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Is There Still Hope In Fiji?

For the first time since Fiji's coup of 14 May, there may be a glimmer of hope for a political solution that will not hurl the nation back into the Dark Ages. The compromise arising from the Great Council of Chiefs' meeting in late July, while far from satisfactory, represents a defeat for extreme racists from the Taukei Movement.

The decision came amidst continuing civil disorder and harassment by the military, along with pressure from Taukei extremists, to have Fiji declared a republic, pre-colonial laws reinstated and non-indigenous Fijians stripped of their political rights.

The Taukei had succeeded in pushing their ideas through nine of the fourteen provincial councils that represent rural-dwelling indigenous Fijians, with the other five councils that represent rural-dwelling indigenous Fijians taking only slightly more moderate positions. They had gone so far as to design a flag for the new republic (based on the colours of the military) and went into the Council of Chiefs' meeting optimistic that a republic was about to be declared and that a new parliament would be completely in the hands of indigenous Fijians.

Resistance to the extreme Taukei position, however, has been growing throughout Fijian society. Supporters of the overthrown Bavadra government focused their efforts on maintaining economic sanctions against the military-backed regime, while Bavadra and his colleagues sought to negotiate with the Governor-General.

A small, open economy such as Fiji's is extremely vulnerable, and the economic consequences of the coup were felt immediately. The two main income earners, sugar and tourism, became the focal points of conflict between supporters of the military regime and those backing the Bavadra government. Tourist arrivals dropped off drastically after the coup, with the hotel occupancy rate falling to around 10% in June. Meanwhile, with the sugar cane harvest about to begin, cane growers and cutters refused to harvest.

The effects were felt throughout the economy. Hotels account for a large percentage of electricity usage and, by June, consumption was reported to have dropped by 50% nation-wide. Consumption of petroleum products declined by 30%. Large numbers of workers were laid off and many others faced reduced wages and hours.

Time was an important factor with the economic struggle. Australia provides the bulk of Fiji's tourists and the important Australian school holiday period was about to begin in July. The sugar crop was under added threat by a severe drought that was causing the cane to dry out even faster than normal. Foreign reserves had been F$160 million on the eve of the coup and, by the end of the third week of June, they stood at F$113 million.

At the request of the Fiji Trades Union Congress, unions in Australia and New Zealand had imposed cargo and passenger bans on Fiji. Strong pressure was brought to bear from many directions to have them ended. Bans were lifted on necessary food and medical supplies, timber exports and the movement of Australian passengers over the course of several weeks, but many of the bans remained in place.

The regime launched "Operation Bounceback" in an attempt to lure tourists to Fiji. This included lobbying the travel industry and cutting airfares on the national airline, Air Pacific. Bavadra supporters responded by publicising potential dangers and inconveniences facing would-be tourists. Rapes, robberies and other forms of violence had increased substantially, with some tourists being among the victims.

Operation Bounceback was a partial success and hotel occupancy rates during the school holiday period did increase (to around 25%). But the amount of money that this put back into the economy was limited by the "leakage factor" that was normal to the industry and by the heavy discounting of airfares and accommodation.

The threat to the sugar crop was a much more serious problem because of its greater importance to the economy as a whole. Almost constant intimidation, including passage of severe Emergency Regulations, had failed to force the majority of cane growers to harvest their cane. Negotiations between representatives of the growers and the government were stalled over financial issues, and sentiment among growers against the regime remained strong.
A small amount of sugar was harvested towards the end of June and two of Fiji’s four mills began crushing, but actions by mill workers (including sabotage of equipment and walkouts over harassment by the military) soon forced the mills to shut down. Only enough cane had been produced for one month’s local consumption.

A particular concern for Taukei and other pro-coup elements has been continued opposition to them from within indigenous Fijian society. Two sources of opposition are especially noteworthy: liberal members of the Methodist church and regional antagonism.

Approximately two-thirds of indigenous Fijians belong to the Methodist Church and its influence within Fijian society is considerable. A group of church leaders had backed the Taukei Movement even before the coup, the most prominent being Tomasi Raikivi (Secretary of the Fiji Council of Churches), but many influential members of the church had been highly critical of its racism and violence. Raikivi (who is presently information adviser to the Governor-General) was forced to resign his position with the Council of Churches after leading anti-Indian demonstrations.

The President of the Methodist Church, Josateki Koroi, and other church leaders, issued a statement condemning the coup on the day that it took place. Since then, many church leaders have supported efforts to return the country to democracy. In a letter to the Fiji Sun on 9 July, with the title “Klaus Barbie & Fiji”, the Rev. Akuila Yabaki, Communication Secretary of the Methodist Church, wrote “Racism is a heresy against God whether it is Nazi Germany, South Africa or Fiji” and commented that “The links with recent events in Fiji is perhaps uncomfortably close” with those in Nazi Germany.

The most recent development is the emergence of the “Back to Early May” movement. Among those behind it are a number of important figures in the church, including Daniel Mastapha (the former president of the Methodist Church who resigned from the Council of Advisers after its first meeting) and Akuila Yabaki. It has called on the Governor-General “to return to our present constitution and to re-summon the dissolved parliament” and “to order all troops to return to barracks and to restore full charge of public order to the courts and the police”.

The regional factor is extremely important among indigenous Fijians, and the victory of the Bavadra-led coalition was seen by many as a victory against the chiefly eastern establishment. The coup, therefore, was seen as a move by this same group to regain control of the government. After being released on 19 May, Bavadra quickly moved to the safety of his home village in western Fiji and it was in the west that the strongest signs of resistance emerged. There was soon talk of
secession, or of setting up a government in exile in the west. On 4 June, 500 native Fijians from the west were stopped from visiting the Vunivalu (or high chief) Ratu George Cakobau by a group of eastern Fijians and the military.

Another potential source of opposition is the army itself. To carry out the coup, those planning it had to step over a number of senior officers. Since the return of Epeli Naulatikau (the former commander of the army) from Australia on 29 May, speculation has been rife about a counter-coup. Naulatikau has been highly critical of the Taukei Movement and, in a long newspaper interview, discussed the need to “cleanse” the army of those involved in the coup once democracy was restored.

The Taukei have sought to bolster their support among indigenous Fijians by appeals to racist sentiments and promotion of tradition. They have done so at meetings around the country, over the radio and through the Fijian language newspapers. They have prepared documents denouncing democracy as an imported idea counter to Fijian traditions and linking the survival of indigenous Fijian culture with loyalty to the chiefs.

Soldiers and police associated with the military-backed regime have sought to counter resistance by increased intimidation. Networks of informers have been promoted, and harassment, threats and the arrest of those known or even suspected of opposing the regime have become commonplace. The army has grown in size since the coup and plans are afoot to purchase additional weapons. Soldiers are to be seen everywhere and they occupy many sites considered to be of strategic importance. Steps are being taken to establish battalion-strength garrisons at several points around the country. Most recently, Colonel Rabuka has begun recruiting members to a special counter-insurgency unit.

Shortly before the Council of Chiefs' meeting, Bavadra and the Governor-General were able to negotiate a settlement that allowed the Coalition members of the Constitutional Review Committee to begin taking part in the exercise. At around the same time, unions in Australia and New Zealand decided to lift their bans, and sugar growers in Fiji agreed to begin the sugar harvest.

Efforts by the Taukei threatened to undermine the progress that seemed to have been made on the political and economic fronts. This made the Council of Chiefs' meeting exceptionally important: its outcome playing a determining role in the country's future.

Several factors were important in shaping the decision finally made by the council. Among them was Colonel Rabuka's unwillingness to advocate breaking ties with the Queen. This was crucial in undermining the Taukei initiative and indicated the degree of unease among many conservative Fijians about taking what, for them, was such a drastic step. Also significant was the fact that a number of individuals known to be critical of the coup were allowed to participate. Such people had been kept out of the meeting held shortly after the coup. This time, although attempts were
made to silence Bavadra and his allies at the meeting, they were able to state their position. Others who did not support the Taukei extremist position were willing to speak out as well, and a negotiated compromise became necessary.

Fiji now awaits the outcome of deliberations by the Constitutional Review Committee and the establishment of some form of government of national unity that is to be formed in its wake. Extremist elements associated with the Taukei Movement are likely to continue to try to stop this process, since it appears unlikely that it will result in creation of the kind of state they advocate. While they would appear to have little chance of succeeding, the possibility of bringing about an equitable solution for the people of Fiji remains in doubt. Certainly the Council of Chiefs' proposal, with its communally exclusive basis for voting, remains unsatisfactory to many. Nevertheless, opposition to the Taukei and their allies has become more vocal and better organised, and further negotiation and compromise is a strong possibility.

The forces of racism and violence unleashed by the May coup are still considerable and returning the army to an apolitical role will not be easy, but at last there may be some room for optimism.

Michael C Howard

The Kinnock Factor

By the end of the recent British general election campaign, Labour leader Neil Kinnock had almost lost his voice, but he had not cracked. Although the Labour Party made a net gain of only 20 seats, Kinnock himself emerged with dignity — a bigger figure on the national stage than he had been before and one who, half-way through the campaign, had given the Conservatives the jitters.

His biggest single achievement was this: he came close to suggesting that there was an electable alternative to Thatcherism. He did not pull it off, but it certainly flickered across Britain's national consciousness that a party seeking to promote a fairer society could win.

This is not the place to discuss why he failed, save to observe that there were too many obstacles stacked against him, including the divided opposition. The question is whether he has sufficient qualities to win in future.

Kinnock is, by any standards, an unusual man. It is peculiar to be at times the best orator in the country and, at others, to be among the world's worst wafflers. At times he preaches egalitarianism, yet at others becomes lyrical about the virtues of the meritocracy. One wonders what he would have been like if he had been at the University of Oxford, not Cardiff. More like a Thatcher than Aneurin Bevan, perhaps? Or another Harold Wilson?

When he opted for the non-nuclear defence policy, it looked like an act of conscience with bravado thrown in. He went even further than the bulk of the Labour Party had seriously demanded in seeking to
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deny the Americans the use of British bases. Yet afterwards he trimmed. The most damning charge against him here is that he did not know what he was doing.

On Europe — an issue that bedevilled the Labour Party for nearly 30 years — he won without a fight. The subject was not debated at the party conference last year: acceptance of British membership of the EEC was slipped into the manifesto and has gone unchallenged. In the last few weeks the Labour group in the European parliament changed its leader from an anti-marketeer (Alf Lomas) to a pro-marketeer (David Martin). But

attacked Scargill only when the miners had gone back to work. And he fell into the trap of accepting Tory propaganda about loony town halls. Very few of the town halls are loony. When Kinnock went for them he was allowing the Tories to dominate the debate. It is remarkable that he should regard Ken Livingstone as a potential enemy rather than a potential ally. Livingstone ended his time at the Greater London Council as a rather popular figure who at least tried to do something for the capital: for example, cheaper fares.

Yet the fact remains that, despite his weaknesses, Kinnock is still there, his position enhanced by the election campaign. His strengths are twofold. One is that he is the unchallenged leader of the Labour Party. The other is that he appeals to a large number of people for whom Thatcherism is too harsh a doctrine.

The two go together. In the Labour Party Kinnock is beholden to no-one. He may have owed his election to the leadership largely to the unions which he had assiduously cultivated over the years, but he also owed it to constituency workers whom he cultivated as well. It was the Labour Party coalition, not a particular group, that elected him. There is no sign whatsoever of a belief that anyone else could have done better. Roy Hattersley, his rival for the leadership, has served him loyally and acknowledged early on that Kinnock was the right choice.

At his best, Kinnock is seeking to create another coalition in the country: between the have-nots and the have-nots. In this he has never wavered. Every conference speech he has made as leader has stressed that Labour cannot hope to win on the basis of support from minority groups alone. The votes of the poor, the sick, the old, the unemployed and the otherwise disadvantaged are not enough and, in any case, many of them do not bother to turn out to vote. It is a matter of winning over more of those who are not too badly off.

The fact that the Conservatives still won no more than 42% of the vote, despite rising living standards for the majority, suggests that the task can be done. Kinnock had the right idea in emphasising that the twin priorities are the reduction of unemployment and the alleviation of poverty. The trouble was that not enough people believed he could deliver, and more than 20% of the electorate voted for the Alliance rather than Labour.

Shirley Williams once said that the Social Democratic Party was the last best hope for Britain. She was wrong. What must be true, however, is that Kinnock is the last best hope for Labour. He is only 45, learns very fast and, in the election campaign, gave the Tories a shock by reminding them that calls for a fairer society have not entirely lost their appeal.

(Originally published in *Marxism Today*. *ALR* will be running a fuller examination of Britain in the third term of Thatcherism, by Bob Jessop, in an upcoming issue.)

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF ALR**

- Black deaths in custody
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plus Bicentenary controversy, more features, *Time Out*, Briefings and reviews.
Or: Left Out in '88?

The left can't carry on any longer hoping the Bicentenary will go away. It's time to face the question of how to upset the tidy consensus view of history that's planned for us.

Envisaged as an Exhibition about Australia for Australians, it will focus on our history and our heritage, our culture and our community, our achievements and our future.2

Thus the Australian Bicentennial Authority (ABA) Factsheet on 15 December last. Pitched somewhere between the schoolmasterly and the "Life, be in it" modes, the language of the ABA's publications, especially Bicentenary '88 (the newsletter of the ABA) and the Bush Telegraph (a tabloid publicising the development and progress of the planning of the Bicentennial travelling Exhibition) is carefully tailored in its emphases on participation, consensus, enjoyment and learning.

All sections of the community are addressed in the ABA's plans: Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, women, the aged, the disabled, unions, young people and even people whose stories have never
been told. Central emphases are placed on experience — of life, journeys, of histories, of time and place; and on discovery — of self, of identity, of landscapes, of communities. The Bicentenary has ambitions to become what Gramsci called, without denigration, a "national-popular" form. It delimits a particular space and time — the Australian nation since 1788 — but also, and more importantly for its aims, the Bicentenary seeks to establish or, perhaps, to redefine the nature of the persons — the people — who inhabit that space and time. Hence, all the emphasis on experience, learning, discovery, effective participation:

"that heightening of the senses that we hope you can achieve on your journey through the Australian Bicentennial Exhibition."

or, more economically, and according to a key refrain of the ABA's advertising theme song:

"It's a fee-feeling ... just like you and me"

It would have been easier and more comfortably academic to have written this article in 1989 or, better still, in 2038 when, with more or less hindsight, it would be possible to look back on the events of 1988 and to point to them as evidence of an historically specific and politically charged celebration of national unity of a particular type. Or, perhaps, as a resounding failure. Or, as a missed opportunity. By then, at least, there would be access to some assessment of success or otherwise in the form of attendance statistics at the travelling exhibition and other events, sales figures on the "landmark" volumes to be published, participation rates in the various community-based programs and so on. But even without the benefit of hindsight, it would, I think, be a pity if some future researcher were to look back and identify the 1988 Bicentenary as a triumph of inane pomp and circumstance, of restrained official culture, as a moment of consolidation of what would, by then, be called the "Hawkean Consensus": or as the year of Barrie Unsworth's Birthday Cake. It would be a pity, in other words, if 1988 was seen as a restricted exercise in what Debra Silverman has called, in relation to another national celebration, "selective historical remembrance".4 What this means, of course, is that it would be seen as a moment of a very precise forgetting of, most importantly, the effects of settler colonisation on indigenous peoples.

This last point is certainly the most crucial issue in the left's current attitude to the Bicentenary. The Bicentenary, in this view, amounts to two hundred years of colonisation, repression and genocide. Therefore it should be boycotted. It is impossible to deny this fact, of course, but it is possible, I would suggest, to recognise it and yet find ways other than abstention of publicising and, in appropriate terms, of "exhibiting" it as "About Australia and for Australians". This is one central theme of my argument.

Another theme is that, despite this indelible mark on the Australian nation's origins, there are things which can be celebrated. Among these we would probably want to list, for example, the history of socialism in Australia, the democratic traditions and progressive achievements which have been fought for and won, certain values of community, identity and allegiance in local, regional, national and multicultural contexts. I may be beginning to sound a bit like an ABA brochure, but there is possibly a good reason for this — which is that the issues which they address are not inextricably and for all time part of the repertoire of an official or dominant culture. A political strategy based on the presumption that the past two hundred years of Australian history is indelibly marked by a single and repressive origin is as guilty of a one-dimensional view of history as some of the most inane re-enactments which the Bicentenary itself promises. In effect, this stance can produce no political strategy but only an ethical position: the ethics of guilt. This is a controversial point to which I will return below.

It may also be that, despite a certain left common sense on these matters, the ABA is not staffed solely by the tribunes of conservatism. There are a good many progressives working within the ABA hierarchy and on projects sponsored or supported by the ABA. I will also come to some of these initiatives in a moment.

But, first, let me return to the first point above about the issues which the ABA seems to be foregrounding — community involvement, experiences, journeys, participation, learning, life-histories. Perhaps all of these can be subsumed under one category invented by Madison Avenue in the 1930s — lifestyle. As David McKnight pointed out in the last issue of ALR, this concept, perhaps because of its origin, has been one which the Left, to say the least, has not been comfortable with.5 It has been below or beyond the levels of analysis with which we are accustomed to work. It is about the apparently undefinable areas of choice, preference, the clothes we wear, the houses we live in, the ways in which we define our environment and communities — precisely, the style of our lives. It is the advertising industry's name for anthropology. It's a bit of a problem.

Not so, apparently, for the ABA, which goes right to the heart of the matter in attempting to confer on these lifestyles a place, a history, a value and a currency in relation to the nation. We may not like the way in which it does this, but it is important for us to recognise that, in so doing, it is staking out a bid for the occupation of two areas: lifestyle and the nation as politico-cultural forms. Here they are combined in the 1986 brochure of the ABA:

The year will be bursting with activity, as families, neighbourhoods and whole communities join hands to celebrate ... From great spectacular events to educational programs of lasting significance, the national celebrations will help all Australians to honour their heritage and leave valuable legacies for future generations.

This, of course, is the boy-scout view of the Bicentenary and it comes...
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complete with jolly little pictures of smiling men, women, children, pictures of boomerangs (the only visual representation of Aboriginal culture), aeroplanes, yachts, the odd kangaroo and so on. You know the sort of thing. This prefigures, perhaps, the worst possible outcome of the Bicentenary: an Anglo-Saxon jamboree with a bit of ethnicity thrown in to spice the birthday cake. But there is a contradiction here. The Bicentenary is essentially a "staging" of history which, if left to the official version, promises to be an act of justification of where we are now on the basis of what we have collectively and continuously come through over the past two hundred years. The "we" there, of course, is the "we" of the last two hundred years: in other words the "we" produced by white settlement. If this collective subject and this particular periodisation of history are left as they are, then it is certainly true that as Mary Graham and Ross Watson said in May 1985 to Bob Hawke: "your bicentennial celebration will be merely an empty celebration of theft, genocide and destruction".

