertain to Australia and can we expect a similar movement here?

In one obvious respect circumstances differ in Australia where the memory of a (conventional rather than radical) conservative government still remains and a Labor government has won the last two elections. However, the current economic crisis and the shift to the right of the Labor government is fashioning a comparable state of affairs. And the arguments used by Red Wedge to support Labour in Britain are the same as those applied by many young people to the Australian Labor Party — they’re the best of a bad bunch. Yet it is doubtful whether such a movement would be whether such a movement here would be avowedly socialist like Red Wedge, given the exaggerated stigma attached to the term in Australia. This is not to argue that intense political debates do not arise here in association with rock music. The current dispute over tobacco sponsorship of rock gigs is testimony to rock’s political potential.

In the middle of 1985, the tobacco industry (in the shape of Philip Morris’ “Peter Jackson” brand) made a major move into Australian rock. The Sydney-based Peter Jackson Rock Circuit functioned as an exercise in market testing, with the ultimate aim of having a national rock gig network bearing the logo “The Peter Jackson Rock Circuit Presents ...”. Currently, names such as Electric Pandas, the Allnites, the Party Boys, the Saints, Machinations and Boom Crash Opera have followed that of Peter Jackson. The tobacco company undertakes to
few years now, while Marlboro (another Philip Morris brand) has sponsored acts overseas. With arch-corporate competitor Amatil (Benson and Hedges) vying for the familiar sport and high art outlets, the rock music audience is an appealing target group. All that disposable income and pleasure-seeking should amount to a good return on the $100,000 or so invested to buy goodwill through association. This kind of underwrite the cost of publicity, promotion and advertising of selected rock gigs in return for a brand-name check on posters which prominently feature open cigarette packets inviting (wordlessly) the consumer to taste and try.

Perhaps the only surprising thing about this development is that it took the tobacco companies in Australia so long to stumble onto the idea. After all, Pepsi Cola have been doing it for a rationalisation of the entertainment industry is commonplace, and it is not really a major jump from the multinational corporate record companies such as RCA, CBS, and EMI (who have signed up most of the prominent Australian rock bands) to the other conglomerates who are looking for a piece of the youth market action. The tobacco companies, with their restricted advertising opportunities, are particularly keen to spread brand awareness through new channels.

These manoeuvres have not, however, gone unchallenged. It is symptomatic of rock in the 'eighties that for every move by big business to colonise it there is resistance to such intrusion. Tobacco sponsorship of gigs was criticised in full-page advertisements by bands such as Hoodoo Gurus, Hunters and Collectors, and Midnight Oil who cried "Hands off!", while organisations such as the Australian College of Physicians, and individuals like Gordon Chater, Dick Smith and Lisa Forrest exclaimed "Hands up!" A rival circuit was set up by Quit for Life, promoting "The Big Gigs" by bands such as Spy v Spy who, in turn, thank Quit for Life for giving us freedom of choice of where and how we want to play.

However, the financial insecurity common to many rock bands blurs the apparently stark choice between circuits. For example, Verity Truman of Redgum, a signatory to the "Hands off!" letter opposing tobacco sponsorship, has written of the "agency/live venue scam" which "puts bands in the invidious position of choosing not where to work, but whether or not to work at all". Also, Vince Lovegrove, the manager of another signatory, The Divinyls, further highlights the complexity of the issue by pointing out that they "do not support, in any way whatsoever, the Right to Life Organisation [sic] nor any lobby movement to remove the Peter Jackson Company from any form of sponsorship of the rock industry". This latter response, with
its confusing encouragement of corporate sponsorship and simultaneous tirade against "attempted corporate monopolistic sponsorship which dictates who will perform where", is representative of the predicament of mid-eighties rock. The need to take care of business leads to tensions between idealism and pragmatism, autonomy and dependence, obscurity and ambition. There is no space outside of a narrow range of market choices in which to shelter. In the Darwinian world of contemporary rock, there are many more bands than smokers who Quit for Life.

Currently, names such as Electric Pandas, the Allniters, the Party Boys, the Saints, Machinations and Boom Crash Opera have followed that of Peter Jackson.

Corporate sponsorship also made considerable inroads into rock culture with the Australian Made tour over the recent New Year period. The multinational Mobil Oil Australia Limited, Ansett and the ANZ banking group sponsored the Australia-wide tour by acts like INXS and Jimmy Barnes. The essentially commercial nature of their involvement was carefully camouflaged through the shrewd utilisation of a community program and the exploitation of Australian nationalism. Thus, Mobil's "Streetbeat" road safety campaign which was heavily promoted during the tour gave to their involvement a "charitable" quality which recalled the altruism of Live Aid. This was rock for the common good — which also coincided, happily, with the raising of half million dollar loss for the common good — which also coincided, happily, with the raising of money-making activities. Rock is always likely to throw up a punk culture or a Red Wedge which challenges rationalised entertainment. For, while many rock movements either begin or end in an orgy of cynical commercialism, their uses and meanings can never be easily confined or predicted.

REFERENCES

5. One Australian working for Red Wedge says in The National Times article: "In Australia if you had the word 'socialist' attached to a group like this, it would go down the tube."

DAVID ROWE teaches media and cultural studies at Newcastle CAE.
ALL QUIET ON THE HOME FRONT? The Contradictions of Family Life

Rebecca Albury

The New Right's economic and industrial policies have attracted far more attention in the Australian media than their social and family policies. Lower taxes will, however, require lower state expenditure on social welfare programs. The burden of the "reduced" state expenditure on welfare will fall on people with lower incomes. Women, Aboriginal people, recent migrants, people with disabilities, and what can be called multiple minority groups, will be hardest hit as the "family" is asked to replace the state as the chief source of welfare.

Following the example of conservative governments overseas, Australian politicians have begun to use the slogan "community care" as the code for welfare cuts. The family is the institution that has absorbed the shocks of these cuts as real wages fall, the social wage is cut and unemployment continues at a high level. In December 1986, the Liberal Party announced its family policy with loud concern for single-income, two-parent families. The Nationals have always promoted themselves as the party of family and nation. Joh Bjelke-Petersen combines a patriarchal style with sentimental appeals to the value of the family for the nation. Labor has been quick to assert family values, especially in NSW where Premier Unsworth hopes that a return to the values of the 1950s will solve a multitude of social problems. He remembers them as family-centred; others remember other aspects of the
'50s — racism, the cold war, the invisibility and isolation of women, illegal abortion, hard-to-get contraception, the repression of homosexuals, and the general suppression of non-conformity. The left needs to mount a coherent challenge to the sentimental appeal to the family which is being used to justify a range of service cuts.

The debate about the social role of the family is an old one, given new focus by the feminist analysis of the oppression of women. Their challenge to the sexual division of labour in the household as the “cornerstone of society” was viewed by many as an attack on the collectivist values of family life and as a support for the worst excesses of economic individualism in the market. Since few social critics seem to imagine that production relations can be changed, they fear that changes in family relations will destroy the values of personal loyalty, mutual sharing, spontaneous emotion and nurturance.

Despite the changing material conditions of family life — married women in the workforce, fathers assuming some domestic responsibilities, reliable fertility control, increasing divorce rates — the left has not developed an analysis with sufficient power to challenge the call to save the family and thus civilisation as we know it. Traditional left (particularly marxist) theory and activism have accepted the same division of life into the separate spheres of public and private as the bourgeois liberalism that it opposes.

When socialists attacked the economic and public politics of capitalism they pulled back from an equally strong challenge to the power relations of sex and age in private life. In Australia, the call to “save the family” is not yet as shrill as in the United States, nor used as blatantly to cut social services as in the United Kingdom, but it exists. Both Labor and non-Labor politicians and parties assert the importance of the family in ways that are socially conservative.

The sexual division of labour in the “ideal” family makes the power relations in ordinary families seem “natural” and hence outside the realm of political struggle. Yet as closer look at the reality of family life reveals many contradictions, not only between the ideal and the lived experience, but between the ideal and the conditions which are supposed to make it possible. It is through an exploration of the contradictions that the power of the family as an ideological weapon in class struggle is most clearly revealed. Further consideration of the contradictions can form the basis of the analysis needed to confront the call to “save the family” with an acceptable range of ways to live that support human relationships without supporting capitalist or patriarchal power relations.

There are at least six separate contradictions which combine in various ways in individual lives:

* The “ideal” family is assumed to be the goal or experience of everyone, but this is demonstrably not the case.
* The family is the site of both the protection and the oppression of individuals.
* Private life is supposed to enhance individuality, but it is structured to produce conformity.
* Parenthood is both fulfilling and limiting.
* In liberal democratic states all citizens are free, but male homosexuals and women, whether straight or lesbian, are not to exercise that freedom with their bodies.
* The family is in the realm of private life yet the state intervenes regularly to maintain a particular family form.

Ideologues of the family have used the positive values expressed in the first half of these contradictions to enforce the power relations revealed by the second half. At the same time, they use a variety of social controls, including repressive morality, to deny the existence of any contradiction at all. Activists and writers within the left and sexual liberation movements have tended to emphasise the negative half of the statements and ignore the positive half. Meanwhile, whoever is in government tries to assert the values of the first half while developing policies to cope with the worst abuses of the second half.

One problem with the development of policies to deal with families is the lack of a precise definition of “family”. It is used in political speeches more for emotional effect than with a specific meaning (Indeed, the very vagueness of definition is the reason for the strength of “family” as a symbol.) It can be used to represent a set of social relationships based on biology which seem to locate an individual in society, to form the foundation of personal identity. It is a concept that is both abstract and concrete, “the” family and “my” family. In these various contradictions
the meaning of the concept slips between those two poles of meaning. The inability of individuals to live the ideal is blamed on the individuals by the right and on the ideal by the left. Both are partially correct, both are wrong.

