STereo Types

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Rural Retreat

Who would vote for the Nationals? Certainly not members of the Left, who tend to consider the party to be at best a quaint anachronism, at worst a collection of vicious anti-intellectuals whose red-necked arrogance hides corruption and greed.

Environmentalists are unimpressed and consider the party to be out of touch with green concerns for forests, conservation and agricultural sustainability. Urban workers believe the Nationals' main interest is in protecting the privileges of wealthy, privately-schooled farmers, while the rich in Toorak and Vaucluse only laugh at the pettiness and parochialism of the 'hayseeds'. The urban middle classes are too concerned with marriages, maternity and mortgages to be seduced by a party preoccupied with the state of rural roads.

So, who does vote for the Nationals? Most farmers do. So, too, do small business people and many professionals in rural Australia - they form part of a provincial elite which hangs its hat on the future growth and development of medium-sized towns and regional centres in rural areas. Many members of the rural working class - workers who are often themselves off farms or who provide services to the farm sector - feel well-disposed towards the Nationals. The social cement that binds these groups is an overwhelming belief that rural Australia must have a voice and gain political power if it is to capture its fair share of economic resources.

There is said to exist in rural Australia a pervasive 'country mindedness', an ideology which reflects an entrenched conservative attitude to life (and, with this the highest respect for God, Queen and Nation). In its raw form it pits the rural 'battlers' against the city 'bludgers'. This ideology helps to shape political debates in the bush and it is thus often suggested that if the Nationals ceased to exist a new party would appear to fill the vacuum, a party which would give weight to the farmers' claims about the moral superiority of tilling the soil and the virtues of country living.

Despite their attempts to rekindle this pro-rural ideology, the Nationals today are a beleagured party. Corruption in Queensland, the hearings of the Independent Commission Against Corruption in NSW, continued in-fighting over policies and leadership at state level and the call, both inside and outside the party, for amalgamation with the Liberals have served as destabilising factors. Once a party with clear intentions in economic and social matters, the Nationals in the era of Bjelke-Petersen, Sparkes, Sinclair and Murray have lost direction and have forfeited the claims to moral superiority which their supporters might have had.

In blindly following the Liberals toward a free-market philosophy, the Nationals have abandoned those interventionist policies (in particular, policies of decentralisation and farm subsidisation) which had previously advantaged their constituents. In the March federal election the Nationals performed dismally, losing former leader Charles Blunt's seat of Richmond, as well as the seats of Page and Kennedy, to Labor. To add to the debacle, John Stone managed to lose the seat of Fairfax to the Liberals. Those who wish for the Nationals' political resurgence are aware that the party's problems are not merely the result of a 'poor image'. Demography is working against them. Today, Australia has half the number of farms it had in the mid-1950s and, as a group, farmers comprise less than 5% of the workforce. While the cities have continued in-fighting over policies and leadership at state level and the call, both inside and outside the party, for amalgamation with the Liberals have served as destabilising factors. Once a party with clear intentions in economic and social matters, the Nationals in the era of Bjelke-Petersen, Sparkes, Sinclair and Murray have lost direction and have forfeited the claims to moral superiority which their supporters might have had.

A fourth factor in the Nationals' decline concerns the peculiar position of the farmers' own 'union', the National Farmers Federation. The NFF has abandoned the traditional concerns of the farm lobby in the spheres of protection and regulation.

Its free market ideologues argue that removal of 'market distortions' (such as subsidies, tariffs and statutory marketing legislation), as well as the removal of what they believe to be clumsy regulations, is the key to success for Australian agriculture in the 1990s. In this model the least efficient producers must be sacrificed for the benefit of those
remaining (namely, the richer, bigger, technologically sophisticated farmers).

The NFF's economic arguments are implicitly opposed to support for the rural poor and needy (regardless of how this group is defined). Farmers have been receiving a strong message from the NFF that the days of special concessions and support are over: yet farmers' support for the Nationals has been based on the understanding that the latter would, through cunning and blackmail if necessary, manage to deliver the concessions and support so needed by the farmers. The NFF is telling farmers, rather bluntly, that they should abandon the Nationals until the party accepts the NFF's anti-interventionist line. In the eyes of the farmers' union, then, the farmers' party is an anachronism. The Nationals remain one of only a handful of rural-based parties in the Western world. According to many observers, their days as an effective political entity are numbered.

For those who would wish to rejoice in the apparent demise of the Nationals, however, there are a number of sobering points which must be borne in mind. First, with a current paid-up membership of some 130,000, the Nationals can claim the biggest support base of any political party in Australia. And, importantly, they have access to more power and wealth than these numbers alone would imply. Second, the Nationals, unlike the Democrats or Greens, are a traditional party within the Australian political system, not some unknown quantity. With 14 members in the House of Representatives, they remain well poised to form part of a viable alternative Coalition government at subsequent elections.

Finally, the Nationals have a new leader whose political career should be watched with great interest. Despite having served two decades in state and federal politics, Tim Fischer is not well known beyond the farm gate. He is a farmer who believes strongly in the Church (he's a practising Catholic), bushwalking, the Flag, Anzacs (he is, as well, a Vietnam veteran), war memorials, decentralisation and trains. He's a bachelor of 43 going on 63. But he is energetic and dedicated. Indeed, he can be so dedicated to causes that his concerns at times seem a little bizarre.

Rural Australia is undergoing quite significant structural change - a great deal of which is seen to be socially harmful. Australian rural communities have suffered throughout the 'seventies and 'eighties as a result of cost-price pressures in farming, of corporate rationalisations orchestrated by agribusiness and of progressive reduction in the level of government services. On basically all issues of social equity - unemployment, poverty, health, welfare and education - rural people are more disadvantaged than their urban counterparts.

Fischer is capable of providing strong conservative leadership at a time when the Nationals must rebuild their links with provincial Australia. He may just be capable of forging a new identity for the ailing Nationals if he can abandon the old recipe of pork-barrelling and replace this with a new rural vision which encompasses a non-polluting agriculture, support for family farmers and the creation of viable rural towns. He will need, in the process, to extend his obvious concern for native fauna to concerns for forests, soils and people.

Ironically, it may be that in future driest-of-dry debates between a Hewson-led Liberal Party and a Keating-led Labor Party, Fischer and his Nationals may provide the only real relief. Whether this will be comic relief depends largely on Fischer's ability to develop policies which will lead to rural revitalisation.

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Crisis as usual

It's not only the Soviet Union which is breaking up. Yugoslavia too is threatened with dismemberment. ABC Radio's Pierre Vicary recently interviewed Lev Kreft, a member of the Central Committee of the Slovene Communist Party and Director of the official Scientific and Publicity Centre.

On the opposite page he talks to Aleksandr Broz, son of the late Marshal Tito and a member of the Central Committee of the Croatian Communist Party (now renamed the Party of Democratic Change).

Yugoslavia at present seems to be going in a strange direction. Slovenia and Croatia have recently gone to the polls in multi-party elections and the ruling parties have ceded power to opposition coalitions. In the south of the country, on the other hand, you still have the unreconstructed communist party running the country on its own, and the federal party hasn't changed at all. How can a country function like that?

KREFT: I am sure that the process of change going on in Croatia and Slovenia at present is going on also in other parts of the country. In Macedonia, and even in Bosnia-Hercegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, the idea of political pluralism is growing in strength. It's quite certain that everywhere in Yugoslavia the same thing will happen sooner or later. I believe towards the end of this year everybody will have had multi-party elections, and that will mark the beginning of a kind of more earnest dialogue about the future of Yugoslavia.

But in Serbia what seems to have happened is the communist party has simply transformed itself into some form of national party.

That's right. But they don't want to have elections. That I believe is a big mistake. They could get something from elections now. In six or seven months time, however, they will be a party with much less credibility, and their failure to hold elections earlier will be held against them. So I think that in Serbia in the near future the deconstruction of communism will be sharper and more dramatic than in Slovenia where we went step by step.

How do you feel as a socialist, having watched Eastern Europe over the last few months, where socialism seems to have been tossed out of the window. Can something still be saved?

I think so. We tried to begin with a totally new ideology of socialism in our country after 1948 and we did not succeed. We went back into a kind of 'actually existing socialism'. So we have to start again from the very beginning. And this process will go on in Eastern Europe as well.

Let's talk about the comparisons being made with Lithuania. Slovenia, too, is a small country with a tradition of wanting to be independent without, of course, the same long term history. Is it fair to see Slovenia as a sort of little Lithuania?

I don't like these comparisons - not least because we still don't know what will happen to Lithuania! My own preference is for a kind of confederal position of Slovenia in Yugoslavia. Secession is a very dangerous idea for Slovenia because we don't have a historical tradition, we don't have a legal tradition, and our borders aren't secured by international settlement because everything was settled upon the Yugoslav state. Yugoslavia began its life as a unitary state, and then became a federal state, so it's not a matter of independent states having come together. And we believe also that this confederal process can in time lead to a kind of autonomy in a future Yugoslav state. So we believe in an integrative process - not based on a one-party system or ideology, of course, but on the market system.

Do you see the dangers of civil war? Could it come to that?

Certainly there is that danger at present. There are parties, especially in Croatia and Serbia, which have built their political program for elections on the level of fervent nationalism. It's quite obvious in Croatia that people would like to have some national idea, perhaps of the 19th century kind, because nations in this region didn't have the opportunity to go through that kind of nationalism. We will go through a very dangerous period, but I don't believe it will end in civil war.

And yet many of the noises being made now are very similar to the noises being made in 1848. We seem to have gone back 150 years in terms of national aspirations.

New parties tend to begin their life at the point at which their ancestors stopped theirs. So in this country we have right wing parties which have to begin as if their own tradition stopped somewhere in 1939 or 1940. We in our own way are going back to 1914, before communism, trying to understand the splits in the Left between communism and social democracy in new terms and to find a way to rethink the 20th century. So everybody is in a way going back to rethink their own history.

You've still got a picture of Tito on your wall. A few hundred kilometres to the south they put him on trial for counterrevolution. What will happen to the Tito memory?

Tito's memory will go through a period of demythologisation. And that demythologisation will have to be as strong as mythologisation once was. Of course it's not very easy to be a Titoist today, but everybody has to find their own way to understand their own past. As for me personally I don't think that Tito's image in the
What are the major problems that Croatia faces after the election?

BROZ: Major problems, my God. There are so many of them that it’s hard to say, but I think the question of ‘social property’ is fundamental. I don’t think that state ownership is a substitute for that because that hasn’t worked in east or west. Maybe a combination of privatisation and giving the worker the chance to be a shareholder will make industry more efficient. Only with more efficient industry can we survive all these changes now.

They say people work about 2 or 3 hours a day. Is that true?

As much as that? Well, I would not say that people work 2 or 3 hours a day. On the other hand, if you look at the individual productivity of the worker, I think it’s higher than West Germany, but the quality of the productivity is two or three times lower.

The problem is really bureaucracy. If you look at our people who are

(Continued from previous page)

future will be as bad as it seems today. Even if you agree that he was a dictator they were 30 very peaceful years in Yugoslavia.

I feel rather sorry for the older people, the people who were young when World War Two began, who fought to build a socialism, who watched this Yugoslavia grow and now are watching their world fall apart.

Yes, it’s quite hard for them. And it’s even harder because a lot of political argument today in Slovenia and elsewhere, is built upon the idea that the partisans and of course communists have been responsible for nothing but evil these last 50 years. It’s very hard for these people to find that they have become criminals at the end of their life.

It’s obviously the first time you’ve had this sort of election in your lifetime. It must be a new experience for people like yourself to actually have to go out and sell yourselves. Have you enjoyed going out and meeting people, and talking in front of large crowds?

Some of us of course have always been in a kind of opposition within the party, and we’ve always been working through the media. The older communist politicians don’t like the media. The media shows up their mistakes, embarrassments and so on. If you are sure about your own policy you like the media. If you are not, you don’t like them. So, yes, I’ve been travelling around a lot. We staged a lot of popular events in towns, went to popular meeting places, and so on. It is nice to be able to assure yourself as a communist that you can speak with people who don’t like you; that you can discuss things on a normal level with people of opposing views.

It seems to me that a lot of people have voted against the communists simply because they’ve been in power for so long.

When we began this process, when we began our fight inside the party, we knew that in this first election we would be paying for all of the bad feelings about the communism of the past. It’s the price which we have to pay for real democracy. And we are aware of that and will pay it with a smile.
working abroad, they are among the best workers. When they come back they don't get the same results. So it's not a question of the worker, it's a question of the organisation of the job.

How stable is this country?