But it is also the case that the writing of history and, of course, the staging of history, while necessary components of political and cultural hegemony, are also important regions in which it is possible to lay claim to certain forms of redefinition. To boycott this potential in the sense of a total abstention would, in my view, be a missed opportunity of large proportions. Let me now come to the question of the boycott.

There seems to be a variety of strategic formulations regarding the Bicentenary at the moment. The most widespread — and not very strategic — seems to be to ignore it and hope that 1988 will pass by quite quickly. As an articulated position, however, the strategy of boycotting it seems to be dominant. But I think that it is important to understand just what is meant by this. If, as is planned, the Second Fleet is prevented from landing next year by thousands of Aborigines at Sydney Cove, then that is not a boycott, but an imaginative and probably violent intervention in the version of history — the _Onedin Line_ version — which is currently being touted. Interventions like this will disrupt the complacent spectacle and show its flaws, the bits that it forgets or edits out of its vision. The same sort of logic should apply to other, less spectacular aspects of the Bicentenary. Here we can safely ignore the silliness of "historical" reenactment and costume drama,
which can probably be safely boycot ted and ignored, and concentrate more on challenging some of the ways in which the Bicentenary goes about the more subtle tasks of defining, redefining aspects of community and lifestyle. There are several programs, less spectacular, but more pervasive, in which this might be the case. This is where the Bicentenary celebrations focus on the smaller social units of families, neighbourhoods and communities rather than on the larger, more corporate and official concept of the nation in its governmental form. A spokeswoman for the Bicentennial Authority stressed on the ABC PM Program on 23 July last that the Bicentenary is “not a party put on by the government”. Clearly, here, it is attempting to construct the basis of its spectacle “from the bottom up”, with the aim of an end result in a more participatory, persuasive and consensual concept of the nation than that provided by men dressed up in silly tricorn hats and frock coats. Hence the musical slogan, courtesy of the Mojo Advertising Agency:

“Let’s make it great in ’88. Give us a hand to celebrate.”

What are the initiatives in which we are asked to “give a hand”?

- The Australian Bicentennial Authority is helping the community to organise a wide range of national, regional and local activities which will recognise our past and prepare for our future.

That last clause, I would have thought, is pretty important and not something to be left in the hands of, say, the local youth wing of the NFF or the community section of the RSL. What sort of recognition of our past and preparation for our future is going to be staged here? How many progressives are involved in these community activities? I have no answers to these questions, but they are slightly worrying. It may already be too late to have any effect on this now, but if that is so, then it is a great pity. British feminist Ros Brunt once wrote a short article in *Marxism Today* about her fascination with Women’s Institute bazaars and fetes and about the ways in which these shaped not so much hard-nosed Tory political philosophy but, rather, the appropriate lifestyle in which that philosophy would seem natural and taken for granted. How natural and taken for granted are Australian lifestyles going to be in recognising our past and preparing for our future?

- The National Education Program will encourage all school students to celebrate their role in Australia’s development.

The nature of this “celebration” and the particular conception of “development” are also crucial areas for some sort of systematic engagement within the education system. Hopefully, many progressive teachers will already have made their mark in their use of the resource packs on the Bicentenary being supplied to all schools. I have not seen these and can make no comment on their content but, regardless of that, it is clear that, in this area of the formation of future citizens, the shape and critical form given to historical, geopolitical, civic and ethical training in schools is of immense importance to any considerations of development. Certainly, there has already been one potentially important outcome of this program in the form of the Australian Studies project at both Secondary and Tertiary levels. The Committee to Review Australian Studies in Tertiary Education (CRASTE), chaired by Kay Daniels, and with Humphrey McQueen as a committee member, has already produced useful publications on Folklore, Archives and Museums and Heritage and, if its recommendations are followed through, promises to have a significant effect on speeding up the decolonisation of the universities.

There are other initiatives in the all-important area of “national memory” which, with its resources of oral and written history, the left cannot afford to ignore:
The Historic Records Search will provide a permanent record of Australia's heritage through a comprehensive register of old photos, letters and documents which all Australians are likely to discover in their own homes.

Now, while not yet an Australian, I've got a few old photos, letters and documents which, I would like to think, might give a slightly different shape to some of the contours of a celebratory national history. How much more is this the case with the various collective histories of Aborigines, women, migrants, rural and industrial workers? All historical remembrance is, of course, selective, but we should at least ensure that we have a significant say in the criteria of selection rather than leaving it to be determined by the imperatives of a glorified and one-eyed national refrain. The potential of such a database for historians, political activists and community groups is immense. However well-intentioned the ABA may be in this project, it is important to ensure that this potential is realised productively and not just stored in an archive with a weatherproof and vandal-proof brass Bicentennial plaque. It would be a shame if the only history that we learnt and the only resources we had access to as a result of the Bicentenary were those provided by the "landmark" Bicentenary History of Australia — however authoritative and prestigious that might or might not be.

Also under the heritage tag and equally politically charged are projects funding community groups to restore historic sites and heritage trails, and for the preservation of local and regional history. Again, all potential areas in which political, ecological and cultural interventions can be made. Indeed, Aboriginal groups have already realised some of this potential. With a grant of $200,000, the Puntukunuparna Aboriginal Corporation in the Western Desert is undertaking a history of the effects of the Canning Stock Route which brought many Aborigines into contact with Europeans for the first time. From what I have heard of this, it does not sound like a history of national consensus. In fact, Aboriginal groups seem to have made the running on early interventions in a Bicentennial strategy which included gaining funding totalling $7.26 million, including the allocation to set up Australia's first Aboriginal TV station, the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA), the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, the Woompera-Muralag Housing Corporation in Cairns and the Torres Strait Culture Centre on Thursday Island. I may be naive, but I would have thought that these initiatives are important for communities and just the sort of thing the Left could have been doing if it had not been so keen to indulge in the politics of guilt in its attitude to the Bicentenary. Again, we have to be quite clear what we mean when we call for a boycott of the Bicentenary. If we're not careful, all that will be left to boycott are the obvious but really not very important targets of pomp, official ceremonies and birthday cakes. The community work will have been done. But not by us.

Guilt is a bit of a problem in the Left's attitudes to the Bicentenary. A guilt about that massive and tragic injustice at the origin of white history in Australia. There is no doubt, of course, that it is massive and tragic, but it would surely be more productive to — almost therapeutically — transform that guilt into a productive and strategic recognition of our national origins and enable that to determine our intervention rather than our abstention, in 1988. No national history, and least of all that of Australia, which is not a nation-state on the classic European model, is unified, monolithic and simply continuous from a single origin in oppressions of class, ethnicity or gender. Histories are also histories of resistances to forms of oppression — or they should be. This returns me to a point I made earlier which may have appeared flippan: that there are things to celebrate, albeit not necessarily in the terms and on the agenda provided by the ABA. Though it should be said that the agenda has been pretty carefully worked out by the Authority and we may now, at this late stage, only be in a position to respond to predetermined initiatives.

It is inevitable that no matter how firm the agenda for the 1988 celebrations, no matter how thematically organised the events are, the nature of popular participation in them will "overflow" their official limits and provide the occasion not just for the celebration of the "authorised version" but also for other versions of, say, family, neighbourhood, community and nation. The potential is there, given the commitment, to fully develop and organise this overflow into a more critical and interventionist celebration of these forms of social and cultural organisation. But this is on condition that we know what we may be dealing with here and take it seriously.

no political strategy but the ethics of guilt

The structure of the travelling Bicentennial Exhibition gives some sense of the "showing and teaching through experience and participation" strategy which we can expect to figure right throughout 1988 as a sort of "come on". The "National Arcade" in the exhibition will have six major exhibits based on the themes of:

- Journeys: Maps, Dreams, Contact, Settlement
- An Australian Identity: Myths, Heroes, Woop Woop
- The Environment: Place, Site, Frame, Fence
- Living Today: Pattern, Lifestyle
- Living Together: People, Politics, Media
- Futures: Transformer, Choice, Expectation
It is not difficult to imagine the presence of a Phillip Adams at work here. The language would not be out of place in a modernist art gallery or a cultural politics journal. It is not the exhortatory language of earlier more imperial exhibitions of this type, but more like a therapeutic “cure”.

The Australian Identity exhibit
“looks at myths, dreams, heroes and legends, and the search for a vocabulary and icons to explain the Australian experience

While in the Environment exhibition
“The experience should be interactive, allowing the visitors to discover themselves in unsuspecting ways.”

And, in Futures,
“Interactive computer displays will allow visitors to make their own choices in the medium of the future.”

“The Nation, be in it!” We can expect this sort of invitation to have its effects next year. Exhibitions of this type have always, since their inception, with the Great Exhibition of 1851 at Crystal Palace in London, been in the business of symbolising selected icons of national life, prosperity, development and heritage. The tone of the Bicentennial Exhibition and many of the other events planned for 1988 seems explicitly to be distancing itself from some of the dusty pomp of its predecessors and, instead, decking out Australia in Ken Done colours for a bright new sense of future and community. Show, see, experience but, above all, internalise this sense of the national community. Both a gigantic history lesson and (like the best history lessons) an exercise in ethical training and “self-awareness”, the Bicentenary seems committed to the formation of a subjective sense of nationhood effective at the level of lifestyle, family, neighbourhood and community, rather than at the level of the governmental and administrative nation. It is impossible to tell how successful this is going to be. It is difficult to know precisely what is going on in the various communities. This may be a monumental failing on the part of the ABA’s public relations section, but it is probably equally the case that we don’t know because of our own, implicit or explicit, abstentionist strategy. My own feeling is that, like the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups of the Western Desert, Broome, Alice Springs, Cairns, Thursday Island and many other places, who had the foresight to get involved and get funding, we should be getting involved in our communities to give the celebrations, the history, the heritage, the definitions of national life in the past and future a distinctive inflection of our own. And, on that point, a modest proposal.

1988 is going to be a year of a national “taking stock”. Perhaps the official version will say something like, “Well, yes, we acknowledge that there have been a few problems in the past, and we regret out past actions with regard to the indigenous peoples and so on, but look where we have got to now, look at our bright future, etc. etc.”. The apologists of a complacent and inane nationalism have already begun to utter sentiments like these. By its very nature, the celebration of 200 years is an end as well as a beginning and it will probably be seen, in the official version, as a moment of renewal combined with a very strong urge to forget.

a moment of renewal combined with a very strong urge to forget

Wouldn’t it be useful then if we were able to insist upon our own version of renewal — socialist renewal that is — and work to make that have some effect on the contours of the national community, to retrieve some of those experiences which have been edited out of national memory and to insist on other forms of development? If this were to be the case and if, by some chance, the Bicentenary year were to see, as the outcome of this, the formation of a new and popular socialist party, then that would be something more interesting for that researcher to look back on in 1988. If we were able to transform our current concerns and work into a decisive and popular intervention into next year’s agenda, then, as Marx once said, the content will have gone beyond the form.

NOTES:

1. Just my luck that a couple of hours after I had finished writing this on a Friday, the ABC announced that the Bicentenary advertising campaign was due to begin on the following Sunday. I managed to pick up a couple of lines from the advertising theme song which I have included here. It is worth making the point very strongly that the ways in which the Bicentenary is represented in the media are going to be a large part of its meaning for us. For obvious reasons, this aspect receives little attention here.

2. Thanks to Tony Bennett for drawing this blurb to my attention.


6. In Black Nation, 5. Nov. 1985, p. 3. Many thanks to Julia Reid, Honours Student in the School of Humanities at Griffith University, for this reference and for other ideas in this article.

7. This argument is more fully elaborated by Graeme Davison in his excellent “Exhibitions”, in Australian Cultural History, No. 2, pp.5-20.

COLIN MERCER teaches in the School of Humanities at Griffith University in Queensland. He is at present working on a research project on media coverage of the Bicentenary, and would welcome correspondence relating to media coverage of and progressive interventions in the Bicentenary during 1988. The contact address is: Colin Mercer, School of Humanities, Griffith University, Nathan, Qld. 4111.
The Lionel Murphy affair was a cause celebre. But the issues it raised were never openly debated.

Now, for the first time, Wendy Bacon and David Brown both take the stand.
Interrogating The Interrogators

David Brown

In one of the eulogies at the memorial service for Justice Lionel Murphy at Sydney Town Hall, former NSW Premier Neville Wran exhorted us “to try to make some sense out of it all — something rational and positive and constructive” (Sydney Morning Herald, 28.10.86). In that the role of the media, and a section of the print media in particular, was decisive in setting the terms of debate over “the Murphy affair”, some reflection on journalistic practice is called for.¹

Such an exercise is made more urgent by the fact that the “performances” of leading journalistic figures in the media prosecution of the Murphy affair since his untimely death smack of self-justification rather than reflection. And that debate over the role of influential media accounts tends towards two poles: either a unified and conscious conspiracy on the part of the Fairfax press, or a heroic exercise in “whistleblowing” and “investigative journalism”. It might be useful then to try to identify some of the main tendencies or themes in influential journalistic accounts of the Murphy affair.

Perhaps the first issue to raise is the fundamental one of the nature of journalistic practice. The journalists most influential in the media prosecution of Lionel Murphy have consistently argued that journalistic practice is purely descriptive. Their task is that of discovering and revealing “facts”, conversations, incidents, associations, events, etc. These are understood as possessing a truth and a meaning that already resides within them, prior to, and independently of, forms of journalistic knowledge and practice, like pebbles on a beach. The task of the journalist is merely to go out and collect them and hold them up to the public gaze.

Even if we were to concede for a moment that “facts” lie pre-formed like pebbles scattered in the social world, clearly the very process of selection, the choice of a particular pebble from among many, imparts, creates or alters meaning, as does the arrangement of the pebbles in relation to each other, their placement in a new structure or form.

In short, journalistic accounts are a representation, a re-presentation, a process of social construction involving both the primary sources (interviews, research, discussion with sources, etc.) and the existing body of knowledge and understanding, journalistic forms of production and work processes. Not mere description

Awkward Silences

Wendy Bacon

One of the most encouraging signs for socialists throughout the world must be the fact that communist regimes — not only in the Soviet Union, but in Viet Nam, Cuba and elsewhere — are becoming more open to tackling the corruption of officials who have pursued self-interest before socialist policy and principles. As a result, journalists are extending their role from one of propagandists to the role of critic and investigator.

Whatever economic imperatives are encouraging these developments, it is clear that this new openness is being accompanied by the breaking down of “stalinist” methods of disposing of criticism whereby certain leaders and organisations are protected from criticism simply because of who or what they are. Instead of coming to grips with what was said, evidence was ignored or distorted: as a last resort, the critic could suffer character assassination or exclusion.

When one considers the historical legacy of corruption in NSW (that is, before, during and after the Askin era), the fact that a Labor government has been in power for more than a decade, and the highly structured relations and distribution of power between the dominant rightwing machine and the leftwing Steering Committee, it would be surprising if organised crime figures and corrupt businessmen had not concentrated some effort on compromising figures associated with the left wing of the NSW ALP.

When the chance came to find out whether that was so and, even more important, how and why it was done, many on the left who at the time in the labor law and radical criminology movements) preferred not to know. In this, their defence of Murphy had many of the hallmarks of Stalinism. The upshot of this, and the affair as a whole, contributed to the current threat to critical journalism and increasing secrecy in Australia.

There were many on the left who privately did not share the views of those who organised the political campaign in defence of Murphy, but such was the atmosphere of hostility and the strength of the demands for solidarity that few spoke up. One leftwing ALP federal parliamentarian from NSW, for example, told me privately that he wished that left MPs from other states had consulted him about the realities of political life in NSW before rushing to Murphy’s defence. Needless to say, he did not state this publicly.

The tactics used by the Labor lawyers to defend Murphy varied. Public criticism could at least be met on its own terms, even if it was exasperating in its refusal to deal with issues that had been raised. But less public tactics, including loss of work and social isolation, were used against those who held back from joining the ranks of the
but construction, the assembling of a story against a background of a large number of understandings. Understandings about, for example, what is deemed newsworthy, what are the existing frameworks of meaning and interpretation into which the individual story will be inserted, what sort of language and terminology can be used, what the editor will print, what is or is not defamatory or contemptuous, what will or will not endanger sources and informants, meet the deadline and so on.

A first step in rescuing something positive out of the affair might be for journalists to abandon the "mere description" and "fact gathering" defences of their work and enter into a serious debate about the social processes involved in producing journalistic accounts.

A second major characteristic of many of the leading media accounts of the Murphy affair was the manner in which particular legal practices or decisions were evaluated solely on the basis of whether they assisted the prosecution. Little critical attention was devoted by journalists to the question of whether particular practices or decisions were desirable precedents generally.

Examples of this tendency are too numerous to recount. The lack of criticism or scrutiny of the "Temby doctrine" of criminal prosecution on public interest grounds to "clear the air" is a notable example. The obvious danger which was conveniently ignored in the excitement of the chase is that initiation of criminal proceedings generates its own political and social effects, independently of the legal merits of specific allegations.

The extraordinarily hostile portrayal of criticism of the first jury verdict, labelled as "deplorable" and "violent", was another example. For journalists allegedly running on a "let's open up the criminal justice system to scrutiny" ticket, such a response to criticism of the jury verdict amounted to a defence of many of the very legal practices that deprive juries of the ability to play a greater popular role in the administration of justice, and keep them subordinated to the judiciary.

Justice Murphy's recourse to a dock (unsworn) statement, an entitlement under existing NSW law, sparked a frenzy of journalistic hyperbole. John Slee in the Sydney Morning Herald — aptly dubbed the John Stone of the law by a recent correspondent — was not content with describing the dock statement as "an anachronism" (Sydney Morning Herald, 1.5.86). He went on to argue that Justice Murphy's recourse to a dock statement was itself a ground for his removal under s 72 of the Constitution! (Sydney Morning Herald, 8.5.86). But if a judge can be removed from office for exercising a right provided in law, then judicial independence in terms of protection of tenure of office means absolutely nothing at all.2

A third and allied tendency was the subordination of serious and informed public debate over proposed institutional changes of a permanent and far-reaching nature to the immediate pursuit of the Murphy case. Perhaps the clearest example of this was the media coverage of the Stewart report.