Individuals do not live up to the ideal because they cannot; lived experience is not abstract, but particular, continually reconstructed by individual desire; social structures that order relations of race, class and gender; accidents of health and illness; personal ties of love and duty. The ideal, while impossible, is nevertheless a widely recognised expression of the human desire for intimacy, reliable support, a sense of belonging in the world, the opportunity for power and control in some aspect of life, the possibility of reciprocal relationships. Political rhetoric depends on the way meaning can slip from one level to another, but political analysis should not.

In contrast to the alienation of industrial production relations, the family has long been recognised as a reliable support for individual people, but with different effects on women and men. The family as a haven from the harsher aspects of the workforce for men relies on the domestic labour of women. The increased visibility of women in the paid workforce is making this division of labour untenable. For a variety of reasons, few women, even those with young children, remain totally outside the paid workforce for a significant amount of time.

Part-time and casual work fulfil needs for money and adult company and, at the same time, the demand that family life be conducted as if women are at home the entire time. Such work also maintains the other important aspect of the prevailing ideology of the family — it allows the woman to make less money than the man. The woman and children then remain financially dependent on the man, and he can use the greater financial contribution to justify a lesser contribution to domestic labour.

In the mother-at-home-father-at-work model of family life, women and men are held together by the apparently complementary roles they play. The woman provides the pleasant environment for the children and man. It is her skill at mothering which produces well-socialised, hard-working citizens. The model does not include the needs of the mother for adult companionship and ongoing emotional support. While men are not expected to either provide that support for women or to relinquish their needs for the companionship of other adults when they become fathers, they are under considerable pressure to be "good providers". One piece of popular “wisdom” these days accounts for the high rate of marriage breakdown as a result of the inability of young married couples to manage the financial obligations implied by the model of family life that depends on male breadwinning and female emotional support. It seems as if the oppressive demands of the model are contrary to the conditions necessary for the protection of individuals.

The expression of individuality in private life is the repeated message of advertising. The exclusion of government or other outside forces from the family home is a compelling demand of the political right. The experience of sexuality produces the tension between demands for privacy and individual self-expression and the expectations of conformity to a recognised social pattern more acutely than most other aspects of human life.

Sexuality is held out as the most individual expression of the self by a variety of popular commentators in diverse media. Still, the practices that can be loosely categorised as procreative heterosexuality remain the basis for the model of acceptable sexuality. Married or committed, adult, child-rearing, monogamous, male-female couples engage in sexual activity with the goal of male ejaculation with his penis enclosed in her (preferably orgasmic) vagina.

While few outside the socially conservative part of the political right require all of these characteristics for acceptable sex, elements remain in the thinking of many people. Consider the writing about AIDS and other STDs that suggests monogamy as the only reliable form of "safe sex" and implies that illness is in some way deserved. Think of the failure of imagination of those who wonder how lesbians "do it". Then there is the repeated advice which suggests that young people in the mid-teens are always "too vulnerable" for intercourse, that abortion is "selfish", that oral or manual sex is either foreplay (before the "real thing"), or to "finish her off" after the man's orgasm.

While the definitions of acceptable sexual practices narrow the range of possible forms of self expression, so does the social organisation of daily life. A couple
living in a small suburban house with young children or an ageing parent has little time or privacy for extended sexual exploration. Teenagers living with their parents are often unable to have their sexual experiences at home in their own beds: they may not have their own rooms, so even masturbation may be limited. The patterns of work and transport to work further reduce an individual's opportunity (and energy) for sexual activities. Personal happiness and self-discovery are held out as the rewards of private, as opposed to public, life but the conditions of personal experience are often socially rather than individually determined.

The left has not developed an analysis with sufficient power to challenge the call to save the family and thus civilisation as we know it...

Given the current organisation of economic and political activity, there are few opportunities for adults to be responsible for the supervision of an exciting project. Being a parent is a project which seems open to all. There is real pleasure in watching a child grow; the growth is testimony to the success of the parent in providing for the needs of the child. Many experts have seized on these pleasures and on the uncertainty of many parents about the needs of children to set up models for "proper" parenting. It is not only the moral right which provides these models; the state and assorted welfare and health experts are deeply implicated in the social structuring of parenthood.

The foundations of these various models are the same, though those of progressive welfare workers usually admit of more variations. The basis is a father at work and a mother at home, an individual family home, a collection of consumer durables in each house, and the sacrifice of certain parental dreams and ambitions for the sake of the children. The model then takes on a moral imperative with the suggestion that the only "good"parent is the one who conforms to the particulars of the current variation on the basic model, thus limiting further the lives of people caring for dependent children.

Some limitations of parenthood are immediately clear — less time and money for personal use, a day patterned by the needs of the child — and most people accept them as part of parenting. But other limitations fall unequally on women and men. The ideology of motherhood seems to require maternal, not parental, responsibility for every action of the child from toilet training to drug use. Women often feel they must accept the role of social police imposed by some experts; it may also be the only way they can exercise social power. Fathers may find that their duty to provide financial support is in conflict with the risks involved in changing their working conditions, whether by changing jobs or by taking industrial action. Women in paid work face similar conflicts and the continued burden imposed by the ideology of motherhood.

In addition, political activity, particularly radical activity, becomes more difficult for women and men when they have children. Not only are there child care and transport problems, but the popular notions of "good parenthood" work against active political participation. The mother is not so likely to be leading demonstrations for abortion services or gay rights; the charge of "bad mother" could follow. The father might be able to spend several nights a week at meetings; it is less likely that she could. Far too many people on the left share aspects of this definition of parenthood that precludes radical political activism, and far too few develop analyses or campaigns that address the experience of adults as mothers and fathers as well as workers.

One of the basic tenets of liberal democracy is that the individual possesses his body in the same way he possesses property. The use of "he" is intentional because women do not have possession of their bodies under any legal code in Australia. Abortion is a crime except in South Australia where, by law, two doctors must certify the necessity of the operation. The practice is somewhat different. Contraceptives cannot be openly advertised in most states. This seems to be changing with the rehabilitation of the condom as a public health measure. (Spermicides also seem to offer some protection against sexually transmitted diseases — maybe they will be rehabilitated, too.) Poor women are still pressured to undergo sterilisation, regardless of their desire for children.

This repression of women is justified by the moral right on the grounds that it saves the family. It "saves" the family by compulsion, by reinforcing male authority over women, whether by husbands, fathers, or the male-dominated medical profession. In recent years, the Right to Life Movement has used the notion of democratic rights to argue for the preservation of every foetus with little regard for the consequences for the pregnant woman. It is instructive to observe the politics which continue to deny women possession of their bodies.

Individuals do not live up to the ideal because they cannot: lived experience is not abstract, but particular, continuously reconstructed by individual desire.

Homosexual men are likewise denied the right to determine their sexual practices in most states of Australia. The moral right argues that legalised homosexuality is also a threat to the family. The family would seem to be a very fragile "cornerstone" if it is put at risk when some men do not form reproductive sexual partnerships. The AIDS scare has served to justify attacks on gay men in the name of "public health" as well as "morality". The melodramatic representations of the "threat" locate gay men outside of families, but capable of infecting them. This denies the obvious fact that men who
participate in homosexual acts are sons and brothers and may also be husbands and fathers. The location of the “threat” outside the family allows the ideal of family life to remain unexamined.

The right, both old and new, is certain that the family has important rights and duties: personal care of infants and children, sex education of young people, care for disabled people, protection of women, among other things. The more liberal vision of the family sees it as a place for individual expression and supportive care. Meanwhile, the government policies reveal an interest in enforcing a particular family form through the distribution of welfare benefits.

Social Security officers spend a lot of time checking on recipients’ domestic arrangements, not just their financial status. Do two old age pensioners of the opposite sex live together and each receive a “single” pension? Does a supporting mother have a regular male lover? Is an unemployed woman married? The policies which provide answers to these questions do not recognise the principle of financial independence for women, and thus support the ideology of female dependence in a maleheaded family. Homosexuals pose a problem because there is no ideology to say who in a relationship should be dependent and who should pay.

There has been a tendency to reduce ‘personal politics’ to a form of dogmatic and sometimes sectarian ‘alternative lifestyles’.

The regulation of relations between parents and children is similarly informed by familial ideology. It is assumed that parents financially support children. Young girls can be institutionalised for being “at risk”, “in moral danger” or “uncontrollable” (sexually active), but welfare workers sometimes resist intervening in cases of incest because it might “break up the family”. Campaigns against domestic violence still encounter resistance because of the supposed privacy of the family. Dramatic cases of child abuse which seem isolated and deviant are front-page news for a few days while years of lesser abuse continues unnoticed.

In dramatic cases, state intervention can be used to separate parents and children, but services that might reduce the intensity of relations between parents and children before the need for such total intervention are subject to funding cuts. Child care, casual care for disabled children, homecare, community health services, housing and public transport are among the array of underfunded services. The ideology of the ideal, capable and caring family is behind the assumption that these services can be provided by families or bought in the private sector during times of financial stringency.

There is no declared family policy in Australia, but a vision of the family does inform government policy and practices. In this vision, individuals are responsible for the health and welfare of themselves and their dependents. It will be difficult to mount an effective challenge to policies that attribute poverty and ill-health to moral failure because those most in need will not have the resources to organise a political campaign either. A political focus on the structural relations in society which lead to personal problems often means that the immediate needs of individuals become secondary in campaigns to change the social structure.

During the late ’60s and early ’70s, the Women’s Liberation Movement used the slogan “the personal is political” to develop a politics that opened the power relations of personal life to public scrutiny. Feminist activists used what they discovered about their personal but common experiences to challenge the social structure. A range of issues have been taken up by mainstream political parties as a result of that analysis — rape, domestic violence, women’s health and sexual harassment, for example. Many politicians and policymakers have redefined the issues into individual failures or bad actions instead of the logical outcome of recognised social inequalities between men and women. Even as some of the issues have been addressed the more radical potential of the slogan has been diluted.