Nationalism is always an easy thing to sell, but its consequences are another matter. I don't think that the people in Yugoslavia are prepared to have a war among themselves. You have to remember that, constitutionally, each republic entered Yugoslavia freely and this means that they can also leave freely. And because everybody knows that, that is the guarantee for me that they are not going to do so. So the talk in Croatia and Slovenia about absolute independence was just election advertising. I don't think they really believe that they would be able to do it.

Nationalism is not solving the problem, it's only making things more complicated. Don't forget that the younger generation did not experience the influence of nationalism during the war. That is one of the problems that we face today, that the people and the parties are talking about nationalism without knowing what it means.

What is the future for the Croatian Communist Party?

I think that it is much better that we as communists change our own world than that somebody else does it for us. I think that we have selected the right way because here political pluralism and a multi-party system are not being brought about by demonstrations, but by the Communist Party and I think that this is the guarantee for all the others that we have a flexible view.

The Communist Party has a big advantage, and that is that we have the best trained and skilled people, best management, and we have certain results behind us - a security of social living, a social standard. It's much easier from opposition to try to destroy something than to build it up. So the new government are going to have very hard times because they have to produce results. They are promising to double monthly salaries, without saying how they will do so.

At the same time, their radical proposals might make unemployment 20-30% higher. When you give these election promises it's better to be careful, because tomorrow is going to be more expensive. I think that the next elections will be the really important ones because then the people are going to have the experience of the opposition parties in power as well. They may see their interests differently then.

Zapping Czechs

One event which escaped media coverage of the Eastern European revolutions is the appointment of rock musician and composer Frank Zappa as emissary for culture for the Czechoslovak government. The following is an edited version of an interview with Zappa, by David Corn, for the US weekly, The Nation (19.3.90).

How did you make your first contact with President Vaclav Havel?

I called Michael Kicab, who is both a famous Czechoslovak rock-and-roll musician and - now here's progress - a member of parliament. We had met in Los Angeles last year, and now all of a sudden he's in the middle of a democratic revolution. "Could I possibly have an interview with Havel?" I asked. No problem, he said.

Thousands of fans greeted me when I arrived in Prague with my video crew. For twenty years, my albums have been smuggled into the country. The President told me he especially likes my early records with the Mothers of Invention and the Bongo Fury album I made with Captain Beefheart.

But you were there to discuss business as well.

Right. I started to talk to him on behalf of Financial News Network. Then at a small lunch with Havel, his wife, Olga, Richard Wagner, Vice Minister and adviser for economy and ecology, and Valtr Komarek, a deputy prime minister and leader of their new economic team, we discussed how the country could increase its income, and the conversation continued later that day at dinner.

At my request, Milan Lukes, the Czech Minister of Culture, was present. Havel and his ministers know they need some Western investment, but they don't want all the ugliness that often invades a country with Western investment. The easiest way to keep the lid on that is to have someone involved whose primary concern is culture, who can reject or modify a project if it is going to have a negative impact on society. Hence my request for the involvement of the Minister of Culture.

After dinner, Lukes went on television and announced that I would be representing Czechoslovakia on trade, tourism and cultural matters.

So what's the plan for Czechoslovakia?

What they don't want can be summed up by the comment urgently made by one of the many kids who trailed me throughout my visit: "Frankie, Frankie, please don't bring me Las Vegas." There is a direction in which they want to head. Look at Austria, which does $10 billion a year in tourism. Austria has managed to convert its culture - its concert halls, museums and architecture - into a consumable commodity and at the same time preserve its heritage. Czechoslovakia, with its musical, theatrical and artistic legacy, has the potential for the same. All I knew about Czechoslovakia before I got there was what I had seen on Cable
News Network: people walking around in dingy, gray streets and having a revolution. I had no idea how pretty and quiet it is. Prague is clean and comfortable, and the food is good. The airport is not a hellhole like Sheremetyevo in Moscow. This is a very pleasant country, and it's in good shape. They need to create a tourism infrastructure that makes it more accessible to the West.

According to Vice President Vladimir Dlouhy, the total amount of hard-currency trade between Czechoslovakia and all Western countries is $4 billion annually. If they can increase it by only $1 billion, that would represent a 25% boost in the overall standard of living. I doubt whether any other Eastern European nation could do so well in the short term.

But what about hard industry? General Motors is setting up a factory in Hungary. Will we see the same in Czechoslovakia?

Havel and his advisers do want industry, but they do not want to import businesses that will exacerbate the ecological problems left behind by the communists.

Since Czechoslovakia still burns a lot of coal, I suggested that the government explore magneto-hydrodynamics (MHD). This is a process in which low-grade coal is burned but the emissions are cleaned, put through a loop, and used to increase the electricity output - like a turbocharger.

Just about every telephone company on the planet has been to Prague offering to fix the country's inefficient telephone system. And, no surprise, the price tag is enormous. Not one of these companies had suggested to the Czechoslovak government, as I did, that it go cellular. This will make unnecessary the stringing of wires through ancient buildings with nine centuries of history.

**Walshed!**

May was the month of Peter Walsh. With all the subtlety of a Mallee bull, the former Finance Minister stormed through the record of the federal government, the immigration debate, the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody - and of course the PM's backbone.

Among the chief targets: Graham Richardson, former Minister for the Environment and earlier still numero uno headkicker for the NSW ALP Right. Among the recipients of his praise: new Finance Minister Ralph Willis and Employment Minister John Dawkins, both, like Walsh, members of the Centre Left. The parliamentary Left, it seemed, didn't rate a guernsey on either team.

When the dust subsided and the sound of hooves faded, bystanders were left to ask themselves, what did it all mean? The former Finance Minister gloating his own right-wing colleagues for their timidity on micro-economic reform and their nefarious role in the government's third term 'lost chances'? Certainly the game of pinning the factional tail on the ministerial donkey has become more complex in recent years. Yet the sight of Centre-Left heavyweights preching the strait gate of financial austerity to their allegedly profligate right-wing flock still looks rather odd.

Peter Walsh, it should be said, is a political one-off, even coming from a ministry conducive to fanatical economy-mindedness. At the same time, it would be difficult to plausibly brand Walsh's foray as an attack on the government from its right flank. What, for instance, about his suggestions to extend the capital gains tax to family homes, and to reintroduce death duties - both usually considered unelectably 'left-wing'? Rather, it served to indicate the fragmentation of ideological worldviews within the ALP and on the broader Left which has gathered speed over the last seven years. Peter Walsh was a fanatical defender of the government's purse strings - in the jargon of the era, an 'economic rationalist': but he is also a single-minded egalitarian (after his own lights) and a sworn enemy of the ALP Right. Graham Richardson is a powerbroker on the Right: yet his behaviour in the environment portfolio smacked of anything but 'economic rationalism'. Perhaps if the future suggested anything it was that the term 'economic rationalist', as it is now used in popular parlance, could do with a rest.

It makes little sense in the political firmament today to describe with this pejorative label anyone who is concerned with the budget figures or the state of government finances. In an earlier incarnation 'economic rationalism' at least meant the identifiable canon of neoclassical and monetarist economics, along with their (in the West, at least) generally right-wing proponents. Nowadays it's become little more than a term of political abuse. But as the likes of Walsh attest, the economic debate has become both too important and too complex to let swearwords suffice.

David Burchell
But so what? Criticising Hinch is like shooting a sitting duck. It's obvious. The only question worth asking is, does it matter?

When it comes to law and order I would argue that it does matter. It matters because Hinch is just an extreme example of a widespread problem - the problem of the symbiotic relationship between the media and politicians, and the way this relationship influences public policy. And public policy, of course, affects the lives of ordinary people in drastic and far-reaching ways.

An analysis of Hinch's crusading stance on issues like child abuse and drug trafficking provides a nasty illustration of how journalists can devastate the lives of individuals and promote attitudes and policies which can cause suffering to countless others. The plight of alleged drug traffickers in Malaysian prisons is a classic case in point.

Senior Malaysian government officials have made it clear that they are highly sensitive to the coverage of Malaysian affairs in the Australian media, particularly when Australian nationals are in custody in their prisons. Yet Hinch took an aggressive and blood-curdling stance in the Barlow and Chambers case prior to their hanging. He then repeated the performance during the crucial stages of Lorraine Cohen's trial for drug trafficking with her son, putting material detrimental to her case to air at the time her sentence was being considered.

Hinch is such an extreme case it is easy to be outraged and critical of his doubtful ethics. But let's face it, Hinch is hardly the only journalist who reiterates lazy-minded cliches with scant regard for their repercussions on the lives of powerless people. The culture of mass media journalism is fostering the 'Hinch' within us all.

NSW recently provided a glaring example of how 'media cliche' is read for 'public opinion' by politicians. The superintendent of Sydney's Minda Juvenile Detention Centre, Terry Halloran, was forced to take leave pending an inquiry into the escape of a boy who was allowed out jogging with the superintendent's dog. Now that's a story!

The Minister for Family and Community Services, Virginia Chadwick, was interviewed on Mike Carlton's show on Sydney radio 2GB. Mike was in full flight. Minda was "the government holiday camp". The escape was a "situation comedy" and "high farce". The staff must think they are running "Outward Bound". According to Mike, a lot of "bleeding heart social workers and wimps ... think they know best" and "heads should roll".

How does the minister react? "I know how you feel, Mike, and how the people in the community must feel because that is precisely what happened to me when I got the phone call to tell me," says Virginia. The minister eagerly asserts that she is aware of community feeling and that is why the superintendent and another staff member involved "are no longer here ... despite their long years of service". If the superintendent can't justify his actions "he'll be down to the CES I presume." Both Mike and Virginia were reinforcing popular misconceptions which, presumably, they both know to be incorrect.

Hinch's messianic sermons about crime and punishment are just an acute symptom of a widespread media problem.

Julie McCrossin.
CHINA SHOP

Victoria: What Went Wrong?

Kenneth Davidson argues that the Victorian Socialist Left has blood on its hands following the Cain government's fall from grace.

When any government sacks its treasurer and his departmental head it is a fair bet that the government concerned has reached a terminal condition irrespective of the competence of the opposition. Sclerosis set in in Victoria in December 1988 when losses by the Cain government's venture capital financier, the VEDC, caused the government to collapse the operation into the conservatively-run Rural Finance Corporation and sacrifice the loyal and competent Deputy Premier, Mr Fordham.

From then on the Treasurer, Mr Jolly, found it virtually impossible to get even the most straightforward decision out of the Premier. The view of the Premier's Department that the state government should distance itself as far as possible from involvement in business development decisions has come increasingly to be the position of the government itself.

The rot began with the removal of the Centre Unity (i.e. Right) aligned Transport Minister, Mr Roper, in December 1987. Mr Roper's redundancy program was popular with the rank and file, who saw the opportunity of a generous windfall and the prospect of a new start in a state with very strong demand for labour. But it offended Left unions, who saw their power base within the Victorian branch of the ALP being threatened.

Mr Roper was replaced by the Left's Mr Kennan, who stopped the redundancy program and with it rationalisation of the Victorian transportation system. However, because of federal government funding cuts last year, Mr Kennan was required by Cabinet to achieve a quick cut in the transport deficit.

If Mr Kennan had continued the Roper restructuring, the required cut in the deficit would have been achieved over two years by the introduction of automated ticketing. Instead Mr Kennan was forced to go for the quick fix - an attack on the tram conductors, who, because of their rapid turnover were perceived as the soft underbelly of the transport unions. They were to be replaced by the scratch ticket, which required a minimum of capital and organisation.

This disaster came on top of the $1.4 billion losses of the State Bank of Victoria (SBV) merchant banking subsidiary, Tricontinental, which led to the sacking of the Treasurer, Mr Jolly, and his departmental head, Dr Sheehan. They were sacked despite the fact that the board of Tricontinental, which was directly responsible for the losses, was appointed by the State Bank Board - traditionally the most independent of the government's statutory authorities.

In retrospect it is clear that the corporate lending by Tricontinental which got the SBV into trouble was to finance takeovers and other assorted share plays which were never going to produce value added for the state or the nation even if the money had been repaid. The state government was not aware of the individual loans which resulted in the massive losses by the SBV, nor would the government have been told if it had asked. In no way could the lending be construed as being encouraged or validated by the state economic strategy.

Mr Jolly and Dr Sheehan may reflect that they are the most spectacular victims thus far of financial deregulation. Both men may have survived if there had been a better understanding in the electorate of the concept of ministerial responsibility and its limits and their overall success in managing the state economy, which in terms of growth, employment and household incomes is still outperforming the rest of Australia.

But they had no hope when it became clear that since the failure of the VEDC in 1988, the Premier no longer had any confidence in their economic development strategy, and when the leader of the Socialist Left and some ambitious backbenchers began to undermine their authority via the media after the SBV losses became apparent.

