In his closing address, Gorbachev pronounced the four-day meeting a success and hailed glasnost as "one of the heroes of our conference." He promised to bring about a qualitatively new condition in our society and give a human face to socialism—the exact phrase used 20 years ago by Czech Reformer Alexander Dubček. As Gorbachev joined the delegates in song.

A
Moscow
Spring
?
Just a few of the writers featured in AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY over the past twelve months.

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Tony Benn is 63, and has served under six British Labour leaders since he was elected to the House of Commons in 1950. In September, the Grand Old Man of British socialism will contest his party's leadership in an election that he is bound to lose. It would also appear that no one knows this better than Benn himself.

Benn may be seen as the leftwing conscience of the Labour Party by some but he is also seen as hopelessly out of touch by others. His bid to lead a party which has recently warmed to the Australian trend of "win at all costs" may appear to those people as further evidence of his place in the wilderness.

Not that this concerns Benn.

"This is a long-term battle," he said. "If we only contested elections to win them, we wouldn't have fought the last general election, or the one before, or the one before that."

If opinion polls inside and outside the party are to be trusted, Benn has no chance whatsoever of wresting the party leadership from Neil Kinnock. A recent Harris Poll quoted by Benn himself, put his support among the British electorate at just fourteen percent.

Nor does the party's rightward shift under Kinnock show any sign of abating. And in the minds of many MPs, an electorate unwilling to vote for a Kinnock government would be even more unwilling to vote for a Benn government bound to withdraw from NATO, the European Community, and supporting unilateral disarmament.

But Benn believes that the leadership election presents the party's left with a vital opportunity to bring debate back to its own ground.

"Many of the policies I'm advocating are policies which already have been endorsed by successive Labour conferences but have not been put forward by successive Labour leaderships," he said.

"There is an anxiety that if the Labour Party throws overboard policies it has advocated for a long time, people will say, 'Well what do you believe in? Are you prepared to say just anything to get elected?' And if they thought that was the case it may be harder to get elected anyway."

Under Kinnock's leadership, the party launched a campaign "Labour Listens", where party officials consulted electors on their policy preferences. Benn was unimpressed by this. "You can't come forward with a pencil and paper and pollster at your elbow and say, 'Tell us what you think and we'll say it', because that undermines credibility, not only in the Labour Party but in democratic politics as well."

Benn says he does not believe that people are necessarily automatically antagonistic to the left, but fears that the success of the Thatcherite agenda has left many in the Labour Party unwilling to defend and argue socialist policies.

"People are very frightened," he says, "They're frightened of being told that Russia's going to invade, of being told that they're going to lose
their jobs and be out on the street, and that extremists are trying to seize power and so on.

"When people are frightened that does tend to move them to the right. Historically that was true in Germany and Italy in the '20s and '30s, and what we need now is a dose of hope."

Is he saying that British politics of the 1980s are a reflection of Europe in the '30s? "Thatcherism really is the policy of Mussolini," he said. "If you read the life of Mussolini — I’m talking now of Italy in the 'twenties — all the speeches that Mrs. Thatcher makes are in that early form of Italian fascism.

“I know the word fascism has come to mean gas chambers and all that, but I’m talking about the structure of the state — the crushing of trade unions, the crushing of democracy, the very, very strong anti-Soviet policies, the development of military control; all these things are reappearing."

David Greason

Benn’s challenge underlines a poor year for Labour since its demoralising third defeat at the polls last June — and particularly for the “dream ticket” of Neil Kinnock and deputy leader Roy Hattersley. Kinnock is under no serious threat, but Hattersley is being challenged for the deputy’s spot by the soft left’s John Prescott, as well as the fundamentalist Eric Heffer — an indication of Labour’s continued factional fragmentation.

On the one hand, the “soft left” — the Tribune Group and Labour Co-ordinating Committee (LCC) [as well as the CP’s journal Marxism Today] — has divided over how to cope with the current “revisionist” drift in Labour policy. Former LCC chair Peter Hain argued publicly last year for a mending of fences with the "hard left" to lead an assault on the right and, by implication, the leadership. And he accused much of the soft left of accommodating itself to Kinnock’s “rightward drift.”

Meanwhile, Benn’s candidacy has dismayed many in his own hard left constituency, the Campaign Group, with Campaign Group MP Clare Short eschewing the “macho” politics of the futile challenge. It has now to be wondered whether the Grand Old Man is not at the end of the line.

All of this has accentuated Labour’s navel-gazing, and attempts by the likes of Marxism Today and, to some extent, the New Statesman to turn the debate outwards have so far borne little fruit. Part of the problem lies in Labour’s continued refusal to countenance any sort of electoral pact with the centrist Democrats (as the LSDP, the merged SDP and Liberals, tends to be known). In the absence of such a pact, Thatcherism seems assured of continued power until perhaps the end of the century — something which is progressively eroding the morale of an already demilitarized left. Indeed, Eric Hobsbawm has argued that Thatcherism has now become (in the PM’s own slip of the tongue), a “regime”. And Thatcher herself has hardened her already chilling political vision with the observation that there is “no such thing” as society — “only individuals and families”.

DAVID GREASON is a journalist on The Age. DAVID BURCHELL is ALR’s co-ordinator.

Professional Foul

The Bicentennial Gold Cup of Soccer in mid-July was the stage of Australia’s greatest soccer feat, the defeat of world champions, Argentina. It told us a lot about both the state of the sport and the complex of nationalist logic and illogic which underpins the celebration of white invasion.

Association Football’s ruling international body, FIFA, insists that competitions sanctioned as “Gold Cups” must involve at least two former World Cup-winning national teams. This marginalises countries which have been major donors of soccer-playing migrants to Australia (e.g. Greece, Malta, Yugoslavia and Hungary). And various glamorous sides (England, Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany) which were both former winners and local donors were overcommitted after the recently completed European championships.

So who should join Australia in the Cup? The current world champions, Argentina, and former winners Brazil were obvious choices, despite their comparative lack of an Australian cultural link. But Saudi Arabia as the fourth and final nation? Of course: because of the oil money made available to an allegedly bankrupt Australian Soccer Federation.

What of the federation itself? The ASF’s long and dearly-held claim that soccer is the most played football code in Australia has never
shown any correlation with crowd attendance. The game remains a participant sport in this country, not a spectator one.

So, before the competition began, it was already denied a natural migrant constituency by a combination of FIFA rules, timing and the politics of FIFA finances. Then, just as the event was about to commence, the Australian players — all semi-professionals — threatened industrial action if they were not given a wage increase. The team captain even revealed that his side "had a large proportion of dole bludgers" (sic). The same tactic had proved successful on the eve of Australia's only appearance in the World Cup Finals in 1974. Again, the struggle was resolved, as it had to be, in the players' favour.

The competition had difficulty attracting local corporate sponsorship, but money was readily available from overseas. Like many a Bicentennial event, the Gold Cup, in fact, drew much of its local prestige from its "otherness", from how others at the cultural and business metropolis viewed activities on the periphery. "Australia" became important because non-Australians perceived "it".

The only Australian body that gave financial sponsorship to the Cup was "Sport 88", an arm of the Australian Bicentennial Authority which handed over $100,000. But the organisers then reneged on their promise of advertising for the Authority at Gold Cup venues, on the grounds that "you are not a sponsor, you just gave us a government grant". (The ABA revealed all in a somewhat splenetic press release.)

These political issues were given little or no public circulation outside specialist soccer gossip columns. The mainstream media concentrated on anxieties over the status of the competition itself. The Argentinian captain, Diego Maradona, the world's most famous player, elected not to come. Was it all to be a farce? Officials and sports writers strove valiantly to prove that the South American teams were serious about the Cup, that it really mattered to them. Again, a need to assert Australia's significance within a system of global, not local, symbols.

The question of media coverage itself became a centre of controversy. The ABC was chosen to televise the games, allegedly because the ASF saw no hope of securing much-prized commercial interest. (Rumours proliferated that personal/business rivalries got in the way of any such possibility.) Further bitterness then surfaced over both ticket prices ($15 to sit on the grass without any cover for just 90 minutes of action) and the fact that the ABC was permitted to televast major games live in the city of origin after costly advance tickets had already been sold.

Nevertheless, great rejoicing followed Australia's 4-1 defeat of Argentina in the semi-final and consequent qualification to meet Brazil for the trophy. In the same week the Australian Rugby League team lost its first domestic Test against Great Britain since the Whitlam years. The powers seemed to be shifting.

The final between Australia and Brazil summoned up all of these disparate ideological elements. Commentators typified the locals as fit, willing and rugged; the Brazilians as brilliant, charismatic and individualistic. ("Of course, there is a culture gap between these two countries in the game, but the Australians should not be too worried about skills"). Even the sending-off of a Brazilian for unfair (and quite brutal) play could not work against these stereotypes. Throughout the match, there were constant references by the chief commentator — an Englishman imported for the event by the ABC — to how this truly international game might now take its deserved place locally.

Former Australian team captain Johnny Warren was presented simply as an expert commentator. But he was presumably acting also in his unacknowledged role as media consultant to the Cup's organisers. He said after the match that all that was needed now was an overhaul of

Soccer stereotypes. Australia (in the green corner) vs Brazil.
the structure of Australian soccer administration. It had to become a matter of “management” instead of “politics”. Prime Minister Hawke also appeared, marking an important development in his knowledge of the sport. He was able to sanction the event as an exemplar of Bicentennial masculinity: “it’s no game for softies”. That Australia lost the final 2-0 meant nothing. Australian soccer’s new success was emblazoned on the front pages. That it had been achieved against a background of possible strike action, bungled media sales and ticket prices, anxiety about the authenticity of the competition and public apathy mattered not. This was a representation of “Australia” succeeding in a “Bicentennial Event”. This was the rich mix of ethnic groupings that could come together in a multicultural society to compete healthily and successfully with foreigners.

The reality was that a sport which has depended on an amalgam of collaboration and mutual antipathy between various migrant groupings had one week of success at a national level. Any change to the temporary status of that success will require professionalisation at all levels: in other words a commodification of soccer as both work and spectacle, with teams franchised and probably playing over summer to avoid competition with other codes. This process would have to be decidedly political as well as managerial, for it would erode existing migrant and regional bases for the sport. But at least it would be in keeping with the “spirit” of the Bicentenary.

Toby Miller

Toby Miller teaches in Humanities at Griffith University.

Victoria: Socialist State?

It was Joseph Stalin who invented the notion of “socialism in one country”: not perhaps its best advertisement. Have John Cain and his government now invented “socialism in one state”?

Perhaps not, but, on the positive side, Victoria’s Economic Strategy does favour government intervention in the economy as a means of encouraging economic activity and employment growth in certain strategic areas. There is a recognition that markets don’t work effectively in restructuring industries, and that government planning and coordination can provide a catalyst for change.

Also on the positive side, the Victorian government and its instrumentalities (such as the Victorian Investment Corporation, Aluvic, and the Victorian Economic Development Corporation) have demonstrated a willingness to take equity in ventures such as the Portland aluminium smelter, and a range of high technology investments such as computer software, medical products and biotechnology. On the negative side, the preferred strategy is to work closely with private sector partners, take a back seat on equity, and sell out when new ventures become profitable.

All this is good social democratic stuff. Key strategic sectors of the economy are identified. Private investors are approached and unions consulted. But the final decisions are made by the private sector.

As a model, the Victorian economic strategy compares favourably with many international examples, where the push for deregulation and small government has weakened the impact of active industry policies. In Australia, industry policy federally has increasingly come to mean tariff reductions to bring in the “winds of competition”. The assumption is that markets, left to themselves, operate efficiently, and government intervention leads to inefficiency. Victoria doesn’t share these illusions.

There are a number of perfectly conventional economic arguments for such an approach. First, the public sector has a vast amount of data and information on the way economies operate, and can influence the direction of employment growth by direct and indirect involvement in particular sectors. Again, the private sector has demonstrated an inability to accelerate investment in areas of technological and economic opportunity because of perceptions of high risk. The intervention of the state can minimise risks. Third, private industry in this country is relatively weak. Our industrial structure nationally is split between multinationals, who confine their local activities to supplying local
markets, and share-shuffling entrepreneurs. Also, the private sector wants quick returns on investments, whereas the public sector in theory can look at long lead times for investments in the productive sector. Finally, public sector involvement is necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the participation of unions and workers in economic restructuring.

Since 1984 the Victorian government has produced two key strategic documents which give overviews of the Victorian economy, and a number of supplementary documents dealing with timber, tourism, resources and so on. The approach is to identify key strengths of the economy and to build economic activities on these strengths. Following this approach, Victoria has taken initiatives developing the skills of scientists, engineers, the medical profession and productive entrepreneurs. This creates the potential for thousands of new jobs in high technology areas.

There have been a number of other significant initiatives. One was the attempt to reduce destructive competition between states by encouraging the abolition of state preferences. Another was a program, which has won the support of both employers and unions, committed to arresting the decline in the traditional but strategically important area of heavy engineering. And we have seen the establishment of Australia's first Industrial Supplies Office, designed to maximise Australian content in major projects; and an Overseas Project Corporation seeking export opportunities.

Is this then a promo piece for Victoria? Well, having watched a Labor government in Western Australia bail out Holmes a'Court and Laurie Connell, a Labor government in NSW waste taxpayers' money on the Darling Harbour scheme, and the federal Labor government put industry planning in the too hard basket, it has to be said that the Victorian approach does seem to have a number of things in its favour. It is not perfect. There have been a number of blunders: for example, there is an emphasis on energy-intensive industries which has put the State Electricity Commission in a powerful position to construct new power stations; and the costly search for crisis-ridden, polluting industries continues.

It is not a socialist strategy, and it is not run by socialists. But it does have lessons for the left. Just as centrally-planned economies are addressing key economic problems by experimenting with market reforms, so can market-driven economies improve their performance by developing and extending models of active public sector intervention in the economy. Even if it doesn't lead to "socialism in one state".

Julia Andrews

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PO Box A247, Sydney South 2000.
Corris has gained a following among the left by writing sharp-edged thrillers which confront urgent social and political issues. But the TV deal reflects the increasingly commercial orientation of his recent ventures.

Corris tried his hand at script-writing when _The Empty Beach_ became a film in 1985. Now he'll be adapting two more of his books for JNP Films, producers of _A Country Practice_, to turn his Cliff Hardy series into 20 one-hour episodes for television. Rumour has it that the contract is worth $600,000.

"Australia's answer to Raymond Chandler", as he's been called, was born in working-class Melbourne in 1942. His parents encouraged him to study but became concerned at how long he kept at it. He graduated with a PhD from ANU, finally, on Solomon Islands Labour Migration, 1870-1914. It's remote from Cliff Hardy's world (or underworld), but then Corris insists that he's remote from Hardy's world: "I get my material mainly from other books. And unlike Hardy, I'm not into physical courage."

Corris feels that lately his reputation has been too narrowly based on the Hardy series. Ask him about the series and he'll emphatically remind you he's also written books on boxing (_The Winning Side_, a novel, and a critical study, _Lords of the Ring_), espionage stories featuring secret agent Ray Crawley, and his latest baby, the Richard Browning series.

Browning is "an outrageous blunder", a genial scoundrel, a swashbuckling coward with "a dash of Errol Flynn". He deserts during World War 1 and, in the recently published _'Beverley Hills' Browning_, he escapes Sydney for Hollywood in the '20s — only to find himself involved with a secret Mexican army, a corrupt movie business, bootlegging and drug running.

Maybe Corris' eye is too much on the American market, or maybe he's just churning out too much — but the Browning books lack the bite of the Hardy ones. _'Beverley Hills' is often directionless, unexciting and flat. You wonder what's happened to the Corris who created the Hardy plots which short-circuit and explode, where the comments on present-day Sydney are incisive and there is a sharply-drawn cast of shady entrepreneurs, drug addicts, politicians, hit-men, sociopaths, prostitutes, psycho-surgeons and more.

Peter Corris confesses to being surprised at the interest the left has taken in his writing. "I see my books as entertainment and that's all. I regard myself as a pulp writer." He describes Hardy as "a wishy-washy socialist, middle-of-the-road Labor with sympathies closer to Hayden than Hawke". Corris wrote in the _National Times_ in 1986 that "the private investigator, the hard-boiled private eye, is a bourgeois individualist. He's not interested in collective solutions to problems and he tends to be sceptical about social redemption".

Corris' stories are male-oriented and the genre is not exactly "ideologically sound" per se, but perhaps it's the ambivalence, the awareness of tensions (both narrative and political) that make them interesting. In _The January Zone_ Hardy expresses a dislike for leftwing politicians and unions — yet he's opposed to US bases as well.

Corris himself seems to occupy ambivalent ground. The historian and social theorist in him remains preoccupied with wider issues, while the entertainer exploits popular literary forms with commercial success.

Critics have complained recently that the Hardy stories are losing their edge, that the subversiveness is receding. _The Baltic Business_, the second in the Crawley series, raises issues of the ethnic right in Melbourne. But the resolution is conventional and unsatisfying. Corris has said: "to write book after book, you have to write out of something, out of some need, some tension". Perhaps increasing financial security and commercial success have slackened this tension. But who knows? Reworking the Hardy books for TV might provide the stimulus he needs.

Matthew Harding
Currently, the industrial debate is concentrating on the need for Australia to retrain and reskill its workforce to become internationally competitive. Industry and award restructuring are pivotal to this strategy. The growing interest in skills formation is particularly significant in the context of the equal pay struggle, and of a system of arbitration based historically on the practice of paying workers according to their gender.