... an overt political practice that fits between the level of abstraction in which individual pain disappears, and the level of gossip that traffics in that pain.

At the same time, there has been a tendency to reduce “personal politics” to a form of dogmatic and sometimes sectarian “alternative lifestyles”. The everyday life of compromises and tensions lived by most people on the left has disappeared from analysis except in the agonised sharing of confidences and the whisper of constant gossip. The continuing development of a fragile network of support among those who do not live “ideal” family lives is overlooked and thus underestimated. The links of that network, ties of love and duty, have been formed during a shared past of political and social activity.

They are chosen social relationships, not accidental biological ones. Of course, they are overburdened with the vocabulary of idealised family relationships: the “sisterhood” of the women’s movement; the “brotherhood” of the labour movement; the notion of family in shared households. There does not seem to be another vocabulary for expressing close, reliable friendship, but the analogy with kinship poses some problems in its unconscious reversion to the assertion of the ideological family in the new relationships.

A range of human needs and desires is expressed in domestic life. The knowledge of a political analysis of domestic social relations does not eliminate those emotional needs and desires any more than an analysis of the exploitations of capitalism does not eliminate material needs. It will be
hard work to develop a politics that seeks to meet emotional as well as material needs, but also recognises the diversity of those needs. It may take a re-examination of the notion of “material” to include, or at least not automatically exclude, emotions. Certainly, it will mean the development of an overt political practice that fits between the level of abstraction in which individual pain disappears, and the level of gossip that traffics in that pain.

One tool that already exists for this politics is the process of consciousness-raising in which people recount their personal lives in an attempt to understand similarities and differences of experience. Obviously, there is the danger that the exercise will not be transformed into political action. The act of self-revelation, however, may be the only way to discover the issues for further action. Before group discussions, many women felt alone and isolated by their experiences of rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, abortion and hatred of their bodies. The articulation of similar experiences and feelings by many women transformed individual pain into some of the central campaigns of the Women’s Liberation Movement.

Self-revelation itself will be more difficult today than it was fifteen years ago because it has become so identified with various “personal growth” programs and a disavowal of politics. Yet, some level of self-revelation will be necessary to counter the conservative politics based on an “ideal” biological family. It will be necessary to refute the insulting and oppressive assumption that everyone shares the same goals and experiences regardless of class, ethnic origin, gender, age or health. It will also be necessary to demonstrate that politics is shaped by, and transforms, personal experience. Most importantly, self-revelation will be necessary to examine the contradictions of personal life as a step towards their resolution.

Another potential tool for the development of a left politics of the personal is the self-help group. There are many groups, especially around health problems, in which members mutually offer support, promote public education and sometimes engage in overt political activity. Professional helpers too often have their own agendas and are unable to provide for the immediate needs of group members as well as someone who has similar experiences. In self-help groups, meeting the emotional needs of members is a central aim. The danger is, of course, that this can be co-opted by cost-saving bureaucrats or political opportunists in the name of “privatisation” or “deinstitutionalisation”. Whether formal or informal, such groups help to empower people in the times of crisis when family members and institutional helpers fail, and so are worth the political risks.

The Unsworth vision of ‘fifties values cannot remain intact; too much is at stake. That vision is also the other side of the New Right’s economic program. Individuals, families and households cannot bear the burden of welfare cuts, nor can the voluntary welfare sector. The idea that domestic life is separate from economic life must be challenged and politics changed in a way that develops that challenge.

A different vocabulary, more self-revelation, and political groupings based on shared personal experiences seem like an adequate basis for a new politics that recognises the problems that most people face in their lives. I agree that they are small steps, but important. A new vocabulary itself will help us break away from the agenda set by the right by changing the terms of the debate. Self-revelation will demonstrate the diverse and contradictory ways we live our lives. Groups based on shared experience will contribute to a new political agenda that meets people’s needs without imposing a uniform and impossible moral ideal. The personal is still political.

REBECCA ALBURY teaches sociology at Wollongong University.
POL POT'S ALLIES:
The Right in Kampuchea

Ben Kiernan

Last December, in the midst of the "Iran-Contra Affair", the US Congressional Research Service revealed that Washington has given the ousted Pol Pot forces of "Democratic Kampuchea" (or DK, otherwise known as the Khmer Rouge) a massive $85 million in aid since their overthrow by Vietnamese troops in 1979. This secret aid to Pol Pot had always been vigorously denied by US officials. They preferred to emphasise their support for a small rightwing group which they hoped would provide a fig-leaf of respectability for an anti-Vietnamese strategy based on the Khmer Rouge, who murdered or starved to death over a million people when they ruled Kampuchea from 1975 to 1979.

"INSIDE KAMPUCHEA: And Getting out Alive" read the headline in Rupert Murdoch's Australian. The chief-of-staff of the Darwin Northern Territory News, David Nason, had just managed to escape with slight wounds after attempting to enter Vietnamese-occupied Kampuchea from Thailand with a patrol of armed rebels.

The rebels were troops of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), one of the three factions allied in the anti-Vietnamese "Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea", which from exile still represents the country in the United Nations. The other two factions, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge and the followers of Prince Sihanouk, are fairly well known. Most people have probably never heard of the KPNLF, but they had been briefly in the news.

In April 1985, as the campaign to once again provide US arms aid to anti-communist forces in Indochina gathered momentum, the Washington Post categorised the Khmer People's National Liberation Front as "reasonably democratic". The next month, the Post published a plea for military aid to the KPNLF by Congressman Stephen J. Solarz. This was entitled "Help the Democratic
Resistance”. In the *Atlantic* magazine, Stephen J. Morris claimed that, with the Sihanoukists, the KPNLF forces “are the only ones that represent non-totalitarian Cambodian nationalism”. According to Morris, they are “the authentic representatives of Cambodia”, and even “the heroic survivors of the Cambodian holocaust”. The last label apparently applies, in Morris’ mind, only to these allies of the perpetrators of that holocaust. In this context it is obviously worth examining the democratic credentials of the KPNLF, which was founded in 1979 by the onetime Kampuchean Prime Minister, Son Sann.

In late 1979, William Shawcross, Jimmy Carter and many others accused the Vietnamese of committing “subtle genocide” by allegedly starving the Kampuchean people to death. As Shawcross has since admitted, however, “there is, fortunately, no evidence that large numbers of people died of starvation” under the new Vietnamese-installed People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) government led by Heng Samrin. But in areas of continuing Pol Pot control, thousands did perish; it was from these frontier areas that skeletal refugees crossed the Thai border to be filmed by Western television crews.

What is much less well-known is that many people were starved to death in areas under the administration of the newly-formed KPNLF. Like the other anti-Vietnamese forces the KPNLF were fighting to control populations, and they held at least 6,000 Khmer civilians hostage near the Thai border. Because the KPNLF could not feed these people but would not allow them to go elsewhere, nearly 4,000 hostages died of starvation in late 1979.

The Western aid that poured into the Thai-Kampuchean border in late 1979 and 1980 was largely appropriated ... by the Khmer Rouge and the KPNLF.

The KPNLF’s potential as a popular alternative to the [PRK, or Heng Samrin] regime and the Khmer Rouge is, however, still limited. Its social base and social appeal is oriented towards the old functionary/intelligentsia class of Kampuchea, a social group that was small and weak even before 1975, was then physically decimated under the Khmer Rouge in 1975-78, and has been further thinned out by refugee flight since 1979. Although it professes a number of liberal-democratic ideals, in the border camps under KPNLF control there is not even the pretense of democratic political practice. Camp residents are instead ruled by a kind of bureaucratic-military dictatorship, which they complain is arbitrary, corrupt and beset with nepotism and corruption. If more arms were available to it, the KPNLF could with little difficulty further expand its armed forces, perhaps even double or triple them, but without a broadening of its social base and improvement in its political practice, it could not achieve consistent popular expansion.

One year later, a Khmer-speaking French agronomist, François Grunewald, who had spent 17 months working among the refugees on the Thai-Kampuchean border, concluded that the KPNLF still had “no popular base” and that it would “never mobilise the mass of Cambodian peasants behind it”. (However, it had managed to enlist a number of Thai regular troops, who fought, disguised as KPNLF forces, in operations against the Vietnamese inside Kampuchea, according to “certain highly-placed sources in Son Sann’s general staff”, Grunewald reported.)

As for the “political practice” of the KPNLF, it had not improved much since Heder had voiced his doubts the year before. Grunewald recorded instances of KPNLF gangsterism, diversion of aid, and corruption scandals. In 1982, moreover, foreign aid workers in Sakeo camp in Thailand were threatened with death by KPNLF troops if they did not hand over Khmer orphans about to be sent for resettlement in third countries. The Westerners were told to pressure the orphans to join Son Sann’s forces on the border instead.

According to Grunewald, civilian refugees were still being held hostage in KPNLF border camps, “by force if necessary”. In one case, a young pregnant woman planning to go on to Thai-Khoao-i-Dang holding centre (10 miles inside Thailand) was arrested and beaten up until she miscarried, then jailed in the KPNLF prison at Nong Chan and eventually forced to marry a KPNLF soldier. The prison conditions were extremely primitive, especially for Vietnamese refugees held by the KPNLF. Vietnamese refugee women were regularly raped, one woman up to thirteen times on her first day of detention. The Red Cross was “horrified” at the conditions in KPNLF prisons; it took three months of pressure from Amnesty International in 1982 just to get a toilet installed for the women prisoners. But otherwise, Grunewald concluded, “no one decided to put pressure on the KPNLF, even though given its dependence on humanitarian aid, that would be easy ... ”

In October 1982, a KPNLF “regimental commander” was assassinated in an internecine purge. According to the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (5 November 1982), he was shot “in the civilian sector of the KPNLF’s Ban Sa-Ngae camp ... when shooting erupted from the compound of the front’s cadre training school”. This led to the resignation of the KPNLF’s chief-of-staff, Dien Del, who accepted “ultimate responsibility” for the murder. Observers noted
that Del had disapproved of the victim's money-making ventures, including a video cafe in a border camp, where pornographic films were screened three times a day.