The media, who had promoted and used the material Murphy defenders or, worse still, spoke up in defence of NSW Chief Magistrate Clarrie Briese. The Murphy case turned into a test of political reliability for the left. In my case, people whom I had known for more than a decade walked past me as if I did not exist. One of my most vigorous critics in print sent me a private note accusing me of having "joined the hang 'em and flog 'em brigade".

A long-term effect of the spectacular and passionate campaign to defend Lionel Murphy is that the left has largely played a negative role in the corruption and organised crime debate, seeking to deflect and minimise the issue, but not to come to grips with it.

In recent times there has been plenty of fertile ground for the left to explore the consequences of the close relationships between Labor politicians and businessmen. It could have played a role, not only by popularising the issue but also by linking it to broader shifts in politics and economic policy.

There have been notable exceptions to this general silence. For example, in his speeches against the monorail, Jack Mundey, former secretary of the NSW BLF, and City councillor, effectively raised the issue of Sir Peter Abeles' relationship with members of the NSW Labor government.

The difficulty for the left-wing defenders of Lionel Murphy is that, once they attach significance to the long friendship between Abeles and Prime Minister Bob Hawke, for example, or Treasurer Paul Keating and wealthy developer Warren Anderson, it becomes more difficult to maintain that there was no inherent problem in a working relationship between another senior ALP figure (Murphy) and a solicitor (Ryan) who was the partner of a major organised crime figure (Abe Saffron), especially when that relationship included discussions about government appointments, controversial property developments, and political advice about how the solicitor should tackle allegations about his activities.

There was a moment during the 1985 NSW ALP Conference, when sections of the NSW Labor Left broke with the past and called for an open judicial inquiry into corruption in NSW — an inquiry which would have explored leftwing faction leader Frank Walker's denial that he had been on a "love boat" with one of the accused in the Enmore ALP branch vote-rigging case. At the last minute, the Walker faction withdrew their support for the motion and the proposal was easily defeated. The right took the opportunity to admonish those who dared publicly to break ranks.

In the rest of this article, I want to deal with some of the issues raised by the Murphy affair as I perceived them; then I will answer some of the arguments raised by David Brown.

The material in the National Times about the Murphy case was just a small part of a much bigger body of work on the illegal tapes, organised and corporate crime, and political corruption in NSW, Victoria and Queensland. The journalistic techniques used were similar throughout the body of work. No one, including the police themselves decided to target Murphy. He simply turned up, along with a number of other public figures,
from The Age tapes from the outset and argued for action on the basis of the substantive content, generally heralded the Stewart report as a vindication of their campaign against Justice Murphy. More than any other complaints against the condoned this operation by giving overriding weight to questions of institutional processes for dealing with individual scandal rather than as raising more general issues? Newspapers, after all, are in a privileged position to place such issues in the public arena and to structure the terms of debate. From a news angle, it may be advantageous at some point to criticise developments which the debate has generated — as when Brian Toohey in the National Times criticised proposed extensions of phone-tapping powers — but does the news have no history at all, and journalists no responsibility for its structure and effects?

A fourth tendency in certain media treatment of the Murphy affair was the sustained treatment of it as individual scandal rather than as raising more general questions of institutional processes for dealing with allegations of judicial impropriety. In his 1983 Boyer Lectures, The Judges, Justice Michael Kirby remarked on the development in the United States of “institutions and procedures for the impartial examination of complaints against the judiciary” which “do not rely upon the sledgehammer of constitutional removal”. He noted that calls have been made in Australia for a more regular system for handling complaints against judges in a way that would provide both the presentation of judicial independence, including the protection of original and unorthodox judges and the provision of adequate redress for citizens with a legitimate grievance.

But, largely because allegations of impropriety in relation to Farquhar, Murphy, Schneiner and Foord were pursued by way of continually recycled allegations of individual impropriety followed by calls for Royal Commissions of inquiry, Kirby's call was largely ignored. Most media accounts made little constructive contribution to debate about the development of regular institutional processes to regulate judicial behaviour and misbehaviour. So that, when the Judicial Commission proposal was suddenly unveiled, seemingly overnight, by the NSW Attorney-General Mr. Sheahan, the necessary preparatory groundwork of public and professional discussion, debate and consultation over the competing principles of judicial independence and accountability and the exact details of an acceptable scheme, simply had not taken place. The result was a slanging match between the NSW Attorney-General and the Chief Justice, general confusion, and a lost opportunity to put forward a scheme that was the result of carefully researched and developed proposals as a matter of party policy, preceded by extensive debate and consultation to build a supportive climate of opinion.

A fifth tendency was the repeated and uncritical on the illegal tapes. In practice the question about whether Murphy's behaviour should be examined or not arose in this form: should he be excluded from examination because of his long association with progressive causes.

On the High Court, Murphy stood for a more socially conscious approach to the law. He advanced the cases of the underprivileged and those who were the victims of injustice. But in fact after his appointment, Murphy continued to play two roles — one as a judge and one as a senior political figure. His supporters insisted that he was only doing in less ruling class style, what other judges do. And yet, I imagine that if there had ever been a suggestion that Sir Garfield Barwick had not only interfered in the events that led to the sacking of the Whitlam government, but had also involved himself in the appointment of magistrates and public servants, these same supporters would have been the first to demand an inquiry.

One of the frustrating aspects of the radical criminologists' criticism of the Fairfax press for its handling of the massive NSW police illegal taping operation was that (while accusing others of having a hidden agenda) critics have failed to say exactly how they think the affair should have been handled.

It is useful to look at the practical position from the point of view of the journalist (who happened to be Marian Wilkinson) who first received the summaries of the taped conversations. From her contacts with police, she knew that, while they might not be entirely accurate, they were authentic. Was she supposed to sit on them, never mentioning their contents to another soul? Or was she supposed to hand them over to the NSW or Federal police, knowing that there would be no proper investigation (as turned out to be the case). And, after that, was she supposed to destroy the tapes and forget the incident had ever occurred?

What she did was outline some of the contents which demonstrated the most crucial issue — that a solicitor who was clearly involved in a variety of criminal activities, including the exploitation of illegal immigrants, was having regular dealings with a number of public officials, including a judge. The issue was presented as a political one — the focus was on the hidden network used by the solicitor to influence decisions and gain information. This, not the question of whether the illegally taped conversations revealed a criminal offence by Lionel Murphy, was always the central issue. I find it difficult to understand how anyone who supports openness and equal opportunity in public affairs would not consider that this should have been exposed. Yet, to my knowledge, none of Murphy's defenders have ever addressed themselves to this issue.

The implications are that journalists should actively censor material if it does not fit with their political interests — a precarious exercise at best, and one which would leave journalists in an even more privileged position as arbiters of the flow of information than they are already.

The editorial position of the National Times, and my own personal view, was in support of an open Royal
utilisation of notions of guilt by association and "network of influence". The dangers of such techniques and concepts include an inherent vagueness and ambiguity. Their meaning depends on implications of impropriety and conspiracy lurking beneath any association or contact. Their use willfully misrecognises the role of lawyers in our society. To expect criminal lawyers and judges who have practised in the field of criminal law never to have come into contact with people charged and convicted of criminal offences makes about as much sense as expecting surgeons never to have come into contact with people requiring surgery.

Underlying the notions of guilt by association and networks of influence is a 19th century conception of "criminality" as a form of "taint" which spreads or can be caught on contact. It is extremely damaging to the development of more progressive social conceptions of crime and criminal behaviour to see journalists with former civil libertarian credentials championing such notions.

Here again, a certain selective amnesia was evident. David Marr's book The Ivanov Trail provides a careful and compelling critique of the very similar (ASIO) doctrine of "agent of influence". And Wendy Bacon, in her response to Judge Williams' attack, said that she did not see how her previous criminal convictions and associations were relevant to the question of her journalistic competence. Indeed, it is necessary to point out that recognition of the dangers of guilt by association techniques should not depend on the identity of the target.

One of the deleterious political effects of the sanctimonious moralising that has characterised certain media accounts over the last few years has been the generation of a cynical climate of suspicion that forecloses on cultural traditions of openness and equality. One does not need to embrace the mythology of Australian mateship and egalitarianism or to deny the pernicious divisions of class, race, and gender to acknowledge certain national cultural traditions. In Britain, for example, it is inconceivable that the judiciary and other members of the elite would ever rub shoulders and intermingle with "the crowd" (including "criminals" and "prominent racing identities"). For class divisions and stratifications are so highly developed that the "wrong sort of people" are filtered out of social contact with the elite in the establishment clubs and Inns of Court.

Does this make the British judiciary more substantial bearers of "integrity" than their Australian counterparts? To answer this in the affirmative is to celebrate the values of the high tory cloister. And much of the recent media treatment of legal and judicial issues in Australia has strongly promoted precisely these high tory values as the touchstone of appropriate judicial conduct, as did the conclusions of the abandoned Special Commission of Inquiry. On the question of appropriate judicial conduct, John Slee went as far as to compare unfavourably Justice Murphy's image to that of a judge who was reputed to "Keep Fearne on Contingent

Commission into the circumstances in which the tapes were made and into the network of criminals, lawyers and public officials — ranging from immigration officials, a NSW public servant who could influence casino applications (discussed in the tapes), a magistrate and a judge. However, the option argued for by some of those opposed to the publication of the tapes was an inquiry only into the legal taping operations. Such an inquiry would have revealed that the Criminal Investigation Bureau, the NSW Special Branch and the Criminal Intelligence Bureau had been illegally tapping phones in Sydney — an operation which had been taken for granted for many years by political activists and was sanctioned by the highest levels of the police force. The NSW ALP had criticised the practice before it came to office, but did nothing to stop it when elected. Such an open inquiry would have inevitably asked about the responsibility carried by the former Minister for Police and Premier Neville Wran — quite apart from the near impossibility of cross-examining police about their reasons for tapping phones without intruding on the contents of the tapes. Perhaps this is why those who proposed this course, never seriously pressed this solution.

Both NSW and federal Labor governments quickly closed ranks against the possibility of an open inquiry. To the extent that Murphy, as a High Court Judge, was left exposed as the most obvious target for the federal opposition, he, too, was a victim of Labor's cover-up.

Could Murphy have been sacrificed to an even bigger danger? As the National Times attempted to point out on several occasions, the clearest matter emerging from the police record of the conversation was a sum of $50,000 which was alleged to have been paid by casino operator John Yuen to a person in the NSW government who could influence the issuing of licences. This man was referred to as J.D. — and, for reasons not all of which are known, the police had interpreted this as the Chairman of the NSW Public Service Board, and ex-NSW Labor Council secretary, John Ducker. The circumstantial evidence (not necessarily admissible) that a bribe had been paid was strong. There was even talk about how to get the $50,000 back when the timing proved wrong. In addition, the dates of conversations tallied with relevant external events.

John Ducker was a powerful figure in the labor movement and it can be said that, without his support, Wran would probably not have become Premier, nor Hawke Prime Minister. He admitted he knew Yuen, but denied accepting a bribe. Such is Ducker's credibility that not even Judge Stewart in his Royal Commission into the illegal tapes, required him to deny the allegation on oath. Assuming Ducker is not guilty, there is, perhaps, still in the ranks of NSW's influential public servants, someone who was happy to accept a $50,000 bribe on this one occasion. This matter, even more than the protection of Lionel Murphy, required that there be no inquiry in NSW. The National Times regular reminder of the "J.D." case went apparently unnoticed by critics and supporters of Lionel Murphy.

The attempt by sections of the labor movement to
Remainders (two volumes) under his pillow at night" (Sydney Morning Herald, 15.5.86). In welcome contrast to this sort of nonsense, a Sydney Sun editorial following Justice Murphy's death put the issue of judicial style this way: "Justice Murphy perhaps retained more zeal and political style than we are used to seeing in a judge. It may be that one price of reform and public concern is a more public judicial style." (Sun, 22.10.86.)

These are only a few of the general tendencies that can be drawn from influential media accounts of the Murphy saga. They are identified, not to prove a generalised conspiracy, but to raise questions about so-called "investigative", "specialist" or "quality" journalism. What exactly do these terms mean, other than longer articles?

As a society, we might take one step towards "making sense" of the Murphy tragedy if prominent journalists and media organisations ceased responding to criticism of selectivity, sensationalism, prejudice and inaccuracy with highly generalised claims of "free speech", a public "right to know", "the facts" and "the truth". Such arguments are a complete evasion of serious and specific issues of media accountability. The public is entitled to a better response from those whose access to the means of communication makes their persistent calls for others to "answer questions" very influential. Or are the interrogators themselves beyond question?

DAVID BROWN teaches in the faculty of law at the University of NSW.

contain the affair, combined with the determination of a few journalists that this would not occur, produced an unsatisfactory mess. Instead of an open inquiry, there were secret inquiries and a trial which pursued the narrow and subsidiary question of whether Murphy had been guilty of perverting the course of justice in a case against Ryan. For its part, the press had now power to obtain information and was hamsrung by the limitations of defamation and contempt law.

Potential defamation problems were necessarily minimised on the advice of Fairfax lawyers in a way which encouraged straight reports of allegations and evidence rather than a free ranging discussion of the implications of the tapes material. The issue for example of Ryan's reputation in the seventies and what Murphy knew of that reputation was never canvassed by the media. This enabled his supporters to project images of Ryan as just any solicitor and Murphy as socially naive — images which though quite unrealistic were never frankly challenged. (Even now inhibitions imposed by defamation law make it difficult to explore this issue.)

The legal restrictions on the press, the determination of the NSW government to avoid the issue and Murphy's right to a fair trail when he was charged, meant that a central issue — the attempt, successful or otherwise, by an organisation engaged in profiting out of illegal activities, to make use of a High Court judge, who was also an influential political figure, was never confronted.

If there was a central figure in the tapes affair, it should have been organised crime boss Abe Saffron and yet for two years he remained a shadowy figure on the sidelines. As the record of the conversation showed,
Ryan and Saffron were involved in illegal business activities for which they required protection.

Saffron was well aware of Ryan's connection with Murphy: indeed the two discussed how "the judge" could be used to advantage. On another occasion, Ryan talked about how "the judge" would use his political influence in favour of an illegal casino operator. None of this implies that Murphy was involved or knew of these activities but one might have imagined that he would have been as enraged by the way in which Ryan had abused his friendship as he was by the illegal tapping of Ryan's phone (Ryan's phone was tapped because he was suspected by police of fixing drug cases.) One might also have imagined that Murphy supporters would have wanted the issue clarified, if only to demonstrate his lack of knowledge of Ryan's partnership with Saffron.

In fact Murphy was at least aware that Ryan was one of Saffron's regular solicitors. This, you would imagine, might have been sufficient to turn him off pursuing frequent social and professional contact with Ryan, let alone consulting or assisting him in matters of public appointment or property developments. How much further his knowledge of Ryan's activities went remains unanswered. Was he aware of the almost daily contact between Ryan and Saffron? Did he have an independent relationship with Saffron? Had Saffron compromised him, as he had many others, by supplying him with sexual services?

In the earlier days of the affair, Murphy's name was not linked to Saffron's for defamation reasons. This meant that political support for an open inquiry was the only way to resolve the issue.

The advantages such an inquiry might have had over a criminal prosecution as a means of exploring the issues raised can be seen by comparing two sets of proceedings relating to the disappearance of anti-development campaigner Juanita Nielsen. Initially, three men were charged with conspiring to kidnap her. While some factual matters were settled in the trial which followed, the three men could have been acting in a vacuum. It was only later in a more open coronial inquiry into the death of Juanita Nielsen that the connections between the three men, their immediate employer Abe Saffron's night club manager Jim Anderson, and developer Frank Theeman could be filled in. The murder might not have been solved but at least the context in which it occurred was revealed. It was this sort of background which was lacking in the official inquiries into allegations against Lionel Murphy.

What the Fairfax press called for, and what NSW Chief Magistrate Clarrie Briese wanted when he gave evidence at the first Senate Committee inquiry into Murphy's behaviour, was a Royal Commission into the hidden networks which influence political decision making in NSW. What he achieved, and what Murphy and his supporters were the first to demand, was a criminal trial.

The prosecution could have raised the issue of Murphy's knowledge of Ryan's relationship with Saffron during a cross-examination relevant to Murphy's credit. It chose not to do so on the grounds that it could unfairly prejudice a jury against him. By the second trial, the prosecution was aware of evidence from independent sources which indicated that Murphy had had his own relationship with Saffron. This time Murphy chose not to go into the witness box. This and other evidence was being pursued by the secret Commission of Inquiry which followed his acquittal when Murphy became too ill for the inquiry to continue. His death meant that the unanswered questions about Murphy's relationship with Saffron will never be fully answered.

One issue that would have been raised was Saffron's role in an attempted settlement of the Sankey case, itself a cause celebre in the labor movement. The case involved a private prosecution by Sydney solicitor Danny Sankey against ex prime minister Gough Whitlam, Jim Cairns and Lionel Murphy for their role in the 1975 loans affair.

I share the view that this was a political prosecution with little merit which could easily be defeated. I was therefore surprised to learn during an interview with Saffron's ex manager Jim Anderson that tapes surfaced that he had been involved in negotiations on behalf of the defence to settle the case. When I spoke to Sankey he confirmed that he had indeed met with Anderson and as a result spoke on the phone about the case to a person whose voice he recognised as Saffron's.

Anderson's evidence would have been that he was instructed to approach Sankey about settling the case by Saffron who in his presence had spoken to a man he was told was Murphy. Even if you reject Anderson's word on this point, the issue remains — how on earth did Saffron become involved in assisting the defence? Perhaps it was through Ryan, who was acting for Cairns. I am convinced from other inquiries that neither Whitlam nor Cairns had any idea of these negotiations. Would Ryan have independently approached Saffron when on his own and Murphy's account he discussed tactics in the case with Murphy? The negotiations were unsuccessful when Sankey displayed no interest in further dealings with Saffron.

The Sankey case is now history. There will be some who say so what — an unjust case can be settled by any means! To those who would support such extreme pragmatism in a case which could be won by more straightforward tactics, the best answer can only be a reminder of how much political damage to an already tarnished labor movement would have been done if Sankey had chosen to reveal these events at the time they occurred. He did not do so and as a result for several more years, Saffron, either directly or indirectly through Ryan and senior corrupt police, remained dangerously close to events on the Labor side of politics.

The Criminal case against Murphy

A criminal trial is not a vehicle for discovering the truth. It is conducted according to strict rules designed to protect usually powerless defendants. The contradictions which emerge in the unusual case where the investigation arm of criminal justice system directs itself towards public
officials is one of the historical reasons for Royal Commissions.

My view was that there was a criminal case against Murphy on the evidence raised by Briese. (There is no room here to canvas the case in detail.) I also believed that the conversations took place so long ago and conspiracy law is so uncertain that it was the least satisfactory way for the tapes issue to be resolved.