Thus the Socialist Left has managed to get rid of the only Labor minister and the only competent senior bureaucrat in the country who both not only believed that government could play a positive role in economic development, but also set up the structures to put such a policy in place.

The economic strategy - which was an attempt to build on the state's competitive strengths, its strong scientific and manufacturing base and skilled workforce - has been junked in favour of public relations stunts aimed at creating sympathetic photo opportunities for ministers.

Seen through the prism of the media, the Cain government is now reminiscent of the aimlessness of the Hamer/Thompson period of conservative government, when success as a minister was measured by how often one could get one's photo in the Sun or the Herald.

The Deputy Premier, Mrs Kirner, is interviewed every other day explaining how she would never challenge Mr Cain for the leadership of the party, even though it is clearly implied that she has both the numbers and the necessary qualities for leadership. In the process the Left leaches away further the small amount of authority the Premier still has and Labor's small chance of survival at the next election.

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Labor's TURBULENT Tribes

Labor’s factions now dominate party decision-making. They also often serve to stifle rather than promote debate. Lindsay Tanner argues that if Labor is to survive as a mass party it needs to break the factional grip.

Highly structured and organised factions first emerged in the Labor Party in the wake of the 1955-57 DLP split. Since that time the development of factional structures throughout the Labor Party nationally has been dominated by similarly cataclysmic events such as federal intervention in state branches and major changes to national ALP rules.

The split produced an organised Left faction in the New South Wales branch, an inevitable response to the fact that the bulk of the forces which left the Labor Party in other states did not do so in New South Wales. The split also produced dominant anti-Grouper factions in Victoria and Queensland, although these groups were much more informal in their structures and activities. And, finally, the split helped to entrench even less formally organised dominant groupings within the ALP in smaller states such as South Australia, where key anti-Grouper forces like the Australian Workers Union became the focus of party organisation.

Federal intervention into the Victorian and New South Wales branches in 1970-71, and the introduction of proportional representation in internal party ballots, brought about a factional framework in Victoria which still prevails, and legitimised and entrenched existing groupings in New South Wales. Federal intervention into the Queensland branch ten years later produced a similar result: a loosely defined but tightly controlled dominant group, the Old Guard, was supplemented by several formally-structured factions. Changes to national ALP rules and the rightwing push to secure the leadership of the Labor Party for Bob Hawke led to the development of formal factions in smaller branches such as South Australia and Western Australia where artificial consensus politics and informal influence networks had previously prevailed.

Although the form of Labor factions is very much dictated by existing circumstances within the party, particularly party rules and structures, their substance inevitably reflects events and issues external to the party. In the 'fifties the ALP became a Cold War battlefront: factions emerged essentially as proxies for the National Civic Council/United States and the Communist Party/Soviet Union. The factional landscape within the ALP is still heavily influenced by Cold War dynamics, particularly among older factional operatives.
The other crucial external factor which has reshaped the internal topography of the ALP is the rapid decline of blue-collar workers as a percentage of the workforce, the continuing increase in white-collar and professional employment, and the growth of female participation in employment. This structural change in the economy has been the major factor behind the emergence of the Centre Left, complemented by the decline of the Cold War as a central factor influencing political choices in the labour movement. Other related changes in the economy - in particular improvements in transport and communications and education - have helped to make the factions more national in character and structure and a great deal more uniform from state to state.

ALP factions in 1990 have their own constitutions, full-time organisers, membership fees, policies and fund-raising activities. Trade unions affiliated with the ALP are usually also affiliated with one of the party's factions. Factions have leaders who even make occasional public statements on behalf of their groupings. Key ALP decisions such as parliamentary pre-selections and the selection of cabinet ministers are now conducted through negotiations.
between factional representatives, particularly at the national level and in the larger states. It is now almost impossible to play a key role in Labor affairs without being a member of or very closely linked to one of the three major factions.

The factional system has many advantages for the Labor Party. It maximises Labor’s ability to straddle an extremely diverse range of ideological tendencies and interests, and channel many disparate forces into a relatively united electoral and political effort. It ensures that the struggle for power and position within the party is governed by at least some forces of stability and certainty, and that it does not degenerate into total chaos or complete horse-trading founded on lowest common denominator factors. It provides a decision-making framework which ensures that crises in party affairs can be confronted in a relatively organised and sophisticated way, with some capacity to avoid open internal warfare and outright panic. Factions provide a framework within the Labor Party which allows internal conflict to be managed with some reference to the interests of the party, and with a degree of continuity of interest and ideology which imposes significant restraints upon the often atavistic tendencies of those involved in Labor politics.

Perhaps the most beneficial feature of highly organised factional structures within the ALP is that they provide ALP members, supporters and affiliated unions with a reasonable framework of ideological choice. Members voting in internal party ballots have a pretty reasonable idea of what a Socialist Left candidate stands for, even if they have never met or even heard of the candidate. The presence of factions based at least nominally on ideological and policy differences ensures that such differences predominate in internal party decision-making. The extent to which candidates are supported for their actual policies is far greater than under other regimes, such as patronage machines and influence networks which were the norm in the pre-fractional era. The presence of factions allows decision-making to be affected by tribal factors than by ideology. Union officials and activists adhere to the faction with which their union is affiliated. Ideology remains a powerful factor, but it is less important than organizational factors. ALP members who, like a very large proportion of the Australian community, are leftwing on some issues and rightwing on others, are obliged to modify their position on issues for reasons which have nothing to do with any intellectual appraisal or rethinking. If you’re antiuranium and anti-abortion, you’ve got a big problem fitting within the ALP as it exists at present.

Needless to say, however, the disadvantages of the present ALP factional system are quite numerous. Individuals seeking to exercise power and influence in Labor politics are virtually forced to join two parties instead of one, the one within the other, and reshape their views to fit in with the prevailing line within the faction they join. Individual ALP members who, like a very large proportion of the Australian community, are leftwing on some issues and rightwing on others, are obliged to modify their position on issues for reasons which have nothing to do with any intellectual appraisal or rethinking. If you’re antiuranium and anti-abortion, you’ve got a big problem fitting within the ALP as it exists at present.

Labor factions also function to exclude ordinary party members from genuine access to decision-making processes within the party. There is growing anger among the rank and file of the Victorian ALP at the recent prevalence of factional deals on state and federal pre-selections which ensure that the wishes of non-factional party members are irrelevant. If the factions have 60% of branch member support in a particular electorate and a deal is done which directs that support to a particular candidate, the remaining 40% get no say whatsoever.

In effect, factions operate to import further levels of decision-making into a party whose decision-making structures are already far too collegiate. Pre-selection candidates have to seek and obtain support at local and central party level on two planes rather than one: the faction and the party as a whole. In one notorious instance, a candidate who secured nine primary votes in a local faction ballot became the endorsed ALP candidate for one of the safest federal seats in Australia because of the combined collegiate effect of the intertwining factional and party pre-selection structures. Preference distributions in the local faction ballot gave him a narrow victory at that level; the central executive of the faction was bound by broader political circumstances to support the local decision; and the faction had the numbers on the party pre-selection panel. Regardless of the merits of the candidate, a political structure which functions in this way can hardly be described as open and democratic. The more steps in a collegiate decision-making process, the more undemocratic it becomes as prospective candidates or positions are eliminated at each level and lose the opportunity even to be in the race in the ultimate decision-making process.

Many of the supposed advantages of the factional system are more nominal than real, or counter-balanced by mirror-image disadvantages. Factions may tend to displace the patronage dispenser and apolitical power broker at the central party level: in practice this displacement moves them no further than the central factional level. ALP factions are really not much more than federations of local and trade union empires controlled by warlords of greatly varying ideology, capacity and commitment to goals broader than self-advancement.

Because of the manner in which these groups interact with each other, the paralysing impact of lowest common denominator politics is difficult to avoid. The ever-present need of ongoing group interest makes it extremely difficult for dominant forces within factions to make hard decisions in the interests of their faction, much less the party, because of the fear of future retribution within their faction. Policies which should be changed are not; parliamentary candidates are not realistic in the interests of their faction, much less the party, because of the fear of future retribution within their faction. Policies which should be changed are not and are sustained by the comfort of voting for the safe seat. The claim that ALP factions represent genuine ideological differences is also open to dispute. The recruitment of an individual to an ALP faction is usually influenced more by tribal factors than by ideology. Union officials and activists adhere to the faction with which their union is affiliated for reasons of self-interest and tribal culture. ALP members join factions often because of geographical factors: they naturally gravitate to the dominant grouping in their local area. Inevitably, many party members decide to join the faction which offers them the greatest prospects of self-advancement. Ideology remains a powerful factor, but it tends to operate largely in a negative way: a conservative
party member will join Labor Unity because he or she is anti-Left, and vice versa. All factions have an ideological culture and, to some extent, represent a particular ideological position within the party, but this is corrupted enormously by the exigencies of power politics, patronage and feudal empire-building.

The fact that factions are parties within a party, and not separate parties, inevitably increases the power of key figures at the expense of the faction's rank and file. Because a faction does not operate as an independent political entity, its activities are dominated by its relationships with other factions. Because these relationships are conducted primarily through a small group of leading figures, the access to information and broader influence which those figures acquire through those relationships makes them even more dominant within their own groupings. Occasionally the leaderships of various factions combine to make decisions in their own interests which they then have to go and 'sell' to their respective memberships. The cross-factional decision to abandon Labor's long-standing policy of abolishing the Victorian Legislative Council taken several years ago was a classic example of this tendency.

It is very clear that the existing factional framework within the ALP is going to change considerably over the next decade. The days of the Cold War proxies have gone, and the forces in the labour movement which channelled Cold War stances into Labor factions via trade unions - the National Civic Council and the various communist parties - are dying. The international ideological battle between socialism and capitalism continues, but it is no longer a matter of stark choice as it was in the 'fifties. Both ideologies have fragmented to such an extent that the boundaries between them have dissolved into a shifting array of overlapping and conflicting distinctions. Both ideologies are struggling to come to grips with the fundamental changes flowing from the rise of feminism, environmental politics and participatory democracy in western political cultures. The fact that a key figure in the ALP Right, Senator Graham Richardson, has taken the lead within the ALP on environmental issues illustrates the fact that the newly developing central factors in progressive politics in Australia are generating divisions which cut across existing factional boundaries. Both Left and Right within the Labor Party no longer have a coherent world view or clear vision as they have been caught up in the ideological crisis of social democratic forces throughout the industrialised world.

The Thatcherite challenge to the postwar compromise between socialism and capitalism, the emergence of powerful political forces based on gender and environment, the worldwide challenge to leninist and stalinist political structures are all beginning to reshape totally the political landscape. The factors which have determined the makeup of existing Labor factions (the Cold War) and the way they operate (rigid and obscure collegiate structures heavily permeated with leninist culture) are rapidly declining in importance. Divisions within existing Labor factions are becoming as significant as divisions between factions. The harsh left-right division within the trade union movement of twenty years ago has disintegrated and been replaced with a galaxy of inter-related groupings, overlapping allegiances and broader alliances. This change will be further accelerated by union amalgamations, and will flow through inexorably into the ALP's factional structure.

If the Labor Party is to survive as the dominant political force on the left of the spectrum in Australia it must alter dramatically its own structures and political culture: such necessities will automatically impact on Labor factions as the primary component parts of the party. The ALP will be forced to democratise internally by abandoning all collegiate voting structures and allowing party members a vote in elections for all party positions including parliamentary leadership positions.

It will be forced to take action to ensure that women are equally represented with men in all key party positions, and that other traditionally under-represented groups such as young people and those of non-English speaking backgrounds are fairly represented at all levels. It will be forced to abandon its horse-and-buggy rules and obscure and complicated structures which enable participation and influence only for the especially powerful, articulate and aggressive. It will be forced to develop a culture of grass-roots politics, of tolerance towards other political forces, and of constructive interaction between diverse individuals and groups. The ALP will even be forced to reassess the longstanding holy writ of binding caucus decisions, probably the most powerful structural dynamic at all levels of the party and its factions. It may even have to reconsider the structure of trade union affiliation to the party.

If these changes do not happen, the Labor Party will simply wither and die, to be supplanted on the spectrum by other forces which more adequately reflect the needs and aspirations of ordinary Australians in the 'nineties. The ALP, its rules and structures, and the factions which dominate its affairs still reflect the Australian society and culture of the 'sixties. If the party and its factions fail to adapt to the mass political culture of the 'nineties very quickly, the Labor Party will move into a phase of inexorable and possibly ultimately terminal decline.

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The Japan debate in Australia has become a national obsession. Policy-makers see Japan as a model. Others see it as a threat. Yoshio Sugimoto argues that neither camp is looking at the real Japan.