In May 1983, the KPNLF set up a guerrilla training school for about 1,200 recruits from the refugee camps. They do not seem to have been very willing recruits, for several hundred defected within weeks. The total number of escapees from the school soon reached 600. As Paul Quinn-Judge of the Far Eastern Economic Review reported (13 October 1983):

Deserters who were picked up by KPNLF authorities are said to have received fairly rough treatment. An order posted in some KPNLF camps later reportedly said the heads of captured deserters had been shaved and marked. The deserters had also been banished from KPNLF camps, the order said.

In September 1983, a Western doctor completed his tour of duty at Nong Samet, a border camp run by the KPNLF, with a population of as many as 50,000 refugees. The doctor wrote in his report to the board of his international aid agency:

Adolescent men with machine guns now roam the camp openly ... The wife of our hospital administrator in her ninth month of pregnancy experienced her first labor pains. Stepping outside her hut, she was shot in the head and died fifty yards from our hospital. The administrator, fearing for his life and the lives of his eight children, decided to escape the border for third country resettlement. The gangster who controls escape from the border demanded that the twenty-year-old daughter be left in the camp and that the administrator take in her place the gangster's own daughter who would take the abandoned daughter's name ...

... The border is inherently an anarchy that will be dominated by warlords and gangsters ... an epiphenomenon: a constituency not of political allegiance but of dependency on relief rice.

In late 1984 another Khmer-speaking American, Michael Vickery, visited the Thai-Kampuchean border. He met a former prisoner of the Heng Samrin regime who had fled there after three months in jail in Kampuchea. "He said he had not been beaten or tortured in prison, but on arrival at the border was beaten up and robbed by the KPNLF". Vickery continued, to note that "persistent reports of violations" of human rights by KPNLF areas "have been current in the press and known to workers in the refugee camps for years". At Dangruk camp, Vietnamese refugees complained of "rape, robbery and harassment" by KPNLF troops in early 1985. An American researcher at the border informed Vickery of two other cases of alleged KPNLF atrocities.

In one instance a PRK spy disguised as a monk was summarily executed, and in another a defector offering information about a forthcoming Vietnamese attack was killed when his prediction was off by two days.

Since it lost control of all its camps in the late 1984 Vietnamese/PRK offensive along the Thai border, the KPNLF army has largely kept away from Kampuchea. Its forces have regrouped near Khaol-I-Dang refugee holding centre in Thailand, and stage regular night raids in which at least ten refugees were killed in the first quarter of 1985. At one point, up to one-third of the Khaol-I-Dang population were sheltering around the camp hospital each night to protect themselves from KPNLF raids.

There is really no evidence which would lead to the belief that KPNLF rule of Kampuchea would be any more "democratic" than the PRK currently is, and it would possibly be a good deal worse in human rights terms. A KPNLF government would no doubt bear considerable resemblance to the Lon Nol military dictatorship (1970-75) with which nearly all its leading cadres and officers were closely associated. (According to Heder, "the 10 top political-military figures in the Front have their roots in the professional officer corps of the Sihanouk and Lon Nol armed forces ... Their historical commitment to parliamentary government is generally much weaker than that of the civilians in the Front's leadership ... "?)

But the KPNLF in any case could be swept aside by their Khmer Rouge allies even more easily than the Lon Nol Regime was — with genocidal results. A Bangkok newspaper reported in early 1985 that the KPNLF (and Sihanoukists) had agreed to share ammunition, logistical supplies and intelligence information with Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge forces. Since then, cooperation between the KPNLF and the Khmer Rouge has increased greatly, as the experience of journalist David Nason showed. He was actually rescued from Kampuchea by Pol Pot guerrillas who had to come to the aid of the beleaguered KPNLF.

In this same period, the US began to call the KPNLF "the democratic resistance" and to overtly fund its military requirements. The prime mover behind the idea, Congressman Stephen J. Solarz, claimed in The Washington Post (7 May 1985):

With additional supplies and support, the non-communist forces could substantially increase the number of their men under arms and thus intensify the pressure on Vietnam ... to withdraw its troops as part of a political settlement.
One would not know from Solarz’ statement that only three months beforehand, Hanoi had, in fact, offered to withdraw, in return for the exclusion of Pol Pot and the disarming of his followers. It is precisely Son Sann, Norodom Sihanouk, Pol Pot and their supporters who are refusing to discuss such a settlement. Solarz even claims that the USA has “two overriding objectives in Cambodia ... to secure the withdrawal of Vietnam (and) to prevent the return of the Khmer Rouge”. Though Hanoi is now proposing and the non-communists are opposing just this, Solarz claims that “both these objectives require a stronger non-communist movement”, i.e. stronger opponents of the alleged “overriding objectives” of Washington! One can be forgiven for thinking that what really requires a stronger non-communist movement is the reassertion of US influence over Indochina, and that the word “democratic” applied to the KPNLF is really code for “pro-American” — or at least reasonably so ...

When Vietnamese forces approached the perimeter of the KPNLF base at Ampil in early 1984, Michael Richardson of the Melbourne Age probably expressed the prevailing view among Western observers when he wrote:

Ampil is the military headquarters of the Front and its loss would be a grave blow to the morale and standing of the noncommunist guerrillas.

Later that year, Richardson again wrote:

A ground assault against the KPNLF headquarters at Ampil is expected soon and will be a crucial test of the group’s ability to withstand sustained military pressure.

The Far Eastern Economic Review reported on 17 January 1985 that Ampil’s defenders had “proved no match for the onslaught”, and that most KPNLF troops had retreated into Thailand within a day. But on Richardson’s criteria, the KPNLF had failed “a crucial test” and suffered a grave blow to its morale and standing. The last of the eight KPNLF bases soon fell (while the Khmer Rouge and Sihanoukists also lost their twelve camps to the Vietnamese). The group fell into disarray, its activities now largely restricted to refugee centres in Thailand.

According to Western sources, the KPNLF is “demoralised and disorganised”, and there are reports of “sizeable desertions”. Its plans to switch to guerrilla warfare inside Kampuchea “could take much longer than expected”. Further, according to Rodney Tasker of the Far Eastern Economic Review:

The KPNLF also suffers from the lack of a clear chain of military command and the scarcity of staff officers with a working knowledge of how to prosecute a real guerrilla war.

Prince Sihanouk categorised his KPNLF ally’s military capacity as “zero”. Even a KPNLF soldier in the group’s headquarters told The Australian in mid-1985:

I don’t trust anybody in Kampuchea ... Most villages we come across are inclined towards the Heng Samrin regime. In each village there is at least one Heng Samrin agent ... We never stay long in villages, and we never enter them at night. It’s too dangerous.

David Nason’s recent experiences with the KPNLF appear to corroborate this latter statement.

Though the KPNLF had once claimed to be fielding an army of over 20,000, in early 1986 diplomatic sources put total KPNLF and Sihanoukist strength inside Kampuchea at “500 guerrillas operating a maximum distance of 40 km from the border” with Thailand. On 10 July, the Far Eastern Economic Review reported that the KPNLF “for months has been incapable of presenting coherent battlefield reports”.

One reason, apart from military activity, was the serious split in the KPNLF leadership. In September 1985, Son Sann sacked two members of his military command. However, they were supported by two others, Dien Del and Sak Sutsakhan. In December, Sutsakhan struck back, staging a mini-coup against Son Sann in KPNLF headquarters, in the name of a military clique called the “Provisional Central Committee for Salvation” (PCCS).

Sutsakhan represents the career officers corps whose “historical commitment to parliamentary government”, as Heder puts it, “is generally much weaker than that of the civilians” like Son Sann.

Nevertheless, Sutsakhan’s PCCS sub-faction received firm Thai backing. Bangkok officials began to channel Western and Chinese money and weaponry destined for the KPNLF solely to the PCCS, which gradually wore down Son Sann’s supporters and assumed control of their last refugee strongholds. Meanwhile, Dien Del gave up fighting and became a Buddhist monk.

After several months in which the large “Site 2” refugee camp, with a population of 120,000, had been divided between the rival KPNLF groupings, Thailand barred Son Sann and his son Son Soubert from visiting the camp or other sections of the Kampuchean border. Sann thus lost control over his last KPNLF units and refugee supporters.

Recently, a highly-placed KPNLF official said that Thai military personnel always accompany KPNLF patrols into Kampuchea. Thai-speaking relief workers in Site 2 say that KPNLF troops there call these Thai officers wanna, or “chief”. Son Sann has been powerless to prevent Thai control of his army, although the PCCS has suffered even more extensive desertions in 1986, while civilian refugees have fled Site 2 by the hundreds.
On a visit to Site 2 in January 1986, Chanthour Boua and I spoke privately with six low-ranking KPNLF members in a section of the camp controlled by the PCCS. We asked if their overall goal was to have Sihanouk and Son Sann return to power in Kampuchea. The reply was hesitant but revealing: "We dare not say ... " Even privately-expressed support for Son Sann, the nominal leader of the KPNLF, was considered dangerous in this stronghold of the faction's military.

In this same section of Site 2, at least 18 people died in the first half of 1986 in violent incidents involving armed KPNLF troops. Another dozen civilian refugees had mysteriously disappeared.