Once the charges were laid, public debate was stopped. This achieved, the supporters went further and behaved as if the issues should be confined to those admissible in the case. This was quite contrary to the usual left wing approach to criminal law which would seek to take a broader view than the artificially created parameters of the rules of evidence.

The case depended on whether Briese's account and interpretation of conversations with Murphy was accepted by a jury beyond a reasonable doubt. The defence cast sufficient doubt on Briese's account to obtain an acquittal.

There were a number of reasons why I believed Briese was telling the truth to the best of his ability and that Murphy was not. One reason had a compelling effect on me at the time and illustrates some of the complications of journalism never considered by our critics.

There was one witness in the case, himself a senior Labor figure, who told several people including myself a different account of events than the one he gave in court, both well before and after the Murphy trials. According to his off the record version, Murphy had contacted him several times about Ryan in a manner in which he interpreted as an attempt to get him to help Ryan. If this evidence had been given it would have addended enormously to Briese's credibility and probably have been fatal to Murphy.

Those to whom the witness confessed this other account were bewildered by his openness. He is a person known for his integrity who did not relish the uncomfortable compromise he made for Murphy. His own confused actions were a perfect illustration of the cost of demanding loyalty to person rather than principle on which support for Murphy seemed to depend.

This witness not only told people his off the record version but also mentioned the names of others, including myself to whom he told the truth. The situation reached farcical proportions when one of the confessors told the full story to the Commission of Inquiry, including the names of others who had heard both versions.

Just after a decision to subpoena, all those involved as well as the witness was made, the inquiry was terminated. Had it not been terminated an extraordinary and disastrous chain of events would have unfolded. People would have been forced to give evidence against the witness — except for those who could claim journalistic privilege, they could have been jailed for contempt of court.

If Murphy had been an ordinary accused facing prison, I would have sympathised for his predicament. In fact, police and accused mislead courts every day. But in this case, Murphy's defence necessarily involved a savage and unfair attack on Briese (one of the other contradictions of the case was that Briese had also been a reformer in his administration of courts in NSW) and a dangerous test of loyalty for others. Yet in the entire affair, there was no indication that Murphy had any misgivings about a massive campaign which identified his own career with the struggle for civil liberties and law reform in Australia.

This campaign idealised Murphy and gave the impression High Court work could only have been done by him. In fact his judgements typically reflected a worldwide movement around civil liberties in the 1960s and 70s. There were others who could have performed his role as there were always others to adequately replace him. Why, one wonders, was a similar and less dangerous campaign not waged for Justice Jimmy Staples when he was prevented by the Fraser government from sitting on the Arbitration Commission. It was his refusal to relinquish any notion that there is a deviding line between employer and worker that had irritated the government. His contribution to the fight for a just legal system had been just as great.

The Korean Conspiracy Case

Murphy was found not guilty. Even so, it was clear that he was prepared to go out of his way to assist Ryan on a charge arising out of an illegal immigration racket. (An immigration racket is profiteering out of the demand for residency.) One might have imagined that labor lawyers might have been curious about this. Instead the Korean immigration case was one of the great untold stories of the tapes affair.

For the entire period, Ryan remained on a charge of conspiring to assist illegal Korean immigrants. No public canvassing of his case was therefore possible. Once again only a public inquiry could overcome this legal restriction and answer why Murphy was prepared to assist Ryan. (Without such an inquiry and in the space available, I can only signpost relevant events.)

Ryan's work with Korean immigrants went back at least to 1974. Junie Morosi, who will be remembered as one involved in the political events which led to the fall of the Whitlam government, approached the then Minister for Immigration Jim McClelland with a letter in support of permanent residency for a long list of Korean immigrants. The letter was signed by Jim Cairns. Ryan acted for the Koreans. During the remaining months of the government, McClelland played close attention to make sure that the cases of Korean immigrants were properly handled.

Morosi's activities were not restricted to Koreans. During the same period, Morosi was also involved in assisting fellow Filipinos with immigration problems. With her assistance, Murphy obtained some Filipino servants. Not surprisingly, caucus backbenchers were reported to be angry about the obvious political contradictions involved in a Labor MP having servants.

The opposition naturally took advantage of the contradiction. In December 1974, the then shadow Attorney
General Ivor Greenwood asked Murphy questions about his relationship with Morosi. Murphy stalked out of parliament. The questions remained unanswered because by the time parliament resumed Murphy was on the High Court.

His departure from the Whitlam cabinet came shortly after a break-in of Morosi’s house in Sydney. After the case questions were raised about whether the Liberals had organised the break-in as part of a dirty tricks campaign. Several weeks later questions were again asked about Murphy’s knowledge of the break-in, but by then Murphy was on the High Court.

If the Parliamentary Commission papers are ever made public they will reveal a series of statements, one a contemporaneous statement by a senior policeman, which show that Murphy was tipped off about the break-in before it took place by an old friend, Sydney bookmaker Bill Waterhouse. Waterhouse had received the news from Sydney private detective Tim Bristow who told him he was organising the break-in on behalf of right-wing enemies of the government. Murphy passed the information on to the police and as a result of the tip-off two men were arrested — only one was charged. Bristow, who was very close to Ryan at the time was prepared to give evidence that as a result of Ryan and Murphy’s intervention, he had one of his men released.

Even if Bristow is lying about Murphy’s intervention the more crucial question remains — did he tell his fellow cabinet members what he know of Bristow and Waterhouse’s role in the affair? If so why wasn’t political mileage made out of the break-in? Any suggestion at this time that the Liberals were involved in dirty tricks could have completely altered the political atmosphere and the interpretation of other political events, including the Loans Affair, which precipitated the fall of the government.

A few months later, Age journalist Ben Hills told a parliamentary inquiry that he was aware of evidence suggesting that Murphy had assisted Morosi in importing Filipino labour into Australia. There were no further investigations. Later, in a defamation case, Murphy admitted that he had received favours from Morosi and husband, David Ditchburn in the form of free air travel on Ethiopian airlines. Under the Liberal government, the immigration rackets continued to flourish.

Eventually, a young Korean who had paid money to those running the racket made complaints about his treatment. He ended up in hospital after a severe bashing. The issue became a public one again. There was even a suggestion that the Korean CIA was involved. A Federal police investigation was ordered.

According to the tape summaries, Murphy wanted to assist Ryan in clearing himself of the police investigation. He even gave Ryan advice about how to clear his name publicly. If the tape summaries were inaccurate one might have expected Murphy himself would wish to clarify the matter.

Ryan was eventually charged, convicted and won an appeal. While he awaited a second trial, the tapes affair began. The records of the illegally taped conversations provided a wealth of material showing a large number of Koreans, Chinese and others were paying money which was distributed between lawyers and immigration officials for permanent residency. Most of the cases involved Ryan but there was a mention too of one case belonging to Morosi.

None of these matters prove anything against Murphy, but they would at least provide a starting point for an investigation into why Murphy was anxious to help Ryan.

In the week after Murphy’s first trial, I wrote a piece which traced Murphy’s career from his early close association with bookmaker Bill Waterhouse, ex premier Neville Wran and Ryan; his rise through his industrial law practice in the NSW ALP, his friendships with Marcos cronies, Babe Ishmael and Junie Morosi; and the events which preceded his departure from the Whitlam cabinet. I wanted to push the discussion beyond that of guilt and innocence to an interest in the political culture which enabled Murphy to reach the High Court. While it solved some immediate problems, Murphy’s presence on the High Court was a time bomb. In those days, opportunities for a Labor government to influence the High Court were rare — his contribution was a valuable one but there were others waiting in the wings who could have made an equally outstanding legal contribution.

The article was a failure and the debate remained stuck.

Previously, Brown had called for journalists and others to examine “the political preconditions for crime networks . . .” This he argued would “involve among other things, an attempt to transform sections of the left in the ALP from a closed, defensive, manipulative “numbers” style of politics . . .” It never apparently occurred to him that his is precisely how marxist criminologists could have tackled the Murphy case.

In defending the National Times treatment of the Murphy case, I have also demonstrated some of its limitations. Those legally imposed limitation contributed to obscuring the issues. Some of this could have been explained by media commentators at the time, but to my knowledge they were never really concerned with the practical problems of reporting the issue. Instead they projected an image of journalism which bordered on caricature.

Dave Brown treated the press, especially the Fairfax press, as if it was a unified whole. Internally the image he presented was a contradictory one. He persistently ignored the specifics of material raised but failed to spell out how journalists should have acted.

Journalistic accounts are constructed, he argues, by assumptions and ideologies which are not always clear. This of course is true but not very helpful in the specific case, as all accounts including his own criticism are equal-
ly constructed. Journalistic criticism which exposes the way in which accounts are constructed and the hidden agendas of which they are part are nevertheless valuable. Brown has precisely put forward two propositions about the assumptions informing Australian investigative journalism.

The first is that journalistic practice put itself forward as purely descriptive (SMH Dec 27, 1986). In my own experience this is not correct. Many journalists are painfully aware of the power they have to select the facts to be printed or the quote to be televised. Increasingly, journalists both consciously engage in both the presentation of information and comment — the two are often mixed. The more interesting exercise is to examine what political comments are possible and which are discouraged.

Journalists do deal in information and whatever the selection process, information still has to be tackled on its own merits. This is what Brown fails to do. An analysis which focuses all attention on the subjective nature of journalism could be dangerous if it lifted the responsibility off journalists to be accurate in presenting the facts they choose. This is especially so as journalistic accounts often form the basis of a deeper analysis.

Brown’s other proposition is that the SMH and the National Times had a thesis that “crime is immorality” (SMH 27 Dec 1986). I agree with Brown’s criticism of the inherent moralism of Bob Bottom’s books on organised crime. (Martin Mowbray and myself have spelled this out in more detail in a soon to be published second edition of The Criminal Injustice System.) The problem is that although he sweepingly applies the argument to all Fairfax publications no examples he has so far given are from the National Times. I would think it would be hard to find any. On the contrary, during the period we are discussing there were articles in the National Times which deliberately departed from the moral “law and order” emphasis. We canvassed whether heroin should be legalised; criticised Costigan’s punitive approach to SP bookmaking; discussed how Sydney’s “property game” was riddled with hidden standover practices; show how corruption in the Transport Workers Union was affecting rank and file workers. None of these distracted Brown from his determined image making.

Brown also draws attention to the media’s tendency to individualise issues. Once again one can only agree with him (perhaps the best example being Sixty Minutes, which can turn any issue into three case studies.)

There is however value in individual case studies. You can’t discuss corruption in the property game for example without at some point focussing on individual property developers. In preferring the structural view, Brown ends up avoiding the role which individuals play. One valuable role which radical criminologists might have played is in wedding case studies with a structural approach.

Brown’s most telling point is that by focussing on corruption in the criminal justice system, journalists have deflected attention from more systemic issues such as racism or class discrimination, and the conditions of ordinary prisoners.

I think there is some truth in this. Certainly, in recent years, it has been more difficult to get liberal views about criminal justice system or the cases of ordinary people publicised. This has more to do with a general political shift to the right and the decline of prisoner action groups than it does with the corruption debate. In the publicity attached to the issue of corruption in the police force, there was plenty of scope to raise the implications for the cases of prisoners who had been locked up on the word of ex detectives Roger Rogerson and others. Unfortunately this did not happen.

The problem with Brown’s argument is that corruption in the NSW criminal justice system is itself systemic. “Doing business” is embedded in the way the system works, as Bob Milliken and I illustrated in a series of articles in the National Times in 1984. The lack of access to contacts and money is just one more way in which class, sexual and race discrimination work. The temptation to resort to “doing business” have played a part in neutralising the prison and police reform movements which grew in the 1970s.

My own political attitude to corruption was formed through experiences in the Victoria Street resident action group struggle when we confronted a violent organisation protected by the same police who were part of its late night drinking and prostitution rackets. These experiences were later reinforced when I saw prison militants neutralised by the supply of heroin and court deals. In the end, hidden deals reinforce inequality and increase the powerlessness of those who seek change through open means.

On the day Murphy died a well known feminist lawyer sent me a telegram congratulating me on my contribution to the criminal justice system. There will be many who will think I have been excessively harsh on Murphy. It is likely that the stress of the last two years contributed to his early death. His death was a reminder, if I needed one, of the pain you can help cause as a journalist — not that I believe I was the cause of his misfortune. But the point could equally be made about the entirely innocent child of Roger Rogerson who had been wounded by accusations against her father. In the end, journalistic activity — or equally political activity — would become paralysed if you stopped everytime you were going to cause pain.

The opportunity to gain some more understanding of the political network in which Murphy was just one cog, has passed. The network itself has been bypassed by new political friendship and deals on an even bigger scale. There is still plenty of scope for the left to popularise these new connections and show what relevance they have to the shifting political scene. But that cannot be done in NSW until the left is prepared to brave the anger of the political establishment.

WENDY BACON is a reporter on the SBS TV program Dateline. She was formerly a reporter on the National Times.
Love it or loathe it, the Hawke government is one of the most successful in Australian history. But much of the left has still to come to terms with its existence.

Bob Hawke is now the most successful leader in the ALP's history. Labor has probably never before appeared to the general public to be so competent in government; so in command of the political agenda (whatever we might think); or so united. Its relationship to the trade union movement is more secure than that of Chifley in the 'forties, and certainly more so than that of Whitlam in the 'seventies. There appears to be an abundance of political talent in each of the various wings of the parliamentary party, and Labor possesses an electoral machine the envy of its rivals. On all of these counts, its future looks rosy.

It is important to stress this picture, however limited and one-sided it may be because, over the next three years, the left outside the ALP runs the serious risk of becoming detached from the world view of the body politic altogether, and lapsing into a kind of principled monasticism. At the root of it is probably our inability to admit, even to ourselves, that a Labor government — even this Labor government — could govern with a strategy deeply inimical to almost everything we believe in, and yet become a resounding success. There are always those, of course, who will argue that Labor's new face is precisely why it has succeeded — because it has pursued policies "functional to capitalism", and is thus functional to capitalism too. But a simple right turn has rarely been the saviour of Labor or social-democratic governments anywhere in the past; and "functionality to capitalism" is one of those circular arguments which never really proves anything. Clearly, if Labor has been
successful, there are more complex reasons involved.

It's an old saw on the left that the crux of socialist strategy in this country lies in its analysis and understanding of the ALP. Yet, over the last four years, much of the left has simply ceased analysing the ALP in any sober way at all, resorting instead to what was described in the last issue of ALR as the “culture of betrayal”: while other parts have quietly and pragmatically, but without any wider analysis, got on with accommodating themselves to it.

Part of the reason for this probably lies in a refusal to acknowledge our own complicity in the ideological processes at work in the political arena. There's been no shortage of clear and vocal criticism from the left of the positions taken up by the government over the last four years — much of it well-directed and often hard-hitting. What's been absent, however, is even the smallest recognition of the left's own responsibility for this situation — meaning the absence of any credible alternative program of the kind which could be implemented successfully if the left were suddenly and unexpectedly thrust into government tomorrow. Rather, the left has tended to act as if we had a ready-made and widely agreed alternative program somewhere in the backs of our heads, just waiting to leap out. The reality, of course, is rather different. And the consequence has been that the Hawke-Keating position in the ALP has been able to act as if, in Margaret Thatcher's immortal words, “There Is No Alternative”.

One of the keys to the government’s success remains, as it has been from the start, its successful engagement with the trade union movement — an engagement which, as I've tried to argue elsewhere (Australian Society, June), succeeded also in redefining the terms of the relationship between the ALP in government and the union movement. This is why (among other reasons) it is vital for forward looking elements in the left to make up their minds once and for all what they really think of the kind of strategy outlined in Australia Reconstructed. It's vital, not least because, while at least the terms of the ongoing bargain between the ACTU and the government are fairly clear, the left's attitude towards the thinking of the more advanced sections of the trade union movement remains hopelessly ambivalent. And, while this hardly requires that the left accept or reject such a strategy en bloc — if, indeed, that were possible — it does suggest that we at least have to be clear what we think about it. At stake is not only our conception of “the economy”, but our entire strategy in the field of social policy as well.

The campaign

A great deal of newsprint and videotape was expended during the election campaign on the theme of what an unremarkable election it was. What needs to be pointed out, particularly from the point of view of analysis from the left, is that the campaign had some rather novel features which say a good deal about the changing face of Labor.

One highly significant feature of the campaign was the constituencies targeted by Labor, and the way in which they were addressed. For once, there was no pretense of tailoring the entire appeal to that entity known as “middle Australia”, with its well-known alleged propensity to social conservatism, personal self-interest, and little else. Now women, 25-40, with the key emphasis on those either in or aspiring to be in the labour market, were the acknowledged major “target audience” — followed by, in rough chronological order during the campaign, welfare recipients, those concerned about the environment, and (in a last-minute attack of nerves), Labor’s “traditional constituencies”, via Paul Keating's robust verbal assault on the Money Power, in the incongruous manner of his one-time mentor, Jack Lang.

Of course, the sincerity of all this should not be taken too seriously. Neither Senator Richardson's sudden conversion to environmentalism, nor the Prime Minister's equally improbable discovery of a kind of makeshift charity-style affirmative action in his new ministry, was regarded with more than mild amusement by most. Nor have welfare recipients or the “traditional constituencies” (or at least Labor activists) been too mollified since the election by Senator Walsh's macho posturing on welfare expenditure, or the ceremonial opening of the Great Privatisation Debate by Mr. Hawke.

Nevertheless, the difference in style is significant; particularly in the light of the opportunism of the opposition's campaign, with its none-too-subtle revival of what the Liberals presumably regard as their sure-fire last-ditch “fistful of dollars” approach. Labor's campaign was intended to be “statesmanlike” — and, aside from Paul Keating's characteristically cynical hospital-bed poses, it mostly was. A team of ministers, each with his (in the curious absence of Susan Ryan) individual message of responsibility and restraint, replaced the happy-go-lucky prime ministerial vignettes of yesteryear. To the extent that this did reflect a genuine “image” of the government's broader social and economic approach (whatever we may think of that), we should hardly quibble with it. “Image” politics has been much maligned lately. But, as Stuart Hall recently observed, images are not trivial things: “In and through them, fundamental political questions are being posed and argued through”. And, in fact, it was the “style” more than the “substance” of the election campaign which revealed some of the newer trends in the ALP.