Decisions made about how people acquire skills, how they use them and what are the future skills requirements of the workforce, all hinge on one central factor — what is defined as a “skill”. How “skill” is defined in this debate will determine which groups of workers benefit from award restructuring, and which groups of workers don’t. This is where the skills formation and pay equity debates intersect.

While some commentators have described recent national wage case benching as “unpredictable” in their decision-making, there is one issue on which the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission remains steadfast: the rejection of comparable worth in determining fair rates of pay for the jobs that women perform.

The commission’s grasp of the issues surrounding the concept of comparing dissimilar jobs to determine wage rates was put to the test again in the recent national wage proceedings. Public attention during the proceedings focussed, among other things, on union-management deals outside the commission, the ability of the ACTU to rein in left unions and, more recently, late changes to the federal government’s position before the commission.

In all this, the equal pay advocates have been little heard and probably even less understood. After all, haven’t we already got equal pay?

The simple answer is “no”. There are still a small number of awards which have lower rates of pay for women than for men.

But this is no longer the crux of the problem. The issue now — as it was in 1985 when the Council of Action for Equal Pay (CAEP) made its historic submission to the ACTU nurses’ so-called comparable worth test case — is about equal pay for work of equal value.

The equal pay — or, as it is now known, pay equity — lobby suffered a serious setback in that case, but one that proved to be only temporary. Earlier this year in Sydney a new group was established to make a submission to the current national wage hearings. The National Pay Equity Coalition grew out of discussions within the Socialist Feminist Coalition in NSW over Australia Reconstructed and its implications for women, both in and out of the paid workforce.

The coalition’s submission highlights the absence of thorough work value assessments of traditional women’s jobs, and unacknowledged demands in women’s work or, if acknowledged, the fact of their undervaluation.

It argues that male/female wage relativities will be reduced only when that is a specific objective of the wage fixation system. A study of wage movements over the last 30 years demonstrates this. The facts also point to the inadequacy of wage principles since the 1972 Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value decision. Witness the intention of the anomalies provision to restrict the application of comparative wage justice.

The submission argues that the commission has generally been prepared to exercise broad judgment in determining the relative worth of men’s jobs, but not when confronted with specific claims in relation to women’s occupations. For example, the commission is reluctant to acknowledge on-the-job training, posing a problem for women workers who acquire their skills that way rather than through formal accreditation.

The coalition’s submission argues that the new wage fixation guidelines must allow for a comprehensive assessment of the value of work traditionally performed by women to ensure that award restructuring does not merely replicate existing skills hierarchies, entrench existing relativities between male and female jobs, and thus perpetuate the need for equal pay cases indefinitely. How women workers will fare lies fairly and squarely with the outcome of the skills definition issue.

The new emphasis in the unions’ submissions to the wage case on efficiency and productivity through restructuring makes the coalition’s submission particularly timely. There is no question that award restructuring may offer the potential to re-examine work performed and skills acquired. For it to assist women workers, however, also requires a preparedness on the part of unions to review sacred cows like relativities, say between trades and non-trades workers — a test for the mettle of any union!

This is, in fact, the fundamental issue in the debate about pay equity. The coalition’s submission is not shy on the point: it is talking about upsetting relativities.

And the left must address these issues now, before embracing a new industrial order which will, if we are not careful, enshrine one of the most odious features of the old: its failure to acknowledge the worth of women’s work.

ANITA DEVOS is a member of the NSW Socialist Feminist Coalition.
Images are for making, breaking and changing. "I'll make you an' I'll break you", is the traditional snarl of the spurned Svengali. "I owe it all to my public", is the accepted password of mutual reassurance between star and fan. Some interesting images have been undergoing a bit of a sea change lately.

Paul Hogan and Bill Hayden are two of Australia's best known public figures. Both have well defined images, both come into the category of the revered hero — for the significant numbers of people who don't throw up at the very thought, that is.

Hogan is variously credited with re-inventing Australian masculinity, building Sydney's Harbour Bridge with his bare hands and causing the near extinction of the Pacific prawn. Bill Hayden, on the other hand, is a heady mixture of tragedy, drama and honour, an amalgam of Richard III, Gough Whitlam and the boy who stood on the burning deck.

The reality behind these various snapshot impressions is anyone's guess. Examining the entrails between the lines, it seems clear that Hogan is no George Negus: he's not the slightest bit interested in examining his attitudes towards women and relations with them — if he was he wouldn't be making such a comprehensive ass of himself here, he's actually casting serious doubt on the validity of the most interesting Aussie male sex symbol since Robert Mitchum. It would seem, after all, that the overt macho symbolism of the Croc II poster is for real. The big knife; favourite joke and film clip from the original, now takes its intended place — aimed dangerously and purposefully right at Bimbo's crutch. This is an image favoured by the series of bone-headed big-black-stud flicks of the early 70s. It had nothing to commend it, for black or white, man or woman, then — and it still hasn't.

His expressed concern for Koslowski's hurt feelings is also right out of that school of "she is ma woman, ah am her man" thought. It is as if several vital parts of his anatomy have suddenly changed location: he is now talking through his ass, his brain is in his crotch — but his heart? Hard to say where that is: perhaps he left it in San Francisco. Meanwhile, the image of the lovable larrikin charmer, hitherto known as Hoges, must surely be in its death throes. His antics and ice-faced insensitivity towards his wife will have registered deeply in the minds of every woman over the age of twelve: the lady may not be a tramp, but her boyfriend is definitely a jerk.

Jerk is not a description that could have been applied to Bill Hayden. It doesn't fit. His behaviour over the Sinclair-says-shoot-Dallas-or-I-resign business and his flirtatious coyness over the Governor-Generalship brought him perilously close, however. Hayden has for long occupied a special place in Australian life. The public has a healthy disrespect for politicians, ranking them — with journalists — below used car salesmen and impeached US presidents in the stabby tables. But Hayden was an ex-ception: the working class boy made good who, unlike the Hawke-Hoges types, didn't become seduced and rendered revolting by his elevated status.

It's likely, images being the potent little monsters that they are, that he'll be remembered less for his actual qualities and more for the most dramatic incident of his career: the Hawke coup. Only Whitlam and Kerr rank higher and more bitterly in recent ALP memory.

The fact is, however, that Bill Hayden isn't the innocent, honourable lamb struck down by the swaggering silver dingo. He is, after all, an extremely successful politician. We need look no further than his brilliantly executed U-turn over the efficacy of the GGship to realise that.

His on-again, off-again, maybe-maybe not toying with the situation also smacks of nothing less than peacock preening and examination of the attractive new image being held up by the ever-obliging, if unwitting, media. That Hogan has decided to become Mick Dundee in "private" says much the same. Either way, it's a bit disappointing: idols with clay feet are one thing; finding that their heads are filled with stuff is something else entirely.

The dangers of idol worship have, of course, long been cautioned against. In this at least God knew what was what, albeit for the wrong motives. Trouble is, the people who've really been trodden on by these arrogant clodhoppers are their respective wives.

Noeleen Hogan and Dallas Hayden are housewives, mothers, supporters and helpmates for their husbands: the bedrock from which brilliant careers are launched. Unfortunately, once the rocket is in orbit, it gets more and more difficult for bedrock to keep up. It's solid stuff, not intended to exist in an atmosphere of rarified, unadulterated hot air. Inevitably they suffer. Mrs Hayden and Mrs Hogan have suffered perhaps one of the most painful effects of life in the spotlight's reflection: public humiliation. It has not been a good experience, for them, or the rest of us. The soaring vanity of mortal men makes the prickles of the neck rise and a sweat of embarrassment begin to trickle.

There might be one sight left to see however: the ripped up pinups and hither-to fondly considered images would make an excellent bonfire of their vanities. Anyone for a raw prawn?
Springtime In Moscow

Has Gorbachev’s bold experiment lost momentum? Can he now push the Communist Party into its own bout of perestroika?

In the first of two articles Monty Johnstone interviewed Roy Medvedev in Moscow after the recent Party conference.

Roy Medvedev, the Soviet historian and political analyst, lives in a fifth-floor flat on a housing estate on the outskirts of Moscow. For most of his life, he has been viewed as a socialist dissident. During the Brezhnev “stagnation period” he was ostracised and his safety threatened. None of his numerous books and articles have been published in the Soviet Union, though they have become well-known in the West. A measure of the changes taking place in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev is that he now finds himself being interviewed by Soviet papers, press agencies, television and radio.

Recently he held a press conference at the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs press centre. And Soviet publishers are now interested in bringing out his monumental work on the Stalin period, Let History Judge, written more than twenty years ago.

Monty Johnstone interviewed Medvedev in his Moscow flat following the extraordinary conference of the Soviet Communist Party, in early July. This interview will be appearing in slightly different form in the August edition of Marxism Today.

What are your general impressions of the recent Communist Party conference? Do you think it represents a significant advance for democratisation in Soviet society?

The conference certainly represents a significant step forward in what we can call the democratisation of our society. I think it was an interesting and important event. People followed everything that was published and shown on TV. Even though it wasn’t shown in full on TV, those parts that were shown aroused great public interest. Ten or twenty years ago when party congresses took place, people didn’t bother to read the papers because they weren’t interested in Brezhnev’s reports and the speeches that followed them. This conference was different because there was real debate and controversy. The delegates’ speeches were not all alike. Gorbachev’s report was perhaps rather too long by Western standards, but not by Soviet ones. He combined two reports in one. The conference revealed the different tendencies, points of view, trends and even factions in the party — although officially the existence of factions is denied.

Are they sufficiently firmly formed to be called factions? Aren’t they something rather looser?

They aren’t, of course, factions as understood in common political vocabulary as something organised. They are political trends to be understood in a looser sense.

Do these trends exist throughout the party or only in any stable form in the leading bodies of the party?

They are characteristic of the whole party at all levels. The party is not responding uniformly to the process of perestroika.

If one had to identify these tendencies or trends with leading figures in them, could one talk very approximately of a Gorbachev trend, a Ligachev trend and a Yeltsin trend?

It is possible to speak of a Gorbachev trend and a Ligachev trend, but not of a Yeltsin one. Yeltsin doesn’t represent any particular trend now, though there are other people who think the same way. But Yeltsin has shown that he is broken as a politician and cannot lead any trend within the party. There are very many different trends in the party but the party conference represented three main tendencies. The first is the tendency of the opponents of perestroika in general. They are people who want to return to the past, people who are being thrown out of social and political life by perestroika. There are very many such opponents and they still have a huge influence in the running of the country.

But they didn’t express themselves openly at the conference.
They mostly kept silent. They were criticised at the conference. I have in mind the top levels of the bureaucracy — people whose activities symbolise stagnation and what we refer to as the breaking mechanism holding back perestroika. They didn’t reply to the criticisms. For example, the ministry of finance was strongly criticised but the minister didn’t come into the discussion to explain his position to the conference. The huge and extremely rich ministry of land conservation and water resources also came under sharp attack for doing a great deal of ecological damage to our country, but that minister didn’t say anything either.

Although these people were represented at the conference they realised that if they spoke they would get a hostile reception. Only one person from this tendency spoke at the conference, and that was the writer Bondarev. He represents that part of our literature which perestroika is casting aside. People of a different level are now coming to the fore in our literature and in our culture generally. People like Bondarev and Markov were, for twenty years, the bosses of our literature. They formed a mafia which decided the policy of the publishing houses and determined who should and should not be published and what royalties they should receive. Now it is not these people who decide — they have lost power.

And the second trend?

The second trend is represented by people who are supporters of perestroika. They understand that our economy is in a critical state, as Gorbachev said. They want to restructure it, but without glasnost, without press freedom, without democratisation — by the old administrative methods and orders. They are people who come out against corruption and abuses and oppose the mafias. They are mostly honest communists and Soviet people, but they have got used to the old ways of working. The most striking representative of this group
is Ligachev who, himself, organised the Nina Andreieva article. But they won't achieve their objectives without using the levers of glasnost against the bureaucracy. Without a free press, it is simply impossible to formulate a point of view.

This group embraces the majority of regional and city party secretaries, the majority of the conference, where its attacks on the apparatus. It is characterised by both innovation and conservatism, impulses to move forward and dogmatism. It combines both old stereotypes and new thinking. It occupies an intermediate position. It is the strongest group in our party but it does not dominate it because complete power in the party is not in its hands. In his conference speech, Ligachev warned Gorbachev, and it was an unmistakable warning: Without us you wouldn't have become general secretary of the party — that is, without the votes in March 1985 of Politbureau members Chebrikov, Gromyko and Solomentsev, whom he named.

And the third tendency is Gorbachev's?

Yes, the third group can be called that of Gorbachev himself. This group strives for perestroika, for the reform of all economic and political structures. I myself don't understand some of their reforms, for instance, some of Gorbachev's conference proposals for changes in the political system. But, at all events, they are people looking for a way out for our country, for means to take it further forward. They want to give socialism a new face and make it more attractive. Their intention is to do so through democracy, glasnost and a relatively free press, and through involving the whole people in the process of perestroika. And, you see, there is a conservatism to be overcome not only in the apparatus but also among ordinary people, among workers and peasants who need to be got to work better.

And Yeltsin?

Yeltsin represents vanguardism in the party. He doesn't represent a trend as such but only some individuals. He wants to push perestroika ahead more quickly, more energetically, but this is not realistic. Yeltsin is saying much what Gorbachev was saying at the beginning, but there is very little support for this now. Yeltsin's political collapse is due to not appreciating that if we start going too fast it will lead to the end of perestroika, rather than its success. In our conditions, it is possible for perestroika to move forward fairly quickly but not by leaps. Politics is the art of the possible. Yeltsin always spoke of a time span of one or two years. When he went to a factory when he was Moscow secretary he used to say: "I give you two years to fulfil perestroika here." That sort of thing is not possible. And now we see that neither he nor any of the enterprises that he visited have achieved this goal.

How far do you think that, in the interests of pursuing the politics of the possible, Gorbachev has made certain compromises with Ligachev and his tendency, and how far would you see these compromises reflected in the conference decisions?

Gorbachev has always proceeded by means of compromises. There is no other road open to him. The leader of the party and the country emerges from the same stratum that represents the old elite and the previous epoch. Gorbachev was elected from among the Brezhnev elite. He is always making compromises with Ligachev's group and even with the conservatives. But there are compromises and compromises: those which take things backwards and those which move them forward. Gorbachev has shown himself to be a master of compromises, and each of his compromises enables the country to take one step forward and sometimes more than one. The party conference represented another step forward.

Is this compromise between Gorbachev and his trend, on the one hand, and Ligachev and his trend on the other, a long-term compromise which will last a number of years, or a short-term one liable to break down in the foreseeable future?

Each compromise has its time span. I don't think the compromise between Gorbachev's and Ligachev's groups will last very long. But it is not excluded that it could last for two to three years. The main intention of this compromise is to defeat the other main group — the most conservative group of bureaucrats represented by the officials of the ministries and those departments of the central committee which deal directly with different branches of industry and agriculture, like energy, construction and transport. They feed off that power and are often corrupted by it. We need to do away with these surplus parts of our apparatus.

Ligachev and the regional party secretaries also understand that these are bureaucratic obstacles that need to be removed as they are hampering perestroika. It is quite unnatural that one-third of the adult population should be employed in performing administrative functions of one kind or another. It would be quite reasonable if the service sector were bigger than the industrial sector, for instance, as this is a feature of industrially developed countries. But it is unacceptable that a third of the workforce should be employed in administration. In general, the compromise is directed against the most reactionary section of the party and against the opponents of perestroika as a whole.

Do you think that, in two or three years' time, it might come to a showdown between the supporters of Gorbachev and those of Ligachev? Is there a danger that, as in 1964 against Khrushchev, an alliance of different trends might be formed to get rid of Gorbachev? In this case an alliance of the Ligachev forces with the directly anti-perestroika taking advantage perhaps of the fact that the economic situation had not adequately improved?

Of course there are various possibilities. One of them is that anti-perestroika forces might consolidate themselves, win support from some of the forces now supporting perestroika and overthrow...
No hard feelings. In the run-up to the Soviet party conference, several noted Gorbachev supporters were conspicuously omitted from the delegates lists by regional party bosses. One was Moscow historian Yuri Afanasyev, who was passed over for the conference's youngest delegate, 11-year-old Vitalina Trifolenko. When the CPSU's Central Committee insisted on Afanasyev's inclusion, the official press agency posed both delegates together for a publicity shot.

Gorbachev. But this is not the most likely possibility. It is more likely that the anti-perestroika forces will be thrown out as they don't respond to national interests. And there is a hope that people now associated with Ligachev's group will learn how to speak to people, and how to work in a democratic way. Some of the secretaries of district party committees may learn some lessons which will enable them to work for perestroika in the proper way.

So, broadly speaking, Roy Aleksandrovich, you are optimistic about the prospects of perestroika?

I was optimistic when we were living through the worst times here. I said then that perestroika and changes of a completely new kind were possible in our country. It may then have seemed the least likely prospect, but there are many examples of what seems least likely coming about because basic national interests assert themselves. In that respect I am an optimist. I understand that Gorbachev personally might suffer a defeat. He might make a serious mistake, take a false step. A monetary reform or price reform that was unpopular might be used by demagogues against him. The country might again, for a short time, enter a period of stagnation, but that would once again come to an end.