Finally, the Far Eastern Economic Review reported on 28 August 1986 that "Son Sann has told ASEAN officials that he will take no further part in the political work of the Democratic Kampuchea coalition government until problems dividing factions in the resistance group are resolved". The "CGDK President", Norodom Sihanouk, extraordinarily referred to this report but did not deny it, in a letter to the Review on 9 October.

Thus, it appears that the UN now recognises, as the legitimate representative of the people of Kampuchea, an exiled "government" without a Prime Minister (Son Sann, now based in Paris) or even a full-time President. (Sihanouk, based in Pyongyang, has announced that he is spending six months of every year writing his memoirs.)

A retired Prime Minister and a part-time Prince are the thinnest possible facade of respectability for Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. Troops from Cambodia have been closed in the wake of a successful settlement.

However, within two weeks, China and the four "Democratic Kampuchea" factions had over-ruled this initiative. The June ASEAN meeting, it appears, did not even discuss it. The irony is that even the KPNLF's main supporter in the USA, Stephen J. Solarz, accepts that a continuing Vietnamese occupation is preferable to a Khmer Rouge return to power, while the KPNLF leaderships themselves claim the opposite.15

Two recent developments encourage lingering hopes for a settlement. At the ASEAN meeting in Manila in June, Australian Foreign Minister Bill Hayden called for a tribunal to hear the case against Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge leadership, over the massacre and starvation of a million people during their brief rule from 1975 to 1979. Such action would help remove the main obstacles to peace.

Secondly, on a recent visit to Singapore, Norodom Sihanouk agreed with Foreign Minister Dhanabalan that their negotiating position "could be improved upon to make it more acceptable to the international community and Vietnam". According to the Straits Times (5 August 1986),

Other important elements, Mr. Dhanabalan said, such as the disarming of the fighting forces and having international peace-keeping forces, could also be added ... Mr. Dhanabalan said that Prince Sihanouk and he agreed that efforts would have to be made to persuade the Khmer Rouge to accept the new points.

Such efforts need to be encouraged.

A retired prime minister and a part-time prince are the thinnest possible facade of respectability for Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge.

10. Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER), 14 March and 7 February 1985; FEER, 14 February 1985; FEER, 9 May 1985, p. 30. This is despite the benefit of over $1 million worth of covert CIA aid to the non-communists in the 1982-84 period, and "unusually large amounts of rifles and anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons" delivered from Singapore in the fall of 1984 (FEER, 25 October 1984), and "huge" amounts of weapons delivered from China in early 1985 (FEER, 14 March 1985). Most of this money and weaponry had gone to the KPNLF.
12. FEER, 6 March 1986; Sydney Morning Herald, 17 July 1986

BEN KIERNAN teaches history and politics at Wollongong University, and is the author of How Pol Pot Came to Power (1985).
A National Character: Crocodile Dundee

I was in a provincial working-class pub in England over Christmas, one which used to be my "local". Spurred by my presence into talk about Australia, the conversation moved, not to the America's Cup, nor to the Test series, nor even to the weather, but to Crocodile Dundee, just released on the provincial circuits.

Actually, I should say that the conversation moved on to Paul Hogan as Mick "Crocodile" Dundee, the film's hero and main character. Most of the drinkers hadn't seen the film yet but they had, through television trailers, seen that excerpt. That excerpt is the one where, in New York, Hogan and his girlfriend are confronted by three young blacks, one of them menacingly holding a flick knife. The exchange goes something like this: "What's that?" asks Hogan, looking at the knife; "That's a knife, man", says one of the blacks. Hogan's laconic response is to pull out his two-foot machete-cum-croc-killer and say, "That's not a knife, this is a knife." The blacks run away. It's a magical resolution to a moral panic and has audiences laughing and cheering.

Hogan, as Mick Dundee, solves lots of problems like this in the film. First of all, he solves the problem of the giant crocodile who lunges out of the water, about to make a meal out of the woman reporter who has tracked Mick Dundee down and whom he has been ogling by the edge of the water. He rushes out of the scrub and plunges the knife — that knife — into the beast's head. Well, if he hadn't been ogling her, he wouldn't have saved her, would he? Later, transported as the ingenu to New York, the subject of a Time-style feature, he solves other problems too, or at least provides quick-fire solutions to a range of social complexities. Confronted by the social and class distinctions of New York yuppie lifestyle, Hogan's response is either a quick debunking word or, with more effect in one scene with the fiancé of the woman reporter, a smart smack in the mouth carrying with it the mystical power and strength of the man from the wilderness. The same power that had earlier calmed a water buffalo with two fingers and a steady gaze. It is a quick, quiet and unnoticed punch which lays the yuppie flat.

Having dealt with the irritations of social class, Hogan moves on to race: "What tribe are you from mate?", he innocently asks of his black New York chauffeur. (In the outback, Hogan had been a bona fide participant at a corroboree.) In a later scene, this same black chauffeur wrenches the boomerang-like bonnet motif from the limousine and downs one of Hogan's assailants with it. The "tribal" connection of New York blacks and Aborigines is comically confirmed for Hogan.

And from race to sexuality: in a Manhattan bar Hogan is chatted up by a transvestite. Alerted by a taxi driver friend to some ambiguity, Hogan solves the problem by grabbing the elegantly dressed character in the
Class, race, sexuality, law and order: these are precisely the problems which "Crocodile Dundee" confronts and solves, usually with a single and very "masculine" gesture. And, let's be fair, it's funny and successful too. The film, as we know, has been immensely successful in Australia, in the United States — coming second only to the more Reaganesque Top Gun — and, as far as current figures show, in the UK as well. It is easy to dismiss this popularity as the effect of some overarching "capitalist ideology" — a deeply pessimistic theory of "mass culture" — but this really won't do. As I argued a couple of issues back, it is not enough to sit back and dismiss cultural forms like this as if they were only to the side of the "main issues" of serious politics.

As I suggest above, Crocodile Dundee is, in its own way, about class, sex, race, law and order, albeit in abbreviated form. But then one of the keys to comedy is precisely this "economy" in the presentation of complex situations and their resolution. And Hogan is certainly a skilful and economic comedian, deploying a wide range of comic and dramatic techniques, often only by means of a facial expression or a single word. It would be worth our while to consider the question of what techniques we have to meet these forms of effective comic populism.

It is, of course, Hogan, as star, personality and quintessential Australian, who carries Crocodile Dundee which, as Frank Campbell in The Sydney Morning Herald (7 January 1987) rightly said, is an "unpretentious Australian film". Why, then, is the film so popular? Part of the answer to this is in the methods by which Hogan draws on a wide range of popular motifs and genres. The United States now has its various Rambos but it is a long while since it has had a simple, unpretentious populist hero. Crocodile Dundee carries some of the cultural heritage of films made by Frank Capra in the '30s and '40s, mostly starring Gary Cooper: films like Mr. Deeds Goes to Town (1936), Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939) and Meet John Doe (1941). In this genre, the power of simple honesty and individualism overcomes, variously, urban pretension, political corruption and totalitarian political philosophies. Such a popular hero can no longer come from rural American settings of course; these have been tainted by mass murders, chainsaws and Orange People. Australia, and the myths of the bush and the outback now provide both the ideal of the wilderness and an increasingly popular tourist destination. From here comes the bush-wise Dundee. Not a naive innocent in the mode of Gary Cooper, Hogan draws on other resources and forms of imagery as well.

The "character" of Hogan is continuous across the genres in which he works: from film to comedy series, to beer and tourism ads. This was part of the point about that conversation in an English pub: the "That's not a knife" scene worked especially well with Hogan in it because that is precisely the "quintessentially Australian" character which he is known for. There is a beer ad shown on British TV, for example, where Hogan witnesses an angler come ashore and hold up with pride what, by British standards, is a prize catch. Hogan, talking congenially to the camera, walks past the proud fisherman, snatches the fish out of his hand and, innocently, says "Thanks for the bait mate". It is a humour based firstly on a form of identification — predominantly with the white male working class (now the main lager drinkers and the targeted market) — and a corresponding antagonism to Anglo-pomposity, yuppie pretensions, the "Rodneys" of the smart set and the quaint pastimes of what, in an oversimplified version, represents the British ruling class. It is, of course, nothing like this, but Hogan's treatment of these antagonisms is popular and effective. Why, or, more importantly, how is this? It is not often that I agree with Bernard Levin, British high Tory of the paternalistic variety and cultural commentator. But he, in a review of Crocodile Dundee in The Australian (13 February 1987), suggests that there is nothing "mere" about the entertainment which a film like this produces. Reviewers have tended to go on a bit about the film's "mythic" qualities, the theme of the innocent in the big city and so on, and, more precisely in the case of Frank Campbell, about Hogan's skill in tapping an American public beset by moral panics over mugging, drug use and sexuality. Certainly, part of the film's success does indeed lie in this use of received genres and models for storytelling and in the familiar comic strategies of abbreviating, puncturing and resolving complex social problems. But I am a little worried about such "universal" assessments of this movie and would want to suggest that, in addition to this skilful use of genres and themes, there is also an important and strategic area which Hogan handles with supreme and, as yet unchallenged, skill: the area of "national character".

Back to that English pub again: "He's so Australian" was a familiar and repeated comment about Hogan. What this means in effect is that Hogan has effectively come to represent the "quintessentially Australian" for UK and US audiences. And this has not been by virtue of any intrinsic or natural qualities but rather through a skilful, comic and strategic elaboration of a preferred version of character — laconic, laid back, debunking, quasi-innocent and, of course, endowed with certain important "masculine" qualities. These are, of course, all familiar traits but the questions we need to be asking about this is how do they become familiar, acceptable and thereby dominant? How, in the field of
entertainment especially, do the "cultural meanings" with which the character of Hogan is saturated come to be made operative, circulated and sustained?