What Labor's election campaign made clear, in short, was that it has adapted itself very successfully to an era in which the socially-based political loyalties of the past count for a good deal less, and “ideological” appeals based upon identification with certain broad systems of values a good deal more, than previously. The lesson of the decline of British Labour is that the traditional core of the working
class itself has become so differentiated and diverse that the “reliable” core is shrinking in numbers and significance. Hence the concern in the ALP’s campaign for, on the one hand, broad “national” appeals to togetherness and self-sacrifice; and, on the other, for more differentiated appeals to the various, sometimes contradictory, elements in people’s political outlook. Ironically, this phenomenon is of which many on the left have been aware for a number of years — but without the opportunity to translate it onto the national stage. Now Labor, in its own fashion, has done just that.

Where now?

Clearly, the most significant battle ahead for the left, both inside and outside the ALP, over the next few months, is the Great Privatisation Debate launched personally by the Prime Minister himself in August. It is significant above and beyond its strict economic and political importance, for two — on the face of it, contradictory — reasons.

The first is that the question of public ownership and the public sector has long been an Achilles heel of the left. Margaret Thatcher built her political creed on the identification of existing state-run enterprises with socialist values and with the welfare state; and on the counterposed images of plurality and freedom of choice in the private sector. And, indeed, the left very rarely takes the trouble to try to articulate any cogent reasons why public utilities, as opposed to residual services or health or welfare provision, should be in the public sector. As with our alleged economic strategy, we often vaguely assume that the rationale for state-owned utilities is sitting fully-formed in the back of our heads — when, in fact, in the contemporary context, it is a case still very much waiting to be constructed.

There are a number of reasons for this, but the most obvious is the understandable ambivalence many people on the left feel for the role of the state in general. On the one hand, there is the conception of the welfare state as an “island of socialism in a sea of capitalism” (in Barry Hindess’ phrase); or again, the venerable notion that socialism will come via the piecemeal socialisation of the “commanding heights”, rather like a dripping tap — although few on the left would consciously assent to this as a viable or popular road to social transformation nowadays. On the other, there is a strong sense of the alienating features of centralised bureaucracies — particularly among people in the community sector with experience of more participatory forms of provision. Moreover, there is no sense in which public ownership is felt to be an integral part of a strategy for social change. In public, it is pointed out defensively that the same utilities in private hands would lead to even larger monopolies. But few positive arguments spring easily to mind.

At the same time, there can be little doubt that within the labour movement privatisation will be a deeply felt emotional issue, the like of which has not yet been seen in the life of the Hawke government. There has been enormous disillusion within and without the ALP over the drift of government policy these last four years, and a few instances — such as uranium sales, or ESL — which have crystallised these sentiments for a moment into near-rebellion. But the privatisation debate seems, somehow, to serve as a point of convergence for all the misgivings, all the slow ebb of principle, emanating from diverse directions since 1983.

In a sense, this is ironic: after all, few in the ALP seriously regard the socialisation objective as any kind of feasible priority; and many other measures in the field of social policy have created immeasurably more pain in the lives of actual living people than the sale of Australian Airlines would ever be likely to do. Ultimately, however, it may be the difficult area of principle, of the often intangible but deeply-felt springs of political commitment itself, which may prove to be the battleground at this crucial point in the policy of evolution of the government. An important part of this, too, is a sense of history: privatisation is a very tangible means of rolling back the welfare-state compromise of the latter forties. In Britain in the 1950s, Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell, having successfully “revised” priorities in practice across the spectrum, moved to modify the socialisation objective in the Labour Party’s constitution. Suddenly, right and left, trade unions and party branches, found themselves more or less united on a question of little practical substance but immense emotional significance for the very self-definition of their political commitment. While the privatisation debate is of much more than emotional significance, Mr. Hawke could well find that he has committed a Gaitskell.

On the other hand, it may equally well be the left’s last chance to affect seriously the direction of the Hawke government. If the left is unable to argue its case in such a way as to redefine the public ownership question in terms of actual priorities in the lived experience of real people — priorities which nowadays include not only welfare and security, but also a more self-confident sense of citizens’ rights and of the responsiveness of social and economic institutions to people’s needs — then it will have abdicated much of the terrain of social policy as well. Mr. Hawke has set the terms of the debate adroitly: “We can only go forward as a party if we hold our principles not as items of blind faith but as relevant and effective means to achieve our goals”. The left cannot afford not to take up the challenge. But if, in the process, blind faith is the first casualty, it will be no great tragedy.

DAVID BURCHELL co-ordinates ALR.
UNITA WE STAND
Angola’s Continuing Strife
Kenneth Good

After Nicaragua, Angola has the government America most wants to see defeated. Why? And can it survive?

Angola has pro-Western Zaire and Zambia to its north-east and east, and Namibia and South Africa to the south. It is a potentially rich country which, since independence in 1975, has been purposefully prevented — chiefly by the United States and South Africa — from achieving its potentialities. It has oil, diamonds and iron, and vast resources of land capable of producing both a range of export commodities and sufficient food for its relatively small population of 6-7 million.

It inherited from Portugal an education system so poor that only 15 percent of Angolans were literate in 1975, and destroyed equipment when the half million Portuguese expatriates fled. But this does not account for the losses suffered since then. Earlier, the world’s fourth-largest coffee producer, it has seen its production cut to less than one-tenth from 1973 to 1981. Similarly, while formerly the world’s sixth-largest diamond producer, with an output of 2.4 million carats in 1974, it has experienced a drop in production to 750,000 carats in 1985, and the country now imports between 50-90 percent of its food.

This decline is the consequence of external and internal aggression, and the effort to oppose it absorbed 60-80 percent of government revenue in 1986. The government of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) has faced a situation of continuous crisis since its formation. Avowedly marxist since 1977, it is also moderate and non-doctrinaire. The leadership of the first MPLA
government, led by Agostinho Neto, was described by one authority as “skilled, educated, and dedicated”. And that of his successor, Eduardo dos Santos, has stressed its desire for foreign investment and trade with the West. The External Trade Minister, Gaspar Martins, recently referred to the large and growing role of American and French corporations in the oil industry, and said: “We’re not dogmatic. We look at the systems of the world and decide what is applicable to Angola.” He noted, too, that 80-85 percent of his country’s trade was with Western countries. “This is where the market is, where we sell and where we buy. We want technology from the West. There is no reason why this shouldn’t continue.” President dos Santos had earlier declared that Angola was prepared to live “in an atmosphere of tolerance” with South Africa once Namibia was independent. The MPLA government is, at the same time, relatively free from the mismanagement and corruption which has self-induced bankruptcy in some other African countries.

It is not the policies of the MPLA, but the existence of fratricidal divisions within the nationalist movement which has facilitated external aggression against the country. Originating in Zaire in the 1950s was what subsequently became Holden Roberto’s Front for the National Liberation of Angola (FNLA). Roberto had close association with a number of American organisations, and it is said that United States pressure encouraged the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to recognise a Roberto-led government-in-exile briefly in the 1960s. But Roberto preferred to remain in “life-long exile” in Zaire, and the FNLA was structurally incoherent, deeply racist and tribalist — little other than a vehicle for the brutality of its leader, who also espoused a “visceral anticommunism”.

The third movement, the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), was formed by Jonas Savimbi in 1966 as a splinter group from the FNLA — little more than “twelve guys with knives”, as an American official then described them. But UNITA must be compared with Roberto’s group as well as with the MPLA, and what distinguished it strongly from the FNLA was the stress which Savimbi placed on organisation inside Angola and actual engagement in armed struggle. There is evidence, however, that Savimbi in the early 1970s was prepared to collaborate with the Portuguese in military action against the MPLA and to discredit it politically within the OAU. It was Savimbi who subsequently sought a more durable association with South Africa.

The United States has long supported Portuguese colonialism and it had foreseen neither the collapse of Portuguese militarism in Africa nor the overthrow of fascism in Lisbon. When the United States began to increase its intervention in Angolan affairs, in January 1975, it did so against the MPLA and by expanding aid to Roberto. The initiative in Washington came from Secretary of State Kissinger who was spurred on by a vision of world-wide confrontation with the Soviet Union. The United States, reports John Stockwell, then chief of the CIA’s “Angola Task Force”, “clearly wanted this war”. It ignored the fact that the Soviet Union had stopped supporting the MPLA in 1973 and had only resumed significant arms shipments in March 1975. It also ignored possibilities other than covert military and economic intervention: it further ignored the obvious negative features of the FNLA in apparent preference for Roberto’s anti-communism. As Stockwell noted: “Most of what (the CIA) knew about the FNLA came from Roberto, the chief recipient of our largesse”, and “we knew even less about Savimbi and UNITA”.

The United States, however, did not act alone and, in the initial stage, the CIA obtained the co-operation of Mobutu in Saire and Kaunda in Zambia. Shortly afterwards, during the second half of 1975, the CIA began encouraging South Africa to intervene in Angola, in association with Savimbi and again with Mobutu and Kaunda. To the CIA, says Stockwell, “the South Africans were the ideal solution”. The American agency “traditionally sympathised with South Africa and enjoyed its close liaison with BOSS”, the then main intelligence organisation in Pretoria: “co-ordination was effected at all CIA levels and the South Africans escalated their involvement in step with our own”.

Washington’s strategy in Angola following the departure of the Portuguese administration was to place Roberto’s FNLA in power in Luanda, despite their palpable unfitness for national government and the known strength of the MPLA in urban areas. The result was the rout of the inexperienced FNLA and their Zairean allies, and the elimination of the FNLA as a viable fighting force by the beginning of 1976. Washington’s opposition to the MPLA government thereafter assumed two forms which are still maintained. Savimbi was advised to continue fighting, and the United States embarked on a punitive policy of non-recognition of the MPLA government to undermine Angola’s economic relations with the West and hamstring reconstruction in the country.

South African forces invaded Angola before the country’s independence. Pretoria would seem to have been responding to the opportunities presented to it by the divided Angolan nationalist movement, but also to pressure from other countries that it should act. Stockwell reports that “it came into the conflict cautiously at first, watching the expanding US program and timing their steps to the CIA’s”. As it became clear that neither the FNLA nor UNITA had the ability to stop the MPLA. Zambia, Zaire and the United States called for increased South African intervention in support of UNITA. Like Kissinger, both Kaunda and Mobutu feared the establishment of a Soviet-supported government in Angola. In mid-
October a South African armoured column, totalling some 2,000 troops, travelled northwards from Namibia, drawing UNITA and FNLA units in its wake. It, too, was repulsed south of Luanda, and the bulk of the force was withdrawn in January 1976. Kaunda was left to rail against the Soviet and Cuban assistance to the MPLA as a fearsome “tiger and its cubs”, and to try to deny recognition to the MPLA government. By mid-1976, however, Savimbi, with continuing assistance from Pretoria, had organised a renewed rural insurgency against what he now called “Soviet/Cuban occupation”.

South Africa carried out two large-scale invasions of Angola under the Reagan presidency, in August 1981 and in December 1983. The latter operation, named “Askari”, involved no less than 10,000 troops, and ended in fiasco.

**the general manager boldly observed that the US was ‘backing the wrong guy’**

But UNITA continues to provide South Africa and the United States with the weapon of economic destabilisation over much of the sparsely populated countryside. Savimbi's forces concentrated on economic sabotage, mining roads and fields in the richest farming areas. The apartheid regime provides UNITA with requirements like uniforms and fuel and stands ready to defend Savimbi's redoubts in the south when MPLA attacks are close. The Reagan government has recently offered Savimbi increased recognition, money and new weaponry, and greatly enhanced UNITA's destructiveness.

From March 1975, some two months after the United States and Zaire initiated covert assistance to FNLA, the Soviet Union and then Cuba moved to provide the MPLA with its vital defence capability. Cuban military aid was requested by the MPLA in March 1975. Some 230 advisers arrived around May, followed from September by a very rapid build-up of Cuban troops and heavy weaponry, first using Cuban ships and later Soviet aircraft. Cuba's dramatic intervention, says one authority, represented “a decisive turning point” in the war, but it “followed upon substantial intervention by others”. The Cuban action, unlike that of America, was in no sense covert, and it was proclaimed by Fidel Castro as an expression of established state policy and Cuba's African heritage. By early 1976, about 12,000 Cuban troops were present. These forces plus the heavy weaponry which the USSR and Cuba supplied, helped the MPLA's guerrilla-trained units to shift successfully to conventional direct confrontations with the South African military.

But the war of economic destruction and South African incursion continued, and in 1980 there were about 20,000 Cuban troops and some 17,000 advisers and technicians from other communist states in Angola. They operated and trained Angolans in the use of tanks, missiles and radar systems as well as the fighters and assault helicopters which are the shield against South African attack on Luanda and a limited offensive capability against Savimbi's sabotage. It was this weaponry which threatened a major defeat for Pretoria's Operation Askari at the end of 1983. Soviet satellites had monitored the build-up that preceded the invasion, and Soviet diplomats informed the South Africans in New York that the USSR was ready to strengthen its forces in Angola in response to any escalation in pressure from Pretoria.

This was a significant expression of tacit policy, but what the Soviet Union did not provide is also significant. Soviet economic aid to Angola is parsimonious — similar to what is offered to other socialist-oriented African states, but totally unlike the heavy financial assistance given to Cuba and Viet Nam; on the figures of one authority, Soviet economic aid through 1978 totalled only US$17 million. Nor, after eleven years' fighting, has the Angolan government acquired the capacity to eliminate Savimbi, shielded as he is by CIA support bases in Zaire and the South African military in the south. The government's dry season offensive in August-September 1985 came close to Savimbi at his southern base of Mavinga, but the South African military quickly flew in reinforcements, and the attack was repulsed. The Luanda government would require additional heavy weaponry and would be obliged to escalate the fighting in order to annihilate UNITA today.

Washington's non-recognition denies Angola Western economic aid, and the bulk of the government's budget is financed by oil exports, presently depleted by low world oil prices. With coffee and diamond production seriously curtailed, oil provides 90 percent of Angola's foreign exchange, and the greater part of this is exported to the United States. Angola is America's fourth-largest trading partner in Africa, but the oil corporations are under pressure from the Reagan administration to pull out, and are even threatened with attack by UNITA. In this sharp polarisation of proclaimed national and commercial interests, the American companies have chosen to maintain their effective alignment with Luanda, which is thus in a stronger economic position to defend itself. Oil giant Cabinda Gulf's general manager boldly observed that the United States was “backing the wrong guy” in Savimbi, and the president of Chevron, its parent company, assured dos Santos that his company would not be bullied into leaving.

Under Reagan, the United States has moved closer to South Africa. Reagan soon referred to South Africa as a friend that had stood by America in all its wars, and which was “strategically essential to the free world". Controls on sensitive exports to South Africa, introduced under Jimmy Carter, were relaxed in 1982, and important computers and perhaps nuclear materials were
supplied. Military relations were restored. Attachés were again placed in the respective capitals, top South African military commanders were brought secretly to Washington for briefings, and the CIA shared intelligence data with Pretoria. American approval in 1982 helped Pretoria to secure a much-needed loan from the International Monetary Fund. Reagan and his entourage saw South Africa as a good anti-communist country which should be brought within Washington’s strategic embrace. Following the policy of “constructive engagement”, apartheid was accepted as a problem internal to South Africa.

Such policies had strong implications for Angola. Next to Pretoria, Washington by 1982 was the strongest supporter of the notion of linkage between the Cuban forces in Angola and independence for South African-dominated Namibia. Unlike its Western allies, America insisted on the prior withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola, a policy which not only delayed freedom for Namibia, but promised to expose Luanda to Pretoria’s attack. Then, from the opposite side, the “Reagan doctrine” represented increased American support for Savimbi, suddenly depicted not as a traitor and saboteur but as a “freedom fighter” and “scholar warrior” in the global anti-communist crusade.

When Congress, in July 1985, repealed the Clark amendment which had barred covert aid to UNITA, Reagan quickly supplemented recognition with financial and military assistance. CIA chief, William Casey, met with Savimbi in Kinshasa in March 1986, and the shipment of new weapons through Zaire began. In June 1986, a delegation from the US Senate secretly visited Savimbi in Angola, and met CIA station chiefs in Kinshasa and Pretoria. In August the CIA was training UNITA forces on American anti-aircraft missiles and anti-tank weapons at a secret location. Buoyed up by this support, Savimbi intended to seek a larger commitment from Washington. The harmony of outlook between Washington and Pretoria was indicated when the South African Defence Minister, General Malan announced, in September 1985, that it would continue supporting UNITA because this was in the “interests of the free world”.

UNITA has come a long way in 20 years, from tortuous exile manoeuvrings in Zaire to the White House in Washington. The organisation can claim greater political reality than the FNLA earlier or Renamo in Mozambique today, the latter being nothing other than faceless terrorists. But what UNITA is concentrating upon inside Angola in 1986 is indiscriminate assault in the countryside. In the reports of foreign relief agencies as well as the Luanda government, UNITA had planted anti-personnel land mines by the hundreds in village farmlands, trails and roads, in the north and the south-central highlands. The immediate result was injuries inflicted on thousands of peasants with, for example, 6,000 to 8,000 victims in the Huambo region alone. The longer consequence is the abandonment of the fields in some of the most fertile districts and a further drop in national food production. The Luanda government, in April 1986, put the number of “totally destitute and mutilated persons” in need of food aid from foreign donors at 600,000, an increase of 100,000 over the previous year.

Savimbi has many foreign sympathisers in addition to the Reagan right wing, and the apartheid regime. President Mobutu in Zaire still renders important assistance, chiefly as an alternative to Savimbi’s
total regional reliance upon Pretoria, and Tunisia, Morocco, and possibly certain Francophone West African governments are sympathetic. There is also support in political and financial circles in Britain, not least from the Lonrho corporation, a company with extensive African interests; and a minister of the Chirac government in France recently praised what he called, in Reaganite terms, Savimbi’s “brave fight for freedom”. Nevertheless, it is very likely that UNITA would be defeated without United States and South African support. At the end of 1985, two of the three major intelligence agencies in the United States, the CIA and the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research, concluded that Savimbi had no chance of winning on the battlefield, and little prospect of forcing a coalition government in Luanda. The sole agency predicting a possible victory for UNITA was the Pentagon’s Defence Intelligence Agency which had then, for several months, shared intelligence material with Savimbi and provided communications support to his forces.

Rising black resistance inside South Africa, and the growing movement for international economic sanctions against Pretoria inexorably undercuts Reagan’s support for both South Africa and Savimbi. Secretary of State Shultz reportedly resisted the rearming of Savimbi in 1985-86 because it disrupted American diplomacy in southern Africa, and Congress has defied Reagan to impose a range of significant sanctions.