The election of Chernenko was an absolutely false step for the country. In the interests of a small group, time was lost which was precious for the country. For the sake of a fatally ill man a whole year in the life of the country was sacrificed. Such a situation can no longer be accepted. Time is very important for the Soviet Union because such a great power cannot allow itself to fall behind countries like Brazil or South Korea. Ultimately, the national interests of the country will carry the day.

What do you think of the reforms in the political system put forward in Gorbachev's report? In particular, how do you assess the proposal that, in future, first secretaries of party committees should be nominated as chairpersons of soviets at corresponding levels?

Frankly speaking, I don't understand these proposals and I don't know how they will work. It seems to me to be a reform in the spirit of Khrushchev when he thought that something needed doing but did not test it experimentally. I cannot imagine how it will work on the level of a city, a district, a region or a republic. I think the new system is simply impossible locally and will immediately show its ineffectiveness. Gorbachev argued for a separation between party and state organs with each getting on with its own work — the party concentrating on political strategy and policy and the soviets on economic and other matters. But combining the posts of party secretary and soviet chairperson in one person will have just the opposite effect. It hasn't been thought through. It's just going to lead to confusion and the mixing up of functions. Moreover, it's not realistic. I know in practice how people in these posts operate: even now they are overloaded with work.

Academician Abalkin in his conference speech expressed disagreement with this proposal of Gorbachev. If I had been a delegate at the conference I would also have voted against it. But many voted to accept it because they believe in Gorbachev.

One other point is worth mentioning. Lenin's idea was that the soviets should combine legislative and executive power in one organ. I think that Gorbachev in his proposals forgot about this.

Gorbachev's proposal for promoting the separation of powers between legislative and executive bodies by barring deputies elected to soviets from serving on their soviet's executive committee clearly represents the opposite of what Lenin was proposing in his The State and Revolution — which doesn't of course mean that Gorbachev must be wrong!
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What do you think of Gorbachev's constitutional proposals for setting up a Congress of People's Deputies meeting once a year and electing a President with considerable powers, and a smaller two-chamber Supreme Soviet whose members would be full-time parliamentarians?

Maybe it is easier to imagine how the changes at the top will work because every leader of our party eventually became leader of the state. Stalin became prime minister. Khrushchev became prime minister. Brezhnev became president of the Supreme Soviet. Now Gorbachev will get the post of president with increased powers.

But I don't know how the new-style Supreme Soviet in Moscow will operate when even the present type of Supreme Soviet hasn't learnt to work democratically. What will the 400-450 delegates do who will be full-time deputies of the Supreme Soviet? Great Britain, for instance, has very old parliamentary traditions which go back hundred of years. But here, unfortunately, people are not accustomed to such things and they will have to learn a lot. It will take time.

Next Spring elections are due to take place to the new Congress of People's Deputies. Do you believe they will allow for contests between candidates with different platforms, and in a certain sense maybe even protoparties? For instance, if you have green candidates standing on a distinctive green program, might this not represent something approximating a green party and therefore a move towards the de facto ending of the one-party system?

There is no doubt that such "informal" movements and organisations will try to stand their own candidates in the elections to the Congress of People's Deputies. They openly say this. But I don't know whether they will be allowed to or not. Under our system an electoral commission decides which organisations have and do not have the right to put up candidates. Such unofficial organisations have not been allowed to stand candidates in the past. They were considered undesirable elements in our society, and many of their representatives were arrested or put under permanent pressure by the authorities. Also, judging by the conference resolutions there are different sorts of informal groups — useful and harmful. It is impossible yet to say what will happen in the future and who will be allowed to stand.

Some commentators have described the national question in the Soviet Union as a "time bomb" under the whole process of democratisation. Do you foresee such a danger? Do you think that solutions will be found to such problems as Nagorny Karabakh and the demands of the Baltic republics for greater political and economic autonomy?

I must say that I don't see the activation of national movements as a "time bomb" against democratisation. It is a factor for the development of perestroika. But there are different types of national movement. In Azerbaijan, for instance, they go on the streets with slogans like "Make Ligachev general secretary" because they liked his speech which said that Nagorny Karabakh would always remain a part of Azerbaijan. In Armenia, they demonstrate with different slogans. "Lenin, Party, Gorbachev!"

Yes, as against "Stalin, Brezhnev, Ligachev!" in Azerbaijan, I suppose! The situation in the Baltic republics is quite different. In Estonia, for instance, they've set up a very strong People's Front for perestroika. They see in perestroika the guarantee for their national traditions and for democratisation.

Yes, there's obviously a big difference between these positive developments in the Baltic republics and the conflict that has developed between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorny Karabakh accompanied by prolonged strikes and inter-ethnic violence. If no solution can be found to this problem in the period ahead, is it not going to produce a backlash against perestroika with some people saying, as our driver was saying today, that in Stalin's times, such disorders didn't happen?

It's not true that such things didn't happen in Stalin's time though, of course, they were cruelly suppressed. What the driver was expressing was the idealisation of Stalin's time. There were strikes, uprisings, urban disorders and mutinies in the armed forces. Because of the absence of glasnost people didn't know about them. Certainly, it is essential to solve the problem of Nagorny Karabakh one way or another. There are no problems for which no solution can be found. Maybe some people still will remain dissatisfied, but that's only to be expected. However, it can take a long time to solve a problem which is, after all, 1,600 years old.

But Gorbachev hasn't got that much time to solve it!

I can give no prognosis here. It is a regional problem. In the same way that the problem of Northern Ireland hasn't killed British democracy ...

It is a danger though ...

... the problem of Nagorny Karabakh won't destroy perestroika. It is a problem that concerns only a small part of the Soviet population and it will be solved either by compromise or by force. But in the end it will be solved.

1. A long article appeared in one of the central committee's papers, Sovetskaya Rossiya, in March under the name of Nina Andreeva, a Leningrad chemistry lecturer, challenging the whole course of democratisation and glasnost. It was strongly attacked by Pravda.
2. Chernenko, an undistinguished apparatchik, was appointed party general secretary after Andropov's death in 1984 in preference to Gorbachev, and died the next year.
3. The present practice is for those elected to the Supreme Soviet to combine their normal jobs with their duties as deputies. The Supreme Soviet normally meets briefly only twice a year.
4. An autonomous region which has, since 1923, been attached to Azerbaijan but whose predominantly Armenian population has been seeking to be transferred to Armenia. Azerbaijan has refused this request which was made by the region's elected representative body.

MONTY JOHNSTONE is a member of the editorial board of Marxism Today.
The Past Strikes Back

The obstacles to Gorbachev’s program remain strong, but the past doesn’t speak with one voice. Anthony Barnett, recently returned from Moscow, assesses the continuing resistance to the reform program, and its chances of success.

One day, in circumstances that my Moscow friend Nikolai declined to describe in detail but which he insisted were not improper, his cousin noticed that a stranger had dropped his passport. It was a red passport, full size and not the little card-sized wallet for Party membership. On the front it stated it was issued by the Central Committee.

The cousin had been wanting to buy some foodstuffs for his mother who was in hospital. He kept the passport. Then he went to a large food store, showed it and asked to see the manager. He flashed the passport at the manager who immediately sold him some excellent supplies that were not available for the public. No one dared check the photograph in the passport! Later, he was stopped by the police when driving and drunk—a very serious crime in the USSR even before the clamp-down on vodka. He showed the officer his new passport, and drove away. A close friend wanted very much to go on holiday to the Ukraine, but could not get a train. Nikolai’s cousin lent him the magic passport, and he got a perfect seat without trouble. Never once had it been opened. How we laughed as the story progressed.

The story says a lot about how those who govern the Soviet Union are cut off from its conditions. There is a revealing passage in Gorbachev’s Perestroika concerning his walkabout, in the summer of 1986, when he talked with people in Krasnodar.

What a substantive conversation it was, what problems people raised! I was really pleased to see them so zealously supporting the Central Committee line. And then I realized how bitter the people are...

In my experience, it is impossible to go to the Soviet Union for even a week without hearing how bitter people are. That a senior Party member with exceptional perspicacity has to become General Secretary in order to be able to break through the barrier of officialdom to realise this is an astounding confirmation of the effectiveness of the elite cocoon.

The story of the magic passport brought home to me the massive human scale of the resistance to Gorbachev’s reform program. Hundreds of thousands of officials want to keep their jobs, in municipalities, in agro-industrial centres, as Party full-timers, as people who check up on those who check up. Quite understandably, they do not want perestroika for themselves.

At one stormy meeting, my friend Sergei told me he pressed for perestroika in his workplace. He was asked to the Party cell to explain himself. “Gorbachev has called it a revolution,” he told the comrades, “and every revolution is met by a counter-revolution”. An older member agreed, and stated bluntly, “I am a counter-revolutionary”.

In May 1987 Anatoli Strelyanyi, an editor of Novy Mir, had a hair-raising discussion with the Komsomol aktiv at the Moscow State University. Strelyanyi declared dramatically, “There are already two parties in the Party”. And he argued for the rapid acceleration of reform.

The revolutionary nature of perestroika resides in the fact that the people should have freedom ... The opponents of perestroika have remarkable feel for developments ... Administrators and bureaucrats are against a free press and for preliminary censorship. They are afraid of freedom, and they have us by the throat...

He concluded on an even more apocalyptic note, with an image that was doing the rounds in Moscow the following month: “You can’t cross an abyss in two steps. We are standing before an abyss”. Such declarations may belong to a national tradition of impatience that has caused as many problems in Russian history as sloth and conservatism: the best way to cross an abyss is to build a bridge...

At one point Strelyanyi was asked, “What is the social base for perestroika?” — the marxist way of saying, “who is for it?” He replied: Gorbachev is being slow about expanding the social base for perestroika, and this will lead to the defeat of our cause and of Gorbachev himself. It is necessary to take sides openly, from the top to the bottom. The social base of perestroika consists of highly qualified workers, parts of the scientific-technological intelligentsia; parts of the creative humanitarian intelligentsia; and parts of the lower-level Party apparatus and economic managers.
Weak though the sum of such forces may be, the reformers have momentum on their side, and if they can keep the conservatives off balance, the latter, without a political rallying cry, may find it hard to accumulate their numerically stronger support.

§ § §

Overall, Gorbachev’s reform program is a powerful package. Economically, it demands self-financing of enterprises, use of market forces, and dismantling of the command economy. Legally, it seeks to establish greater rights and safeguards for citizens. Politically, it is pushing openness in the media and democracy in elections. Internationally it aims to shift Soviet strategy to sufficient deterrence and disarmament — alongside an important accord with China.

Morally, it is an attempt to make the Soviet Union an honest place. Psychologically, it wishes to stimulate initiative. Scientifically, it is supposed to encourage freedom for research. Domestically, it is committed to more housing and better health. Agriculturally, without which nothing else will stabilise, it aims to allow those who farm the land to take command of it so that it may yield the surplus that should easily be forthcoming.

Such a sweeping assault is bound to create fierce resistance. Yet while the sheer breadth of the reforms extends opposition, it may make them harder to oppose. The more strongly Gorbachev unifies his program and also makes different parts inviting to different groups, the less likely they may be to combine against him. Gorbachev’s and Shevardnadze’s diplomatic success strengthens their political position internally. To remove them now that the INF treaty is signed risks alienating the world community — not just the newspaper readers of Moscow. The obkom First Secretaries, the key regional bosses who make up a significant section in the Central Committee, are said to dislike glasnost. They do no want change, can these two aspects be separated?

There are at least three wings to the opposition, each belongs to a different species even if all are hostile to “western” freedoms. There are the pterodactyls, the corrupt dealers in office and supplies, as old as ages past; there are the ostriches of orthodoxy, with their lovely feathers and their inability to fly; and there are the ominous great skuas of Russian nationalism.

The first group has been routed since the last years of Brezhnev. The “nomenklatura revolution” instigated and invigilated by Andropov after he replaced Brezhnev laid the basis for Gorbachev’s victory over Grishin. The backing of the KGB (itself transformed by Andropov) was essential to the initial cleansing of the Soviet apparat. The old corruption seems broken. The real resistance to change will come from the other wings.

The “Suslovites”, for want of a better word, the ostriches of orthodoxy, are relatively clean and believe in the righteousness of the Party. They hold the clearest immediate challenge. They hold leading positions within the Party
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and the military. Their bureaucratic mentality appeals to nomenklatura who want a quiet life with a bit of travel, and to the lower bureaucracies and suspicious provincials. They take comfort in passive reluctance to get the reforms to work. Their credo appeals to those who dislike risks.

This tendency within the Party faces two problems. Its leaders are not blind to the need for change in the economy; they too desire much higher levels of efficiency and a faster rate of development. Their model is East Germany — a centralised, orthodox socialism that works. (Well, it works much better than the USSR, but perhaps that is because the Soviets are not Germans.) They desire deep perestroika but a very shallow glasnost. So they cannot oppose all the changes in an outright fashion. The orthodox tendency could certainly win power, especially if the KGB supports it actively. But the second problem faced by those who want to slow down democratisation while intensifying economic reform, is that they have to move soon, although their perspective is still incoherent. For a process is under way that becomes more difficult to reverse by the season.

For example, I asked an English colleague about a Soviet official with whom she had negotiated. She dismissed what I thought was his rather creative and imaginative style. "He told me that it took him a year to understand that Gorbachev wanted him to think for himself," she laughed. "He is completely a man of the apparatus, if they tell him to stop thinking for himself, he will." I doubt this. It will be true of some, but not all. Ian McEwan, the English writer, has argued that glasnost is a "permission". Not only is it easier to grant a permission than withdraw it, it becomes steadily harder to withdraw it over time. As people succeed in the effort of thinking for themselves, they will become increasingly reluctant to relinquish such a gain. The longer people "learn" democracy, the harder it is to stop them from keeping it. It is far from impossible, mind. It is just that the more you wait, the greater the force needed to reverse such a change.

So the time for the old guard to defeat Gorbachev is now. This year or next, at any rate before 1990. Now is the time when he may still be overthrown by those older than himself, the "honest monoliths". At present they are bending to the assault of the new men that Gorbachev leads. Are they bending all the better to recuperate and lash back, like a strong reed that is rooted in its place; or are they finally being bent out of the way?

One key figure in their struggle is the second-ranking Politburo member, Yegor Ligachev, generally held to be the leading "hard-liner". Born in 1920 — he is just over ten years older than Gorbachev — he spent eighteen years in Tomsk, Siberia, after he fell foul of Brezhnev, and was brought back to Moscow by Andropov. According to Zhores Medvedev, in his biography of Gorbachev, Ligachev is known to be uncompromising, with a strong character and unflattering convictions, and not reluctant to express his views. He tried, for example, to expel some Moscow raikom secretaries who were linked to corruption cases without getting Grishin's permission.

In his recent statement, Activating the Human Factor — the Main Source of Acceleration, Ligachev signals his low-key attitude towards glasnost:

Some people understand openness in a lop-sided way, as the exposure of shortcomings and their eradication. Openness is also popularisation and affirmation of what is advanced and progressive.

And he went on to insist that openness must "encourage the sprouts of the new", but without any stress on the need for an open argument. By contrast, this is something advocated with respect to science by Ligachev's Politburo colleague, Alexander Yakovlev, who argues:

We cannot endure an official monopoly of the truth — a situation in which the last word in the work of thought belongs not to truth but to the office. Science can develop only in the process of constructive discussions and clashes of opinions. It should be realised that no one has a monopoly of the truth, either in formulating new questions or in providing answers to them.

Ligachev too stresses the need for individuals to become aware of themselves as an "active personality". But he takes a relatively uncritical approach towards Stalin's economic strategy. When emphasising the need to "activate the human factor" he criticises as inadequate for today the "kind of technological determinism, which was quite justifiable when the country was building the material and technical foundations." (my emphasis.)

In these muted debates a central issue is encoded in "the role of the individual". Although he discusses agriculture at length, Ligachev declines to mention the high productivity of private plots. Early in 1987 he was quoted in Newsweek as asserting that "individualism" is among "phenomena alien to socialism", an attitude that has its roots in more virulent times (the word "alien" being another alarm signal). The following, for example, was the sort of thing published in the Literaturnaya Gazeta back in the 1950s:

The socialist revolution has eliminated the question of freedom for creative work. What sort of reasons can anybody have in our socialist conditions to pine for "freedom of creativity"?... The reason can only be sought in philistine individualism, a mortal sickness distinguishable from the plague perhaps only in that outbreaks still occur. Anybody who feels himself restricted by his part in the common cause should look deep within his own heart: he will probably find a wretched individualist lurking there.

In July 1987, by way of contrast, Izvestia quoted Lenin's view that, "One should not see an intrigue in those who think differently, but value individuals who think and act for themselves".

In public all Soviet leaders smile
upon the dignity of the individual, and frown only upon the "ism". One need not be obsessed by Kremlinology to grasp that an absolutely fundamental disagreement is registered in the superficially reconcilable shades of emphasis; a basic antagonism that must be won or lost, on which there cannot be a compromise in the long run. Either socialists have their right to argue different points of view in public or they do not. I say socialists to get round the problem (for the moment!) of the question of the expression of "anti-socialist" views.

It may be true that there is little experience of granting legitimacy to the existence of perspectives opposed to one's own. Dmitri Likhachev, the eminent Soviet philologist, interviewed in a recent Literaturnaya Gazeta, argued:

I believe that glasnost is a poor substitute for democracy. When we enjoy all the fruits of democracy we will not want

But what if the other side does not agree that there should even be an equal exchange of views? Before you can argue about Stalin, say, you need to agree that disagreement about such a central matter is legitimate. Some feel that there can only be one correct view, the Party must draw this up in private and then publish its conclusions so that everyone knows what to think, or at least what they have to say. Others accept that radically different analyses and assessments of the Stalin period can co-exist in the open among Party members and let the best argument win — not by command but thanks to its quality.