Bernard Levin is right on the point that entertainment is never "mere": from the beginning of the nineteenth century when entertainment first began to be consolidated as both a mass and politically strategic phenomenon, the notion of "character" in both popular and "high" forms of culture has been enormously important as a location of forms of moral and political training and persuasion. In popular fiction, forms of melodrama and music hall, the representation of character, and, more recently, of "personalities" in television and the Hollywood star system, has never been "merely" concerned with a straight depiction of interesting "types"; rather, there has been an insistent concern with making concrete, popular and acceptable an array of character traits and, at the same time, making unacceptable other qualities and inclinations.

The questions we need insistently to ask of this process is what precisely is it that makes up this preferred image of the national character, and what qualities have been excluded? How far, for example, does the character of Hogan cue in the features of the "New Nationalism" and to what effect? Is this character merely a manipulative construct as some seem to suggest, or is it the case that Hogan's populist and popular style manages to secure, at various levels, contact and consent with his various audiences? If this latter is the case, as I suspect it is, then it would seem that we need to take Mick Dundee, Paul Hogan and public response more seriously than we are accustomed to do in our critical left perspectives.

Colin Mercer

COLIN MERCER teaches in Humanities at Griffith University in Queensland, and is a member of the Communist Party.

Style Revisited

It's not hard to understand the sense of bewilderment that has settled on a good number of people who thought their many years in politics might have given them some idea what the left's political agenda really was. Now it seems they're wrong. Not about substantive issues (or not on the face of it); but more about a tone, a preoccupation.

I'm talking here about the curious preoccupation with fashion. ALR took it on board last issue, and Tribune has given it a run a couple of times in the last few years. But its real home is in Britain, particularly in the Labour Party's New Socialist. There, among other things, a bond seems to have been forged with the pinnacle of young radical sophistication - the magazine the Face. Those in Australia without subscriptions or cosmopolitan newsagents will have seen it briefly in (one of my favourite) ads for a product which escapes me, but which lists the world's "coolest" items.

New Socialist has been redesigned by the designer of the Face. In fact, it has forced the Communist Party's Marxism Today to follow suit with its own redesign. New Socialist has also included in its substantial list of articles on fashion at least one by the Face's associate editor, Robert Elms. The article - "Ditching the Drabbies" - was one of the most facile contributions to the debate so far, but it shows just how strong the nexus between the young left (a term I'd generously interpret to include my own peers) and the arbiters of radical fashion has become.

Now to come clean, I should say that if the question is simply, "should we care about clothes, design and so on; should we debate it and champion it?", then my answer is a definite "yes". Bewildering or not, there's something vital at stake here, as William Morris could have told us. But that's not the only question. First, we should try to say why, in terms which do a good deal more than accuse previous generations of the left of being drab or boring — personally and, by implication, politically. It's not a very good tactic. But it's also wrong.

But then we should try to draw some distinctions. One fairly obvious one is between "appearance", "pleasure", or "style" and "fashion". I'll say how I think these should be distinguished in a moment.

I'd like to think this was a confusion. But really I don't think it is. The champions of fashion are clearer than I've given them credit for about their attack. You see, if the charge was that the left has ignored style, the response would be obvious. The sixties, which is a particular target, was obsessed about style and clothing. But the real charge is not that the sixties was not style conscious, but that it was drab. Worse, that it was earnest - that its choice of styles was hedged around with external values which determined what was accepted, and which implicitly set them as a new orthodoxy.

This, in fact, is the complaint against the unconverted left — that they refuse to change; that they don't dress because it's fun, but because the clothing represents some virtue. In another sense, the complaint is that
they are unsophisticated, precisely because the codes are so laboriously literal.

This is the real heart of the matter. The charge that the left has been drab, which is often run together with this point — that it denied itself the pleasure of style is patent nonsense. What is not nonsense is the claim that the left believed it could take charge of the meanings of its codes. As shown by all the irresolvable debates over whether nudity, make-up, army shirts, or overalls reproduce or subvert ruling values, this is not true.

But does this mean that there are no rules? Nothing that marks radical style from other style in fact, from “Fashion”? I’d suggest that there are at least three criteria: the extent to which it is a commodity; the way it relates to bodies; and the way it marks out social groupings.

Before explaining this, let me just gesture at why we should (as well as do) take personal style, particularly clothing, seriously. Let’s begin with a counter proposition. That is, that clothes have a “use value” — what they’re really about before they’re mucked about with by the market which is to protect bodies. This is completely wrong.

It’s true that they do this, sometimes (and that this can be useful). But this emphasis is profoundly blind to the real issue — bodies. It assumes that bodies are both given and, hence, unimportant. Neither is true. But what does this matter? Is there a politics of bodies? Well, most contemporary feminist theory thinks so, although it’s too large a subject to go into here. But the other point is that, self-evidently, an enormous amount of what we do is determined by our bodies, and that we work very hard to transform our bodies to both materially and symbolically intervene in these capacities.

This, in large measure, is what clothes are. Clothes are not things done to bodies, but done with bodies. All of this is rather glib, but it’s also usually forgotten.

But what does this mean about a left fashion? Two things, I think. If bodies are a site of political activity, then, like all such sites, there’s a contest. The feminist point that our relationship to our bodies can be profoundly subverted doesn’t go away when we also realise that the crude objection to treating bodies as “objects” misunderstands the way we use our bodies publicly. It also means that the uses of clothing which deny the body (and of all things “fashion” — the reification of clothes — is the main offender) is unacceptable.

It’s also always remarked that subcultures define themselves through their clothes. If we on the left consider social diversity a good thing, then that use of clothes is good too. But I think we miss a useful distinction. Descriptively rather than prescriptively. I’d suggest that we can mark off an oppositional sub-culture from a coopted one by asking whether the dress style is used to include or exclude. Is our main aim to be like each other, or different from the rest?

This is where “fashion” comes in again. “Fashion” styles are always inclusive. They have to be, they’re after a market.

And so, of course, we come to commodities. It may be just tokenistic to buy your clothes second-hand. But that’s not the point. This way of making your style out of something else subverts the market; subverts the commodification of clothing. This is the point. Who takes control of the richness of clothing’s use its richness and its significance? If clothing is left, then we do.

And again, that’s why I cringe when I hear people talking about left “fashion”. I don’t believe there can be one. But thank heavens we can once again talk about radical style.

Adam Farrar

ADAM FARRAR is editor of the ACOSS journal Impact in Sydney, and a member of the Communist Party.
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REJECTING CLASS

The article in the most recent issue of the Australian Left Review written by the coordinator, David Burchell, is one of the most astonishing I have read in that journal for some time. Burchell's treatment of class, for example, can only be described as, at the very least, eccentric, for he views it in general and the working class in particular, as some static and "finished" entity. It is, of course, nothing of the sort. Class in general is a word that implies relationships between people and between sets of people, and the working class, comprising as it does a particular set of relations, is active in defining itself and the society it inhabits.

The changing nature of the working class, from rural proletarian to urban manufacturing to metropolitan service sector, for instance, the changing gender composition of the paid sections of the class, for another; and the various waves of ethnicity through the class as a whole in yet another instance, all render quite silly accusations that the working class, as it does a particular set of relations, is active in defining itself and the society it inhabits.

But it is in this notion of the working class perception of itself that Burchell is at his most ridiculous, for it is this that is best called "tradition", a word that Burchell finds wholly repugnant. As the working class changes itself and is changed by the world it at least partially defines its view of itself and its place in the scheme of things also changes. A tradition is not something given and fixed. It is, rather, full of diversity, variation and disagreement but, nonetheless, maintains a basic set of assumptions and guidelines about how the world works.

What is at stake in the current debate is precisely the nature of that tradition itself. The socialist tradition pre-existed the marxist tradition and the latter built on and is part of the former. But even though that relationship has been and will continue to be problematic, centring as it does around the immediate question of the relationship between marxists and the largely non-marxist socialist in the ALP, a common threat between and through the two traditions has been an understanding of the efficacy and saliency of class.

By rejecting and repudiating both the notions of class and tradition, Burchell quite simply renders even more difficult the establishing of common ground between marxists outside the ALP and non-marxist socialists within it. In an era when we are apparently trying to build bridges and linkages between socialists, destroying those that already exist seem to me to be particularly stupid.

D.W. Barker, Turner, A.C.T.

AWAITING BURIAL

Congratulations to ALR in opening its columns to reader participation.

May I present some opposite views to those on "The Left and the Economic Crisis" in Briefings (ALR 97). In my view the analysis in that article is completely arse-over-head.

The article attributes what it so quaintly describes as "the current economic malaise" to "a massive strategic contradiction within the policies of the Hawke government" between its policy of "sustained economic growth" which along with the Accord predicated Keating and its deregulatory financial policies. If you believe this you can forget about socialism: all that is needed is to change the personnel and direction of the Hawke government and the problems and crises of capitalism will melt away!

I suggest that the real position is the total reverse of what the ALR piece states: that the analysis in the article is fundamentally wrong. The world and Australian depression and all its attendant crises is not caused by the Hawke government elected in 1983, but rather the crisis of th Hawke government and all other social democrat governments is the result of the contradictions and crisis which has beset world capitalism since 1974.

There are two basic sources of the crisis in the Hawke government, leading to its betrayal of its stated policies, and of the working class.

One is the general nature of social democratic and welfare-state parties, as parties of and within capitalism, sometimes giving lip-service to socialism by gradual reform, but always opportunist, always limiting themselves to reforms which are acceptable to and can be accommodated by capitalism, always in office jettisoning the more militant rhetoric which they have picked up in opposition.

The material basis for the existence of social democracy, as well as for liberal reform parties, has always been the availability of expanding profits and increasing exploitation of workers, initially by the expansion of imperialism and the robbing of colonies, and then more subtly during the growth waves of recent capitalism, by the manipulation of productivity and inflation at the expense of the working class.