Decreased American support for Pretoria would rationally involve dissociation from Savimbi. But the anti-communism of the Reagan entourage is of a rabid, crusading, and adventurist kind, which revels in covert action in Angola and other socialist-oriented Third World countries. If such tendencies are, in fact, both the bedrock and content of Reagan foreign policy, UNITA might for some time yet survive.

NOTES:

5. Stockwell, p. 191.
6. Quoted in R.W. Johnson, How Long Will South Africa Survive? London, 1977, pp. 147 and 163. See also “Briefings”, RPE, pp. 85-86, where it is suggested that Savimbi “begged” South Africa to intervene and was assisted in this by Kaunda, Mobutu, and Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast.
7. Crawford Young, Ideology and Development in Africa, New Haven, 1982, p. 87. There was also in 1978 a Comers agreement which pledged US$75m.
8. Cabinda Gulf’s installations were attacked in April, and Savimbi later demanded that Chevron must assure him that it would not block his efforts to obtain more American aid. He noted that French companies in Angola were “keeping up their contacts with us”. Guardian Weekly, 17 August 1986.
9. Hanlon, p. 109
10. Savimbi held meetings with a number of Chirac’s ministers and with the speaker of the national assembly in Paris in October. Interviewed on French radio, he said that “they understood us and promised us aid”. Times of Zambia, 28 and 29 October 1986.

KENNETH GOOD teaches politics at the University of Zambia, Lusaka.
In our last issue, we printed a provocative assessment from Britain of the state of socialist feminism — “Sisters And Slogans” by Melissa Benn. Below we print two Australian contributions to the debate: an assessment of the recent books, by Lynne Segal and Anne Phillips, which prompted the initial article; and a personal view of the current state of socialist feminism in Australia by two well known activists.

Essential Desires

Marilyn Lake

Feminism is confronted with the issue of “difference” on two fronts, with possibly contradictory political implications. On the one hand is the insistence on the difference between men and women, between men’s values and women’s values, men’s ideas and women’s ideas.

On the other, there are the differences between women — an emphasis on the diversity of women divided by class, race, ethnicity, nationality. In the first, “woman” is a unified category; in the second, the unity dissolves in the face of the separate, even opposed, interests of the different classes and races of women.

The resurgence of the belief in women’s separate and special experience and capacities gives rise to the “troubled thoughts” expressed in Lynne Segal’s Is the Future Female? She sees cultural feminism as having replaced socialist feminism and validated a new “essentialism” — which she defines as the denial of the possibility of change — and which, she argues, constitutes the public face of feminism in the 1980s. (One wonders, in Australia, whether “femocracy” might not be the public face of feminism.) Segal identifies Dale Spender and Mary Daly as the real villains in this process, characterising both as elitist idealists and linguistic determinists who scorn the material realities of women’s subordination in the workplace.

Essentialism is Segal’s bete noir and a wide range of writers on quite different subjects — for example, Nancy Chodorow, Susan Griffin, Luce Irigaray and Juliet Mitchell — all seem to share the fatal flaw. Segal recognises that the new positive valuations of women’s capacities and experience are, in part, an understandable reaction to the earlier misogynist strain of much 1970s feminism (“childbirth is
barbaric", etc.). Feminism does indeed face intractable dilemmas in its "appraisal of women". But the championing of women's nurturing skills, women's morality, the espousal of women's difference is, according to Segal, a strategy of despair, a consolation of the powerless. I think Segal is wrong here: on the contrary, this new "feminist chauvinism" (to adopt a phrase of Katherine Susannah Prichard about an earlier movement) proceeds from confidence, from a record of achievement. Women no longer wish to be assessed on men's terms, will no longer adhere to masculine models.

Segal worries about the hegemony of cultural feminism because of her equation of assertions of sexual difference with essentialism, defined as above. I would agree that feminists need a theory and politics which is transformative, but it seems to me we should not confuse recognition, even celebration of difference, with statements of determination or explanation. In other words we should be able to accept difference (whether biological or socially induced) without affirming it as the "cause" of inequality. We should be able to recognise the particularity, the specificity of female experience, without losing sight of male dominance as a social fact, a social construction.

It is precisely the denial of difference, and the promotion of sameness, which has fuelled the excesses of Spender and Daly. Their excesses stem, in part, from their trivialisation of class and racial oppression. Such is their enthusiasm for the unity Woman confronting Man that the real barriers and differences between women, women's oppressive relationships with each other, disappear from view. Segal's characterisation of Daly as an elitist, oblivious to the material barriers preventing the majority of women from embarking on her journey to the Otherworld of the Race of Women, is well founded. Such a denial or trivialisation of class as a shaper of the lives of women must hearten those who would criticise and dismiss feminism as a privileged middle class movement.

It is these criticisms, and the more general relationship between feminism and socialism, which Anne Phillips discusses in her engaging account Divided Loyalties: Dilemmas of Sex and Class. For it is quite evident, as she notes, that the unity of women is continually disrupted by conflicts of class. Conflicts of race have the same effect, but they are not equally the subject of her book.

Philips notes that "class" has often been used to put feminism in its place, to undermine its pretensions to being a radical movement. Rather than retorting with claims about the primacy of the sex struggle and the masculinism of the class struggle, Phillips is concerned to trace the intersections of sex and class in shaping British people's lives in the past and present. It is significant that the problems of priority, of competing loyalties, of schizophrenia, seem to have been felt most acutely by women: "women have continually tussled with problems of priority, dragging ourselves first in one direction and then another as different oppressions have come to the fore".

Phillips shows with astute historical analysis how gender has structured people's experience of class and how class has structured people's experience of their gender. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, as "femininity was being constructed as a class ideal ... gender was not so much a separate structure as something incorporated into the meanings of class". Phillips argues that in the twentieth century the lives of women became much more homogeneous: marital status supplanted class as the key determinant of a woman's role and work. "In the nineteenth century, social class had dictated whether or not a woman went out to work; by the early twentieth century the key question was whether she was married and had children". By the latter half of the twentieth century, however, most women went out to work. But as there were convergences in women's experience across classes, so there were new divergences. "As women are drawn more and more into paid employment the gap between the kinds of jobs they do has inevitably grown". One cannot help but wonder, in the Australian context, to what extent some Affirmative Action strategies are facilitating the "inevitability" of this hierarchy.

Against the background of these changes, Phillips suggests how the attention of feminists has shifted backwards and forwards, first spotlighting the distress of the spinster gentlewoman, then the plight of the overburdened working class mother. There are significant divergences here between the Australian and British experience - with the latter confronting the problem of "redundant woman". But by the 1970s paid employment had become a key issue in both countries. In her conclusion, she advises that, when confronted with the complexity of experience arising from class divisions, we resist the temptation to polarise, to stipulate either/or choices, to simplicistically condemn ("typically middle class", "so very workerist"). Different women inhabit different positions and need different things at different times. At the same time, socialist feminists must learn how to bargain with the men in the socialist movement, for socialist feminism must continue to grow.
How to act upon the diversities of difference? There are no easy answers, no longer a list of imperatives. Phillips advises that we become more sensitive to the differences engendered by class. We should heed the fact of class exploitation. But, in building a socialist movement with men based on that recognition, we must also, as Segal says, preserve our autonomy as women, lest the specificity of women again be rendered invisible by the "objectivity" of men. Fears of "essentialism" should not divert women from the truly essential project of asserting our female needs, desires, priorities and visions.

MARILYN LAKE teaches history at Melbourne University.

**Different Struggles**

Jane Martin and Marilyn McCormack

Melissa Benn's article "Sisters and Slogans" (ALR 100) raises some provocative questions about British socialist feminism and, by implication, socialist feminism in general — among them that the feminist side of socialist feminism has loitered; that the debate over sexuality within socialist feminism has largely been dropped; and that there's been a failure on the part of socialist feminists to build up a network of alliances based on a real recognition of "women's different histories".

This is a hasty response from two socialist feminists involved in organising the September Socialist Feminist Conference in Sydney — a hasty response because, at the time of writing, we're still up to our ears in organising the conference.

First, we agree that it is difficult, in the face of the current rightwing assaults on the gains made by progressive coalitions of feminists in the past, to keep adequately drawing out the importance of sexuality politics within socialist feminism. The politics of sexuality — including the understanding of women's desire as it is, with the spotlight on how it came to be that way rather than on how it "should be" — has vitally important implications for our political work in general.

Socialist feminists in this country have long pointed out that sexuality and sexual oppression are not given "unchangeables", but are determined both historically and culturally — and that the possibilities and limitations around sexual desire are often both race- and class-specific. To make progress within these possibilities and limitations is to make progress with our relationship to political change.

We agree with Melissa Benn that "there has been [a] transformation of the notion of woman as the "object" of
oppression/discrimination to something more complex — to ideas of woman as subject — an active agent of change and holder of power". We also feel that this shift is the result (in this country at least) of the contributions of socialist feminists, among others, to the sexuality debate — a contribution which stressed that sexual practices can’t be seen in isolation from social structures and social context. Likewise, we argued for a shift of emphasis from assessing sexual activity as "good" or "bad" in and of itself, to assessing it in relation to other historical forces such as state intervention and the power differences between gender, race and class.

sections of the left feel more secure in arguing that socialist feminism should in effect be feminist socialism

At various times in the 1980s, the sexuality debate has been taken up as a major and, at times, the major priority, of socialist feminism in this country. What needs to be stressed in this regard is that, while the priority accorded to this debate waxes and wanes, the debate over sexuality both within and outside the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) is a permanent one. It seems difficult to believe that, in Britain, "the majority of socialist feminists have been completely absent from such discussion". In Australia, socialist feminists have, in fact, sought out and introduced to left debate a range of controversial challenges in the field of sexual politics — for example, the relationship between power/powerlessness and domination and submission in sexual practices to wider personal and political relationships. Nevertheless, Melissa Benn’s article does serve as a reminder that, while political priorities will always be heavily influenced by the prevailing ideological and political climate, they must not be allowed to become wholly determined by it.

It is difficult, too, to judge the claim that the feminist part of socialist feminism has lofted in Britain, but not so difficult to refute it in terms of the Australian experience. One problem, however, is that, while recognising the complexity of the issues facing the WLM, and putting them in an historical context, she seems to attribute negative consequences of these complexities to socialist feminism — without placing it in an historical context. This makes it difficult to respond in a manner which can both avoid the "Ra, ra, let’s defend socialist feminism" approach and clarify the confusion.

The article suggests, for instance, that British socialist feminism is dominated by membership of political parties. Again, this is difficult to judge. However, it is useful to note that one of the reasons why Australian socialist feminism has been at the cutting edge of the WLM is because it has been composed of consciously non-aligned women; party women who have constantly maintained the autonomy of the WLM as a political imperative; and, on occasion, coalitions of party and non-party women, as well as between radical, cultural and socialist feminists, in highly significant campaigns such as those against the Pine Gap and Cockburn Sound nuclear bases.

The development of women’s services in Australia has likewise been achieved by something of a coalition between feminist activists from a range of political positions, united by the aim of widening women’s personal and political power. This is not to say, of course, that such feminist collectives have not had huge political differences between and within themselves. Various collectives have taken up both socialist feminist and lesbian separatist positions at different times, and during different debates and campaigns.

The fight against the Fraser government’s dismantling of federal funding structures for women’s services earlier this decade was mobilised primarily by radical feminists. The campaign for adequate wages and conditions and the unionisation of women’s services, on the other hand, was taken up by socialist feminists. The marked difference in strategy in each case reflected the different philosophical and political bases of the two groups. There have been numerous coalition campaigns over issues of shared priority — for instance, the fight against volunteerism and unpaid labour, child-care funding in women’s services, the right to free, safe abortion, to affordable housing, and so on. Coalition work is not, however, based on a simple formula of a + b + c = unity. Such campaigns have, at various times, been paralysed by political polarisation, as well as by the all-pervasive shift to the right, as evidence, for example, in the conservative drift of the refuge movement as church and charity-based women’s services have gained increased funding.

In recent years, this rightward shift has also contributed to the increasing difficulty of raising questions such as the politics of sexuality, the imperative need for coalition work, and the importance of the principles raised by this work, in the left as a whole. Increasingly, it is seen as wishy-washy to continue asserting the need for an ongoing anti-racist and sexuality politics on the left. In the face of the right’s ideological and economic assaults, some sections of the left appear to feel more secure in taking up the ultra left position of arguing that socialist feminism should, in effect, be feminist socialism — so that the “primitiveness of class issues” can remain
constantly on the tips of our tongues. This sort of static politics contents itself with repeating the catechism of the primacy of marxism, and abjures from the vital debates over the continuing contradictions facing socialist feminists who do venture beyond such an ultra left framework.

In recent women's movement debate, radical feminists have repeatedly argued the need to employ and support only working class, migrant and Aboriginal women in the women's services industry. Likewise, they have argued that the left's focus on wages and conditions has tied the industry into government dependency, and entailed a conservative shift dictated by the limitations of "femocracy". Socialist feminists outside the ultra left framework, on the other hand, have argued that strategies based upon the dependency, and entailed a conservative shift dictated by the identification of women according to their class and race (the identity rather than to a broad strategy politics referred to by Melissa Benn) lead to an individualistic politics, rather than to a broad strategy against race and class discrimination in employment.

The main point is that the debate goes on. While various issues take precedence over others at different times, we don't agree that this means that those which appear to have lost priority have been abandoned. We do agree that there has been a lack of forums for debate and strategy development in the WLM in this country in the '80s — which is something socialist feminists are hoping to rectify with the September conference. We also agree that the insights created by the politics of difference has been the key development in the thinking of the WLM in the '80s. As socialist feminists it has had radical implications in all our areas of work. On the one hand, it means, in Anne Traynor's words in a previous issue of ALR.

The power that women have in the socialising and domestic realms is a power which, to date, women have been unable to realise, or recognise, since they have been taught that their work is valueless compared to that of men. From the point of view of difference, women can begin to realise that power. It begins with the rejection of those negative aspects which have been attached to our work, and a reassessment of our worth to the social system ... our "difference" has inscribed us as having particular needs and particular values; turning our "difference" to a positive advantage we can place these needs and values at the centre of a political program which radically confronts the system. Ultimately, the assertion of difference is a demand for self-determination in all areas.

At the same time, much of our work requires political unity to overcome the ideological and economic push for women to return to and remain in the home, to return to the unpaid workforce, the subservient and caring role, and the silence. And often, in contradiction to this is the need to keep asserting difference within the movement itself, especially in anti-racist work — difference in power, privilege, status and resources. In order to place political priority on the demands of least powerful and least resourced — in Australia this is most obviously the Aboriginal people — we are constantly confronting the contradictions arising from our commitment to a broader class, race and gender politics.

Finally, we were pleased to see Melissa Benn's opinion that socialist feminism is more present within the socialist part of its own politics than it was in the '70s and earlier. The fight for meaningful proportional representation and women's participation in the structures of the left in this country has been a long and arduous one. It should be said that, in the main, it has been the cumulative result of the dedicated work and example of a relatively small number of women who have been at it for decades. In our own personal experience it has also been fostered by a close socialist feminist political network within the structures of the left.

Needless to say, the job is never done. To meet family commitments, to earn money, to raise children, to have pleasure, to find time to speak confidently, to argue coherently, to feel comfortable, to overcome intimidation and self-doubt, to assert difference and work with contradictions, all remain a large and demanding part of ongoing socialist feminist struggle.

NOTES

1. We would like to thank Jenny Proctor and Barbara Cameron for their contribution to the writing of this article.


Feminists and Their Daughters

Carmel Shute talked to seven feminists, and two of their daughters, to find out what they wanted for their daughters, and what their daughters wanted for themselves. She spoke to: Marilyn Lake, a Melbourne historian and mother of two small girls; Carmen Heliotis, Italian-born mother of two daughters and a son; Susanna Rodell, a Melbourne journalist, and also mother of two daughters and a son; Zelda D’Aprano, an activist in the equal pay movement in the 1960s; Merle Thornton, a pioneering feminist in Brisbane; and Rosemary McBride and Carole Ferrier, both feminist activists from Brisbane. She also talked to Susannah’s eleven-year-old daughter, Besha Rodell, and Carmen’s seventeen-year-old daughter, Lara Heliotis.

She began by asking Marilyn Lake about social attitudes to the birth of daughters.

MARILYN: The culture definitely does have prejudices in favour of boys. You only have to look at congratulations cards for boys and girls: they still say “Congratulations, you’re really lucky it’s a boy”; or else with girls it’s about pretty stuff. So when I was told I was having a girl — this was the second time — I was really pleased. It was quite nice the way the doctor told me, too — “It’s another little girl”. I thought, well, how terrific. Yes, I feel very privileged to have girls.

CARMEN: Yes, very much so. The expectations are that a boy is a more valuable person to have.

SUSANNA: I’ve always got really huge with each pregnancy, and every time I always had the greengrocer or the butcher or whoever saying, “Oh, it’s so big, it’s going to be a big healthy boy” — and I’d grit my teeth.

SUSANNA: I know I definitely felt that. I think there is a definite sense of identification with a girl, a sense that this is somebody who is like me and very close to me, and has that very visceral bond, but who perhaps won’t have the same sorts of limitations that I had. She will be able to do things that I couldn’t do; and things that I had to fight very hard to do will come a little more easily for her.
MARILYN: Feminists have a loyalty to their own sex. And I think they can express that through having daughters. There is that extra dimension of pleasure, loyalty, pride, added to the mother-daughter bond. That makes it very special. I think, along with Susanna, that in the 1980s we might expect that the limitations we grew up under might be removed. And so we’re conscious of opening the world for our daughters, and not having to face the same restrictions on them that they might have faced in the 1950s or 1960s.

What was it like for an earlier generation of feminist mothers, Zelda?

ZELDA: I became a feminist later in years, and, by this stage, of course, Leonie was a young woman. My feminism always made me aware of mistakes that I’d made. To a certain degree, when Leonie was very young, I conditioned her into the female role—not totally, because I wasn’t totally successful, and I’m pleased about that. For example, when she was very little, and allowed to choose books for herself, she bought all boys’ books. And, of course, I was always buying her girly books. When I mentioned this to her and asked her why she bought these boys’ books, she simply quite clearly stated that they were far more interesting. And even after she told me that I still didn’t wake up to what was going on, not until years later.

Merle, do you think feminists have a special relationship with their daughters?

MERLE: Well, I think feminists have a special relationship with all their children, because they’re trying to bring them into a new way of life. I think I have a special relationship with both my son and my daughter, and I try in both cases to counter any stereotypical treatment of the child from outside concerning the way boys and girls should be treated.