There is, therefore, a clear, fundamental point of disagreement in principle between the logic of reform and orthodox resistance to it. It concerns the nature of Soviet politics itself. Either debate on major topics should be free or conclusions should be pre-ordained. For glasnost to retain its credibility over the next few years, politically it needs to move towards a situation in which people exercise a legal right to say what they wish to say and, scientifically, in terms of research and publication, it must do so.

Such a development will challenge at least two Soviet generations — and one-quarter of the million-strong Moscow Region Communist Party is over sixty. Either the orthodox break the political momentum gathering behind the reforms or they will be obliged to retire in favour of those who insist that an open exchange of views is essential to progress. Totally different attitudes lie behind these positions. As life throws up contention after contention, one view or the other will prevail. One of the problems about writing a piece like this at such a time is that, even as it moves towards publication, the two sides of this historic conflict are gathering their forces.

In from the cold. Andrei Sakharov, for years a non-person in the Soviet Union, officially launches glasnost crusader Yuri Afanasyev's new book, No Other Way, before the recent party conference.
Life Beyond The Fragments

Left renewal or pragmatic regroupment? The left is in a quandry. And the agenda continues to slip from our grasp. But Adam Farrar sees light at the end of the tunnel.

These are beginning to feel like heady times again. The Soviet Union is breaking out of its shell. School students are on the march in Sydney streets. Even the federal government has rediscovered social justice in an attempt to win back support. So why does it seem so hard for the left outside the ALP to emerge from this with a new, effective organisational form? Why is the new party or movement — which is so widely seen to be necessary — experiencing such a difficult birth?

That there is a difficulty is there for all to see in the short-lived bursts of enthusiasm for this or that option from one group or another. In the middle of all this turbulence a few more long-term attempts are still on their feet, but are clearly finding it very hard to wade forward.

The New Left Party Charter Process is one of these which shows just how hard the task has been. Since its disastrous conference in Melbourne last November (see ALR 104) the process has been struggling to find a new firm footing. Held seven months after the circulation of the Charter for a New Left Party, that conference had been intended to assess whether enough support existed for a definite launch late this year. The irony is that, if nothing else, the conference showed that the support did exist. It also showed that support alone was not enough.

There seems little doubt that the immediate cause of the conference's failure was the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) decision to try to push through a doctrinaire statement of aims; and, when this received only marginal support outside of SWP members, to b洛c vote to prevent the more open critical alternative receiving the required two-thirds majority. This tactic shattered the, by then already tenuous, trust between participants and led to a debilitating process of mutual recrimination.

But behind this lurked a much more significant confusion about the Charter process itself. In a recent article in Arena examining a conference held by the Rainbow Alliance in March this year, Alan Roberts described two processes which have marked attempts internationally to construct new forms of political organisation. One is the approach, exemplified in Australia by the Rainbow Alliance, which bypasses existing political groups “to unite under one political umbrella those already committed to oppositional activities through the various movements”. (The Rainbow Alliance is the only project which seems to be moving ahead reasonably smoothly despite a few doubts and difficult patches. But more of that later.)

Roberts’ other process is a “regroupment of the Left” forging links between existing groups or parties. He then goes on to describe the Charter as just such a regroupment between the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and the SWP.

It’s a pity that such complete misunderstanding of the Charter process still has currency. But it is no real surprise because, underlying the SWP approach, was a belief that, despite the rhetoric, regroupment was precisely the real agenda. The CPA members involved, on the other hand, were attempting something far more difficult. They were trying to create a new political form by fostering a process outside of the CPA into which, if the process was successful, the CPA might then choose to be dissolved.

As an aside, in this the CPA seems to have shown more understanding than the ALP Left which, at its pre-conference meeting with left unions, marred the otherwise very important decision to invite community groups from around the country, by all too often haranguing them about the need to help build the ALP. A rather more innovative approach has been the very successful Politics in the Park series of discussions at Sydney’s Harold Park Hotel, organised by some ALP Left members. All of this is evidence that the ALP, too, sees the need for renewal. But back to the Charter.

This clash of conceptions between the SWP and the CPA was, of course, a recipe for disaster. Caught in the middle were the 50 percent of those involved in the Charter and the conference who were in no party at all. In the eight months since the conference they have been the target of a bewildering paper war as the Charter began to move along two separate paths.

On the one hand, the most active independents, particularly in NSW, and the CPA (for the first time taking a decision as an organisation about the Charter) decided not to work on the Charter with the SWP. This meant a slow and uneven process of disentangling local groups from the activities and forums involving
SWP members. To add to the confusion, most groups continued to participate in an uncertain way in national Charter teleconferences organised by those (principally the SWP) who did not publicly accept that the Melbourne conference had been a complete failure.

The culmination of this second path was a national meeting at which the SWP argued successfully that a new left party was no longer possible and that a coalition of the left was the only option. This proposal dovetailed neatly with the recent revival of talks between the SWP and the main pro-Soviet party, the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA). A launch of this coalition is planned for later this year.

While this decision may have made the task of disentangling the two threads of the Charter easier, the remaining active independents and CPA participants were faced with the task of reactivating a process which had all but stalled. An informal regional meeting of NSW Charter groups in April proposed another national conference to do the job last year’s Melbourne conference failed to do. But this time, a sense of urgency has meant that the conference will probably only go ahead if a clear statement of the aims of the new party can be agreed on and can attract enough endorsements to demonstrate its viability.

This sense of urgency does not only apply to Charter members. Within the CPA a growing number no longer believes the party can wait around for the Charter, and that the experiment with those outside the organised left should be given up. They, too, are beginning to feel that “regroupment” may be the only way to go.

The regroupment option is certainly on the agenda. Every left political organisation has now talked with a number of others, and co-operated on particular activities. As well as the SWP and the SPA “coalition of the left”, the Association of Communist Unity (ACU) [a breakaway from the SPA based mainly in the BWIU] and the CPA have well established joint industrial metings and have begun a series of joint seminars on developments in the Soviet Union and principles of socialist organisation.

While the latter may have little more than symbolic value, many in both organisations see the joint industrial work as the real test of whether there is a solid basis for unity. This is what might be called the pragmatist position in socialist reformation. Their opposition to regroupment proposals such as the SWP-SPA “coalition of the left” is about styles of work, not regroupment as such. In particular, they are opposed to the marginalised and oppositional approach of those groups. But if these pragmatists are to see the CPA and the ACU embrace more closely, they will have to overcome the resistance of strong groups within both organisations.

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Within the ACU there are those who believe that the majority of the CPA have so clearly abandoned marxism-leninism and democratic centralism that unity is impossible. At the recent ACU conference they firmly put the brakes on any headlong rush towards the CPA. Some of this group have their eyes, instead, on attracting members of yet another group looking for a renewed socialist presence to an avowedly marxist-leninist party. This other group is the Socialist Network, a loose organisation somewhat smaller than either the Charter or the Rainbow Alliance, the majority of whose members belong to a minority grouping within the CPA.

The Network was formed by people concerned that the search for a new party would abandon both an explicitly socialist identity and a marxist analysis. Some Network members have supported the SWP position in the Charter and the proposed Left Coalition; others are members of both the CPA and the ACU; while still others would prefer to see the CPA "rebuilt".

On the CPA side, the caution about regroupment with the ACU comes from those who are most concerned that the left needs a new political vision and organisational form. In this they are following a path which began with the adoption of the current CPA program in 1979. That program stressed most of the ingredients which have become the building blocks of most alternative left programs, from the left of the ALP to the Rainbow Alliance. In particular, it placed great emphasis on democratic participation in all areas of life including, of course, workplace self-management. It also recognised the central place of radical movements — most notably the women's and environment movements.

For the past decade, the CPA has doggedly followed wherever this path led — from debates about the prospects for socialism, through arguments (and initiatives) for socialist renewal, to a search for a new socialist party. Not surprisingly, many in the CPA see the regroupment option as the result of exhaustion, rather than any pioneering spirit. Equally reasonably, a good many people are asking whether, after all this time, this path is leading anywhere. Perhaps more important, the pragmatists argue, given that the pendulum of social responsiveness seems to be swinging back to the left, can we afford to let it swing by while we search for the right formulations?

This is a strong point. But what seems implicit in the position of the proponents of a "new vision" — and here we should include those in the CPA (including some supporters of the Network), independents in the Charter, and the members of the Rainbow Alliance — is a concern that judging the moment is a notoriously risky business; and we might do better to build a secure and long-term basis for radical social change into the future.

It would be a mistake to draw these lines too sharply. While many of these pragmatists active in the union movement base most judgments more on the commonsense of union or traditional left practice than on radical vision, this commonsense has proved itself well able to extend to building important and creative alliances such as the BWIU's work with community organisations and the Aboriginal movement. But the problem remains that a left political organisation should be thinking far more seriously about a strategy for overall social change. Perhaps the most striking, and depressing, aspect of discussions among the orthodox left about the changes taking place in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in the socialist world, is that there has been absolutely no attempt to tease out their implications, either for our understanding of socialism or for our strategy for social change.

So once again we must ask why the left — those committed to a "new vision" — have made such heavy weather of launching a new party? The answer can only be found if we ask what is involved in building a new party outside existing left organisations.

There are a number of reasons why the new alternative is synonymous with this "externalist" approach. The main one is institutional rigidity. First, as can be seen from the competing views discussed so far, any attempts to build a coherent new approach from the ground up within an existing party, will not only be confronted with political or theoretical differences but with a history of old attachments which cannot be abandoned without serious organisational damage.

And these aren't just theoretical attachments. As many of the young new left activists and intellectuals who flooded into the CPA in the late '70s found, a coherent radical project (at that time a self-consciously marxist one) is also subject to organisational pressures, the demands of a "realism" built of a particular history of political and organisational experience. At the same time, this tension is not altogether absent in the externalist strategy. A concern on the part of some from political organisations that some proposals don't acknowledge practical constraints has played a role in adding to the frustrations of the Charter process.

A more obvious point is that such a project must draw on ideas which, precisely because they are different, exist outside the party. Finally, new ideas are not enough. There is more chance of new people joining an obviously new organisation, than of their joining a revamped old one, whatever the substance of the changes. Probably too much weight shouldn't be placed on this last point because the jury is still out on whether the problem of tiny membership, which has dogged all left organisations, is to be solved by a more united left presence (regroupment), or by a more effective organisational form or new vision.

But even if it is agreed that such an externalist strategy is needed, it is much less clear how to go about it. The Charter strategy may have stalled because it expected all those who answered the call for a new party to decide collectively what sort of party they wanted. If it is absurd to
Over the Rainbow

Up until now the new alignments on the left have produced little in the way of practical rethinking on programmatic and policy questions. An exception is New Economic Directions for Australia, a discussion paper produced by a number of leading members of the Rainbow Alliance, which appeared in April.1

The document takes on the ambitious task of outlining a quite detailed set of proposals for a left economic policy over the short and medium, and long terms. But it also does more than this. It tries to outline a new vision of social provision and of the principles of society, involving a "new structure". In this, understandably, it remains sketchy, although it undoubtedly takes much more seriously the question of values than most left economic documents.

The authors declare at the outset their intention to get beyond "the usually fragmented or poorly thought through shopping list of desires" (p. 1) which characterises much left thinking on economic and social transformation. Thus "the proposals must be seen as an interconnected package rather than a shopping list from which specific items can be selected in isolation" (p. 4).

The long-term vision is strong on principles: equality without uniformity; cultural diversity without structural inequality; ecological balance; democratic participation and planning. The economy is visualised in terms of four sectors: a "democratically controlled public" sector; a co-operative one; small business; and a "non-money exchange sector" (which remains somewhat vague). There is little or no thinking about the role of markets: indeed, the stress is on their limited significance (p. 8). In this, paradoxically, it exhibits less "new thinking" than some older parts of the left.

The short and medium term proposals are far more detailed. They include full employment over ten years; a Guaranteed Adequate Income (GAI) of 120% of the poverty line, targeted at the poorest 30 percent of the community; equal pay and universal access to child care; a radically progressive tax system (with a 65 percent top rate for personal incomes over $50,000); deregulation of the finance sector; and the abolition of ecologically unsound industries. Borrowed from Australia Reconstructed is the National Investment Fund (although, like other borrowings, this remains curiously unacknowledged).

The document acknowledges and tries to face up to some of the contradictions inherent in any set of proposals of this kind. For instance: it advocates full employment concurrently with a reduction in economic growth along ecological lines; settling for the compromise that this will be a different kind of growth. And it acknowledges that its hefty and detailed tax package and "massively increased public expenditure" will surely be met by strong political pressures.

In many respects the document has a surprisingly Keynesian flavour, and its authors are careful to outline a package of responses to expected inflationary pressures. Yet they have not much to say on the international constraints upon public-sector-led recoveries as exhibited in the French experience, and the document retains an ambivalent posture towards increased consumer demand per se. At one point (p. 24) it raises the question of wage restraint as a trade-off for the massive social package; elsewhere (p. 13) it advocates an immediate return to full wage indexation. And there are a few places where the puritanism of some economic thinking on the left bursts through (for instance, an odd proposal to ban market research for its alleged effect on election results [p. 53]).

Overall, however, New Economic Directions is easily the most sustained piece of economic thinking to come out of the new trends in the left. This makes all the more curious the absence of any sense of a strategic perspective such as might outline some of the responses to the economic destabilisation certain to accompany an economic program even half as ambitious as this one. Early on (p. 3) the authors disclaim this as independent of the task of developing an economic vision: but it is difficult to see how the two can be separated.

This same strategic vacuum lends a certain shapelessness to the proposals as a whole, since there is no yardstick (or set of them) for determining priorities within the grand plan. And it leads too to an eerie otherworldliness in trying to visualise their implementation: what are the wider social coalitions, and where are the best lines of advance, which can bring such a program to the light of day? How can the unions, for instance, be won to a program which seems to use them only in a very instrumental way?

To attempt an economic vision without an equally well-thought-out political vision might be construed as putting the cart before the horse. The document is, however, an important attempt at yoking the two, too often isolated, realms together.

David Burchell.

1. New Economic Directions for Australia: A Discussion Paper, prepared by John Wiseman, Lorrie Read, Joe Camilleri, Peter Christoff, Bob Reid-Smith, Ian Ward, Rob Watts and Boris Frankel; with comments and suggestions from Belinda Probert. Contact: John Wiseman, C/- Department of Social Work, Phillip Institute of Technology, Plenty Rd, Bundoora 3083.
among movement activists, a feature which has attracted some of the most radical members of organisations like the CPA to work in them.

All these points are fairly well illustrated by the Rainbow Alliance. The Alliance chose a very carefully managed path. Activists were invited from selected areas and with particular expertise. As a result, the Alliance has gone public with a package of policies nearly developed, and a much clearer project for potential members to assess. There can also be little doubt about the socialist orientation of those so far seen (see box). The price it has paid is some impatience from those with a day-to-day involvement in various movements, some suspicion about the motives and aspirations of key players, and some difficulty in tapping a broad enough range of expertise. Significantly, labour movement expertise seems in short supply.

The only useful judgments about all these jostling strategies will be made retrospectively. But not all the cards are played yet. The CPA at least is having a shot at bringing some order into all this and, certainly, it is best placed to act as a broker between some of the key players. In the next few months it will try to build some consensus between individuals and organisations, including some (like the many ethnic political groups) who have so far been scarcely involved, as well as the existing Charter organisation.

It is certainly significant that the CPA is now throwing its organisational resources into the process rather than waiting to see what evolves. It provides the best chance of matching (and hopefully complementing) the managed development that the Rainbow Alliance has so far achieved. The much harder question is whether it will be able to find a balance between dealing with both existing organisations and the target group of independents in the movements, without tipping into mere regroupment.

ADAM FARRAR is a policy officer with the Council of Social Service of NSW.
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The federal government’s economic policy agenda has politicised Australian higher education to a degree not seen since the peak of the student revolt in the 1968 to 1971 period.

But this time the left is not setting the agenda. The government is drawing its ideas more from the political right than the left, and the left’s main role has been to react.

In December 1987 John Dawkins, federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training, issued the government’s Green Paper on higher education. The Green Paper placed education policy squarely in the centre of government economic strategy, proposed major changes in universities and colleges of advanced education (CAEs) and immediately would be little greater than we have stopped since. Higher education has set off a furious debate that has not set the agenda.

The Green Paper’s “indicative” target of 125,000 held out the prospect of long-term expansion and with 20,000 students per year unable to find places in the system and school retention rates increasing by leaps and bounds, few could disagree with that. The other aspects of the Green Paper were more controversial.

First, the Minister declared that the government could not afford to pay all the costs of the expansion itself and he set up the Wran Committee to investigate alternative sources of financing. While contributions from industry were within its brief, its main attention was focused on individual “user pays” arrangements — student fees, whether paid at the point of enrolment or paid through the tax system after study had finished.

The Wran Committee reported in May, proposing a tax on former students at two percent of taxable income to be paid at income levels of $21,500 and over. This has been somewhat modified in the tertiary tax scheme approved by Cabinet in late July for inclusion in August’s federal budget. If the scheme is finally introduced next year (opposition inside and outside the ALP remains very strong) students’ tax debts will accumulate at the rate of $1,800 per full-time year and payment will commence at $22,000 per year (one percent), rising to two percent at $25,000 and three percent at $35,000 until the indexed debt is cleared.