The Australian public appears to be increasingly embroiled in what may be called the Japanisation debate. In the area of management, Australian employers and managers are debating the possible adaptability of the Japanese model to the Australian context. In recent years the Australian educational system has introduced more competition and regimentation, which Education Minister Dawkins and other education reformers claim as the essential ingredients to ameliorate the level of Australian technology in the way the Japanese have.

When Paul Keating attributes rising housing costs to the Australian reluctance to adapt to high density housing, his comparison is with the Japanese model where the concentrated style of living is supposed to contribute to the efficiency of the economic system. The Australian tourism industry has increasingly promoted the Japanese pattern of leisure and recreational activities which are commercially organised in separation from everyday family life.

The 'learn-from-Japan' trend is also evident overseas. In the United States, Harvard sociologist Ezra Vogel published a best-selling volume entitled Japan as Number One: Lessons for America. Other English best-sellers include such titles as Zen and Creative Management, The Art of Japanese Management and MITI and the Japanese Miracle. In Singapore, the government has enthusiastically introduced the Japanese-style police box system and enterprise unionism. In Malaysia, the 'Look East' program is a national policy.

On the Japanese side, a sense of euphoria pervades the nation as a result of its economic success, technological development and improved status in the international hierarchy. It is now fashionable among young Japanese social scientists to define Japan as a postmodern society trailblazing ahead of most Western societies. The concept of postmodern society has not been coherently defined, and there is little agreement as to its ingredients. In comparison with the established theories on transformation from the pre-modern period to the modern stage, conjectures on the arrival of the postmodern phase are in a state of flux. To begin with, the postmodernism debate was not a Japanese invention but another cerebral commodity imported to Japan from the Western intellectual community.
The Western polemic has been associated with such names as Bataille, Baudrillard, Castoriadis, Deleuze, Derrida, Guattari, Heller, Lacan and Lyotard; but, as an imported argument, the Japanese version has a peculiarly Japanese slant. Emphasis is most conspicuous on three aspects in the Japanese context: the information revolution, consumerism and the blurring of boundaries among social groups.

One version emphasises the advent of the 'information revolution'; a sudden mutation of the system where the transfer of information has replaced the transfer of manufactured goods as the defining feature of Japanese society. Kogawa Tetsuo, a leading media critic in Japan, argues that contemporary Japan is shifting from monetary capitalism to information capitalism. The Japanese are now supposed to live in the most advanced information environment dominated by such electronic devices as car telephones, vending machines for food and tickets, satellite and cable television networks, compact disk stereos, fax machines and word processors. With Japanese electronics companies dominating both international and domestic markets, Japanese lifestyles are increasingly automated, their social relations are influenced by electronic media and their mass culture presents itself through the medium of electronic devices.

There is much evidence to suggest that the information revolution has indeed taken place; and high-tech manufacturing and the knowledge-intensive industry have come to occupy the central position in the Japanese workforce. Research has predicted that employees working in communication, entertainment, publication, education, medicine and other information industries will constitute a quarter to a third of Japan's total labour force around the turn of the century. Therefore it appears reasonable to
conceptualise a new industrial classification - the quaternary industry - specialising in the transfer of information and knowledge, which will branch off from the conventional tertiary industry (such as retail, wholesale, real estate and transport) specialising in the transfer of manufactured goods.

Another version of the postmodern view of Japan stresses a fundamental change of economic motives from production orientation to consumerism. Sociologist Takatoshi Imada, for example, maintains that what drives the postmodernist Japanese is not the ‘deprivation motive’ with which people work to free themselves from economic hardship, but rather the ‘differentiation motive’ which prompts them to purchase luxury goods and services that would give them a sense of being different and distinguished from other people. In this sense, Japan has allegedly gone beyond the most advanced state of Western-style development, such as David Riesman’s “other-directed” type society and Walt Rostow’s “high consumer society”, in which consumer conformism has dominated. In postmodern Japan, it is argued, consumer preference is diversified, and the distribution market is ‘segmentalised’ in such a way that a wide range of individual consumer choices can be met. Thus, the argument goes, Japan’s commercial market cannot ignore and, in fact, must calculate carefully, spenders’ specific predilections for high-brand commodities, lavish services and extravagant entertainment. Consumer conformity in modern Japan has been transformed into consumer diversity in postmodern Japan.

The third version accentuates the disappearance of confrontations of a dichotomous nature. The two sharply divided camps of confrontation between the Right and the Left, capitalism and socialism, and conservatives and progressives have disappeared in favour of the hybrid of finely fragmented groups with changing orientations and memberships. According to the research institute of a leading advertising agency, Hakuhodo, even the conventional dichotomies between the private and the public, the centre and the periphery, the old and the young, the professionals and the amateurs, males and females, and the normal and the abnormal are all disappearing; and Japan is observing what they call the “non-boundary phenomena” of an unprecedented scale. In this environment, as one of the leading postmodernists, Akira Asada, argues “play”, “game” and “style” take the place of the “meta-narratives” of the modern times, the requirements to pursue true knowledge for the progress of society, to work and succeed in the corporate world, or to organise a revolutionary movement to fight against the injustice of the existing order. With these imperatives failing to be the concern of the postmodern generation, dichotomous conflicts are supposed to disappear from postmodern Japan. The proponents of postmodernist theories in Japan list some guideposts to postmodern society which include a wide spectrum of symbols: playfulness, gaming, escape, tentativeness, anarchy and schizophrenic differentiation - in contradistinction from rigidity, calculation, loyalty, fixity, hierarchy and paranoid integration of modern society. How plausible is this as a depiction of trends in Japanese society? One useful guide is to make a quick survey of five key institutional areas of Japanese society: orientation to work, education, philosophy, family structure and status of minority groups.

First of all, in the sphere of work, a transition from modern society to postmodern society is supposed to be accompanied by a fundamental change from the production-oriented work ethic to the quality-of-life orientation which does not define employment work as the primary life-purpose of human existence. It is difficult to regard Japan as postmodern in this regard. The number of total working hours per annum, which is the crucial index of the work ethic, is much higher in Japan than in most Western societies. The Japanese level is about 2,100 hours in comparison with 1,950 for the United States, 1,650 or less for West Germany, France and Australia. According to the survey conducted by the Ministry of Labour at the end of 1987, employees enjoying the privilege of working five days a week constitute only 28.5% of the total labour force, and only 7.3% of all firms conforms to this practice. Although Japanese workers are entitled to paid annual leave of twenty days, they have only about eight days off on the average, using less than half of their entitlement. Overtime per worker has increased by about 50% from 127 hours per annum in 1975 to 188 hours in 1988. Workers now tend to build overtime payments into their household budgets to cover housing mortgage and education costs and thereby compel themselves to work beyond normal working hours. According to the study conducted in 1988 by Sohyo, the Japan Federation of Labour Unions, two out of five employees engage in the so-called ‘service overtime’ without receiving overtime allowances. In recent years, a term karoshi which literally means excessive work deaths, has been coined and gained currency because of the increasing number of employees who have fallen victim to Japanese work practices. Overall, there is little indication at present that Japanese workers are freed from the modernist work ethic and are assuming the postmodernist quality-of-life orientation. Again, in education the postmodernist style of learning assumes permissive choice-oriented guidance as distinguished from stern authoritarian training which characterises modernist education. Yet, the Japanese educational system displays an exactly opposite trend. The widespread practice of
corporal punishment in schools provides an example. While it is prohibited by law, a large number of teachers resort to physical violence to control pupils, occasionally inflicting serious injuries. Teachers can get away with exercising such illegal acts of violence because a large section of parents appear to support this style of disciplinary action. The national survey on human rights conducted by the Prime Minister's Office in 1988 revealed that 32% of respondents regarded it as an acceptable practice. Another area of national controversy is the extensive application of detailed school regulations to pupils. These rules include a range of trivial restrictions as to the length and colour of hair, the mode of dress as well as the the size and type of school bags and shoes. In opposition to the postmodernist paradigm, Japanese education today is characterised by stringency, rigidity and regimentation.

The third area of metamorphosis from modern to postmodern society supposedly consists of the collapse of the ideal of nuclear family structure. Cohabitation without formal marriage, single mothers and fathers, and the increased divorce rate all form the landscape of postmodern lifestyles. In this respect, too, the Japanese pattern shows little sign of rapid transformation. The family registration system as well as the resident registration card system have served as powerful deterrents to the diversification of family structure, because papers associated with these systems are required on such crucial occasions as school enrolments and job applications.

Those women who wish to retain their own surname after marriage encounter much legal difficulty as well as community opposition. While abortion is legal, the use of the contraceptive pill is prohibited by law. Marriage ceremonies and functions have increased enormously and, according to the survey of the Sanwa Bank in 1986, the total costs associated with marriage service and honeymooning are on the average more than $A70,000, to which parents contribute about 40%. The divorce rate has increased a little, but remains low in comparison with most Western societies. The conventional values associated with the modern nuclear family system seem to be alive and thriving in Japan today. A cross-national comparative study conducted by an American research institute, the Population Crisis Commission, to measure the status of women in 99 countries in terms of five variables (health, marriage and children, education, employment and social equality) found that Japan ranked 34th, lowest among industrialised countries, and on a par with Cuba and Argentina.

Finally, minority rights should figure predominantly in the projected postmodern social structure in which multiculturalism, equal opportunity and affirmative action make up the legitimate vocabulary of society. Here again, Japanese society appears to resist tendencies in this direction. The Alien Registration Law requires long-term foreign residents to be fingerprinted at the municipal office of their residence. They include 700,000 Koreans, an overwhelming majority of whom are second- and third-generation residents whose native language is Japanese. They are barred from holding teaching positions in government schools and assuming chairs and other posts of authority in public universities. The total number of Indochinese refugees who have settled in Japan amounts to only about 6,200. The notion of Japanese society being unique in its racial homogeneity and purity is firmly entrenched at the grassroots level, and it has often been used as a popular explanation of Japan's economic success. The occasional comments made by political leaders on the alleged racial superiority of the Japanese are hardly isolated cases.

The catalogue of these specific tendencies casts much doubt on the proposition that Japanese society qualifies as a postmodern society. To the extent that the features which characterise modern rather than postmodern society do dominate in Japan, it could probably better be described as neo-modern society. The popularity of postmodernist writings, then, is attributable precisely to the scarcity of postmodern features rather than their abundance and as such represents the aspirations rather than realities of contemporary Japan. Unless Japan undergoes quantum transformations in socio-cultural software as distinguished from techno-economic hardware, one can perhaps only speak of the coming of post-industrial society, but not of that of postmodern society.

Since postmodern orientations have emerged in reaction to modernity, some of them display the appearance of
sharing many pre-modern features which modern societies presumably left behind. The alleged dearth of individualistic self-orientations in Japan which are the hallmark of modernity gives the nation a facade of being non-modern and therefore somehow postmodern. Some of the Western postmodernists who believe that Western societies have lost humane, mystical, collectivist culture in the process of industrialisation and modernisation find in Japan exotic attraction and enchantment influenced by this facade. Thus, they frequently muddle their postmodern aspirations with pre-modern Japan’s zen, tea ceremonies, flower arrangements, noh and kabuki. Similarly, some postmodern ecologists and animal liberationists in the West flirt with the supposed Oriental tradition of living in harmony with nature. It may well be the case, as Ronald Dore’s 1988 work *Taking Japan Seriously* implies, that postmodernisation does not necessarily require a modern society having been firmly established, and a society may well be able to move from a pre-modern phase to a postmodern stage. Nevertheless, one has to look seriously at Nozamu Kawamura’s observation on this point when he likens Japan to a long-distance runner in an athletic stadium, racing ahead of a group of others as an apparent winner but who is, in fact, one lap behind.

In short, advocates of the Japanese model in Australia should examine carefully not only the economic benefits but also the social costs which are associated with it. When Australians adopt the Japanese model, they must caution themselves against its possible consequences because while it may lead to the improvement of production and consumption measured in monetary terms, it may not necessarily raise the standard of living measured in terms of the quality of life, and could worsen it. The postmodernism debate raises a much broader question about Western analyses of Japan, the degree to which the structural arrangements of non-Western capitalism are transferable to Western societies, and the extent to which the Western models of advanced capitalism apply to rapidly expanding capitalist systems of Asia. Three observations are in order.

Firstly, in the current climate of ambivalence of Western nations toward Japan, analysts are often tempted to fall into either a Japan-admiring camp or a Japan-bashing camp, and to portray Japanese society in simplistic black-and-white terms. Yet, insomuch as Japan is a multifaceted, complex society, one would perhaps have to start with a kind of ‘trade-off’ model which focusses upon the ways in which both desirable and undesirable elements are interlinked. To the extent that Japanese society is an integrated system, its observers would be required to examine the processes in which one set of parts relies on many others to enable the total configuration of Japanese society to function. Pattern A may be an outcome of Pattern B, which may in turn be a consequence of Pattern C. From this perspective, every institutional sphere contains Janus-faced arrangements.