I remember my daughter came back from kindergarten — she would have been three or four at the time — and I’d put some new trousers on her to go to kindergarten, warm ones, of the kind that used to be called Coogans, after Jackie Coogan. She came home and said that her kindy teacher had said she’d have to wear a skirt. I said, “Oh, she didn’t, she wouldn’t have said that.” And she said, “Oh yes, she did.” So I said, “Well, I’ll speak to the teacher.” I went next day and said to her, “Sigrid told me you said she had to wear a skirt. That wouldn’t be right, would it?” And she said, “Oh yes, it would. Because the little boys laughed at her.” And I said, “Well, that’s for you to say something to the little boys, isn’t it?”

ROSEMARY: Just the other day I said to Sarah, “What do you think a feminist is?” And she said it’s a mummy who doesn’t go to the tuckshop. Someone who yells at demonstrations. So I think I’ve really got to push the positive sides of feminism!

What approach did you take to bringing up your daughter, Rosemary?

ROSEMARY: As a feminist I don’t aim to arm my daughter as a warrior to fight the battle where I’ve left off. But I think I make her aware of women’s role in society and I’m very conscious at home of ensuring that the boys do an equal amount of housework. I’m careful that she isn’t burdened with the domestic work — as so often happens in a family where there’s only one girl. I think it’s that kind of thing that’s more important.

What about when, say, your daughters want Barbie dolls or frilly dresses and want to wear make-up?

ROSEMARY: Those are really externals. Simone de Beauvoir once pointed out that a lot of women were ostracised by other women in the women’s movement because they actually wore make-up or they shaved their legs or whatever. I think all the regalia of femininity are really externals which women of my generation had to give up in order to project themselves as real people. But I actually think my daughter’s generation don’t have to fight that battle — and I also think that there is always going to be peer-group pressure. I don’t agree with censorship — I’m a product of the ‘60s — so I can’t really censor Barbie dolls and Cabbage Patch Kids and all the rest of it. I think really what I have to do as a mother is to prepare Sarah for life and to make sure she’s equipped with certain skills, and that she’s able to stand up for herself. She may sometimes wear frilly dresses or make-up, but I don’t think any man will make a slave of her.

CAROLE: I suppose one of the points, too, is that to be a feminist or a socialist you don’t have to present yourself as ugly or grumpy or generally unappealing. I’m someone who hasn’t worn lipstick for about twenty years, and when I stopped wearing it in the ‘60s it was one aspect of feeling I was liberated. So it’s a bit of a shock when your eight or nine-year-old starts emerging covered with make-up ...

And what do you do when that happens?

CAROLE: Basically I just let her do it. Perhaps not in certain contexts, but certainly if she feels comfortable with herself, I think that’s probably more the issue.

Susanna, you also came up against the problem of ideology not always coinciding with your daughter’s expectations.

SUSANNA: We had all sorts of little struggles from an early age. I remember I used to dress her in little overalls and stripey T-shirts and that sort of thing. It took quite a long period of struggle before I finally gave in and, in fact, realised that when I was five years old I really loved that stuff, too. And I thought, why should I deprive her of that sort of pleasure? So I just threw my ideology to the winds, and I’d make her little tutus with sequins all over them, and fairy dresses, and we ended up having a pretty good time of it.

MARILYN: I was quite happy about my children having the notorious Barbie doll, and other things like that, because ultimately I don’t believe that Barbie dolls do any harm. One of the interesting things with my daughters, particularly the young one, is how she plays with Ken and Barbie. Her Barbie always goes to work, drops her babies from the
car into a creche, and bosses Ken around. In fact, she reconstructs the whole meaning of Ken and Barbie in terms of her own life.

Zelda, did your daughter want all the trappings of femininity back in the late '40s, before Barbie dolls were invented?

ZELDA: Well, in Leonie’s case, no. She wasn’t into all that. As far as I can remember, she only had one doll. And one of the things I was very aware of was not to condition her into the whole fashion thing. TV, of course, makes it much harder these days for parents in that respect. But this was in the early days of television, and we didn’t have a TV set. So I never did dress her in frills. I had her in slacks for the winter months, and anything that was sensible. So Leonie never went through that crazy teenage stage.

She was an only child and we always took her to good theatre and drama — because, coming from the working class, I always had a deep feeling inside me that most of my class didn’t appreciate this area of culture, because we never had the opportunities to do so. So I went out of my way to see that Leonie had these opportunities. And this was more important to me than dressing her in frills. She never showed any interest in that.

Susanna, did you treat your son differently from your daughter?

SUSANNA: I certainly made an effort to bring my son up in very much the same way as my daughter. In some ways I was careful with him in ways I wasn’t with her. From a very early age, all my kids have been in creche, and he was exposed to a lot of very definite little boy stuff. He absorbed that, and acted it out at home in a way Besha never did. So I took more care with him in the sense of making sure that he got a lot of the gentle stuff, and a lot of the cuddles and nurturing, making sure that he was allowed to have dolls as well. There’s a real tension there, between allowing him to develop in a masculine way so that he won’t necessarily be stumped on when he goes outside the house, and making sure that the other side of him is reinforced. In a way, it’s been harder to raise the son.

MERLE: Because our culture does value the masculine over the feminine, it’s much easier to bring up feminist daughters these days, because the culture approves nowadays of girls playing with train sets and blocks and those traditionally masculine things. But it doesn’t approve as much of boys playing with dolls. I rather resent the fact that there’s an expectation that girls are not allowed to have dolls, but that they should play with train sets, whereas it doesn’t go the other way round. I think, in fact, both sexes should play nurturing games, should play more caring games.

SUSANNA: It’s a funny thing, my son likes playing with dolls, but he had always assumed that all dolls were girls — which is interesting. At one point I went out and bought him a little doll in overalls, thinking “Here’s a boy doll”, and he went out and named it a girl’s name. As a matter of fact, he gave it my name — which is also interesting. Finally, I had to go out and spend a long time finding a doll with male genitalia so that he couldn’t mistake it for a girl. Even then it took a while for it to sink in that this was boy doll and that he
could be nurturing it. He eventually did get into it: he really loved that doll and he still does.

**MARILYN:** From a very early age I introduced my children to the term "sexist". I'm interested at what a young age they've grasped that — so that they now quite readily pronounce on all and sundry, whether on television shows, or what children say at school, or what teachers do, as sexist. I think that's really heartening, when they can already see the unfairness in a sexist system. But working out how to deal with what they confront as sexist behaviour is something that's far more difficult for them.

**ROSEMARY:** When my son first started school he was misbehaving, and he was punished by being sent to the girls' playground. He immediately said to the headmaster, "That's really sexist punishment. And anyway I like playing with girls." I think he'd picked that up from me: he was aware of sexism from a very early age. So I think politics is something that is, in a sense, in your blood.

**CARMEN:** Yes, I think it starts quite early. I remember with Lara I felt that when she was at school she had to make sure that enough of the teachers' attention was devoted to the girls. So I tried to make her aware of all the politics within the classroom, and how male teachers — or even female teachers — are likely to behave towards boys and girls. I was stressing the point that she's got to grow up thinking she's going to be a doctor: and there were so-and-so who's a friend, and she's a doctor; and there's so-and-so who's also a friend, and she's a doctor, too". "Oh, yes," she said. So there were constantly quite major things about the way my daughter would see her future, that I had to work against.

Was there a dilemma between giving your daughters independence, and making them aware of the dangers women face in our society?

**ZELDA:** I recall the period of my life when Leonie was going through her teens as a period of constant anxiety for me whenever she went out anywhere. Apart from the horror of rape in my mind was the terrible horror of the violence that often goes with it. And, in fact, I would never go to sleep until I heard her come in.

**MERLE:** I experienced more anxiety on behalf of my daughter in this area of her life than I did with my son. It was precisely because of the fear of rape. I wanted her to be very free in her activities and her social life. But, at the same time, I didn't want my ideological position in that respect to set her up for dangerous situations. I did suffer quite a lot of anxiety about that, and I did try, without inducing anxiety in her, to have her as well warned and informed as I could.

**ROSEMARY:** My sons roam the countryside to some extent, and yet, when Sarah's out and it's getting dark, I get extremely concerned. I think it's just a problem that all women have to face in a society where there's violence against women, and where they're treated as sex objects — more so than younger boys are, so it is a concern, and I probably do restrict her on account of that.

**MARILYN:** I feel that very strongly. My impulse is to allow my daughters lots of independence, to develop self-reliance, and to be exploratory but, on the other hand, I'm acutely aware of the increasing vulnerability of girls in our society. So there's an enormous tension involved in how far they wander by themselves.

**Will you be disappointed if your daughters don't become feminists when they're older?**

**MARILYN:** I can't ever imagine that they wouldn't be. I find it very difficult, given what they already understand, to imagine that they wouldn't be feminists. I'm probably in for a shock.

**CARMEN:** Yes, I'd be heartbroken to think that either of my daughters would just simply become totally dependent or, even worse, anti-feminist. I would be very disappointed.

**SUSANNA:** I would certainly be disappointed if my daughters turned out to be anti-feminist. I wouldn't necessarily be disappointed if they weren't feminist in the sense of it being an enormous part of their lives. But I'd be really upset if it turned out that being a woman in some way or other limited their choices.

**ROSEMARY:** I don't want her necessarily to become a particularly active feminist, but I want her to be aware of feminist issues, and also just to be able to stick up for herself.

**Rosemary, did your own upbringing have an influence on the way you treat your daughter?**

**ROSEMARY:** Well, I come from a long line of matriarchs. My grandmother, my mother, they were all women without men: the men in
our family died very young, or left home, or whatever. So I think I was brought up in a very unauthoritarian household. And I’m sure that influences me in how I treat my daughter. I don’t present myself as an authority figure to her. I think, because of that, she tends to be freer in the way she behaves, and she tends not to rebel so much.

ZELDA: My parents were migrants, and the fact that my mother didn’t have any of her own family here gave her a tendency to cling to us. She tried to live through us, and I found this very oppressive. Apart from that, my mother was a very strong woman in many respects, and she had a very positive influence on me. However, I found this clinging possessiveness, and the emotional blackmail, very difficult to cope with. I was determined that in my relationship to Leonie this would not be the case. I felt that because of that experience I couldn’t make her think what I thought; I couldn’t make her agree with all the philosophies I had.

MERLE: My family also had a strong matriarchy. I was very influenced by that. I knew my great grandmother; she lived until I was thirteen. My grandmother was a very important person in my life, and the female line was always an important consideration in our family. I realise how important now as I find I would very much like my daughter to have a daughter.

Lara and Besha, what do you think of your mothers’ feminism?

BESA: For me, as a girl, I’m not worried that she’ll say no, you can’t go out and play sport with the boys — you have to sit at home and knit, or something like that. So it’s a good thing for me.

LARA: It’s sort of pride, that she can stand on her own two feet and is independent, and doesn’t need a male to stand there and look after her.

Do you think your mother has tried to bring you up in a consciously non-sexist way?

BESA: Yes, very much so. She tells both me and my brother when something is sexist. My brother has taken it up so strongly that he used to pretend he was pregnant with Anthony, the boy doll that mum got. I felt that this wasn’t his role, because I’m the one who’s supposed to get pregnant, because I’m a girl. I told him that, and he said “That’s sexist. If I’m not allowed to be pregnant...”

LARA: I think that’s a wonderful attitude for him to have: I’d much rather him be pregnant than me.

How much credit do you give your mothers for the way you’ve turned out?

BESA: It’s not only her: it’s my dad too. He’s like a feminist, too, because Rugby League are fine — if the truth be known, previous ALRs were too academically oriented anyway — but let’s be reasonably attuned to an approach and style which lend themselves to a working class audience.

Let me point some directions: An interview with Tom Uren — what changed him from boxer to reformist socialist? What are his views on a “new socialist party”? Or, a round-table discussion with western suburban workers — men, women, migrants, etc. What do they think of the Hawke government? Are they happy with tightening their belts? What are their views of “socialism”? Or an open interview with several housewives: what is their opinion of current child care facilities; Medicare; education; domestic violence; the feminist movement? Or even, on Rugby League, an interview with Roy Masters (retiring coach of St. George) — why is he “getting out”? What is the political structure of modern football? How much corruption is there? Does he really believe the “silver tail/fibro” dichotomy that he himself largely fostered?

Let’s be unafraid of a full range of views but, nevertheless, let us constantly raise the question of socialism. I know we won’t always get answers we like but, in such a way we may point some concrete directions for revolutionary work among

LETTES

POPULAR CULTURE?

I am reminded of a recent visit to Shalvey High School (in Mt. Druitt, NSW) when I asked a group of Year 10 students if they knew what the “working class” was. They did not. When I suggested that they themselves were part of what was referred to as a “working class area” they were surprised, nonplussed, and more than a bit confused. Clearly, despite the fact that they lived in the heart of one of the most indisputably working class areas of Sydney, these students were an abstracted “working class”, talked about by others, but with no consciousness of their own role in the process whatsoever.

This brings me to the article on Rugby League, and the whole “populist” direction of ALR itself. While the subject matter of the contribution (i.e. Rugby League/popular culture) was, no doubt, a well-meaning attempt to touch upon mainstream thinking, the overall tone was of pure condescension and negation.

No attempt was made initially to understand the popular infatuation with football and thence to win over worker readers to a new perception of the sport.

Clearly, ALR is a forum in which professional pundits talk about the working class but which is not inclined to address itself to the working class as potential or existent readers.

I understand that much of ALR’s recent direction has largely been inspired by the “success” of Marxism Today in Britain. The problem is that the success of Marxism Today has in no way been matched by any success of the British working class itself — indeed, all that we read about are continuing defeats, further retreats and pessimism, pessimism, pessimism.

What I am saying is that the “populist” direction of ALR is misplaced. It is a populism that caters to a middle class perception of workers as some static, Victorian ideal of noble ignoramuses easily misled by the “Bread and Circuses” of modern football. Articles which deal with Lady Di and the Royals, “style”, and
he works for the equal opportunity, and he's influenced me as well — they both have. They've made me think a lot about things that other people in my grade haven't thought about yet.

**LARA:** I'm a good example in that, while I don't live with my father, he's a raving chauvinist. I can go and see him now, and I think, "Yuk, how can you possibly be like that, and expect your wife to go and get the coffee for you and have your dinner ready for you when you get home." He used to ask me to make his coffee, and I'd say, "No way. Get up and do it yourself".

**Would you call yourselves feminists?**

**BESHA:** I'm not sure. I'm very against anything like the T-shirts that people have that say "Anything boys can do girls can do better". I don't like those sorts of things, because they're just silly. I think "Why?", and you can't really give an explanation for that.

**LARA:** I agree about the T-shirts. Things that say women are better are just as sexist as ones that say men are. So I'm more for equality than "Women are better than men". I disagree with that.

**But would you call yourself a feminist?**

**BESHA:** There's a girl in my grade who was interviewed on the radio and she was talking about how she felt about things, and the interviewer said to her, "Are you the little feminist, then?", and she said "Why shouldn't I be?" He was saying it as if it was a bad thing.

**LARA:** Not a total feminist. Not the extremes — the things like changing man-holes and things like that: I think that's really going too far. And I disagree with the women who think they are better than men. So I guess that's not really a feminist. It's close.

**What sort of things do you want in your life when you're older?**

**BESHA:** I want to be treated equally, because there's no reason why I should be treated more or less equally than men. I'm just another human being.

**LARA:** I entirely agree with that. But I think what I want most is independence: to do what I want to do, when I want to do it, and with whom.

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**UPSET**

The article on Rugby League in *ALR* 100 left me feeling angry and upset. I finished it very much with the feeling that David Burchell loves Rugby League but is too ashamed to admit it. I, too, have many criticisms of the game, but this does not stop me from loving and enjoying it, or wanting it to improve and develop.

He says that it is a spectacle of excess without any discernible aesthetic. This seems just plain wrong. I have visions of Bob Fulton or Roy Masters poring over videos, agonising over tactics and devising complex backline moves. What would they make of his claim? Even Rex Mossop is scathing of sloppy play and waxes lyrical over exhibitions of skill.

He says there is gratuitous violence. I agree, but I strongly suspect that the League executive is deeply worried about this. Rather than attracting people to the game, as he seems to imply, the League can see lost dollars at the gate, and worried parents who will not let their sons play. Witness the ever-increasing severity of the judiciary, and sports commentators falling over themselves to praise the "hard but clean" state of Origin series. They told us ad nauseam that Rugby League was the winner.

He says that very few of its leading exponents last beyond the age of thirty, by which time they are often balding and arthritic. Injuries and declining ability are a problem in many professional sports. I think it is important not to conflate injuries and violence. On a political level, Ray Price has already pointed out quite forcefully that the League exploits players' love of the game by not insuring them adequately.

He says that hooting and mocking the referee is an integral part of any serious fan's pleasure. I consider myself a serious fan who enjoys the skills of the game. I am quite happy to concede that the best usually wins, and I am sure I would enjoy the game even more if the violence was cut out.

He says that Rugby League is a parody of class divisions. Players are now being poached mid-season and going to the highest bidder. The remorseless advance of national media and a national marketplace means that club identification will be increasingly city-based, echoing moves already made by Australian Rules.

As a psychotherapist I am mystified by his comment that Rugby League is playing out the dramas of psychiatry in sporting form. I do know, however, that no activity is intrinsically interesting; it all depends on how much love and care you invest in it. Within the framework and rules of Rugby League there exist the spaces to be exciting and creative, as there does in any complex ball game. If this creative space is nurtured there is every possibility that Rugby League can develop and transcend the gratuitous violence that spoils the game.

**Vittorio Cintio,**
Wentworth Falls, NSW.
Living History


Frontier documents European attitudes to Aborigines, as they were being dispossessed, and beyond. It is a sequel to The Other Side of the Frontier which rewrote the history of Aboriginal responses to the European invasion. In his introduction to this history of race relations, Reynolds writes that "the past is still alive, is dangerously alive, in many parts of Australia". This is brought home to me daily in the Northern Territory where I now live.

"Aboriginal issues" have been shown to be statistically second only to economic issues in determining the voting preferences of the electorate. And now there is news of another Aboriginal death in custody in Queensland. This is a history book which really sheds light on Australia today.

Reynolds' book is purposely broad-sweeping and passionate. Rather than sway his audience with eloquent argument. Reynolds pummels it with fact after fact, quotation after quotation, drawing on events that occurred in all parts of Australia to demonstrate the recurring themes of frontier violence. European rationalisations dressed up as all sorts of theories, and the continuing struggle for land rights from 1788 to today. Hence the book's three sections: "Conflict", "Ideology" and "Land".