The tertiary tax is highly regressive because whatever your income level, you end up paying the same amount to the government. Medicine graduates accumulate tax debts at the same annual rate as nurses, despite the massive income disparities between the two and despite the Minister’s argument that the level of private benefits accruing from education qualifications justifies the education-specific tax.

Second, in the Green paper the government sought to secure efficiency through the amalgamation of smaller and medium-sized institutions with other institutions. To “encourage” amalgamations, Dawkins declared that institutions under 2,000 students would not be funded in future and that institutions of under 8,000 students in size would not be funded for research across the range of their disciplines. While this was in reality an ambit claim, it created a climate of uncertainty and vulnerability and set off a furious scramble over merger options.

Third, the government sought to intervene more directly in the work of higher education institutions to secure particular economic objectives. Greater priority was to be given to applied sciences, technology, engineering and business studies; research was to emphasise marketable products and links with industry; and the academic labour market was to be rendered more “flexible” through the erosion of permanent employment, market-based wages that varied between disciplines, and the declaration of redundancies.

These policies were confirmed in the government’s White Paper on higher education, issued on 27 July this year. The second paper is more carefully worded to reassure the critics but the main messages are the same. Only in the areas of equity
Policy (where the government will now intervene somewhat more strongly in requiring institutions to develop equity strategies) and research funding (which will be even more centralised and where there may be a substantial erosion of the research time of university academics working outside disciplines of economic priority) is there much of a shift from the Green Paper.

Political Centralisation, Economic Decentralisation

The Dawkins approach is most usually understood as the assertion of Ministerial power over institutions that have enjoyed a large degree of autonomy in their day-to-day work — an autonomy for which there is little public sympathy — but the reality is not quite so simple.

In significant respects, the Dawkins approach is also deregulatory. Institutions are being encouraged to develop their own market activities by the provision of full fee places to overseas students and the development of full fee postgraduate courses (a two-year MBA is now available at the University of Melbourne for $17,000). The tertiary tax would introduce price signals into enrolment decisions, albeit through managed and uniform prices. Public funding of research is being deliberately constrained to force institutions into direct relations with industry, and more emphasis on market-driven applied research as recommended by EPAC two years ago.

This coupling of political centralisation and economic deregulation — strong state, strengthening markets, weakened social policy objectives such as social equality — is the approach perfected by the Thatcher government. Indeed, the Australian Green and White Papers have an uncanny resemblance in both substance and style to the parallel documents issued by the UK government in 1985 and 1987 respectively. The Thatcher government has gone further in one respect in abolishing tenure for all academics newly appointed, promoted or transferred after November 1987. But Thatcher stopped short of introducing a tertiary tax.

But the positive side of the Dawkins reform package also needs to be taken into account.

The educational profiles to be negotiated between the government and individual institutions will require the latter to formulate and implement strategies for rendering fairer the socio-economic mix of the student population, through changes to student selection policy — a more positive approach to the “tax inequity” problem than the introduction of a tertiary tax!

The White Paper also provides for more liberal credit transfer arrangements so that it will be easier for students to be credited for their past work when moving from TAFE to higher education, and between higher education institutions. This could be a major step forward in equity; it would also serve the government’s efficiency goals.

The abolition of the hierarchical distinction between universities and CAEs is also to be welcomed. All institutions will become part of a unified national system and all will receive some access to research funds.

The dangers to watch for here are the possibility of some education activities (e.g. critical social sciences, women’s studies) in the smaller universities being cannibalised to feed the legitimate resource needs of the CAEs, and the probability that the differential social status, social power and private fund-raising capacities of institutions will lead to a new hierarchy in which market forces will play a greater part in creating inequalities of resources and standards. The unified national system may become a unified national market.

And more than a little significance may still be attached to whether or not an institution receives the formal title of “university”, preserving elements of the old binary distinction.

Beyond the ‘Community of Scholars’

The Dawkins language of higher education policy has created a closed space in which the value of certain academic activities (marketable research, some vocational training) is enhanced but the bulk of academic activities — and most significantly, the traditional liberal notion of academic practice — are diminished in value or excluded altogether.

The White Paper gives lip-service to a broad cultural orientation — at a number of points, the importance of the social sciences and humanities, and research and scholarship across the range of disciplines, are affirmed in general terms — but does not find for these activities a productive role within the new economic strategy.

The traditional balances of the modern university are thus being disturbed in a fundamental way. The Dawkins approach is incompatible with the formally equal status given to the sciences and the non-sciences, and to “pure” and “applied” research. It does not fit with the self-image of academic communities as communities of scholars, equal to each other, selected on the basis of “intrinsic” merit, who practise the creation of disinterested knowledge.

The new economic strategy gives priority to outcomes, recognises knowledge as tied to interests and names the interests that should be served: the needs of industry and hence, the needs of the national economy — a particular reading of economic interests re-presented as the national interest through the authority and the funding powers of the state.

It is not surprising that many academics have reacted so critically to the government’s policies. The field of legitimacy established by these policies threaten to exclude their work and radically negates their own self-image. It is equally clear why these academics are socially isolated. To most people, the new notion of the social responsibility of higher education that has been posed by the Minister — however crude its formulation and narrow its
orientation — is preferable to the older image of the academy: isolated, disinterested, socially and intellectually elitist.

In practice, knowledge is never disinterested and knowledge and power relationships are closely intertwined. Knowledge and power produce each other. And most often, higher education has been linked to conservative powers. Scientific knowledge in higher education services only a minority of society directly and the humanities produced in the traditional community of scholars have provided social elites with ways of distinguishing themselves from the masses.

The Dawkins policy claims to impose the "real world" on higher education from without; public opinion is happy to identify with this "real" outside world. In this context, Dawkins appears to be (and in some respects is) a democratic reformer, a posture all the more easy to construct because he and his supporters in the media have connected with the anti-intellectual populism traditional to the Australian cultural psyche.

**The Response of the Left**

In the face of these rapid shifts in the terrain and the emergence of a thicket of new issues, the response of the left has been largely reactive rather than proactive.

There have been two main responses on the left to the government's policies.

The first and most common response has been simply to oppose everything the government is doing, in continuity with the left's political strategy during the Fraser years. The problem with this approach is that not everything the Labor government is proposing is undesirable (e.g., the credit transfer reforms and the abolition of the university/CAE distinction), and much of it has connected powerfully with popular opinion.

Opponents of the official line are being marginalised as self-serving and conservative; a left position of simple opposition often comes down to uncritical defence of the status quo in higher education, an approach indistinguishable from that of the old Right on campus — the classic academic elitists. (Ironically, these people were the bitter enemies of the left in the earlier era of campus radicalism.)

The other left response has been simply to support some or all of the government's policies. This is also a position of weakness. It means being carried along willy-nilly in a vehicle someone else is driving and some of the destinations of that vehicle are worrying indeed. There is something wrong when left people find themselves supporting one of the highest user payments in the OECD (the tertiary tax), applauding attacks on intellectuals as a group and welcoming not only business involvement — which is desirable — but also business control of key parts of the public education system.

In education, as in some other social spheres, the influence of the New Right has been profound. While the right is often politically divided, it is ideologically coherent and in the present era it has defined the field of debate. The right now occupies the territory once particular to the left; it has made images of progress, radicalism and iconoclasm its own property. Dawkins is riding a wave of "reforms" generated by the wave machine of the right. The right has the ideological momentum.

Left activists inside and outside the higher education sector need to get the politics of higher education right. Our understanding of the way things work should tell us why. Higher education is an important, influential site with complex social roles. It is closely intertwined with
the practices of the professions; it is a principal social selector. More and more of the population is seeking entry. Much of our knowledge is produced there. Despite the growing role of the media and of the think-tanks and private consultancies, the cultural importance of higher education is great.

It is a central part of the social order.

Higher education is implicated in ruling class power. It is also a crucial democratic space. Since the 1960s, through the history of the Australian Union of Students in the 1970s and early 1980s, universities and colleges have been a political laboratory for progressive politics and a source of many activist recruits now located in the trade unions, the media, government, the social movements, the Labor Party and the parties of the left. The politics of higher education today have considerable longer term implication.

The present division in the left over the Dawkins agenda is a serious problem, but it is really the symptom of a deeper malaise: the absence on the left of a productive approach in this social sector. As Stuart Hall has put it, what we need to develop in higher education is:

... a perspective on what is happening now, a vision for the future, a capacity to articulate these vividly through a few clearly-ennunciated themes or principles, a new conception of politics. In short, a political strategy. (Marxism Today, March 1988.)

Elements of a Left Strategy

It is clear that defence of the traditional academic approach is no longer a viable option and it cannot be justified in social terms. It is exclusive of needs of most people, whether these needs are expressed in the abstract form of the “ordinary taxpayer” or understood as the needs

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of workers, migrant communities, Aboriginal communities, local communities, and so on.

Higher education should be socially responsible. To that extent the Minister is right. This means, firstly, that the left within higher education should be much more vigorous in pressing for completely different methods of student selection, especially into the privileged professional faculties such as law and medicine (credit transfer from nursing to medicine is an important avenue to explore). Traditional academic selection is culturally biased and socially exclusive. The evidence is clear. Universities and CAEs are public institutions and should serve everyone.

Second, social responsibility needs to be developed differently to the way in which the government understands it. Better integration with material production in the economy is only one aspect of it. We should welcome the development of higher education’s specifically economic role to the extent that, and in the areas that, this economic role is a direct one: some applied research projects, vocational training to meet shortages of skills, and so on.

But the economic benefits of most teaching, learning and research are indirect and unquantifiable. Like political rights and freedoms (to which they contribute) they also have other, non-economic benefits. If the generalised organisation of teaching, learning and research is subsumed under the rubric of vaguely defined but specifically economic national priorities this will lead to the truncation of much that is socially valuable in higher education.

The democratic benefits of education lie most of all in the subjectivity of students themselves: in engagement with knowledge and its application, in the personal and hopefully, collective empowerment which this can bring. Learning, analysis and the construction of new languages and new ways of seeing society have always been part of the left during its periods of upsurge. In this sense, the benefits of higher education — or rather, the potential benefits, because the present system falls well short of this conception — should be brought within reach of everyone.

This means that we need to generate the long-needed debate about the content of higher education courses. Historically, the left has established small enclaves in higher education that practise relatively progressive courses.

The left inside and, especially, outside the institutions needs to be much more vigorous in making connections with these courses — influencing their content, using their knowledge, defending their existence (a much needed task) and spreading their approach elsewhere.

But the left in all locations needs to start examining and criticising the content of “mainstream” courses. Trade unions should be interested in what is taught in industrial relations and economics. Environmental organisations should start to question the social responsibility of science and engineering courses by looking at their content in detail and raising issues publicly within the institution concerned and in broader debate.

In short, we need to start taking the intellectual/political issues seriously. We cannot afford to leave them to “autonomous” higher education institutions and the social elites who have been traditionally serviced by them. And we cannot afford to leave them to the New Right and the economic rationalists, who are using the present high priority on science and on neo-classical economics to rewrite the language of politics, rewrite the map of disciplines in higher education (with incalculable long-term consequences) and restructure the organisation of higher education and the social structure of its beneficiaries — all, at present, with little challenge from the left.

It is therefore essential that the left defends the right of academics/intellectuals to research and teach in areas that are not directly economically beneficial or even popular. Though never neutral, intellectual production is a good thing. We need new ideas and new ways of ordering information. But a positive attitude to intellectual production must be combined with the demand that it be brought into the public eye, its values and its social implications subject to close and critical scrutiny. Individual democratic rights, social responsibility and collective organisation need to be combined.

Collective organisation also means collective responsibility. The quality and quantity of the work of higher education institutions can be improved. The Minister has seized upon a public perception that academics could be more productive. Performance indicators, collectively managed, might improve both the work and the standing of higher education.

To carry through such perspectives the left will also need to reforge methods of organisation in higher education. Higher education is characterised by individualism and careerism. The present policies are setting academic against academic, student against student more specifically than before.

Collective forms of organisation do exist, but they are under-developed and sadly under-utilised by the left.

A serious and sustained left intervention in staff association politics is necessary in order to democratise the industrial policies of the academic unions — which would certainly strengthen collectivity on the campuses — and to raise distinctly left views on the education policy issues. And in student unions the left needs to move beyond the present fractionalism; the National Union of Students mirrors the last days of AUS in that regard.

Much good work is done by left student activists on campus, but the most urgent need is not to capture the student union apparatus; it is to change the agenda of political debate. The Minister understands that. The New Right understands that. It is about time we started to work that way ourselves because there is much at stake.

SIMON MARGINSON is a research officer with FAUSA in Melbourne.
Crowning The Duke

The Democrats have their best shot at the US presidency in a decade. But, argues Elaine Thompson, as with Labor their pragmatism is no substitute for a new vision.

The presidential election of 1984 pointed to the polarisation of the American electorate on class, gender and racial lines. Middle class, protestant, white men were either satisfied under Reagan or were alienated by Democrat Walter Mondale’s identification with the poor, unions, blacks and women.

The old patterns which have held since Franklin Roosevelt continued: the white affluent voted Republican; a majority of the poor, the black, Jews, Hispanics, unionists and intelligentsia voted for Mondale. But a critical element of the old Democratic coalition — the white south — did not. Moreover, for the presidency, the Republican Party had a carefully constructed southern and western base.

Luckily for the Democrats the conditions which led to a Republican victory in 1984 do not hold in 1988. There is no highly popular incumbent president to defeat: the Republican candidate, George Bush, is fairly colourless; and the Democratic candidate, Michael Dukakis, while equally colourless is at least not seen to be on the far left of the political spectrum. 1988 provides the Democrats with the best opportunity for winning the presidency in a long while. The Democrats, buoyed by their congressional successes in 1986, are determined to pick up larger percentages of their traditional voters and get “Reagan Democrats” to return to the party when voting at presidential level. The job ahead for the Democrats is to break up the Republican voting inclinations in the south and west. That task is not impossible. These Reagan voters form the least ideological, least sophisticated sector of the community, and their attachments to the Republicans are not achieved by strong ideological views of the world. They can be influenced.

Despite the current optimism surrounding Dukakis’ chances of winning the presidency, the odds must still lie with Bush. For the last decade the Democrats have had serious internal problems, highlighted by their inability to provide vision and coherence even in symbolic terms. The effects of unemployment and inflation during the Carter years have been that fewer voters trust the Democratic Party to deal with economic issues. Analysis of 1986 poll data found that voters have strikingly different evaluations of each party.

The Republicans are seen as more likely to produce prosperity (by 10 to 18 percentage points), to cut inflation (14 to 22 points), and by a five point margin, to deal with the “most important problems facing the country”.

For the Democrats, the most damaging finding is that the party has lost its status in the minds of the voters as the party of prosperity and of high levels of employment. According to the polls, the major strength of the Democratic Party is that it is seen as caring about and protecting individuals and groups — women, minorities, the elderly. But its very strength in these areas is seen in a negative light by the white, male, lower middle class of middle America.

On the positive side of the Democratic ledger, the 1988 party convention, unlike the last two, at least showed the Democrats all pulling in the same direction. The troika of left, right and centre supported Dukakis and created a short, clear platform of sufficient ambiguity to make it a very hard target for the Republicans. In the past the Democrats have, in their platform, attempted to satisfy every possible minority group to whom they could appeal. The result was the Republicans could find something in that platform to alienate everyone else! In 1984, for example, they successfully portrayed Mondale as the candidate of the “special interests”. This time the Democrats have not made the same mistake.

For the presidency, the South is the key region. Indeed, it is the only significant region in which any real party realignment has taken place, particularly at the presidential level. Basically, the Republicans have been able to succeed nationally and win the presidency because the South ceased being Democratic and the white South consistently votes for them. Even in the Carter election a majority of white Southerners voted Republican.

The South presents particular problems for the Democrats because it is more politically conservative (on both economic and social issues) and more likely to be attracted by a conservative style presidential candidate. The South remains the least urban: 38 percent of Southerners are rural compared to 22 percent of the rest, and Southerners are poorer and less well-educated than the rest of the country. Moreover, the South experienced a
sharp rise in fundamentalist and evangelical church membership and a stagnation or decline in membership of mainstream protestant denominations. The social conservatism shows up in polls where, for example, only 41 percent of Southerners approved of couples living together without marriage as opposed to 52 percent of non-Southerners. The question for 1988 becomes: can Dukakis portray himself as sufficiently attractive to the white South to win large numbers of white votes?

The Economy

Because polls have shown, over a long period, that people will reject the party in the presidency if they feel that “times are bad”, the Reagan administration has consistently attempted to sell the economy as a booming, healthy one. On the campaign trail in 1986, for example, Ronald Reagan had commented “it looks as if our four year economic recovery is going to turn into a second boom”. On the same day, Reagan’s budget director, James Miller, announced a record budget deficit of $221 billion for fiscal 1986, and claimed a victory of sorts because it was $9 billion less than the summer forecast. What Miller conveniently forgot to say, and few papers reported, was that the forecast just over a year before had been for a deficit of only $172 billion. The actual result was a bigger deficit by almost $50 billion, reflecting a weaker economy than anticipated. The Reagan tendency to paint a rosy scenario is nothing new — over the entire period of his administration, Reagan and his aides were consistently over-optimistic in forecasts and projections. America has, under Reagan, gone from a net creditor nation to a net debtor — and the trade deficit is still growing. GDP under Reagan stagnated during the 1981-86 period at a 2.3 percent gain, compared with 3.4 percent from the end of World War II through, and including, the Carter years. The budget deficit has averaged about $200 billion a year.