In work, for example, the permanent employment system is regarded as a scheme which provides job stability, company loyalty and job commitment. In exchange, however, most workers in this category find it difficult to disobey company orders which, at times, impose serious sacrifices on them. When asked to transfer to a firm or a branch office distant from their location of residence, one out of four married employees is estimated to have little choice but to live away from their own families as the so-called company bachelors. In community life, low crime rates in cities are closely related to the costs of criminal activities: harsh prison conditions, merciless methods used to force suspects to confess and the penetration of police into private lives of citizens. In exchange for the close surveillance of shopping and entertainment areas, yakuzza, Japanese mafia groups, subject shops and stores to their control in the name of ensuring the safety and security of the areas.

With these dimensions of trade-off crisscrossing in the Japanese social system, a simplistic argument about importing a particular element of that system into Australia or any other country requires careful analysis; as long as that element is dependent on the operation of other elements, transplantation would be ineffective unless a total package is imported, and the learn-from-Japan campaigners should be aware that good things would come with bad things in this process, and vice versa.

Secondly, there is every indication that the Japanese pattern of development may represent the prototype of social formation of rapidly developing capitalism in Asia, particularly that in South Korea and Taiwan and to some extent in Singapore and Malaysia. These societies appear to share several attributes: a high degree of centralisation of power, virtual one-party control of governments over decades, power of public bureaucracy to intervene into the activities of the private sector, widespread violations of individual human rights, enterprise unionism as a means to regulate labour, discipline-oriented regimented education, and so forth. These properties, once finely tuned and blended, have conceivably contributed to the swift advancement of Asian capitalism. While debate over ‘Confucian capitalism’ has borne little fruit because of its obsession with cultural variables, it would perhaps prove useful to examine the patterns of sharp authority relations which newly emerging industrial economies of Asia maintain in common. Following the Japanese archetype, these economies appear to be attaining measurable levels of industrialism and even post-industrialism without firmly establishing social arrangements and value orientations of modern society, not to mention postmodern society.

Thirdly, the Japan phenomena pose a wide range of questions about the ethnocentric nature of Western analysis. Specifically, the theories of bureaucracy as developed in the Western sociological tradition are highly ‘culture-bound’. Large bureaucratic corporations in Japan tend to give priority to such paternalistic arrangements as company housing, company leisure facilities and company excursions. At the level of personal interaction, an elaborate system of arrangements also operates to enable superiors to put subordinates off their guard. In corporations, supervisors spend an enormous amount of time paying personal attention to employees under their charge beyond the call of job specifications. They entertain subordinates in pubs, bars, restaurants and clubs after working.
hours, serve as a formal go-between in their wedding ceremonies, listen to the personal problems of their families and even attend the funerals of their grandparents. None of these activities are formally required, yet managers in Japanese firms could not retain their position without them; the expectation is that their subordinates are, in return, willing to spend their time for work and to commit themselves to it beyond the call of their job specifications. This inordinate exchange of expressive resources between superiors and subordinates characterises Japan's bureaucratic organisations. National time-series surveys have consistently shown that “a supervisor who is overly demanding at work but is willing to listen to personal problems and is concerned with the welfare of workers” is preferred to “one who is not so strict on the job but leaves the worker alone and does not involve himself with their personal matters”.

These qualities of Japanese bureaucratic organisation contradict the key thesis of the Western theories of bureaucracy that its most efficient mode is a legal-rational one. From Max Weber to Robert Merton, sociologists of modern bureaucratic organisations have long argued that its operation must be governed by universalistic law and formal criteria, and must transcend interactions and subjective factors. This is one of the reasons why nepotism is regarded as dysfunctional to formal organisation in the Western model of bureaucracy. The Japanese model, however, points to the possibility that the legal-rational approach may not be the only avenue to achieve bureaucratic efficiency; the exact opposite, which the Japanese pattern represents, may be another possible path.

To address the problem of possible bias built into theories of modernisation and modernity, three solutions seem to be possible. The first is a Eurocentric solution that is based on the so-called convergence theory. According to this position, all industrial societies become increasingly akin to each other in structural arrangements and value orientations which are observed in Euro-American societies. In showing patterns incompatible with these societies, Japan is simply lagging behind in institutional and orientational areas despite her indisputable technological advance and will catch up over time. This position shares the Orientalist assumption of which Edward Said and others have accused Western social science scholarship.

The second possible solution is a Japanocentric approach. Dore’s reverse convergence thesis presents the most sophisticated formulation of this position. According to his argument, industrialised societies are converging on a set of patterns observed not only in Euro-American societies but also in Japan. On the one hand, this approach has some healthy theoretical implications. Most sociological concepts are assumed to be culturally universal but it can be argued that they were initially culturally-specific concepts of Euro-American societies which became culturally universal because of the cultural hegemony of Western nations. In this sense, one should not lose sight of the extent to which much Western theory contains elements of cultural imperialism.

On the one hand, this position leaves room for Japan’s cultural imperialism in the name of cultural relativism. Explanations emphasising the allegedly unique aspects of Japanese society have been used as a convenient negotiating tactic by Japanese in their dealings with people overseas. The Japanese are made to appear inscrutable, since decisions seem to be made by some distinctive process which foreigners cannot understand. Some Japanese negotiators suggest that it is contrary to the commonly accepted doctrine of ‘cultural relativism’ to expect the Japanese to behave in a way predictable to the foreigner. Such views of Japanese society create a mystique behind which it is easy to parry the approaches of foreign negotiators.

The third solution is to postulate a multi-linear model of social change. According to this formulation, the Euro-American type is simply one of many modes of modernisation. The Japanese model appears to represent another type into which a good number of late-comers to industrialisation may fall. This is not to belittle the economic, financial and technological challenges to the advanced Western economies from the Japanese model. But it might help to remove some of the simplistic assumptions and the Japanese ‘mystique’ which currently lurk behind the polarised positions in the current “Japan debate”.

YOSHIO SUGIMOTO is Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Latrobe University.
Since ALR published Peter Groenewegen's article in April, the consumption tax debate has exploded. And passions are running high. Here are four responses to that article, and the debate.

Peter Groenewegen's article (ALR 116, April) is a welcome addition to the debate which has recently resurfaced on the introduction of a broad based consumption tax (BBCT) in Australia. It signifies that the Left is moving away from the perception of the consumption tax as an issue on which we will "go to the wall".

That is not to say that the victory achieved at the Tax Summit in 1985 should be ignored. The Left and the trade union movement as a whole (including the ACTU) was, and remains, correct in their rejection of the proposal to replace progressive income taxes with a BBCT. In this respect, it is useful to recall that Peter Groenewegen's proposal is broadly similar to that proposed by a significant section of the trade union movement in 1989.

The Australian Public Service Federation (APSF), the national body of the state public service unions, commissioned the HV Evatt Research Centre to undertake the first ever comparative study of the six state public services. The result of that study (State of Siege: Renewal or Privatisation for the Australian State Public Services?), canvassed the idea of a State Goods and Services Levy, basically a BBCT.

The State Goods and Services Levy (SGSL) would be used to replace a plethora of state taxes, and the federal wholesale sales tax. It was proposed as a means of ensuring the continued financial viability of the state in an era of a continuing need for services the states already provide, and emerging new demands for state services. The recent experience of each of the states over the last few months - as stamp duty revenue has been significantly below projections due to the collapse of the property market - shows how urgent is the need for the states to develop a secure revenue source. Continued reliance on stamp duties on property transfers would be similar to a household which

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**Siege MENTALITY**

The text continues with more detailed responses and analysis related to the consumption tax debate.
Reliance on such a narrow taxation base has significant economic effects, which Groenewegen has outlined, and which do not need to be repeated here.

The SGSL proposal would replace certain state taxes with the SGSL which would be a BBCT. State of Siege canvassed in particular the replacement of the states' reliance on payroll tax.

It is important to explain why this tax was particularly targeted, given that payroll taxes are the most important contributor to states' own tax revenue (the largest contribution to states' total revenue remains federal grants). State of Siege pointed out that it is necessary to distinguish between the statutory incidence and the actual incidence of a tax.

The fact is that, while payroll taxes are statutorily levied on employers, the burden of the tax can be, in the last instance, shifted forward (to prices) or shifted backwards (to wage rates). Alternatively, it can create an incentive to replace labour with capital which does not incur the same tax liability.

The negative impacts of the SGSL were also recognised in State of Siege, and proposals for their minimisation were put forward. These proposals were also canvassed by Groenewegen's article. Basically, they fall into the category of transfer payments to low-income earners.

The inflationary impact of a BBCT has been the subject of much debate. It is important not to exaggerate this and to realise that what inflationary impact it may have would be one-off. The allocative advantages which would result easily outweigh the inflationary impact - particularly for the manufacturing sector.

But the APSF did not limit its proposals to the introduction of the SGSL. Additional proposals included the serious consideration of a wealth tax; the targeting of franchises from alcohol and tobacco sales to health expenditure; and urging all state premiers to work actively towards harmonisation of state taxes.

On this last point, it is significant that the Premier of New South Wales has already expressed the view, in the context of environmental policy, that the old conservative view of states' rights is passé. It may be possible for the Left to urge - at least - the Labor premiers to adopt the same attitude on state taxation.

The APSF took what can only be described as a far-sighted and courageous step in advocating the introduction of the SGSL. The problems that would arise from the introduction of such a tax have been recognised, but proposals have been put forward to minimise the equity disadvantages of such a tax.

But it is clear that all the issues involved could not be canvassed. That will require ongoing and open debate. Peter Groenewegen and ALR are to be congratulated for providing a forum for the Left to debate the issue rationally.

JOHN BUTTON

Suggested a consumption tax could eliminate a "tax bias" against manufacturing.

JOHN HEWSON

Set the ball rolling with his no-compensation consumption tax proposal, to "boost savings".

LACHLAN RICHES is national secretary of the Australian Public Service Federation.

STEPHEN RIX is an economist for the NSW Treasury, and was research co-ordinator for State of Siege, which was published by Pluto Press and the Evatt Foundation, 1989.
One of the Left's few major victories in the 1980s was the defeat of Paul Keating's proposal for a consumption tax. Now the proposal has been reactivated by corporate capital in conjunction with the Liberal Party and sundry other supporters. Even ALR has seen fit to run an article extolling the advantages of a consumption tax. Still, after giving space in the February issue to a reaction- ary polemic by PP McGuiness on "the death of communism", one should not be surprised at that. No doubt ALR justifies this policy in terms of contributing to public debate, but these views get a good airing in the mainstream media.

So the Left has to gird its loins to do battle against the consumption tax again. One is reminded of Marx's comment that we live history once as tragedy, but to live it twice is farce! Contrary to Peter Groenewegen's claim in his pro-consumption tax article, the situation has not changed fundamentally since the national Tax Summit of 1985. The main issue is still the same - how to finance a good range of government expenditures by a tax system which is geared to people's ability to pay.

The basic problem is still the same - tax minimisation by companies and the wealthy (now resurfacing in 'out-of-the-harbour' rather than 'bottom-of-the-harbour' schemes, as recently reported in the press) which throws an excessive burden of tax on low and middle income earners. The basic solution remains largely untried - to simplify and widen the definition of income for taxation purposes so as effectively to eliminate tax avoidance and ensure that the nominally progressive tax scales are actually progressive in practice.

Against all this, the alleged inadequacies of the system of indirect taxation pale into insignificance. Indeed, there has been reform of sales taxation since the Tax Summit, leading to some simplification of the scales. The intention has been to gear the rates of sales tax more closely to the price of a new house. The article claims that unification of the states would reduce that residual, so the overall effect is just as likely to be a reduction in savings.

These sorts of discriminations reflect an attempt, albeit imperfect, to tax more highly the sort of goods typically, but not invariably, purchased by upper income groups. What alternative does a consumption tax provide? It taxes the lot at a uniform rate. That is certainly one way of eliminating potential anomalies; but at the expense of the overall equity of the tax system. The poor pay more and the rich pay less. Dearer bread, cheaper BMWs.

So the blow has to be softened by "a comprehensive compensation package" comprising income-tax cuts for low income earners and improved social security benefits, plus a new wealth tax. But this is a sleight of hand, since those changes have no necessary link with the introduction of a consumption tax. If the income-tax and expenditure system can be reconstructed to help the poor, let's have those changes anyway. If a wealth tax would increase the equity of the tax system, and raise substantial revenue without massive offsetting costs of assessment and collection, let's have it anyway.