"Conflict" details the extent of bloodshed on the frontier. Like The Other Side of the Frontier, it debunks the myth of the peaceful settlement of Australia, revealing the atrocities committed and Aboriginal resistance to the invasion of their land. It documents powerfully Europeans' fear on the frontier - a dread that outlasted open fighting, and meshed with guilt and rationalising belief in the inherent violence of Aborigines to produce a racism embedded in the national psyche.

"Ideology" briefly outlines the various philosophies that were applied to "explain" Aborigines: the "noble savage". Enlightenment theories of universality. social darwinism, scientific racism. As well as showing how theories such as social darwinism bolstered European domination. Reynolds gives space to the philanthropists and missionaries who argued against the brutality and injustice, but whose concerns fell on deaf ears. Their voices in the wilderness serve only to condemn more loudly the disposessors. They cannot be pardoned as products of their times when it was they who rubbered the non-expedient and chose the ideologies to justify their practice.

"The Land" questions the historic decision of Justice Blackburn in 1971 in Milirrpum v Nabalco that native title never existed in Australian law, all Aboriginal legal rights being extinguished upon the declaration of sovereignty in 1788. Reynolds compares this decision with Canadian case law to the contrary, and provides evidence that this was not even the universal view in the late eighteenth century - rather, "sovereignty gave the nation the 'sole right of acquiring the soil from the natives and establishing settlements upon it'". It did not, of itself, deliver up, unencumbered, all land held by the indigenes. The question of native rights had to be resolved afterwards. And, in that process, it was never assumed that the indigenes were without rights" (p.170) British sovereignty extinguishing Aboriginal rights made Aborigines officially British subjects - supposedly with the attendant protection of property - while actually enabling Europeans to lawfully take Aboriginal land, labelling the resisters criminals, not legitimate enemies in war.

Frontier is not a dry scholarly history, and Reynolds makes no bones about his personal concern to see justice done for Aboriginal people. Because it is intended "to present, in a form accessible to the non-specialist, a distillation of the Australian frontier experience as it was manifested in the relations between whites and Aborigines" this book may frustrate the academic. There has been no footnoting of
individual pieces of evidence, rather references are generalised at the back for each section of the text. The scope of the book leaves little room for more than basic presentation of ideas. There is brief mention in the conclusion of the fact that colonisation "represents the success of the bourgeois revolution in Australia" and "the complete and violent overthrow of one social economic system, one mode of production, by another". Yet there is little attempt throughout the book to place the fate of Aborigines in the broader context of world economic development. The thirst for land that killed and dispossessed so many Aboriginal people is not linked with, for instance, the needs of Britain's textile industry. Only brief mention is made of the British government's original stated concern for the Aborigines in the face of its sanction of the theft of their land, and the contradictory sanctity of property of the new regime.

But while the lack of development of such themes may be a weakness, it also attests to the scope of the book. Frontier probably does not introduce new ideas to anyone acquainted with Aboriginal history. What it does is try to make Aboriginal history more generally recognised as Australian history. The history of European settlement is inextricably tied to the fate of the original owners of the soil. Reynolds neatly sums up the issues, providing a compact rationale to the land rights supporter and a devastatingly persuasive introduction to the alternative, so-long-suppressed history of Australia.

If one doesn't accept that Aborigines' rights to land were extinguished in 1788 (and you can hardly do that having read Frontier) then, writes Reynolds, "Aboriginal land rights were extinguished not by official edict but by force, district by district, over many decades. The gradual eviction has gone on throughout Australian history. It has continued up to the present. The moral responsibility for the dispossession was not the burden of any one group or even a particular period of Australian history. It is shared by all generations of white Australians. The modern land rights movement embodies the same moral dilemmas as those faced by early governors and officials. Time has passed, but we have not escaped from our history". (p.179)

It is almost cliche'd to remind Australians of the self-assessment that should go hand-in-hand with the lavish self-congratulation governments are planning for next year. Yet, reading this book one can only join in gasping with indignation "What is there to celebrate?" History is only now being rewritten. Reynolds' book is a major addition to that rewriting. And a third volume is promised, dealing with the incorporation of Aborigines into the European economy and the policies of assimilation and segregation. A major rethinking of the past and a new look at the present would be a much better thing to celebrate in 1988.

MADELEINE SMITH works in the office of the Aboriginal Land Commissioner in Darwin.

Fantasies?


The New Right's Australian Fantasy is the culmination of a sustained campaign by Ken Coghill, Victorian Labor MP (and secretary to John Cain's Cabinet) against the emergence of the newly aggressive Right. Even had he not edited this book, Coghill's activities would have been noteworthy, rare as it is for a Labor parliamentarian to research and campaign against such an ideologically-focused extra-parliamentary political force.

The title of the book is taken from a chapter by John Button, federal Minister for Industry, Technology and Commerce, who states that "in the shifting sands of political priorities and fashion there is a significant element of theology and fantasy, and that's equally true of the political Right as of the political Left".

Button refers mainly to the New Right's "fantasy", although what led to the use of that term was one of the Labor Left's "fantasies" - the proposed nationalisation of the Commonwealth Oil Refineries and Carlton and United Breweries (the former privatised by Menzies).

Button's presence as a contributor highlights the main weakness of the collection: its silence about the symbiosis between Labor's post-1983 conservatism and the emergence of the New Right.

At one point in his chapter, Button lists the reasons for the
establishment of Australia’s public corporations — adding that this exercise is useful "for a consideration of which functions are truly public sector ones and which might be capable of equally utilitarian private sector ownership or control".

While I don’t believe the Left should be locked into a stance which says that every single part of the public sector must be retained on principle, it’s a pity none of the contributors address the way the New Right’s agenda, including privatisation, has been assisted onto the stage by the Hawke-Keating strategy for Labor.

A number of the contributors are fairly pedestrian in their critiques — something perhaps which is partly due to the method of basing a book on conference papers.

One of the best chapters is Dennis Altman’s “Tilting the political globe” which goes beyond damning the New Right to attempt to understand why it has managed to shift the terms of the political agenda. Altman criticises the inadequacy of that form of leftwing analysis of the New Right which has limited itself to three themes: privatisation, attacks on the union movement and the emergence of New Right think-tanks.

The real success of the New Right, he argues, “has been its ability to tie together a number of not necessarily related programs, and through clever political campaigning, present them as offering a more attractive picture of society, as it is and as it could be, than we on the Left currently seem able to provide”.

He points to the successful mix of the ideology of individual selfishness and moral conservatism which propelled Reagan into power, and notes that “in general the Australian Left does not regard issues such as abortion, homosexuality, pornography etc. as somehow being ‘real politics’ in the same way as is, say, industrial relations”.

In this respect, John Howard’s invocation of "the family" in his economic policies in the recent election campaign was instructive, although many on the Left tend to dismiss this as flummery to cover his “real” aims.

The left must recapture the notion of freedom and provide an alternative vision of society to meet the challenge of the New Right, Altman argues in his all too brief chapter.

Bernie Taft also makes a number of useful points, arguing that “the voices of the New Right strike a chord in the experience of ordinary people. They express some of the difficulties, dissatisfaction and alienation that many people feel in our society. The campaign against the public sector takes advantage of the fact that people have had negative experiences with inefficient, high-handed and uncaring bureaucracies in government departments”.

The struggle against the New Right not only involves exposing its false, inhuman and irrational policies, but also putting our own house in order, he concludes.

Ken Coghill and his contributors have produced a useful book which, most importantly, takes the Right seriously and undermines their logic and policies. It’s a great pity it stops short of discussing that dialectic between Labor and the New Right which may, ultimately, despite the recent election result, bring a version of Thatcherism to Australia.

DAVID McKNIGHT is a journalist on the Sydney Morning Herald.

Eternally indebted


SUS ONE TRILLION: The total foreign debt contracted by the Third World at year-end 1984. Following the near “bankruptcy” of Mexico in August 1982 — and later Brazil, Argentina and the rest — Third World calls for moratoriums and outright default met stony-faced Western creditors.

During 1984 they forced 24 countries to reschedule loans amounting to 10 percent of the Third World total which, at year-end 1984, was up some 50 percent on the 1980 figure. Two-thirds of the debt was owing to private banks.

With talk of complete collapse of the international financial system, Western governments blamed the bankers, the bankers blamed the Western governments. Their forum and negotiating table: the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Last year, Zed Books released an English translation of a work by four young social scientists published in their native German in 1984: The IMF and the Debt Crisis. It’s one of a plethora spawned by the so-called debt crisis: no doubt seen in the Third World as a credit squeeze.

The highlight of this new edition is its simple, straightforward account of the IMF’s contemporary role as “crisis manager” of Third World indebted economies. The text might appear, on the face of it, indefensibly biased, because the authors are highly critical of the IMF. But even Henry Kissinger has damned the terms of IMF stabilisation programs which “create instability”, “lead to revolutionary conditions”, and
prescribe “a cure that is worse than the disease”. In fact, the accusations in this account are moderate and justified, and there is ample reliable evidence to support their claims from many other sources.

The book situates the IMF as linchpin of the international financial system’s domination of indebted economies. And it’s true that the IMF, as “honest broker” in rescheduling negotiations, invariably represents Western government’s strategic interests to the detriment of the Third World poor.

IMF stabilisation programs, the familiar starting point necessary for continued lending by the international banks, are renowned for their austerity. The primary aim of stabilisation programs in the Third World is to achieve balance of payments stability, through application of free market principles. The IMF binds the troubled government to a “letter of intent”. This commitment to both broad and explicitly detailed monetary and social policies and targets, “conditionality”, brings continued foreign capital as reward.

By devaluations, cuts in wages and public welfare, the removal of basic goods price ceilings and trade restrictions, and the encouragement of capital inflows, IMF officials seek to improve the economy. Their record, from their own standpoint, is poor, as this book testifies. More importantly, the draconian measures insisted on by the IMF officials, as representatives of the international bankers’ interests, result in bleeding the poor.

The immediate results are political instability, often leading to rightwing coups, the installation of military governments and veritable civil war. Literally hundreds of people have died just in the riots prompted by the threatened erosion of subsistence living standards by inhuman economic policies demanded by IMF officials.

Instead, the authors suggest IMF officials should patronise sociopolitical reform and economic self-sufficiency programs in the Third World: enlightened conditionality for continued financial credit. It’s clear that they fail to recognise that the IMF only has clout now because it represents the concerns of international bankers and Western strategic interests. If IMF officials developed a social conscience, the authors suggest, they would no longer maintain the crucial support of the world’s lenders. As such, the IMF would have no role at all. This is a fatal flaw in their thesis.

In the long term, a conditionality oriented towards development should promote low-debt development strategies which help to mobilise internal resources and reduce developing countries’ traditional dependence on world markets.”

The reformed IMF officials would commit countries to “stabilisation” programs with new performance criteria: food self-sufficiency, labour-intensive production of mass consumer goods (“ploughings being preferred to tractors”), greater taxation of the wealthy, “uncoupling from the world market”, export diversification, promotion of indigenous technology and the “democratisation of society”.

The political naivety of the authors — and one, Rainer Tetzlaff, is Professor of Political Science at the University of Hamburg — is rivalled only by their inconsistency. At the start, they call for “a reformed, development-oriented conditionality — if necessary over the heads of the ruling classes”. By the final chapter they admit “A state-class cannot be expected to introduce reforms which deprive them of their power-base overnight”, so gradually reforms will be brought in. Do we have to experience any more Chiles, Jamaicas, Polands, Whitlams or Fijis to recognise that ruling classes do not appreciate gradual reforms any more than they tolerate immediate ones?

While the authors castigate Allende’s Chile and Manley’s Jamaica for economic carelessness in wasting foreign exchange on “ambitious social and consumption-oriented goals”, their very own “expansionist stabilisation strategy” requires deficit financing of budgets. But surely this IMF with a new face could “insist” on private banks offering medium-term loans at reduced interest rates, delayed payment, and favourable rescheduling conditions, even “if necessary partial remission of debts”! And, in case you’re wondering, “the interests of the creditors would not be ignored: the Fund would help them to overcome their short-sighted individual interest in rapid repayment and thus educate them to realise that their common interest is in the long-term stabilisation and thus capacity to repay of developing countries’ economies”.

Another hurdle is to incorporate the now marginalised masses into a “political consensus” on stabilisation programs agreed to with the IMF officials:

The marginalised urban and rural classes on whom the burdens of stabilisation policies have to date mostly been unloaded will scarcely be able to speak out even if the structure of the IMF is reformed. The only conceivable corrective here would be world public opinion, which could name the victims and the beneficiaries of these measures, denounce the self-privileging tendencies of the politically dominant classes and discuss the effects which the IMF’s conditions would have on development ...

The imagination boggles at this international “capitalism without capitalists”. The IMF has always been dominated by the USA, as leader of the industrialised countries and promoter of their interests. You must read the book to find out how the IMF will be reformed without a squeal and, in fact, with increased funds from those powers that be ...

ANITRA NELSON is a member of the ALR Collective in Melbourne.

CORRECTIONS

- In ALR 99, in David Rowe’s article “Striking a Chord”, the first two paragraphs on p22 were laid out incorrectly. Our apologies to David Rowe and to readers.
- In ALR 100 we incorrectly foreshadowed an article by Hester Eisenstein for this issue. The article may appear at a later date.
Sydney's Harold Park Hotel, in Wigram Road, Glebe, is celebrating the second anniversary of its acclaimed Writers in the Park series on Tuesday nights. The readings have brought together some of Australia's best-known writers and poets with international celebrities, with an open section for new and unpublished local poets. The September program includes David Malouf, Rosemary Dobson, Thomas Shapcott and Judith Rodriguez on the anniversary night, September 8; admired British novelist Angela Carter, the marvellous Elizabeth Jolley, and Drusilla Modjeska on September 22; and amongst others, the notorious Brian Toohey on September 29. All the readings start at 8pm. Entrance is $4/$3 on September 8 and 29; and $6/$4 on September 15, 16 and 22. More info from the Harold Park Hotel; on (02) 692 0564.

Straight. Fringe or Piccolo. September is Spoleto Festival time in Melbourne, and the variety of events is staggering. The Spoleto Festival was imported from Italy last year, and immediately generated a host of related events. The Fringe and Piccolo Spoletos each boast hundreds of concerts, plays, readings, film showings, exhibitions and dance, all packed into four weeks. Prices are more than reasonable for most events, but there is so much to do you had better abandon eating for the month.

It's impossible to choose between the marvels on offer, but if you really must try:

**SPOLETO**

Porgy and Bess. Thurs Sept 10 — Fri 25.
State Theatre, Victorian Arts Centre.
Tickets from $14 to $39. 'I love you, Porgy' wails Bess: 'We love you, Gershwin', croons the audience. A joint Australian/American venture.  
Tickets $14 to $37. But can they boogie?

**YUGOSLAV THEATRE POSTERS**

Sept 10-26, Westpac Gallery, vic Arts Centre. Yugoslav's leading graphic artist, Boris Rucan, creates superb visual images for the theatre.

**SPOLETO FRINGE**

New Works By Women. Mon Sept 14-Sun 27. Arena Theatre, South Yarra.
Tickets $8/$12 night or $14/$22 the season. A mini festival of women's work, with four or five short events each night.


Funny Writers Read. Tuesday 15, 22, 29. Prince Patrick's Hotel, Collingwood. $7/$5. They talk funny, too.


**PICCOLO SPOLETO**

Oath to Freedom. Thurs Sept 17.
Footscray Community Arts Centre.
$9/$7/$5. A performance workshop by the Peta Filipino Theatre. Sound, dance, mime and narration tell of ordinary experiences of the last days of the Marcos dictatorship.

**MUSIC DELLIVE**

Fri Sept 11. Toorak Uniting Church. Family ticket $15, individual tickets $7/$5. A smorgasbord of music from around the globe.

Have a rest, watch television and replenish the coffers after your action-packed Melbourne September, but if you've still got the energy for one more scintillating night out, try **Volcanto, the Nicaraguan New Song Movement**, Friday, October 2 at Fitzroy Town Hall; Sat Oct 3, Mill Theatre, Geelong. The vibrancy of Nicaragua comes alive through Mario Montenegro, singer, songwriter, poet and puppeteer, and the Duo Guardabarranco, Nicaragua's answer to Whoa!

Fine wine is for the leisured classes. Right? Wrong. Because of changing tastes (more people drinking white, more drinking the newer style reds, fewer the classic Australian styles), enjoying premium red wines of slightly unfashionable styles has never been easier on the pay-packet (or dole cheque). Aside from the safe-and-sure Jacob's Creek and Tyrrell's Long Flat Red the following very reasonably priced reds all represent excellent value-for-money:

**Wynns 1985 Coonawarra Hermitage**, a full-bodied aromatic red, is a steal at under $5; Penfolds' very respectable **Koonunga Hill Clarat 1984** can be found at $4 on discount; the **Rouge Homme 1982** Coonawarra claret is a glorious wine which will still age well, for around $6.50; Lindeman's marvellous **1983 Hunter River Burgundy** is a well-balanced, lighter-style shiraz and great value at under $7; as is the **Chateau Reynella 1983 Cabernet Sauvignon** (also around $7) — and (as the wine jargon goes) a 'very well-made' wine, if less fashionable than the more expensive Cabernets. Ignore the puritans who tell you wine is an ideologically unsound pleasure; what other diversion can provide you with an evening of bliss for under a fiver?

Sydney's Leichhardt Council is a disgrace. Which is why a team of eight Community Independents have banded together under the slogan 'Your community, your environment, your Council'. And, unlike the present councillors, not even one of them lives in Melbourne. Vote for them on September 26 and give the local mafia a shock.
Politics Can Also Be About Pleasure

Political thrillers are one very popular way to escape and stay ideologically sound at the same time.

As a special offer to new subscribers, ALR is offering a simply thrilling bargain: two Pluto thrillers, Watching The Detectives and The Euro-Killers, by Julian Rathbone, for just $10 the pair (normal price is $15).

Commissioner Jan Argand is an ordinary cop who starts to think twice about the system after an anti-nuclear demonstration turns into a near-massacre. Of The Euro-Killers the Library Journal wrote 'Quite exceptional ... subtle yet straightforward and truthful'; while the Literary Review commented that 'Julian Rathbone is a highly original artist who uses the thriller form to comment on the increasing violence and absurdity of the post-industrial world we live in'.

Or, if thrillers aren't your bent, try this: the encyclopaedic Book Of Business, Money And Power, by Michael Kidron and Ronald Segal. Normally it retails for $40 in hardback — but to new ALR subscribers it's just $19.95. Of it Robert Heilbroner wrote: 'This will teach you more about modern day capitalism than you would learn by reading all the books of its Nobel Prizewinners'.

Don't delay — send in the form today.

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