The problem for the Democrats is that the economic pain is very unevenly spread. In current American jargon, “Joe and Jane Six-
pack" (lower middle class whites from the non-rural mid-west) are A-OK. For them, inflation is down, interest rates remain very low and they can get work. For them, the 1984 Reagan campaign promise that "it's morning again in America" came true. For others, it is still midnight. Employment has increased but the new jobs are part-time, non-unionised and with very low pay. They have been gained at the expense of wages and conditions.

Moreover, the gap between rich and poor; employed and unemployed; black and white, has increased. Seventy-five percent of inner city black youth are unemployed and never will work. Sixty percent of blacks enrolled in college now drop out because of the Reagan cuts in student aid. Indications are that the move from working to middle class by blacks has been stopped, and that there will be no blacks to replace the current generation of black professionals. An average of one child in five lives in poverty. Again, the burden is disproportionately spread: among blacks, one child in two is poor and, among Hispanics, two in five are poor. Poverty in general has increased and the government safety net has been seriously slashed. Even by official government definitions, the percentage of people living in poverty rose from 11.9 percent in 1979 to 14.4 percent in 1984. The much trumpeted "trickle down" just didn't.

On the other hand, the top one percent increased the amount of total net personal wealth controlled by them by roughly 25 percent over the past 20 years; their share is now approximately 40 percent and their average net personal worth is more than $5 million per household. The wealthiest one percent own three-fifths of all corporate stock. Despite celebrations of "people's capitalism" through diffuse stock ownership, the percentage of American households owning at least one share of stock fell from 25 percent in 1977 to 19 percent in 1983.

The vast majority of households, meanwhile — those in the bottom 80 percent — barely earn enough to get by. These 70 million households, with median annual earnings of about $18,000 command, on average, no net personal worth.

Unions

Workers' protection against supervisory harassment has been eroding. Union membership is down from 30 percent of non-farm labour force in the 1960s to less than 19 percent in 1988. But that is only part of the picture. The nature of union contracts has been changing, with a shrinking percentage of workers having the right to complain about or speak back to supervisors. Protection has declined, and the industrial accident rate has increased correspondingly — by roughly 50 percent from the early 1960s to the early 1980s. Politically, there has been a decrease in the importance of unionism and a decline in the relative size and importance of industrial labour among the working class. Labour has lost its organisational solidarity. Hence, the single most important base for left, welfare politics has been weakened greatly.

Women

The gap in income between females and males has been narrowing, but very slowly. Over the past six years, the median annual income for females working full time has increased from 60 percent of male income to 64.6 percent. After all other factors have been factored out, the gap in income is a result of the fact that females work in very poorly-paid service jobs. Three-quarters of women who work, do so full time. It is a myth that women really want part-time jobs. Census data reveals that, while 14.3 million people work part time, six million of these would like to have full-time jobs. With 53 million women now in the paid workforce, women are in the labour market to stay. Two-thirds of the new entrants to the labour force will be female.

While large numbers of women have always been in the paid workforce, the big change has been that females are now working through the child-raising years. Sixty-three percent of mothers in the labour force have children under 18 and more than 50 percent have children under three years. Indeed, 50 percent of females with babies less than one year old are in workforce, as are 60 percent of females with 3-5 year olds. Four in ten women will, at some stage, be single parents, and there are eight million single parent women, of whom one-third live in poverty. Moreover, six in ten children, according to the US census, will, at some stage, live in a single parent situation for at least one year. These changing work and family patterns mean that "child care" is an economic, not a "women's" issue, and one which the Democrats should be able to capitalise on.

Of even more interest to the Democrats is the importance to them of the female vote. While the 1986 election was seen as issue-less, a gender gap showed up in eleven states. At least four Democrats won Senate seats because women voters provided the margin of victory. Indeed, it has been argued that the overall Senate victory for the Democrats was gained on the female vote. Polls stress that the gender gap has existed since 1980: men supported Reagan in substantially larger numbers than women. That gap in attitudes to Reagan did not "disappear" in 1984 but was hidden because many women did not like Mondale. According to Roper polls in 1986, the gender gap also existed with respect to the parties. Men favoured the Republicans by 49% to women's 35 percent, while women favoured the Democrats 47% to men's 33%.

The Women's Vote Analysis conducted for the Democratic Party found that women were more likely to see interconnections and trade-offs and were more willing to have government involvement. They see the need for doing things collectively. Even when men and women agree on issues, they differ on approach. Both expressed anxiety about toxic waste, for example, but women talked more about health and genetics; men about property rights. For the Democrats, the problem lies in how best to profit
from women's support while attempting to attract men over from their support of the Republicans.3

The Democratic Party

Despite the apparent unity shown at the convention, the Democratic Party is far from united. Moreover, it still lacks a sense of ideological direction. The first of these problems is not new for the Democrats who have always been a very diverse and divisive bunch. "I belong to no party; I'm a Democrat", goes a saying. Ideologically, the party has, historically, been able to stretch from rightwing Southern racists such as George Wallace, to leftwing intellectuals such as Eugene McCarthy. However, the party at national level and, in particular, at presidential level, had from the New Deal until the middle 1960s, a clear sense of ideological direction. In international politics, there was a commitment for internationalist involvement against communism; domestically the broad agenda was one of moderate Keynesian economics with limited welfare spending, funded by a healthy growing economy.

Since the 1960s, the ideological direction of the Democrats grew progressively more and more confused as old alliances broke down, and issues cut across party lines. The old coalitions of voters weakened; the economy found itself unable to fund both Vietnam and domestic welfare spending. By the 1970s, growth ceased and priorities were challenged.

The result of these changes was that the Democrats lost their pre-eminence in setting the ideological frame of reference in which political debate took place. Their last president, Jimmy Carter, proved a failure; while Reagan, articulating a new ideology, challenged Democratic values. Substantial numbers of liberals within the Democratic Party lost their congressional seats in 1978; and in 1980, not only was an incumbent Democrat president rejected at the polls, but the Democrats lost their majority in the Senate, something that had not occurred for 30 years. These traumas were only reinforced in 1984 when the Democrats, running with a liberal candidate, Walter Mondale, were devastatingly defeated in the presidential election.

The party has consistently been trying to redefine itself since then. Indeed, one of the Democrats' problems was that they have been seen as engaged in endless soul searching; but, in fact, have not recaptured any sense of direction. In that context, the 1986 Congressional elections were very important psychologically. Had Reagan managed to pull it off one more time, Democrats would have been badly dispirited. Their 1986 win and the 1988 convention mean that the Democrats are now ebullient. It should mean that the party activists will work hard for an election win in 1988 rather than fight among themselves for pyrrhic victories.

Ironically, however, if they win in 1988 it will not be because the party has managed to articulate a new vision for America, but because the electorate has rejected Bush and because the Democrats have moved sufficiently towards the centre not to drive voters away. The troika displayed at the 1988 convention and its rejection of Jackson's suggestions for the platform indicate the success of the moderates and right-wingers. For the left, of course, the platform underlines the weakness of the left — despite Jackson's conscience-provoking speech at the convention.

The Republican Party

The Republicans' claim that demography is working in their favour is probably correct. For at least twenty years the Democratic Party has not been the permanent majority party for the presidency. Thus, the two political parties have achieved an equilibrium that is remarkable in American history — neither is a majority or plurality party at presidential level. Reagan's approval rating has been around sixty-two percent. But it has been a personal following. Voters have not approved either of Reagan's policies or of the Republican Party. Those who approved of, and voted for
Reagan are not “Republicans” because only 40 percent would vote Republican for Congress. Indeed, 54 percent would vote Democrat. Even the “independents” are shared between the parties. Sixty-five percent of them may have approved of Ronald Reagan, but only 35 percent would vote Republican for Congress. Fifty percent would, routinely, vote Democrat.

All these statistics only serve to underline the fact that party allegiance is very weak in America today. Presidential elections are so susceptible to the style of the individual candidates that it is more than possible for the Democrats to win. They are attempting to reshape their overall image so they can appeal to the same groups forged into a coalition by Reagan: traditional and “new right” republicans, blue collar workers and adults under 45 from various economic levels.

The Left

For the left of American politics, whoever wins, the prospects remain poor. Despite the extraordinary success of Jesse Jackson, the underprivileged lack political weapons. Jackson may make middle America feel guilty, momentarily, about the poor, but he cannot create a winning electoral majority from his rainbow coalition. Dukakis must win conservative, white lower middle class America to gain the presidency, and these voters do not see themselves as belonging to Jackson’s rainbow.

Outside presidential politics, the position of the left is also extremely weak. Despite the fact that the Democrats held a majority in both houses since 1986, at least half of the Democratic leaders in the Senate, for example, have records of providing strong support to the Reagan administration. An examination of the sources of finance for the Democrats also reveals the declining position of the left. Fifteen years ago trade unions were the largest contributors of money to members of Congress with the result that their voice was listened to by Congress. Today, trade unions are vastly outspent by business and corporate organisations. Even Democratic members of Congress received, in 1984, as much financial support from corporate organisations as they did from unions. This pattern of contributions helps to encourage paralysis in legislation. It certainly gives no clear mandate for the sort of welfare spending that the underprivileged need.

The left should also be concerned with the overall alienation of the electorate. The extremely low turnout among the poorer and less well educated ought to be a major concern. Low turnout now seems accompanied not by anger but by indifference, and by an almost eerie disengagement by the voters. Analysts suggest that the way campaigns are now run is directly contributing to this disengagement. There seems little or no concern with the major issues on the part of candidates. Indeed, the Democratic Party’s platform further reinforces the emphasis of style without substance. Electronic campaigning is now the major mechanism of contact with the voters, and even more seriously disassociative is the style of political advertisement favoured. Campaigning is now a multi-million dollar operation. It is big business with computers, flow charts, weekly goals, and financial statements. There is a serious danger that what is being created in the process is a complacent, empty, self-centred vision of the world into which the concerns of the underprivileged cannot be admitted. For the left, it means they are being shut out of the political agenda.

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3. According to Ethel Klein, from Columbia University’s study of the Gender Gap (Dunn and Bradstreet, 1986).
The Circulation of Commodities

Alexander Cockburn spins the Wheel of Fortune, and muses on game shows' appeal...

A game show is reality, not fiction. Except for sports and news, game shows are the only reality left on television.

— Giraud Chester, executive vice-president of Goodson-Todman Productions.

I visited "Wheel of Fortune" on the first day of spring. The radio told me that it had been another good day for the Dow and that the House of Representatives had just rejected President Reagan's request for $100 million for the Contras. With uplifted heart, I swung into the NBC parking lot in Burbank and made my way towards Studio 4, outside of which was a long line of people waiting to get into "Wheel of Fortune", the most popular show on American television, source of pleasure and excitement for forty-two million Americans each day.

Inside, they were starting to tape a show. The wheel spun and disembodied voices squealed, "Whee-e-e-e-l of Fortu-u-u-ne!" A nymph, vestal virgin in the Temple of Mammon, raised her arms in gesture of demonstrative worship towards a Mazda light truck and a revolving platform, partitioned into three rooms crammed with consumer durables. A curtain fell swiftly in front of her and her temple, and the camera shifted to "our host", Pat Sajak, who smiled pleasantly and then introduced the nymph, emerging radiantly from behind the curtain, as "our co-host", Vanna White.

Then Sajak introduced the three contestants, each backed by a great sun painted red and yellow and blue. There was Phil Loper, a first year student from the University of New Mexico; Heather Daly, a psychology student at UCLA; and Mark Steimer, an administrative assistant in a communications company — as nice a bunch of young people as you could hope to meet.

The atmosphere was of a mutuality of good feeling so pervasive that even in its forced moments it had an innocent authenticity much like Vanna's smile and eager cries as she urged on the players. The studio crowd was encouraged to applaud, but they seemed to want to applaud anyway. Only the players themselves appeared a bit self-conscious as they shouted, "Thousand dollars!" at the wheel and clapped resolutely as it revolved. (It soon became apparent that Mark, the loosest of the three, was going to do the best. Early in the game, either Phil or Heather started well, building up their dollar holdings, calling out correct letters on the great puzzle board so zealously tended by Vanna. But then they stumbled, and there was Mark, ready to clean up. It was Phil or Heather who got as far as THE E---T---N P---R---DS, but somehow it was Mark who rose to fortune on their honest toil by guessing THE EGYPTIAN PYRAMIDS.)

With each victory came an implacable ritual: Sajak announced to Mark the dollar value of his win — say $3,000 — and attention shifted to the heaped-up prizes, as Mark peered at an off-camera billboard listing the available goodies and their dollar values.

"I'd like the Caribbean cruise."
"Now we're talking," said Sajak gleefully.
And for $1,999, the pine bookcase."
"Fine with me, and that takes you down to $495."
"Uh, for $400, I would like the mantel clock."
"And that leaves you $95 in gift certificates. And now, let Jack tell you what you've got."
And then came, with anonymity from the heavens, the deep voice of Jack.
"They're beautiful, Pat. Mark, we start with Hamilton's Monticello mantel clock, key wound, eight day, walnut solids and veneers, gentle triple chimes, furnished by Hamilton, retail value $400. Now, this impressive arch-front bookcase is a reproduction of an early Spanish design. It's carefully crafted in pine.
With panel doors at the bottom. And, finally, we'll fly you and your guests to Miami, to a new superliner, the fun ship Holiday, cruising seven days to Saint Martin, Saint Thomas, and Nassau, all furnished by Carnival Cruise Lines, retail value $2,900.

Jack's voice kept us company as the evening wore on.

"Wheel of Fortune" shows are taped for about twelve days each month, with sometimes as many as five half-hour shows recorded per day. Mark was a three-day winner, so he didn't look too upset when he lost a bonus-round chance to win the $7,000 Mazda light truck. He already had $15,120 worth of prizes in his possession, including two vacations. With a final radiant smile, Vanna bade him and his girlfriend, Danna, farewell as they stepped out into the night.

Ours is a society with a most refined sense of discrimination about what constitutes the legitimate proceeds of luck and application, and what pertains to the less wholesome pursuit of getting something for nothing. And it is no small part of the genius of Merv Griffin, inventor of "Wheel of Fortune", that he understood this sense of discrimination.

Griffin has said that the game developed from his memories of long car trips with his family when he was a little boy. He and his sister would play hangman, the game where you outline of a hanging man). In the selection of contestants is an unending process. Each month, Pat, Vanna, producer Nancy Jones, and staffers Harv Selsby and Peggy Lavell take off for a new city to find players. In a two-day stint in Atlanta at the start of April, they conducted four interviews a day of 150 people each, thus winnowing down 1,200 of Georgia's finest puzzle solvers to the tiny group that would finally be invited to travel, at its own expense, to Burbank. Once in lift-off mode at Burbank, waiting for the final call, the contestants are given a series of briefings by Harv and Peggy, by the "compliance and practice" people ever alert to the possibility of cheating, and by PIC-TV on the important topic of the prizes.

What does the staff look for in contestants? "Well," said Peggy, "we ask ourselves, do they have energy, personality, a sense of humour? Are they having fun? We don't want to have people who are introverted. Not that they aren't people, but on the game show it's that little extra spark the contestant brings that adds a lot to the game."

Just as Peggy and Harv were rounding off their account of the rites de passage of competitors, I could see three of them being shown this particular day's stock of prizes. No unauthorised contact with contestants, pre-show, is allowed, but I joined Karen Griffin, assistant to the producer, as she wandered around the prizes making sure everything was just so. Merv Griffin has said that "Wheel of Fortune" gives Middle America the excitement of a shopping trip along Rodeo Drive. Actually, the prizes are exactly what the average rational American would buy if God suddenly bestowed an extra fistful of dollars. Karen said that audiences use the show like a sales catalogue, calling up to ask where that bookcase or brass lamp came from.

The lights went up, the crowd filed in, the wheel began to spin. When all goes well, a "Wheel of Fortune" show builds, across the half hour, to a climax and dramatic resolution through the substantial victory of one contestant over Fortune's Wheel. That night it was the turn, and the triumph, of Dolores Rovnak, a young housewife from Redondo Beach.

At the end of the first half hour alone, she had won Le Creusot of America blue cookware, $350; Krups small kitchen appliances, $358; a Taylor Woodcraft Gourmet Servic Cart, $450; a service merchandise gift certificate, $142; a pair of tea caddy lamps, $280; a Hitachi compact disc player, $450; a Suzuki portable keyboard, $532; a Van Cleef & Arpels eighteen-carat gold and diamond scollop-shaped ring, $1,300; and, finally, what Jack's ologious tones announced as a guarantee to "fly you and a guest from Los Angeles to New Orleans, where you may long remember your week's stay at the Bienville House in New Orleans' French Quarter. It's close to historic sights and sounds, furnished by the Bienville House, retail value $2,238."

In the next two games Dolores won another $15,460 worth of prizes, including a RCA video camera and recorder, $2,320; a Sony stereo cassette, $400; a Sharp video recorder, $600; and airline tickets and a three-day stay at the Hotel Coronado in San Diego, $960.

