I take issue with Janet Wright's "Wombs for Rent" (ALR No. 116). It is a marvellous favour for one woman to be prepared to carry a baby for another. Surrogate motherhood is not universally rejected. A Saulwick/Sydney Morning Herald opinion poll recently conducted (SMH 9/7/90) revealed that Australian voters are almost evenly divided on the issue.

The points raised by Janet are all in line with bourgeois morality. She raises economic and moralistic objections but does not discuss the matter of in vitro fertilisation and its relationship with surrogacy, nor the advantages or otherwise of the practice for some people. There is not an objective glance at the issue.

The anathema connected with the sale of children stems from the genuine revulsion against slavery. When Janet and others use these terms, it is intended to arouse these feelings. There is no suggestion that any child being fostered (which surrogacy is) is being sold, let alone sold into slavery. On the contrary, the child is much desired and welcomed.

The moral criticisms are not relevant. If Janet considers that surrogacy is renting a womb, then marriage is selling a womb. The objections she feels are characteristics of the capitalist system, not peculiar to surrogacy. It is capitalism we need to oppose, the political structure based entirely on the exploitation of labour, the vagaries of the market and the profit motive.

The exchange of money for a baby, to quote Janet again, is not a sale any more than money for intercourse is the sale of a body. It is the price for a service rendered. The exchange of money for the surrogate's service is no criterion for opposing it. She is just as much entitled to payment as the priest or parson, prostitute, midwife, doctor or funeral director for their respective services.

The act of giving birth is only as significant as one makes it, or as society makes it, or circumstances make it. Birth out of wedlock was an anathema in the past. We no longer allow ourselves to be deluded by Christian bourgeois morality.

The child was once rejected by society because of the person to whom she/he was born. Now we seek to have the child, the natural parent and the fostering parent(s) rejected because of the manner in which the birth occurs. The simple fact is that a child is born, not by accident, as was more usually the case in the past, but by design and preparation. The birthing mother has agreed to do a favour for two aspiring parents.

A generation ago it was considered a Christian duty to take their children away from single mothers, Aborigines and prisoners (convicts). The Christians seem to have changed their minds. Now they are more likely to insist that the bond between birth mother and child should not be severed. Shouldn't this be the mother's decision? So long as the welfare of the child is not placed at risk, why should we object?

The nuclear family has been found to be unsatisfactory, not to say dangerous for some women and children. The incidence of domestic violence and child abuse have forced other lifestyles upon us. We need to use other models for rearing and caring.

Some women believe they will never be as free as men until they cease to incubate; on the contrary, some women approve highly of pregnancy and giving birth. It is possible that in the future there will be more children with a birth mother and a foster mother. It is no longer within the realm of science fiction to consider the possibility of men's bodies carrying a foetus - there are men who have expressed such a desire. For my part, they are welcome to try.

Edna Ryan,
Glebe, NSW.

David Burchell (ALR No. 118) states that I have praised, in May, Ralph Willis and John Dawkins: "both, like Walsh, are members of the Centre Left".

I have publicly drawn attention to Willis' intellectual capacity and fundamental decency. This could legitimately be described as praise. But Willis is not a member of the Centre Left. He belongs to the Victorian Labor Unity, more commonly described as the Victorian Right.

I have advocated reintroduction of some form of inheritance tax and extension of the capital gains tax to the principal residence. The official 'Left' has done the same, but with an exempt threshold so high, the measures would be meaningless. This has the advantage of facilitating the warm inner glow without actually achieving anything significant.

Senator Peter Walsh,
Parliament House, Canberra.