But why link these progressive proposals to a patently regressive consumption tax? More realistically, why give this sort of conditional support to a consumption tax when the conditions - particularly a wealth tax - are unlikely to materialise in practice? In fact, Groenewegen's article in ALR acknowledges most of the problems that a consumption tax raises. It would be inflationary, adding a possible 6-7% to the consumer price index in the year of introduction. It could fuel unemployment, particularly in the housing sector where it would add many thousands of dollars to the price of a new house. The article claims that unemployment need not occur, but the introduction of a consumption tax in current economic conditions, with the prospect of resurgent inflation and the possibility of a recession, would be a 'courageous act' (to use Sir Humphrey Appleby's famous phrase). Moreover, the claimed advantage of consumption tax as a stimulant to savings is, at best, a statement of faith. Proponents claim that a consumption tax would encourage savings since it effectively favours saving over consumption spending. However, savings for most people are a residual after they have met their consumption needs. A consumption tax would reduce that residual, so the overall effect is just as likely to be a reduction in savings.

Fundamentally, it seems that the case for a consumption tax rests on two themes - the desirability of a "non-distorting" tax system and a pessimism about the capacity to create an equitable tax structure. The former aspect rests squarely on the abstract formulations of neoclassical economics. As the ALR article puts it, the tax "creates less
distortion on the consumption decisions of individuals and households because it does not interfere with the relative prices of consumption goods”. However, such “distortions” pervade all aspects of the economy because of the effects of monopoly, imperfect information, trade barriers, regulations and “externalities”.

What does a “level playing field” for taxation mean when there are so many other bumps? Indeed, as every good mainstream economist knows, the theory of second best states that there is no reason to suppose that the removal of some but not all imperfections from the market will improve the society’s economic well-being. So we are left with the defeatist case that a consumption tax at least squeezes some revenue out of the wealthy, whereas other forms of taxation are seemingly incapable of doing so. This position seems more particularly to underlie the views of Russell Mathews ever since his observation that “the essential problem is not to nuke the rich pay high rates of tax or even to pay more tax: it is to make the rich pay any tax at all”.

Yes, it would also be nice to get some more taxes from the tourist dollar and from the services sector; but the main task remains that of enforcing a tax system based on ability to pay. The task is to correct the situation noted by Mathews, though subjecting income from whatever source to an effective and progressive tax system. That would also have the effect of simplifying the tax system and enhancing its legitimacy. The debate on consumption tax is a diversion from this political priority.

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PAUL KEATING
Claimed he’d already fixed the tax system, and that the tax would cost $2 billion.

Virtually all consumption tax (CT) proposals have been couched in terms of “revenue neutrality”: new revenues raised by CT are to be offset by other tax reductions, so that total tax revenues as a proportion of national income remain unchanged. This is not because the current tax share of national income is regarded as ideal but simply to separate the issue of desirable tax level from the issue of desirable tax structure. It is the latter which is really at issue with regard to CT. There appear to be two distinct proposals being floated in public debate, involving three different major rationales:

1. Apply a CT to reduce income tax and, in particular, marginal income tax rates. Rationale: reduce disincentive to the supply of saving and increase the proportion of national income which is saved (“the saving ratio”) - a so-called ‘supply-side’ argument.

2. Apply a CT to reduce income tax and, in particular, marginal income tax rates. Rationale: reduce disincentive to work and labour supply - another supply-side argument.

3. Apply a CT to reduce other indirect tax and rationalise the indirect tax system as a whole. I will come to the rationale for this in a moment because it is the proposal I regard as worthy of support.

Proposals 1 and 2 are obviously closely related, the distinction being that the first emphasises the potential for a change in the direct/indirect tax mix to increase the saving ratio and thereby reduce the current account deficit as a proportion of GDP.

I don’t wish to go into technical detail on this matter and
Poor

LOGIC

A part from acknowledging that a broad based consumption tax cannot fail to be generally regressive, most commentators, including Peter Groenewegen (ALR 116) pay little real attention to the effect that its introduction would have on those with the lowest incomes. Furthermore, no argument seems able to be put forward as to the positive advantages that such a tax would have for that group. This is surely a question which must be addressed by any commentator who pretends an interest in justice and equity as goals for reform in Australia’s economic and financial systems.

Most supporters of the tax also argue for some sort of compensation, either through the social security system or the income tax system, for those who will inevitably be disadvantaged by its introduction. Groenewegen also falls into this trap. Comments such as “Compensate those disadvantaged...as long as their situation actually warrants it” (p33) seem reasonable enough at first glance. However, they imply tight targeting of benefits. This has a number of problems.

Although cost effective, targeting also can exacerbate welfare dependency through ‘poverty traps’ which means that those just above the threshold for benefits are sometimes worse off than those receiving them. Targetting also leads to a much more complex and, for the user, more cumbersome social security system. If the ‘tidy government’ brigade, being among the main supporters of the tax, wish to argue for simplified financial systems, an admirable aim in itself, then they must also argue for a simplified social security system.
The current tax system is very simple for the poor. It is only the rich who find it complex and, indeed, who work hard to add to its complexities. Social security recipients are much less likely to be in a position to be able to negotiate difficult government systems than taxpayers. Their livelihood literally depends on them being able to find out what benefits they are entitled to, and to jump through all the hoops on the way to claiming. This is no mean feat as those who have dealt with the income support scheme well know. One has to ask why all the targetting and fine tuning should happen at the social security end of the system with its consequent disadvantages for welfare beneficiaries, rather than at the tax end. Tighter targetting creates an even more readily identifiable and stigmatised class of welfare recipients.

Rises in the CPI will push more people over the line beyond which they cannot manage on their incomes which, together with the increased costs of managing a more complex system provides a bigger and better target for those who want to hit out at welfare spending and welfare recipients. Women in particular will be disadvantaged. Not only do they form a large proportion of beneficiaries and low income earners but, as the family shoppers, they will be forced to make the family pay packet go further - breadwinners will not necessarily hand over significantly more because they are getting a few dollars more per week in income tax savings.

Much of the failure to address the real effects of a consumption tax on the poor comes from a failure to understand a central issue in the lives of poor people - their lack of choice. Comments such as the following hint at this failure. “The claim to fairness on the part of a broad based consumption tax has been much misunderstood. It needs to be understood that sales taxes of the type currently used in Australia fail to treat people with similar incomes equally because of differences in their consumption patterns.”

(AlR 116, p32.)

This statement is no doubt true. However, it begs the question of whether people on low incomes really have a great deal of choice in relation to their consumption patterns - that particular lack of fairness only affects those who have enough surplus once the basics have been taken care of to make any choice as to how disposable income will be spent.

The tax has appealed to certain sections of the Left on the basis that there would be more dollars for the “welfare basket”. It would require a hefty consumption tax, say 20%, to cover the promised abolition of the current taxes which would disappear in the ‘tidy up’ accompanying its introduction and allow even a very small income tax reduction. It is also acknowledged that dry government would only introduce a consumption tax if it could be sold to the electorate on the basis that it would not raise the level of tax (and therefore of revenue) overall.

As argued above, there is no point in a bigger welfare basket if the introduction of the tax also creates a greater need. One of the main arguments is that evasion will be harder or impossible by those who should pay. The success of the fringe benefits tax and capital gains tax (minimal though the rate is) in raising revenue has shown that there are ways of collecting from the rich.

Most supporters of the tax now acknowledge that it will have minimum effect in achieving one of the main aims - that the introduction of the tax will be revenue neutral. It would therefore create no need for compensation but would be an unlikely measure for any government because it would bring no tangible benefits. As an incentive to savings he describes another option - an “expenditure tax” which simply gives people an income tax deduction for the increase in their savings via designated savings vehicles. However, any tax based on deductions and savings involves a regressive shift. Not only do the poor have less, if any, capacity to save, the value of deductions is less to them. Deductions are also notoriously prone to loopholes.

The foregoing answer to Peter Groenewegen will no doubt be criticised on the basis that it offers no positive alternatives to the consumption tax. It must be acknowledged that the debate requires more lateral thinking about alternative ways of redressing the inequities in the current system and raising more revenue from those who can afford to pay. At the same time, those who propose a consumption tax need to provide some better arguments as to precisely how the lowest income earners will benefit before the welfare sector should support it.

ROBIN GURR is president of the NSW Council of Social Service.
The POST-FORD Pill

In our last issue Barry Hindess took issue with John Mathews' blueprint for a democratic post-Fordist future. Democracy, he argued, was not enough. Here, John Mathews responds with a vision for the Left after the death of Communism.

A hundred years into the socialist project, it is time to take stock of what has been achieved, and what can be done in the future. We live in exciting times. We have seen the collapse of the hated regimes in Eastern Europe, which called themselves socialist but in reality blocked any possible advance, in Europe or elsewhere, towards worthwhile social emancipation. Questions of the most fundamental character now have to be asked in these countries: who is to own their productive apparatus, and develop new industries? What kind of social security or welfare system is to be constructed? How can markets be introduced without fuelling an inflation of currency, hopes or fears? What is the role of political parties and trade unions?

Meanwhile, things are stirring in the Third World and in the newly industrialised countries. The horrendous military dictatorships of Latin America have been overthrown, at huge personal sacrifice by thousands of dedicated militants, and murderous regimes toppled in the Philippines, South Korea and elsewhere. Even in South Africa it seems that apartheid is finally being dismantled.

An event of a different character has also signalled the end of an era. On June 4 last year, in Beijing, the Chinese Communist Party showed that it had exhausted its progressive role in China, and was now an obstacle to further advance. The communist parties of Eastern Europe are seen in a similar light. The turn of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is coming. This brings down the curtain on a hundred and fifty years of political development from the 1848 revolutions in Europe, and the issuing of the Communist Manifesto, through the Russian Revolution and the models it inspired.

In the West we have had one hundred years of openly organised socialist political parties. The model they pursued, when elected to power, was a surrogate of social ownership of the means of production through state ownership. This, too, as a model has run its course. When Gorbachev calls for the rapid introduction of capitalism into the Soviet Union to forestall social collapse and chaos we are shocked, but we know he is right. Events are moving so fast they are outrunning our capacity to anticipate them. And it has always been the boast of the Left
that what differentiated it from the Right was its capacity to anticipate the future. Now we are not so sure.

The debate about the future of the Left, of social democracy and of democracy itself needs to be set in this context. Barry Hindess, in his comments in last month's ALR on my model of "associative democracy", avoids any mention of these stirring events. He asks, provocatively, what's so good about democracy. Let me try to provide him with an answer.

There is a long preamble to Hindess' question. He has done the Left great service in the past by unmasking the delusions of socialism, insisting that socialists had to come to terms with parliamentary democracy and markets and the other institutions of modern societies. We had to come to terms, in other words, with social and political reality. This lesson has been learnt, and the Left (particularly, I would argue, in Australia) has fashioned highly effective strategies for intervening in and setting the agenda of public debate, within the constraints of what is seen to be realistic and achievable. Hindess has now taken to reflecting on more fundamental issues.

In a paper delivered to a conference in London last year he set forth what he called the "imaginary presuppositions of democracy". This time the 'fantasy' that is the object of his attention is that of citizen participation in a self-governing community. Considered as communities of citizens, he argued, they cannot be self-governing (because of external events and agencies impinging on them); considered as communities approximating to self-government, they cannot be seen as communities of citizens (because they depend on a variety of voluntary organisations such as political parties and pressure groups that cannot be equated with citizens). Hindess has linked these concerns back to socialism by pointing out firstly that there is no single principle or model allowing us to classify communities as being more or less democratic; secondly, democracy is an impossible dream if it is equated with the notion of a self-governing community of citizens; thirdly, socialism is equally unrealisable because of the contradiction that must exist between the goals of controlling the economic agenda and defending the autonomy of citizens; finally, internationalisation has consigned the idea of local self-governing communities to the historical dustbin.

Hindess has provided some trace of these arguments in the conclusion to his ALR piece last month. In most elliptical fashion, he put the view that the notion of democracy "is not without ambiguity", and specified several grounds for doubting its contribution to a resolution of current concerns. In particular, he noted that it is confined to a national dimension, and hence cannot come to terms with international issues; that it fails to get to grips with gender relations and the "constitution of human beings as gendered subjects"; and that it cannot effectively address forms of "social regulation" that involve spheres such as "law, medicine and psychiatry".

Now Hindess brings these charges against democracy "as traditionally conceived". If by this he means democracy conceived merely as an electoral process involving a designated community of voters once every so
often selecting representatives who then deal with issues on their behalf, then we have no problem in agreeing with him. But the vision of democracy I have advocated goes well beyond this. In Age of Democracy I have argued for an extension and enrichment of our notion of political democracy to encompass the democratisation of the organisations and institutions that Hindess himself points out have come to play an important role in Western societies.