Finally, the bonus round. Sajak asked Dolores to give him five consonants and a vowel, and Dolores offered L,N,R,S,T,E. Up on the puzzle board went -E-- R-RE, with indications that the puzzle was a phrase of two words. Dolores had fifteen seconds, and after about eight she cried out "MEDIUM RARE," thus winning a Mazda hatchback with a/c, radio cassette, floor mats, freight, tax and licence, $9,079.

I saw Dolores right after the show as she was busily signing forms put in front of her by someone from PIC-TV. On one of them I noticed
excited. An aerospace company, here in L.A. How do you guess MEDIUM RARE?

I like to eat. When I saw R. blank, R.E. I knew. Have I got room for all this stuff? Well, I'll give some to my mother. I've got several sisters-in-law. I'm sure they could use some of the stuff. Thirty thousand dollars in prizes. Boy, that's twice what I was making when I worked as an accounting assistant at Hughes Aircraft.

It was the end of taping for the day. Vanna passed by, sighing, "I'm exhausted. When I go home after doing five shows I usually die." She bathed me in a wonderful smile and moved on. Security guards paced watchfully round Dolores' prizes. The puzzle board went dark and the wheel came to rest.

"Wheel of Fortune" isn't about greed. It's a stately mime of capitalism at its best, celebrating that sine qua non of the system, the circulation of commodities. It is a Keynesian parable about the creation and satisfaction of demand in an egalitarian society in which all competitor-consumers are created equal in the eyes of Pat Sajak and, with the appropriate injection of capitalist good luck and capitalist hard work, earn the right to the prizes, which are sanctified in their life-enhancing, economy-boosting properties by the divine Vanna.

The competitors I saw were not crazed with greed; indeed, both Mark and Dolores seemed much more excited by the fact that they had won than by what they had won. Dolores referred to her treasures rather disparagingly as "stuff," and was plainly relieved that she would be able to dump much of it on her in-laws. Indeed, she had a positively Brechtian objectivity about the mime: her account of her efforts to get on the show was couched exactly in the idiom of someone trying to get a job. ("So I was discouraged. I came back, made an appointment to come for an interview ...").

This objectivity was sustained when it came to the prizes, as though Dolores recognised that it was absurd to have both an RCA and a Sharp video recorder, yet simultaneously accept the entirely correct proposition that, as presently constituted, American capitalism (and Japanese capitalism, too, for the show's ideology is internationalist and anti-protectionist) can survive only if the consumer buys as many video recorders, microwave ovens, et al. as the home will hold. There's no hoarding on "Wheel of Fortune", no obeisance to the exigencies of capital formation, the need for thrift, and other virtues dear to the heart of the Chamber of Commerce.

The game, because it is an idealised representation of the proper motions of the economy — does not pit competitors against each other: it's all against the wheel and the limitations of their own skills. Even the losers don't seem too upset. Many of them have won something nice, and even the complete losers go home with a bottle of carpet cleaner (or some similar reminder that consumerism has its dreary side). For all the talk of prizes, Sajak was right when he said, "ours is not a big money show, relatively speaking. We've had a few instances where people have lost a huge amount of money, but usually it's a few hundred dollars. You get bankrupted, you lose a microwave oven. It's not a matter of life and death." The show is not vulgar. As Vanna has said, "It's not hysterical like 'The Price is Right'. Who wants to look at screaming women at 7.30?"

Alexander Cockburn's Corruptions of Empire (Verso Books) was released in Australia in March. This edited extract is reproduced with permission. © Alexander Cockburn 1987.
Convict Chic

Old prisons are all the rage in 1988. Tony Bennett explains why.

When Millbank Penitentiary opened in 1817, a room festooned with chains, whips and instruments of torture was set aside as a museum. Thus did a new philosophy of punishment committed to the rehabilitation of the offender behind closed doors distance itself from an earlier regime of punishment which had aimed to make power manifest by enacting scenes of punishment in public.

The same period witnessed a new addition to London’s array of exhibitionary institutions. In 1835, after decades of showing her waxworks the length and breadth of the country, Madame Tussaud set up permanent shop in London. Her new establishment included, as a major attraction, the Chamber of Horrors where, among other things, the barbarous excesses of past practices of punishment were displayed in gory detail. As the century developed, the dungeons of old castle were opened to public inspection, as they still are, and in many places, as the centrepieces of museums — as at Lancaster Castle, for example, or at York’s Castle Museum, located in two eighteenth-century prisons.

And Madame Tussaud's now has a rival in the London Dungeon, one of the city’s most popular tourist attractions, where special-effects technologies reproduce the mutilation of the body in scenes of torture and punishment — branding, drawing and quartering, burning at the stake; crucifixion — from yesteryear. As for the Chamber of Horrors, it’s still there.

The realism is stark and chilling in the Chamber of Horrors, with its sinister parade of murderers and assassins. Among the grisly relics here is the actual knife blade of the guillotine which was traced in 1846 by Madame Tussaud's son to the grandson of the Paris executioner. There is also a “lifesize” working model of the guillotine, complete with simulated blood stains. (John Lucas, The Magic of London’s Museums.)

And much, much more: the scaffold from Hertford Gaol, the door of the condemned cell at Newgate prison, and the bell that tolled when prisoners were taken to be executed.

If all this makes for good reading, the connections between the histories of prisons and museums are not merely of anecdotal interest. Although little remarked upon, there is an important symbolic relationship between the development of imprisonment as the major modern form of punishment and the simultaneous tendency for museums and related institutions to devote all this effort to the display of past forms of punishment.

For it is the logic of the penitentiary that punishment should remain hidden from public view. To the degree that this is so, the penitentiary’s claim to embody humane forms of punishment oriented toward the rehabilitation of the offender is deprived of public validation. The exhibition of the excesses of past regimes of punishment thus provides visible support for the Whiggish view of prison history in which it is viewed as an instrument of humane and benevolent reform. The openness of past scenes and practices of punishment to public inspection helps to insure that the doors of the penitentiary remain well and truly shut in conjuring up visions of such barbarity that the prison, whatever its defects, cannot but seem benevolent in comparison.

This is of special relevance in Australia’s Bicentenary year, given the unique importance accorded to depictions of past forms and scenes of punishment within our museums and heritage sites. Yet this, too, is a relatively new development. Twenty to thirty years ago, most penal institutions from the convict period were either disused or dedicated to other government functions. Since then, the number of such institutions — as well as late nineteenth century prisons — which have been converted into museums is truly remarkable. Port Arthur, Hyde Park Barracks, Old Melbourne Gaol and Old Dubbo Gaol are among the most obvious examples, but there are innumerable local prisons which have been converted to house local history displays, and several more are destined to make a similar
transition in the course of 1988 — the Narrabri Old Jail Heritage Centre, for example. And, in all of these, depictions of past regimes of punishment figure prominently.

Yet it is not simply the marked increase in interest in past regimes of punishment which makes these new museums significant. In fact, such representations of past punishments usually play in two registers simultaneously: as parts of the Whiggish view of progress in the history of punishment, and as images of the nation's origins.

In the Whiggish view, the emphasis falls on depicting the harshness of the convict system or that of the penal institutions developed to deal with indigenous crime in the course of the nineteenth century. Although, in its day, it embodied the aspirations of nineteenth-century penal reformers to use imprisonment as a mode of rehabilitation, Old Melbourne Gaol now functions as a testimony to the harshness of a penal regime that is depicted as past. In its display of the instruments of prison discipline (the cat, truncheons, a whipping post), the scaffold (reconstructed for the film Ned Kelly), the condemned cell, the white masks prisoners were obliged to wear outside their cells and the death masks of hanged felons, the gaol fulfils the same function in relation to Australia's modern penal system as did the museum within the Millbank Penitentiary for the mid-nineteenth century.

The more distinctive theme, however, is that which depicts the convict population as one of the cornerstones of the nation. In this respect, the penal past forms a part of a broader transformation of attitudes toward the convict period — to the extent that the discovery of convict ancestry is now one of the most sought-after prizes of genealogical inquiry. A healthy egalitarian tendency, no doubt. What is more questionable is the accompanying tendency for the convicts to be cast in the role of enlisted immigrants or early pioneers in order to provide a point of contact with the subsequent histories of settlers, squatters, miners and so on. As an official catalogue glosses the lessons of Port Arthur:

Gradually a tourist traffic developed, until today, visitors from all corners of the globe come in their thousands to Port Arthur to catch a vision of bygone days and relive a history of which we should be very proud, for it is the story of the pioneers, bond and free, who laboured together to build the foundations of the Tasmania we know and enjoy today.

It is not necessary either to idealise Australia's early convicts or to transform them into oppositional sub-cultural heroes to suggest that many of them probably did not see it that way. This annexation of past experiences is, indeed, an exercise in "punishing history".

The same theme is evident at The Rocks where, combined with a nationalised version of the Whiggish view of penal progress, it serves the unlikely purpose of establishing a conflict-free moment of origin for the nation. Cadman's Cottage and the First Impressions sculpture in The Rocks Square both suggest that the only forms of conflict to mar early Australian history were antagonistic relations, imported from the old world, between the colonial administration and the marines on the one hand, and the convicts on the other. Yet these antagonisms — alien intrusions of a past foreign regime of punishment — are retrospectively erased once Australian history proper gets under way, as the convicts and marines, when granted land, are portrayed as joining shoulders with the settlers in laying the foundations for a free, democratic and multicultural society.

While all this may seem fairly innocuous, this transformation of "the penal past" into a national image has the further consequence of pre-empting the uses to which that past can be put. The use of such national symbols is never an innocent choice; its consequences have to be assessed partly in terms of the alternatives it excludes. Thus, in giving the penal past the role of a foundational chapter in the history of the nation, that past is simultaneously detached from other histories to which it might be more intelligibly, and certainly more critically, related — in particular, the broader and subsequent history of Australian practices of punishment.

In their singular failure even to gesture in this direction, all of the institutions mentioned above serve a crucial role in institutionalising amnesia with regard to contemporary practices of punishment. In aligning "the penal past" to the present within the framework of a rhetoric of national development, and in representing that past as one whose excesses have been overcome, contemporary forms of punishment are bereft of any public history except that which, axiomatically, suggests their benevolence.

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London’s Burning


Sammy and Rose Get Laid is a big step onward from Hanif Kureishi and Stephen Frears’s earlier film My Beautiful Laundrette. The later film again uses comedy and the edge between social realism and surrealism to explore contradictions between and within race, class, gender and sexuality, and is both more complex and more self-conscious than its predecessor.

While both films use the social fabric in part as a backdrop, in Sammy and Rose Get Laid, there is an acute self-consciousness of the voyeurism involved in this kind of endeavour.

Stephen Frears, the director, describes the film as having “A much better script. Mind you, I’ve no idea if it is such a charming metaphor.” My Beautiful Laundrette revolves around “laundering” — of dirty money, dirty politics, violence, whitewashing, racial hatred and difference. But it’s difficult to find such a central symbol in Sammy and Rose Get Laid. The centrality of fucking seems too satirical to be described as a metaphor. Rather, it is at once a confronting visual focus (for the characters watching each other and the audience watching the movie) and the means of displacing other concerns.

In one scene Rosie walks in old-fashioned and stylish hat and coat through the riot-torn London streets at night to meet her lover, an image which captures the tremendous courage and the awful self-centredness of her sexual radicalism. Having accused her husband Sammy of turning his back on reality by staying at home on a night of such political significance, Rosie goes out to “affirm the human spirit” in a very different manner to angry and grieving Black people who are avenging the police murder of a black woman. (Later in the film, Rosie has an affair with that woman’s foster son, Danny.) The film connects these diverse struggles (against racism, against moral sanctions on female sexuality) and questions Rosie’s romantic priorities.

It is, in fact, her father-in-law, Rafi, the Pakistani statesman with a reputation for brutal tactics who, inspired by the flaming portrait of Virginia Woolf (!), goes out onto the streets to see what is actually happening, reluctantly followed by a coked-out Sammy. And so it is that the relationship that develops between Rafi and Danny has more basis in reality than that which develops between Rosie and Danny. No relationship is exempt from irony, however — Danny follows Rafi to ask him, the torturer, how he should choose between non-violence and violence.

It is typical of the film that any attempt to place or evaluate one of its characters will be thwarted by some contradictory aspect. Their multifaceted nature is reflected in the actors’ feelings about their roles, the
possible differences in interpretation. Frances Barber, who plays Rosie, sees her as "a very sympathetic character", "strong and determined" but caught in a "maelstrom" of events. Without this partisan view, I doubt she would have been able to play Rosie with the supreme confidence the part appears to demand. Yet, for all Rosie’s strong points, she does not escape the critical eye of the camera. She, a white woman, sexually objectifies Danny, a young black man. He, on the other hand, defiantly escapes objectification.

Roland Gift, who plays Danny, describes how he, Kureishi and Frears all have subtly different interpretations of the part. "It's just opinions you form about people and their experience of Danny is different to mine." Even Anna, the white North American photographer who embodies voyeuristic lack of commitment (a shot here at mainstream US filmmaking?) is allowed her moment of grandeur when she dangles Sammy dangerously above the water and demands commitment from him.

Rafi is perhaps most complex of all, and through him the film engages with the anguish, necessity and risks of trying to do something in a complex and imperfect world. A ruling class Pakistani, he has fought white imperialism and racism, yet imprisoned and tortured the workers of his own country in the name of democracy. Strongly committed to family values, he has deserted his young son in the pursuit of power. Incurably romantic (is this his connection with Rosie?), he has for years abandoned the woman he loves in order to embrace a Pakistani identity and marry within his own culture.

Rafi’s brutality is never condoned. At the same time we are not allowed to forget that white imperialism and racism played a major role in fostering his Machiavellian attitude to politics. The film at times allows him great stature and dignity while, at other times, he is reduced to a comic or pathetic, feelie and confused old man. His self-consciousness, in the shape of an inescapable conscience, is more fully and frighteningly dramatised than that of any other character in the film.

Through its self-conscious and sometimes surrealistic form, Sammy and Rosie Get Laid evokes a complexity of characterisation and situation without denying the inherent contradictions of a pretended objectivity. It thus reapproaches what used to be called "the universal" without glossing over difference, or privileging a particular cultural viewpoint. It emphasises, rather than denies, the active role of the audience/reader in creating the experience of the film.

As an audience, we are aware of watching; often we are watching characters watching other characters (for instance, Rafi’s fascination/revulsion with the blatant sexuality of the two black lesbians, Vivia and Rani, which will have diverse effects on different members of an audience). The film poses but offers no answer to the question of how to move beyond the spectator role without losing one’s perspective, into an activism that is neither narrow nor brutal.

Glasnost Snapshots


Writing a book on perestroika and glasnost is a hazardous occupation. Things are changing so rapidly in the USSR that anything written today will almost certainly be outdated a month later.

Readers of Moscow News, that extraordinary window on Soviet life, know this only too well. Each week its journalists push the limits of glasnost to previously unsuspected limits. Anthony Barnett arrived in Moscow on a private visit in June 1987 with co-author Nella Bielski, a Soviet citizen living in Paris. The shock waves of Chernobyl were still echoing through the corridors of power. Coming so soon after Gorbachev had launched glasnost on a cynical public, Chernobyl was a critical test. Glasnost was slow to move into gear. In the meantime, the Moscow joke machine took over: "It is proof of the advance of socialism that we have had the world’s greatest accident ..."

Up to a point, glasnost passed the Chernobyl test. The picture of utter incompetence and the “crude”, phallic vainglory of enormous triumphs” (Barnett) were exposed—but the responsibility was placed with scapegoats. And the Ukrainian party empire headed by Sheherbtsky, a Brezhnev appointee and Politburo member, remains.

Chernobyl’s fallout, however, continues—in more ways than one. Recently, in Moscow News, Professor Popov, a champion of radical perestroika, wrote of a distant relative who was diagnosed with radiation sickness. Even now, no strict monitoring of foodstuffs for radiation levels takes place.

Barnett is best when his journalistic instincts get free rein. His piece on the “Russian economic miracle” is consciously ironic: the miracle is that anything works. Quoting Pravda, he gives the
example of new, expensive refrigerated railway stock. Many of
the carriages go back and forth empty, "transporting air". "Their
efforts are measured according to kilometres covered by the carriages...
The more kilometres the carriages mark up, the bigger the bonus ..."

Paradoxically, then, for Barnett the USSR is the most unplanned
society in the world, despite the enormous volume of plans
"organising" society from the top
down to the last nuts and bolts of
every factory. Waste, cynicism,
corruption — all are natural
products of such a system. Such
planning means, in the end, no
planning, as opposed to the very real
planning through indirect state intervention that takes place even in
Mrs. Thatcher's England.

Barnett likens the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) to the
British Establishment. It is not a
party as we understand the term, but
rather it "embodies the country's
social, political and economic
order", through the 
nomenklatura
system. The CPSU is "the combined
Houses of Congress and the White
House, along with all the
Department of State. Western-style regimes do not offer their people a
choice between alternative political
orders, even if they offer some choice within their given system".

But he does not use this last argument, as it has often been used in
the past, to excuse the Soviet system.
On the contrary, Barnett sees
perestroika and glasnost developing
through the "civil society" of the
West and, implicitly, a more complex
system of rule. This may not mean
the existence of competing political
parties as such, but certainly it will
involve what was once called "right
of tendency".

Already, in Estonia, a "People's Front" has been formed, bringing
together CPSU members and non-
members on a platform of support
for radical perestroika. The poet
Yevtushenko, in a recent Moscow
News writes of the need for such a
front nationally and, during the
recent Soviet Party Conference,
spoke to a demonstration called to
the same end.