Apart from the general contradiction of social democracy between its stated and real aims, a particular contradiction has consumed all such parties since 1974. The post-war long boom ended, world-wide depression overwhelmed the economy, the material possibility of pursuing social democratic reform programs vanished (and on no-one's prediction is likely to return in the foreseeable future). This development was reflected in the political and personnel changes in the last year of the Whitlam government, as it abandoned all of its reform program.

The particular post-1974 contradiction made the general contradiction sharper and irreconcilable. The ALP had two alternatives: to support its verbal policies, raise wages, the social wage, public spending, spending, deregulate the economy, boost profits, and bash the unions. A middle course is a total impossibility in a depressed and contracting economy.
Given the fundamental nature of such a party, the choice the A.L.P made, to betray the working class, was inevitable.

The issue, and opportunity, before us now is the development of real alternative policies, based on a true analysis of the crisis of capitalism, and the launching of a struggle for the development of a transitional government, NOT any dream about restoring the A.L.P. Social democracy is dead, and awaits burial.

Brian T. Carey, Canberra, ACT.

STIMULATING

I am responding to your invitation in issue No. 98 to offer comments on that issue. There were quite a few articles I liked and found stimulating — a departure it seems from our usual practice of writing only for the converted — for once we had articles on subjects in which practically everyone is interested. For instance, the cricket season, the Chamberlain case, Carmel Shute's on politics and pleasure, and Ken Coales on disarmament.

On the whole, No. 98 is easily the best issue of ALR that I've read for a very long time — so good in fact that it changed my mind about discontinuing my subscription which I had decided to do after reading No. 97. But I feel impelled to speak out against the forbidding format of the pages. We need to stop crowding so much print on every page — a habit perhaps more likely to make even the bravest heart quail whilst deciding whether To read or Not to read.

It might mean less room for an article or two, but I'm on the side of Lenin when he said "Fewer but better" — I forget in what context, but I'm sure he was pleading with dedicated bolsheviks.

Now that I'm sufficiently wound up, I feel like having you on about the covers of ALR, invariably uninviting. Now that you are entrusting it to the newsagents you should aim to make it easier for them to gain sales. The cover of No. 98 is a good illustration of our fixation about giving pride of place to articles which seem to us the most important. So we have in great heavy black capitals THE MORAL MEETS THE NEW, followed by an almost equally heavily printed sub-title Alliances on the Radical Right. The rest of the also-rans (and perhaps more likely to attract new readers) are printed in super light italics on a yellow ground almost invisible except for the most searching eye.

Dear Collective, I have stuck by ALR through thick and thin, so please bear with me!

Win Walsham, Sydney.

WHICH WAY THE LEFT?

The domination of current politics by the struggle for control of the conservative political forces in Australia illustrates the extent to which the left is isolated and in an historically weak position.

The left's concentration on single issues and on reactive and oppositional policies; the pursuit of sectional demands; and the absence of a credible and popularly supported program has created an ideological vacuum.

For example, the left has been largely silent on what economic response there should be to the collapse in terms of trade and the loss of national income, except to oppose the strategies employed by the Hawke government. Coffee-shop Keynesianism is not a sufficient response to the widely accepted views of the federal Treasury and Paul Keating's contemptuous dismissal of alternatives — founded more on hope than logic — is depressing and monotonous in its regularity.

Many on the left largely relied on neo-Keynesian commentators such as the Melbourne Age's Ken Davidson, who are themselves now arguing for a reduction in government expenditure in response to the decline in the terms of trade. Conventional left positions on government intervention, extension of government control and nationalisation are now little more than articles of faith, rarely put forward in any concrete manner.

This problem is part of a more general malaise whereby the left is unable to articulate a concise set of objectives, or to represent itself through a unifying set of values with which people can identify.

The sum total of a diverse range of issues and the articulation of a range of often maximalist demands does not represent socialism in any organic sense, let alone establish a socialist agenda with any sense of strategy or priorities.

In the face of the simplistic nostrums of the New Right, the left is seen as being largely negative — reacting to events, opposing specific policies and initiatives, representing values which are not appealing to a significant number of people. The left seems unable to fashion the needs of its many parts into a coherent vision and philosophy.

The right has cleverly shifted the grounds of the political debate away from its traditional image of social conservatism and, representing powerful interests, to that of concern for the material well-being of individuals and families. That shift, and an appeal to selfish individualism, continues to allow them to dominate the tax debate.

Whereas socialism is undergoing a crisis, both in its theory and its application, the possibility for at least some

We welcome your letters for the Winter issue. As a general rule, letters should be no longer than 250 words and, preferably, should be typewritten. The collective reserves the right to edit letters down to this length. The author's address should be included, although this will not be printed. The deadline for letters for the Winter issue is 11 May.

The New International Review Winter, 1987 Issue

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individuals to benefit materially under the strategies of the New Right means that it can draw a surprising level of support. Many people believe they stand to gain from deregulation and cutting personal income tax, while social wage benefits are more difficult to identify and quantify.

Moreover, while it is possible to demonstrate that a number of leading New Right figures are merely the old order in a new guise, Bjelke-Petersen is a more elusive figure.

Apart from the professionalism of his political machine, his own inadequacies of speech and manner, combined with his ability to articulate the concerns of many working people, and his image of strength and determination provide an empathetic figure for at least a significant minority of working people, particularly those with socially conservative values.

For instance, in the recent Queensland elections, many voters who had doubts about Bjelke-Petersen nevertheless must have been able to enjoy being part of “doing” professional pollsters and the media in the eye.

His supporters like to portray Bjelke-Petersen as a threat to the existing order not only to the Hawke government but also to established interests such as the professions, the media, trade unions and public servants. Frustration and anger about the failure of that “established order” to address social and economic problems, and the fact that he is a threat to those interests, may in itself generate support from people who ironically have most to lose. Their feelings of powerlessness and alienation, particularly if they feel the ALP no longer represents them, will contribute to that process.

Nor is it sufficient to expect that the extremism of many of the policies of the right will repel many of his potential supporters or that the actual experience of neo-conservative governments will produce a swing back in public opinion. Events in the US, UK and recently in West Germany testify to that.

Unpalatable though conservative policies in those countries may be, the left has been unable to develop credible alternatives. Put simply, the left is no longer the engine room of the ideas which directly and indirectly strongly influence social and political thought beyond its ranks.

To recapture this role, the left must engage in some free thinking and critical appraisal of its own policies. There is an urgent need to reconstruct a core set of socialist values and beliefs which address the central concerns of working people in their daily lives.

Socialist values must therefore address issues such as wealth creation, the national interest, productivity and specific industry measures, rather than being seen as concerned with only the redistribution of wealth, or single issues. This is particularly so when those issues can be portrayed as having a negative impact on growth and employment. By way of contrast, the work done in the environmental movement on specific and feasible economic alternatives to dams and logging forests in Tasmania is an important forward step.

Media and conservative attacks on the public sector cannot, of themselves, shift public perceptions about its performance. The attacks have been effective because they have fallen on fertile ground.

Too often, the left’s reluctance to address questions of the performance of the public sector, the need for restructuring, resource reallocation, waste and inefficiency leads to arguing for “more of the same” in the pursuit of an apparently abstract social goal. In the public sector, the left has been irrelevant in the inevitable restructuring which has taken place and has been unsuccessful in influencing broad public opinion about the need for an expanded public sector and an interventionist role for government.

One does not have to be an economic determinist to recognise the critical importance of economic policy to the credibility of a socialist stance.

Socialist ideology has had a measure of popular support in previous decades because it appeared to have a scientific basis, and because it afforded hope through collective action around basic economic and industrial issues. Certainly there is a need for a new style of politics which seeks to extend democratic practices and offers the possibility of personal growth and development - major current concerns. These concepts are not inimical to the socialist program which has an economic focus as its centre-piece.

In summary, if socialist renewal is to have a real meaning, I believe a consensus must emerge around priorities for socialism through a reappraisal of traditional left positions.

Peter Noonan

PETER NOONAN is a member of the Victorian Socialist Left of the ALP.

WOMANSPEAK is a feminist magazine in its twelfth year of publication, produced by an all-women, Sydney-based collective of volunteers, and including only women’s contributions. It provides information on women’s involvement in film, art, fiction, theatre, work and domesticity, politics, feminist activism.

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Challenges ... and Problems


"Men may cook or weave or dress dolls or hunt humming birds, but if such activities are appropriate occupations for men, then the whole society, men and women alike, votes them as important. When the same occupations are performed by women, they are regarded as less important." Translated into the concerns of social theorising, this quote from Margaret Mead, used by one of the authors to introduce her chapter, encapsulates the fundamental insight of this collection of essays.

From several different perspectives, the thirteen chapters of the book explore the impact of feminist theory on contemporary western philosophy, liberal political theory, sociology and history. Although the authors differ in their theoretical positions, they share a map of the general outline of the battlefront.

Feminists, they argue, started by pointing out the absence of women from contemporary social theory. At first, their project involved using the tools provided by their respective disciplines to look at women and at their interests — their political participation, rights as citizens, history, work, sexuality, the bearing and raising of children. In the process, some feminists re-read the "founding fathers" of western philosophy, and discovered that most did have things to say about women, and very nasty things at that. In the ideal republic, Rousseau tells men "to renounce one's liberty is to renounce one's quality as a man, the rights and also the duties of humanity". Women, in the meanwhile, "must be trained to bear the yoke from the first so that they may not feel it: to master their own caprices and submit themselves to the will of others".