I have argued that the Left should take the promises of democracy at face value, and argue for its extension into industry, the economy and communities, using as the vehicle for activity the collective 'associations' formed for the purpose by workers and citizens. This allows us to start where we are, with the associations that we already have (trade unions, firms, social movements, political parties); and it provides us with the vision of a functioning democracy that is not dependent for its regulation on the role of the state, but sees the broader civil society as the source of its innovation and social co-ordination. How does this expanded notion of democracy fare against Hindess' charges?

1. If ever there were a sphere where the social movements (which are the protagonists of democratic 'associations') have set the pace for social reform, it is in the global sphere in the face of global challenges. Organisations like Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and their local affiliates in scores of countries, including the ACF and Wilderness Society in Australia, have shown a capacity and a willingness to adopt a global posture, to form a global network, to engage in global mobilisation, while acting and intervening locally. So Hindess chose a very poor example if he was trying to demonstrate that "associative democracy" is bounded by the traditional borders of the nation state. On the contrary, these new forms of democratic expression positively favour and encourage the development of global awareness in a fashion which will become increasingly relevant and politically effective in the 1990s.

2. In the same way, one can make a case that gender relations have been transformed as a direct result of the organising activities of social movements, such as the women's movement and the gay movement, as well as by specific campaigns such as those directed to questions of abortion, rape, and child protection. In the case of AIDS, and its early toll of death in male homosexual communities, the social networks of support formed by gay activist organisations (the associations of "associative democracy") showed unprecedented social capacities of innovation and mutual support. The associative democracy framework has no problems with gender issues.

3. When Hindess talks of "forms of social regulation and surveillance involving law, medicine and psychiatry", he is no doubt alluding to the networks of control exercised by professionals that go beyond the formal constraints imposed by civil and criminal law that form part of the fabric of political democracy.

Foucault has shown successfully how pervasive these networks have become in transforming the exercise of power into a multitude of micro-environments dispersed throughout civil society. One might add to this list the constraints imposed on workers by trade unions and companies; the constraints imposed on social intercourse by the design of public technological infrastructure in the form of telecommunications, public transport, and public media; and so on. In all these cases bodies and professionals outside the direct control of parliament exercise considerable influence on the lives of ordinary citizens. Again, I have been concerned to address these issues directly with the notion of "associative democracy".

In the design of public technological systems, for example, I have argued that it is futile to expect a seventeenth century institution like parliament to have the technical capacity, even if it had the will, to regulate these developments in the public interest. Instead it is necessary to seek the expression of human and community values through associations of those directly concerned with these processes. In this case, the associations are the voices of workers and professionals. So again, associative democracy has something positive to offer on this score. My vision of a social democracy that can lead societies through the next hundred years is one in which people (citizens) associate around their immediate interests, such as professional or trade concerns, community interests and moral concerns, and intervene in the polity directly through these associations. I have described what such an "associative democratic polity" might look like, and how it might work, in Age of Democracy.

The role of a social democratic political party in such a vision is not diminished, for it retains a monopoly as the vehicle for representation of people committed to values of social solidarity, mutuality and co-operation, in public bodies and forums (not just parliaments at national and regional level, but also public authorities and, I argue, in public corporations as well, such as BHP). But it is not seen as the sole means of expression for these values; it complements their direct expression in associations organised around specific issues or interests.

For the past hundred years most socialists have conceived social progress in terms of re-extending the regulatory capacity of the state over more and more areas
of social and economic life. The end point of this falsely conceived notion was the nightmare totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe. My vision of associative democracy is concerned to curb this tendency, to re-emphasise the innovative capacities and powers of co-ordination that emanate from associations formed by citizens in the civil society. I claim that the major political trends of our time support such a view.

In this country, for example, we can point to a new sophistication on the part of trade unions in formulating a vision of the future of Australia as a productive nation, and in negotiating directly with employers to realise this vision. Such direct associative encounters have been encouraged by the framework of the Accord. Now we see this approach being extended (albeit slowly and hesitantly) in the form of accords over such issues as logging, negotiated directly by logging industry associations, forestry unions and conservation groups. The State (in this case, the federal government) is learning to play a facilitating role in these arrangements, rather than seeking to regulate the issues itself.

I do not seek to minimise the difficulties and obstacles to be overcome in any program inspired by a vision of associative democracy. Obstacles and difficulties will confront any program of social transformation - or any program of conservatism that seeks to restrain irresponsible development instigated by private interests. It is most puzzling that Hindess foresees future social conflict in the paradigm of associative democracy, and argues that this detracts from its potential as a social order. I embrace the notion of social conflict, and see it as fundamental in any pluralist society. Conflict is absent only in a totally repressive or totalitarian social order. I seek to harness the energy and creative aspects of conflict through direct negotiations between associations. The outcome of such negotiations can't be determined in advance.

Worse, Hindess appears to assume that any expression of social interests will have to be orchestrated through a "democratically elected government". This is what he counterposes to the continued existence of "private business corporations". This is a very old and tired opposition. I have tried to move beyond it by posing a role for citizens and workers to participate actively in the expression of social values through their associations. Democratised business entities will be one such avenue. Government will not be the sole means for expression of social values or of the public interest. In an associative democracy, the 'public interest' will be expressed through a multitude of associations. Indeed, it could be defined as that 'entity' around which associations form in the first place.

I am not concerned, as Hindess believes, to 'defend' the state against the exercise of such power. On the contrary, I am concerned to protect the exercise of power on the part of associations by reducing the role of the state. And my vision of democracy is one where the state exercises its surveillance to ensure that associations function democratically according to principles of natural justice without becoming fiefdoms or unaccountable entities. Struggles waged over the past 80 years in Australia to keep trade unions honest, open and accountable, frequently through recourse to the courts, should leave no one with any illusions that associations will keep themselves democratic automatically.

Hindess argues that the link between my discussion of associative democracy, and discussion of trends and potentials in the world of production of goods and services, is problematic. He claims that there is a contradiction between advocating a 'non-substantive' democratic framework, and a desired future for industry in the form of post-Fordism. Let's investigate this.

My vision of associative democracy was developed as a means of accommodating, at the political level, the innovative kinds of strategies I saw being pursued by unions and social movements at the level of production. The old political frameworks of classical liberal democracy, on the one hand, and socialist state ownership, on the other hand, failed to accommodate these new kinds of strategic interventions. Worse, they actively discouraged intervention at the level of production, seeing it as illegitimate. (Illegitimate from the perspective of liberal democracy in that it represented extra-parliamentary political intervention; and illegitimate from the perspective of classical socialism in that it attempted to influence production decisions other than through state ownership.)

I have sought then a political framework that would accommodate a more strategically oriented intervention by unions and social movements, lifting their sights from immediate self-interests (workers' pay packets, or a community's welfare regardless of the welfare of others) to more general concerns. In Australia I have argued that the Accord served this purpose because it encouraged strategic intervention by unions at the point of production, broadening the agenda of industrial relations and taking unions and militants off the endless treadmill of wages struggle. This cycle certainly fed inflation, but any notion that it fed a social consciousness was a delusion. I argue now that extensions of the Accord are feasible and desirable to bring in new social forces such as the conservation movement, and to bring in the employers (as
achieved recently in NSW by the pact agreed between unions and employers).

Now there is a sense in which the post-Fordist agenda represents a desired or imposed substantive industrial outcome. It certainly seeks to break with the Fordist simplicities and rigidities that are part of the vision of productive efficiency associated with mass production. (For details, see my Tools of Change.) It seeks to enrol unions in the project of moving firms in both the production of goods and services to higher value-added activities placing a premium on quality, service and skill. I argue that this is what award restructuring is all about in Australia right now.

But there is also a sense in which post-Fordism can be seen as a project of democratisation of the workplace. If workers are given more say over their conditions and the products of their work, they will elect to move away (I presume) from boring, mechanical and repetitive tasks assigned to them in low-value-added mass production, and will seek to exercise higher skills and levels of responsibility in producing more complex goods and services in a more socially responsible fashion.

This works both ways because the decision on the part of a firm to move to higher value-added production entails calling for greater commitment from a more skilled and responsible workforce which will only be forthcoming with greater direct democracy and wages linked to productivity.

Recent works by Linda Weiss and Robert Mann have revealed how the mass production system was virtually imposed through war mobilisation as a means of producing stockpiles of armaments, and of keeping workers under military discipline. This was generalised in the twentieth century through Fordism, and social democracy itself was shaped by this process. I argue that post-Fordism represents the end of the militarisation of industry and the beginning of its substantive democratisation. This is a force that must feed into social democracy, and which social democracy can harness.

I conceive of associative democracy as the extension and generalisation of the post-Fordist agenda to the whole of civil society, and not just to the firm, thereby bringing into the process wider sectors and associations than simply firms, unions and technology professionals. It is for this reason that I insist that the democratisation process must be concerned with the current wave of introduction of new technologies. It is not motivated by a desire to be seen as being "up with the latest" (as Hindess unkindly suggests) but rather by a concern that the process of democratisation be seen as relevant to current efforts to make industry more productive and place it on a new footing of skills formation and collaborative work organisation. If the Left's democratisation agenda is not relevant to this process then it is not relevant at all.

In Australia we are coming up to the centenary of the founding of the ALP. It looks as though the event will be celebrated with back-patting and nostalgic looks back into the past, to Barcaldine and Ballarat, to the diggers and the shearsers. While it is appropriate to honour the founders, it is also important to chart the future. I would suggest that the ALP Centenary would most fittingly be celebrated by the formation of a party commission to develop a long term strategy which would be put to a national conference and adopted as the guiding set of principles for the party over the next decade or more. Of course, the pragmatists will object that such a commission would be 'divisive', and that it might open up issues which are 'electorally damaging'. I have responded to such criticisms in Age of Democracy, where I label them 'pragmatic evasion'. No party can be called mature that avoids such long-term discussion. The German Social Democratic Party has engaged in just such an intense exercise and is now poised to dominate a reunited Germany. The Australian Labor Party has something to offer the rest of the social democratic world and the time to project its image into the future has arrived.

If we want to progress, if we want to build something marvellous in this world it has to be on the foundations of democracy. There is no other acceptable way. And this means having to live with the New Right, with the Moral Majority, with capitalists who openly sneer at democracy and goad their workers to strike at remote iron ore mines. It means having to organise in competition with them, to compete with them for space in the political arena, in the media, and ultimately in the popular imagination.

Associative democracy is advanced as a vision or paradigm that can sustain such an effort. It does not present a finished blueprint, even if such were feasible. It does not present a last word in social arrangements. It is in my view merely a first step, if we can democratisate the major institutions that shape the public order, to bring them into the mainstream of public accountability. To encourage and foster these sorts of developments, the movements and tendencies that identify themselves with social democracy need a vision that is open and yet structured, like democracy itself. The future social order has to be fashioned; designs for new social institutions have to be developed; but these need to be developed within a framework that gives them their core values and structure. This is what I have in mind when talking of a new political paradigm.

It is time to break with the old models, with all their authoritarian overtones and language of class struggle. A new model or series of models fit for the next hundred years needs to be seen in terms of a clear rupture. This is what Kuhn was getting at when he talked of successive scientific paradigms, and what Perez and Freeman are getting at when they talk of successive technoeconomic paradigms. The point about a paradigm is that it provides a setting in which intellectual work can be profitably performed. We should demand of the social democratic paradigm that it deliver just such a program of intense intellectual activity, designing the political, economic, industrial and community institutions that will enable humanity to prosper for the next hundred years.

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At first sight, Lynne Segal’s new book, *Slow Motion - changing masculinities, changing men*, may seem to be part of a well-established current of feminist writing. It tries to grapple with the question of what we mean by masculinity and, for about a decade now, a great deal of feminist theory has been about men.

This reflects a change from a politics which fought to challenge women’s exclusion from the male world and the construction of women as the ‘other’ sex – which fought for equality by showing that men and women were the same in most relevant ways. But since then the ground has shifted. For some years now a lot of work has gone into establishing the differences between men and women. The point of at least some very influential writers who have taken up this theme has been to show that, across a very wide canvas, masculinity is the problem and, often, that the solution is female.

Of course early feminist writers also talked about differences. But they tended to talk about the different gender ‘roles’ imposed on men and women, and proposed a future where both women and men had escaped these constraints. Since then many women (and men) have argued that being male goes deeper than any particular ‘role’ and often they have talked as though there is some essence which marks off the male world from the female world.

Support for this position has come from two related observations. The first is that, for all the hullabaloo about ‘the new man’, very little really seems to have changed. Despite apparently changed expectations, studies of housework, child care and the like show minute changes in the distribution of this work. The second is a sense of political pointlessness. Despite all the formal legal and political changes, a decade and a half of conservative reaction has left women more constrained, impoverished and dispirited than before.