More generally, the independent political clubs provide room for
"dissidents" and party members
backing radical perestroika, alike. There are thus, already, (at least)
two "parties" in the CPSU.

Barnett sees as critical the
development of a "civil society" —
the autonomous social and political
culture outside the official structures.
The concept of civil society has a long
tradition in marxist thought but,
significantly, the editor of Moscow
News and his interpreter, interviewed
by Barnett, did not know the Russian
translation. Only now is Gramsci's
thought being studied by the most
radical supporters of perestroika.

In the West, Barnett notes, "A
political space exists outside state
processes and parties, a space in
which "public opinion" can play its
own role and have its own influence".
In the Soviet Union, however, it is
still (in Gramsci's phrase) primordial
and gelatinous. The development of
a healthy civil society is vital to
Gorbachev's ability to enlist practical
popular support for his reforms.

But there is a very long road to
travel yet before the embryonic civil
society developing under glasnost
becomes anything but a shadow of
what has developed in the liberal
democracies of capitalist Europe.

All this happens in an
atmosphere of crisis and
"revolution", Gorbachev's economic
reforms (self-financing, the
cost-accounting of enterprises) are being
sabotaged by the centralised plan
and by a bureaucracy which exploits
the latter's legal status. Prices remain
so out of line with real costs that any
cost-accounting is a miracle of
invention. "You can't cross an abyss
in two steps," Barnett quotes a saying
doing the rounds in Moscow. "We
are standing before an abyss." The
Soviet leadership has little choice
when the Soviet infant mortality rate
is 53rd in the world — at the level of
"developing" countries.

Democratisation is an essential
part of the process, despite the
dreams of some Soviet technocrats
that economic reform can be
achieved by a "strong leader". Simple
fact: the Soviet office worker rarely
has access to a photocopier. Any
control is strictly guarded — after all,
someone may run of a samizdat on
one! The answer increasingly is:
What if they do? What's the
problem? The cost of not having
photocopies at one's right hand is
immense. Remember carbon paper?

Personal computers are
"dangerous" too, if your main
concern is unauthorised publications.
PC technology and use is
woeful by western standards. Even at
such a basic level the cost of
squeezing out dissent is enormous.

Barnett is ultimately optimistic
about glasnost and perestroika's
prospects because he sees no
alternative than for the USSR to sink
further behind, economically and
militarily, into the position of a
second-rate power. He is also
optimistic because, despite
everything, there is a socialist
tradition, the sad remnants of
October 1917. But he also recognises
the dangers: "some already see
Solzhenitsyn as the Russian
Ayatollah", waiting in exile to lead
the forces of Russian pramaeal
orthodoxy and chauvinism, now
appearing in the cracks opened by
glasnost.

One often hears socialists in
Australia say that perestroika and
glasnost will make the spread of
socialist ideas here easier. Barnett's
book suggests that the opposite is so.
The Soviets are now exposing all the
problems of "really existing
socialism". It is not a pretty picture.

In the realm of social provision
even the most critical socialists had
thought the USSR was ahead of the
West. The facts suggest the contrary.
Of course, glasnost and perestroika
do help lessen anti-Soviet phobias
and open the way to further
dismantlement. But that is not
the same as presenting a positive
ingage of "socialism". Perhaps in
a decade or so, the buds of perestroika
may bear fruit in the west. But the
crimes of Stalin and Brezhnev will
remain millstones around the necks
of western socialists for many years
to come. If perestroika means more
socialism, as Gorbachev claims, then
we must ensure that the essence of
socialism here is more democracy.
Redressing History


What's the difference between Nellie Melba and Kitty Gallagher? Melba was a famous Australian opera singer, while Kitty was an obscure Irish patriot who led an uprising against the English in 1798. The young Kitty was transported to New South Wales where, during her turbulent life, she drove a bullock team and fought off attacks by bushrangers with flintlock muskets.

But Gallagher's contribution to Australian women's history is no less significant than Melba's. This anthology of 200 Australian women puts Gallagher and other unknown women who battled against tremendous odds into the history books that have been traditionally written by men.

Women's Redress Press is a feminist publisher with the grassroots and academic networks necessary for such a comprehensive collection of women's biographies.

An earlier incarnation of Redress Press foundered on the contradictions between female practices and self-imposed male structures not eighteen months after it was born with much promise back in 1983.

The new Redress has produced eight new titles since its reformation on a very small budget and with the devotion and sacrifice of a small group of women who edit, typeset, distribute and publicise the books themselves.

The editor of this anthology, Heather Radi, has been a pioneering women's historian at the University of Sydney. As section editor of the Australian Dictionary of Biography she was concerned that too many significant women were being left out. Radi says that although women's history is now on the curriculum in senior schools, good reference books are few and far between. This anthology should help to fill the gap.

The Nellie Melbas, Margaret Prestons and Caroline Chisholms are there, but it's the lives of previously hidden or forgotten women which surprise and delight the reader.

A short entry under the name of Bill Smith shows how far the women's struggle has come in recent years. Female jockeys were not given recognition by the Australian Jockey Club until 1974, so Wilhelmina Smith became Bill Smith, hid her femaleness behind a barrage of foul language and an odd habit of refusing to change with other jockeys. Small, tough and singleminded, she won the St. Leger Quest in 1902, the Jockey Club Derby in 1903 and the Victorian Oaks in 1909-10. How would the Australian Jockey Club have coped with the discovery? We'll never know.

And there's the long forgotten struggle of Mary Lee, suffragist and trade unionist, whose untiring efforts led to the parliamentary vote for women in South Australia in 1894.

In these days of the Movement to Ordain Women, how many people know that, in 1927, Winifred Kiek was the first woman to be ordained in any church in Australia? Kiek, a Congregationalist, campaigned for peace and for legal rights for women.

Students of the fight for equal pay can learn from the biography of Muriel Heagney who devoted her life to the labour movement and died in poverty at the age of ninety. When women formed the Women and Girls Printing Trades Union, Mel Cashman joined and lost her job. Doris Beeby was another relatively unknown trade union activist who was in the forefront of the struggle for better conditions for women.

Sadly, Rosaleen Norton, painter, writer and witch is left out, while the queen of Sydney bohemia, Dulcie Deamer, does not rate an entry. And while literary women are usually over-represented in such collections, it seems strange to find an entry on Charlotte Sargent of Sargent's Pies fame.

The anthology traces a common thread of Aboriginal women like Louisa Briggs who led a protest in Victoria against the abolition of Aboriginal reserves in 1876, and Pearl Gibbs who organised strikes among Aboriginal pea pickers at Nowra, NSW in the early 1930s.

I showed my review copy to a friend who lives next door to the house Bessie Guthrie rented in Glebe, in Sydney's inner-west. Sue Bellamy's entry describes how abused and homeless children found their way into Bessie's backyard in the 1950s when she ran what amounted to a half-way house in her own home. In 1939 Bessie established Vikings Press, publishing anti-war material and poetry mainly by women. When Bessie died in 1977, a small plaque was placed on the front wall of her house. It's gone now and the house is being renovated by the Department of Housing. My friend has asked the department to replace it. They have assured her they will.

CARLOTTA McIntOSH is a Sydney radio journalist.
Social Volcano: Sugar Workers in the Philippines, by Larry Jagan and John Cunningham. London 1987, War on Want. $4.95 paperback.

The island of Negros in the Philippines is known to Australians as the place of Father Brian Gore's arrest and imprisonment. This report documents the causes and nature of the social unrest which led to the charges against him. It describes a region where the entire economy is dependent upon one crop — sugar — with so much concentration of the land in the hands of the feudal hacienda owners that 98.5 percent of the population is totally landless. How that has come about, and what is now happening to the people of the island as a result of declining international markets and the incompetence and corruption of the Marcos regime is graphically portrayed. So also is the struggle of the National Union of Sugar Workers to build cooperative farming ventures. Extensively illustrated and tersely written, Social Volcano shows how deeply the Philippines need radical social change and how unlikely it is to come through yet more government by the landowners.


Every year in every corner of Australia, people are writing histories of their locality or region. Most are comfortable celebrations of the achievements of friends, neighbours, and fellow citizens. Some, however, try to go beyond uncritical myth-making. Peter Gardner's account of the career of Angus McMillan, the "founder" of Gippsland, falls into the second category. His introduction says "perhaps in this Bicentennial year it is appropriate that at least some works such as this show some of the darker side of what is euphemistically called white settlement". This he has done with care and determination, presenting a description of McMillan's role in the murder and expropriation of Gippsland's Aboriginal population that draws on every available source. Perhaps some of the local controversies are covered in excessive detail, but he provides an important model of what local history can and should be.


Despite the title, the causes, nature and consequences of Australia's own indebtedness take up only part of this study. Most of it looks at the international situation, with case studies of several African and Asian countries, and at the structure and policies of the international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank. It then proceeds to a series of recommendations, mainly centring on the role the Australian government could play in pushing for debt reform through its membership of various international organisations and institutions. It is not a radical document, but it does advance some important arguments about the nature of today's international economic order, and it does provide some interesting and important information about the comparative size and composition of Australia's foreign debt.

Disarming Poverty: Disarmament for Development in Asia-Pacific, edited by Janet Hunt, Canberra 1987, Australian Council for Overseas Aid. $5.00 paperback.

This pamphlet, one of the ACFOA series of Development Dossiers, looks at the relationship between militarism and economic development (or lack of it). Richard Tanter, Ted Wheelwright, Lyuba Zarsky and a number of others have contributed chapters on various aspects of the regional arms race and its effects, or case studies of particular countries, including Vietnam, Indonesia and Kampuchea. Effects on democratic rights, on the growth of trade unionism, and international alliances are all examined. The essay on Australia's arms exports to the Third World is particularly topical at the moment, given the recent decision of the Australian government.

How far can we ignore moral and political implications for the sake of boosting our economy through military exports, and how much do they work to preserve First World domination of the region? The pamphlet provides some clues.

Available from ACFOA, Box 1562, Canberra 2601.


Looking at an exhibition catalogue can be a frustrating experience, especially for people who have not had an opportunity to see the actual display. However, this catalogue is worth obtaining both for the reproductions it provides of some of the exhibition, and for a quite substantial essay on the history of May Day in Melbourne by Charlie Fox. As anyone who has looked for information about Australian celebrations of May Day will know, like so many other parts of labour history, there is almost nothing available. This booklet is a step towards filling the gap. It also provides a short biography of Sam Merrifield, from whose collection most of the material is drawn, and a description of the collection.

Ken Norling
Socialism

I was a little shocked to find John Mathews' and David McKnight's articles side by side in ALR 105. John Mathews seemed to be arguing that socialism had become irrelevant, and proceeded to replace it with something sounding remarkably like Australia Reconstructed writ large. To me, socialism means a bit more than that.

David McKnight, meanwhile, seemed to be saying that blue collar workers are no longer of any interest to the left, and that our only hope is in persuading well-intentioned young middle-class people to become a bit more radical.

Both of these points of view are counsels of despair, and neither of them offers anything useful to the left in what you call its "rethinking".

Colin Robinson, Sydney.

Not All Conflict?

A few days ago a friend showed me a copy of your June/July issue. This gave me a chance to look back at a movement to which I was once committed, but to which I am committed no longer.

For me, the most revealing article was Rosalind Brunt's review of Shere Hite's latest book. After some twenty years of supposedly profound analysis of relations between the genders, Australia's far left is just beginning to acknowledge women's desire "to love and be loved by men". Even this acknowledgment comes only in an article reprinted from Britain.

Dear former comrades, it's true. Women love men. Men also love women — but perhaps it will take you another twenty years to figure this out? Life is not all conflict.

Faith Richmond, Fitzroy, Vic.

The Future for the Left

Jade is astral travelling this issue, but will return in a different format for ALR 107.

Apologies

In last issue's notes on contributors a gremlin crept in. Denis Doherty was speaking in his personal capacity in the round-table on the peace movement. Jim Crosthwaite wishes it to be known that he is not, nor ever has been, a member of the history staff at Melbourne University. Rather, he works in the Bureau of Statistics in Melbourne. And Pat Ranald is national research officer, not women's officer, for ACOA. Apologies to readers and to all involved.

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Letters

- We welcome your letters for our next issue. As a general rule, letters should be no longer than 300 words and, preferably, should be typewritten. ALR reserves the right to edit letters down to this length.

- authors' addresses and a contact phone number should be included, although, naturally, they will not be printed. The deadline for letters is four weeks prior to the month of publication.

Reading survivor

As a recent subscriber to your magazine, I was informed and entertained by the standard and scope of articles in your June/July issue.

I read with interest "The Mob of Women", a review of Finola Moorhead's novel Remember the Tarantella, having read the book and, like Kate Grenville, partly enjoyed and partly felt excluded from the subject matter. As a service to those members of the shrinking reading public who are still interested in the practice rather than the theory of reading, how about extending the same courtesy to the subject of your review as you do to the reviewer and printing full name, publisher and price of the book reviewed?

Amanda Reid-Young, Faulconbridge, NSW.

Apologies. Remember the Tarantella was published by Primavera Press in November last year, and sells for $24.95.

— Ed.
Tucked in at the back of Coles in Melbourne's Little Bourke St is the Kun Ming, an institution in Melbourne's Chinatown. It's probably the cheapest place in that long stretch, but it's the unfailingly good food which draws the crowds (and often queues) at lunchtime and on Friday nights. I started eating there in 1976, when I was a student. Then, you could get three dim sims, a bowl of green pea soup and a pot of Chinese tea for $1.30. The menu hasn't changed since then; nor have the prices (well, not much). The laminex tables are still the same, too.

The Kun Ming serves fairly standard Cantonese fare, but it's always fresh and tasty. The black bean dishes and the sates are excellent. The servings are generous, the service quick and unobtrusive. It's terrific for a quick meal before a meeting, and a two course meal costs around $7-$8 per head.

Around the corner is the Satay Inn, advertising 'simply good Malaysian food' — and it is too. After only four or five years of operation it hardly rivals the Kun Ming as an institution, but it already has a devoted clientele. Make sure you try its lobak, mouthwatering rolls with a beancurd skin and served with a sweet sauce. Worth trying, too, is the laksa, a spicy soup made with coconut milk, chicken, seafood and vegetables — a meal in itself.

The Satay Inn specialises in 'howkee style' dishes, including a large variety of noodles. Other dishes come from 'across the Causeway', reflecting their Singaporean influence in the greater use of chillies. Its fish curries, chilli prawns and spinach balachan (stirfried with dried shrimps and shrimp paste for less than a minute) are highly recommended. Try them with achar achar (a salad of roasted peanuts and pickles) and the coconut rice. If you have room, sample the desserts and don't be deterred by the quaint descriptions on the menu.

The service is friendly and quick. Two courses costs about $12-$14, and it's a good idea to book if you're trotting out on a Friday night.

Kun Ming, 212 Little Bourke St, Melbourne. Ph: 663 1851. BYO, no cards.

Satay Inn, 205 Swanston St, Melbourne. Ph: 663 4703. BYO, all major cards.

Norton Street Leichhardt hold a growing part of Sydney's Iltalo-Australian culture. After the Italian victory in the World Cup soccer series in 1982 it was almost impossible to move down the street without becoming part of the enthusiastic celebrations. Although soccer victories have been less frequent since that year, the presence of things Italo-Australian has continued to grow.

Nearby in Parramatta Rd, if you're fortunate enough to read Italian, there's the Libreria Italiana, where, depending on your fancy you can read what the PCI is saying in L'Unita, pick up a copy of the locally produced Nouvo Passe, or even see how James Joyce reads in translation or Gramsci in the original.

Also at this time of the year you can enjoy a production by the FILEF Gruppo Teatrare, one of Australia's few bi-lingual theatres at the state school on the corner of Marion and Norton Streets. For the more immediate needs of a bite to eat, a good coffee and pleasant company, there is the Norton Street range of cafes and bistros, each of which has marked a fairly distinct following.

Near Parramatta Rd, Bar Veneto and the Cafe Bon tend to cater for the morning and early afternoon trade. The former is best either for an early morning coffee before work, or a place to take a break from Saturday morning shopping.

The Cafe Bon, with its sunny balcony and friendly proprietress, is equally relaxing, and for about $5 you can enjoy a coffee and focaccia while overlooking the toing and fro-ing on the street below.

The eastern, or city side of Norton Street operates best from mid-afternoon onwards (even up to 3am at Bar Baba), though by this time at night you'll probably only have your chess board for company. Next door, the Bistro of the Imperial pub provides an earlier start to the night with a decidedly hearty and proletarian menu.

Here you'll either be rubbing shoulders with your families having a Friday night break from home cooking, or former partisans who punctuate their card games with a well earned meal or more frequently a glass of wine or beer. It's open for lunch most days, but only for dinner on Fridays. Further along the street and for a couple of dollars extra ($8 or so) you can choose from the range of pastas, parmigians and sea food at the Il Rugantino restaurant. Although the menu is again fairly meaty, it's possible to find some concessions to vegetarian diets.

The Bar Italia, up past the Town Hall, is possibly best known as a place to meet feminist friends over an excellent gelato or to catch welfare workers outside hours still pondering over their funding submissions. Bar Italia also has a useful notice board which may provide your next collective household, allow you to finally take the plunge into yoga or simply find homes for the recent litter of kittens that has mysteriously arrived in your back yard.

Peter McNiece
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