Today, the potential inherent in the first project has been all but exhausted. Gradually, "adding" women and their interests to social theory has revealed conceptual problems which could no longer be contained within the parent disciplines; after a certain point, feminist insights challenged the very foundations of western social and political theory. At this point, the contributors to Feminist Challenges explore two different paths. Some feminists try to reject "male-stream" social theorising altogether and seek to develop a new form of feminist social understanding. Others — the majority in this volume — make social theory and its categories themselves the object of feminist social inquiry.

The notion of an individual, so important in western social theory, is used by several of the authors to elaborate this theme. Put simply, the world is divided into a public and a private sphere, the former comprising...
government, politics, and paid work, and dominated by men, the latter centred on the family and inhabited by women. What happens in the public sphere is important, has a general significance, is truly human. What happens in the private sphere is closer to animal nature, is less important and unsuitable as a basis for deriving general principles about humanity.

In this scheme, humanity, rationality and individuality are defined in a way which not only leaves out significant female concerns, but are frequently the very antithesis of what it means and feels like to be a woman. Indeed, for such analysis to work, people's bodies have to be left out of the defining characteristics of individuals. In turn, since some aspects of rationality and citizenship are defined as the very opposite of women's activities and concerns, and femininity is seen as something which has to be transcended to become a citizen, it is not enough for women simply to seek equal access to science and to political life. Sex equality is not enough. Rationality and citizenship themselves have to be redefined.

Within the general framework of the book, different contributors to Feminist Challenges focus on particular issues. There is a useful chapter outlining some of the tricks which make women disappear from "male-stream" social theory, a chapter on the links between war and the definition of self in western philosophical tradition, and chapters examining the writings of French feminist theoreticians Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir.

There are two major problems in Feminist Challenges, one specific to this collection of essays and one more general. In Europe, feminist theories such as those put forward in this book have been challenged by black women for failing to come to grips with racism and with the very real differences in the social situation of black and white women in different cultures. (The British journal, Feminist Review, has been one forum for this debate.) Certainly, while some authors in this volume are careful to specify that they are dealing with a western tradition of social theory, others can, with some justification, be accused of ethnocentrism, and none address the issues of racial and ethnic differences among women directly. One reason for this is the book's greater emphasis on philosophy rather than on anthropology and history.

The second problem is more general. Feminist Challenges is a theoretical book about theories and, as such, epitomises both the achievements and the problems of theorising personal and political issues. The authors are interested in far more than writing for the sake of conceptual clarity and theoretical tidiness. Theirs is no academic exercise. They want to change the world. And indeed, the insights contained in this collection of essays will help feminist theoreticians understand and describe the world in radically new ways, help them see through some of the ways of thinking and understanding that are so crippling to women. But, by the same token, the technical language in which the book is written is not accessible to the majority of women in our society. How can radicals bridge this gap between theory and ordinary people?

PAVLA MILLER teaches sociology in the Education Department at Melbourne University, and is a member of the ALR collective.
Succeeding the Accord

The Accord ... and Beyond by Frank Stilwell (Pluto Press, 1986). $11.95.Reviewed by Geoff Dow.

It is easy to catalogue the failings of Labor governments. It is similarly easy to conclude that the parliamentary process, institutional reformist intentions are all bound to fail because of the stubbornness of capitalist production relations. When we apply class analysis to such experiences, we tend to imagine that we, on the left, have a complete understanding of the forms and effects of class conflict and that we know exactly what capitalism is.

The post-1983 Labor government in Australia has forced a belated recognition that labour movement responses to capitalist economic crisis are often far from adequate. Stories of frustration and disappointment have been told so many times now, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, that it is somewhat surprising the appropriate lessons have not been properly learned. Evaluations of labour and social democratic governments which compare actual policies with ideal socialist principles are usually of very little help. So are supercilious assessments that refuse to understand that, when parties of labour accede to political pressures from the right, or from employers, or from economists, or from reactionaries within their own ranks, the resulting policy failures are effects of a generalised class weakness of the left, and that we must all shoulder some of the responsibility for it. Assumptions of an imagined “authentic” militancy similarly produce only predictable denunciations hardly requiring detailed analysis.

The great merit of Frank Stilwell's latest book, the first full analysis of the much-debated ACTU-ALP “Accord”, is that it doesn't presuppose either the terms or the conclusions of its investigation.

In ten chapters and three documentary appendices, Stilwell presents a comprehensive summary of the development and fate of the Accord in a way which raises and soberly deals with many of the issues that, on a week by week basis since 1983, the left has been required to confront. As an historical record of the key political concerns of the 1980s, the book is invaluable: as a definitive coming-to-terms with theoretical and strategic conundrums for the labour movement. I found it rather less satisfactory. But the fault here, if that is what it is, is not Stilwell's alone.

"... The unsatisfactory presumption that any policy which aids economic recovery is reactionary."

Then follows a section of four chapters dealing with specific policy aspects of the Accord's implementation and of the Hawke years more generally. This section details those outcomes of economic policy making under Labor that have most disappointed (and harmed) Labor supporters. Stilwell speaks of the degeneration of a prices and incomes policy into a wage-restraint policy; the adoption of restrictive and contractionary budgetary and monetary policies; attempts by the government to introduce a regressive, indirect taxation system (and its limited success with tax reform since then); and industry policy (manufacturing decline, the case for intervention and specific industry plans).

Finally there is a series of chapters evaluating the Accord in terms of the constraints upon even well-intentioned interventionism, suggesting a "more progressive" alternative and discussing possible future changes in labour-capital relationships in Australia.

Clearly then, there is a structure here for a thorough appraisal of the possibilities and limitations of social democracy, of the political aspects of capitalism in crisis and of the aspects of conflict in capital accumulation in the local context. It is in drawing out these underlying conceptual issues in the political economy of the Labor government that the book contains confusions and limitations. I will try to explain some of them.

Of considerable significance, given Stilwell's prominence in the political economy movement and the associated controversies, is the book's failure to outline concisely the perspective that political economy provides. Stilwell suggests that the role of political economy is to provide a political dimension to an analysis that would otherwise be sterile and formalistic. But he doesn't allow us to build upon the insights into the processes of capital accumulation, class struggle and political institutions that separate the classical and marxian traditions of economic analysis from the more modern, and inherently conservative, preoccupation with
issues based around the "allocation of scarce resources".

More specifically, it seems a pity that the book only implicitly presents the general case for new political institutions to allow democratic control of investment and income distribution. Stilwell is not unaware of the need to replace market mechanisms in any complex economy with political or institutional mechanisms; but the case is not presented systematically enough to indicate what the objectives of an alternative approach to capital accumulation would be. Consequently, leftist critics of economic orthodoxy are left with no counter to the unsatisfactory presumption that any policy which aids economic recovery is reactionary. We need to be reminded more often that labour movement interventions in this sphere are both legitimate and emphatically anti-capitalist.

To a very considerable extent, Stilwell comes close to incorporating these imperatives into his analysis, especially in the summary of "what went wrong?" (ch.8). In a discussion of problems on the left he acknowledges that the left does not have "the numbers" but is less ready to argue that it does not have the arguments either. Credibility problems are a two-way street: and the reasons cited for our "relative weakness" don't include our inability over a long period to resolve either what the meaning of a socialist strategy in a capitalist society could possibly mean, or what we should do when international crises, unemployment, inflation, balance of payments problems or Treasury "remedies" confront us. The left's weakness, it seems to me, stems more from our own abstentionism in the sorts of debates which fed into the Accord than from the development of the Accord strategy itself.

Whatever we may think of the Hawke/Keating abrogations during the past two years, we need to remember that they brought to fruition plans to involve the labour movement in macro-economic policymaking that were absolutely unimagined by the Whitlam circus. We need to fight against the contractionary policies of the current government while asserting our right to have the Accord commitments to wage maintenance, industry policy, anti-recessionary policy and economic democracy honoured. We should be less surprised than we pretend to be when Labor governments capitulate in this manner. We should be less concerned to blame governments for the stances they take and be more active in creating the interventionist conditions and institutions that would allow labour a more assertive role in economic management.

The book makes dozens of sensible proposals for reform, for example, the suggestion that workers could be more involved in arbitration system deliberations on appropriate wage relativities and the submission that import controls be linked to domestic expansion so that overall levels of trade can be maintained. Despite these, I felt the absence of any serious attempt to prioritise the author's arguments. There seemed to me to be too many hasty concessions to what might be called "knee-jerk" leftism, even where these leave inconsistencies in our case against the present policies. Stilwell's comments on "statism", for example, seem to imply that labour's confrontations with capital must always be achieved through the offices of government. His calls for greater attention to price controls reproduce a serious deficiency in left argument generally: that price control is impossible unless we have a prior understanding of exactly which
industries we want to exist and how downturns in economic activity are to be handled.

As I indicated earlier, the problems in this book are problems for all of us. The failings of Labor governments are not new (recall the Scullin and Macdonald governments’ responses to recession): they reflect a general failure of the left to construct a political and economic strategy which acknowledges that the reflation of a capitalist economy and the struggle to secure permanent full employment are, in themselves, profoundly radical projects. It is increasingly apparent that transition to socialism is something that requires high levels of economic activity and that, insofar as capital cannot guarantee what its own ideologies promise, labour needs to take on social and economic functions wherein its past role has been entirely subordinate. This subordination becomes less and less a cloak for macro-economic performance the longer we go down the track of capitalist development. Therefore, we need not only to develop alternative economic strategies but to shed our own conceptions of capitalism of the misapprehension that this isn’t our proper role.

The Accord gave labour an opportunity to usurp long-lived capitalist prerogatives; if economic policy under Hawke has been insufficiently faithful to this project, then we must fight to regain our influence over it. But we need to remember that the institutions and arrangements that the Accord ushered in are absolutely essential; the subsequent retreats from the 1983 commitments have been disappointing but not surprising. That we haven’t had effective counter arguments is an indication of how much work there is still to be done.

GEOFF DOW teaches in Humanities at Griffith University.

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