So, in the face of this, Lynne Segal’s new book makes some bold claims that men are changing, that there is no essential maleness and that a socialist feminist struggle to change both economic and political and male structures is still the only answer. As she says in the book “there is a reason to believe that even in this blighted political environment...a new moral agenda could be proposed. It would be one that connects with people’s deepest fears, anxieties and ambivalences, while also tackling questions of personal diversity, choice, freedom and desire.”

Lynne Segal’s writing has always been controversial. Since 1979 when, in *Beyond the Fragments*, she, Sheila Rowbotham and Hilary Wainwright challenged the Left to adopt a new vision which, using the experiences of the women’s liberation movement, would make possible “a united socialist organisation out of those involved in all the fragmented movements, campaigns and political groups which socialists are involved in”, she has argued against entrenched and defensive positions. Now that the women’s movement is itself fragmented, she has argued strongly against the new feminist essentialism in her 1987 book, *Is the Future Female? Troubled thoughts on contemporary feminism*.

This latest book on masculinity is controversial, not only in its substantive claims (which I will come back to), but also in the sources of politics it draws upon and defends. In this embattled and defensive period few on the Left are comfortable about defending, let alone drawing upon, the hopes of the ‘sixties and ‘seventies. Even fewer feel at all comfortable about the self-conscious attempts to change the men’s groups of that period. And it is now orthodox to condemn the ‘sexual liberation’ of the ‘sixties as nothing but a male con job.

Because this heterodox attachment to more optimistic days underpins
both the theoretical and polemical project of the book, it was one of the issues I wanted to explore with Lynne when she was in Sydney to promote it. Whatever the personal attachment to the activism of that period (and there is a very strong personal stake there), her account raises a far more general political question. That is, if we focus on the practical political obstacles which derailed the projects of the ‘sixties, we are led fairly quickly to the conclusion that feminist and socialist objectives must make common cause against the economic and political dominance of conservatism.

I spoke to Lynne Segal about these questions. She responded that: “What happened throughout the 1970s was that some of the optimism and confidence that women could gain control of their lives, and control of their sexuality, was going to enable them to become new women together who could reshape the world closer to their own desires was overtaken for many women by the difficulties of that process.

“The difficulties were both at a personal and at a social level, and that’s what’s hard to separate out. Of course, we’ve always had difficulties at a personal level. Often our innermost desires might be constructed in ways that simply don’t fit in with our egalitarian, confident, optimistic hopes for being able to create loving, caring, equal relationships.

"On the other hand, part of the feminism of the early ’seventies was an optimism that we could begin immediately to create the social environment that we wanted to live in. This was a time of squatting, of setting up creches, of setting up play groups, community nurseries, local papers. That sense of trying to grab hold of the world and change it.

"By the end of the ’seventies, with the recession and the steep rise in unemployment, the confidence that we could, through struggling hard enough, win what we wanted - not only keep hospitals open but organise maternity care in the way we wanted; struggles we’d fought and sometimes won in the ’seventies - was being worn down. By the end of the ’seventies these struggles were being fought but always lost. The space for working together with other people to grab hold of the immediate social world and shake it till it began to get a little nearer to what you wanted seemed to be becoming ever more difficult. With the advent of a radical right Conservative government, any chance of gaining hold of the physical spaces you wanted - large houses to live in together, or places that could be used as community nurseries - was disappearing.”

However, for many women these objective political setbacks, far from leading to a common cause with other Left forces, led in quite the opposite direction. At least part of this arises from what in the book Lynne calls the “crisis of personal life”. But here, too, she is concerned to assert the significance of the motives which underpinned something as now commonly rejected as the so-called ‘sexual liberation’ movement of the ’sixties.

If I read the book correctly, there seems to be a suggestion of a parallel between the radical potential of the greater sexual openness of some subordinate masculinities (particularly gay masculinity) when compared to the sexual discomfort of most dominant western masculinities and the early feminist response to ‘sexual liberation’. This is very different from the dominant sexual pessimism of some more recent feminist writing.
By the early 'seventies the exploitative nature of much 'sexual liberation' was quite clear. "However," Lynne argues, "the way in which early feminists of the women's liberation movement engaged with the 'sixties project of greater sexual freedom for everyone was to look for a means of expression of their own sexuality which would be a genuine sexual freedom for women. And of course that went along with ideas of people taking control of their own lives generally because we tended to be more Reichian in those days and see sex as central to life. Women, too, were to gain control of their lives through being confident sexual creatures."

While Lynne is gently ironic about those inflated expectations, she does not share the sense of bitter betrayal which many other feminists report. In the book she points to a retreat into narrower, and inevitably unrealised, expectations of personal fulfilment, away from that earlier extension of sexual freedom into wider social struggles "where relationships beyond the couple would be invested with some of the meaning, commitment and passion never for long fully nourished by the search for love alone."

But she also points out that "it was only by the mid 'seventies that the full horror of the reality of men's violence was taken on board by feminists. The everyday horror for many women of some men's extreme brutality also then feeds into the pessimism of the times. And that was a product of the decline of the hopeful spirit of the 'seventies feeding into the more cynical idea that no change is possible.'"

Perhaps as a result of all these changes the voice of feminism itself seems to have changed. "I might be criticised for saying this, but I think that some of the voices of feminism by the 'eighties are beginning to be chosen by publishers (dare we say Dale Spender?). Voices which represent feminism today are not really part of that grassroots feminist activism of the early 'seventies." Lynne is quick to acknowledge that it would be very odd if the public face of feminism had not changed. "But because of the grassroots nature of the early feminist struggles, it's very important to remember them and to hold on to the aspirations of those days - particularly aspirations from women and the anti-sexist men in more confident times, to compare with the ideas of today which I see as springing from far more conservative times."

But what of the aspirations of those anti-sexist men? Again, Lynne acknowledges the limitations of the pace of change over the past 20 years, without rejecting those aspirations. "While feminists were very clear in the 'seventies that we wanted men to be involved in child care and working with us in the nurseries, this was certainly alright for men who were ex-students or beginning to move into professional jobs, particularly part time, where it was possible to sort out arrangements for working and living that allowed for more sharing between women and men." The problem was that most women and men did not have that economic luxury. In any case, men changing themselves individually was not going to change the world for all women.

Clearly, those ideas did spread, and in Slow Motion Lynne pays considerable attention to the changed social expectations - particularly about fathering. And, clearly, despite (or because of) the criticism of people like Bea Campbell, the struggle moved from men's groups into the trade unions and political parties. But even acknowledging the huge political and economic obstacles which have intervened, the pace of change in what men really do has been so slow that it is hardly surprising that many women ask whether masculinity itself is not the problem.

This brings us to the theoretical heart of the book. Lynne: "The main point of my book is to argue that there is no essence of masculinity, as indeed in my earlier book, Is the Future Female?, I was saying that there is no essence of femininity that is going to save the world." Much of the most original and exciting work in the book is the detailed description of different, dominant and subordinate masculinities - colonised men and male colonisers, black men, gay men, fascist men, Victorian men. In this she is elaborating the kind of work begun by people like Bob Connell.

But if there is nothing 'in' men - psychology, genes, essence - which explains male dominance, where are we to look? "I argue that masculinity gets its force and power, gets its meaning, from the fact that everywhere men are privileged. It seems to me that since the psychologies of men are culturally diverse and individually diverse, there must be social forces outside of men which are continually recreating themselves to place men as central."

Lynne argues that, while no one thing explains this reproduction, one crucial element has been the way in which the caring work of society has been organised so that the meanings attached to sexual difference have made this work both female and peripheral.

Just as important, she argues, that what it is to be a man is to be more important than something else - either a woman or some other subordinate type of masculinity. For example "the cruel of modern masculinity was the close of the nineteenth century, the rise of the white colonial empire, and the superiority of white men to black men was central to that Victorian image of masculinity."

The political conclusion from such an analysis is, of course, that political struggle must be directed to those institutions. But, at the same time, political action will not be sufficient unless it offers an alternative moral vision which answers both men's and women's "deepest fears, anxieties and ambivalences"; and perhaps for this reason it is important not to foreclose on the politics of the 'seventies.

Unquestionably there is a tremendous amount in this book that is new. But at the same time an equally valuable contribution is the sense of having passed through a tunnel and of having emerged on the other side still carrying the best of the cargo from that earlier, more hopeful time.

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1. Slow Motion - Changing masculinities, changing men, by Lynne Segal. (Virago, 1990.)
Soccer’s World Cup is the world’s biggest television event. But is it an icon of working-class culture or just an excuse for violent nationalism?

Mike Ticher agonises (a bit).

Serious sport”, wrote George Orwell, “has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard for all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words, it is war without the shooting.”

The greatest and most eagerly-awaited event in “serious sport”, the soccer World Cup, takes place in Italy from June 8 - July 8. More than 16 billion TV viewers around the world will tune in during the month of the finals series. Considering that the entire population of the world is only around 5 billion, it’s not surprising to learn that this will be the largest TV audience for anything in the world, ever. Nelson Mandela, the Berlin Wall, forget it.

While virtually every other nation on earth has taken the beautiful game to its heart, Australia still remains nervously warming-up on the sidelines. Nevertheless, thanks to SBS, we will have unrivalled access to the event. It is believed to be the only TV station in the world which is screening every single match in full - not that the vast majority of Australia’s sporting public will thank them for the effort.

It’s not hard to suggest reasons for football’s unparalleled hold on the world’s imagination. Simplicity is its strength and the key to its success in appealing across class and culture, despite its origins in English public (i.e. private) schools.

All you need are a few friends and a bundle of rags or a tin can, resources available even in the backstreets of 19th Century Glasgow or the meanest shantytowns of today’s Rio de Janeiro. The rules are uncomplicated, as is the scoring system. As Bertolt Brecht once said, “It’s sensible. Anyone can understand it, it’s easy.” Or was that communism?

Anyway, the important thing is that soccer is essentially an escapist past-time, which is why it was anathema to Orwell and remains so to many on the Left. The quick fix of pleasure which football provides every week is merely a distraction from the revolutionary destiny of the working-class. It’s the old capitalist bread-and-circuses ploy.

The rather irritating problem with this line of argument, however, is that lots and lots of people seem to get an enormous amount of pleasure out of their “serious sport”. Like soap operas, alcohol, lotto and (in days gone by) religion, mass spectator sports fulfil a need. To dismiss them as mere “opiates”, whose function is simply to sedate the masses and divert them from political organisation is to take a particularly patronising (but by no means uncommon) view of working-class culture. For all his willingness to share the physical degradations of working-class people, Orwell himself was a hopeless snob when it came to actually enjoying the things that they enjoyed. He hated football with a vengeance, declaring that “there are enough real causes of trouble already, and we need not add to them by encouraging young men to kick each other on the shins amid the roars of infuriated spectators”.

Well, perhaps. But the point is that people actually like such ‘circuses’. Whether they are ‘encouraged’ or not, they will continue to prefer them to having their consciousness raised.

All of which does not mean, of course, that the reverse is true - that anything which is ‘working-class’ or ‘popular’ is necessarily a good thing. Football itself is rightly associated in many people’s minds with violence, macho posturing and, since the Heysel and Hillsborough disasters, horrific death on a mass scale. Nevertheless, it continues to attract a worldwide following. Perhaps more interesting than the futile argument about whether or not this is a good thing, is to look at the way in which football itself has been used. After all, it is not football which creates aggression or petty nationalism - it is only one arena in which such social problems find expression.

Nor is it necessarily the case that the game has always fostered such undesirable attitudes. Although, in the light of events such as Heysel it now
seems a grotesque absurdity, it was a widely-held belief not so long ago that international soccer was a useful means of promoting peace and understanding between nations - or at least that war without the shooting was better than war with it.

It was certainly in this spirit that international club competitions were begun in Europe after the war, as well as the World Cup (which was first staged in 1930). Even as late as 1973, when Britain, Ireland and Denmark joined the EEC, it was thought appropriate to mark the event with a football match between sides selected from the six existing members and the three new ones, as a symbol of European co-operation.

There have certainly been moments when football has been able to provide a means of instant communication between diverse cultures. In 1945 a Moscow Dynamo team toured England playing to massive crowds, eager not only to see top-class football again after the war, but also to catch a glimpse of the Soviet 'supermen'. It may have been a propaganda boost for Stalin, but it also succeeded in showing the human face of what was then an almost unbelievably strange and distant country. Similarly, one of the most famous and moving pieces of film in the World Cup archive is of the 1958 Brazilian team parading a huge Swedish flag around the Stockholm stadium after they had given the Swedes a polite, but emphatic drubbing in the final.

On the other hand, examples of the game being used for more unsavoury ends are just as easy to find. One of the most famous was the 1938 match in Berlin between Germany and England, before which the English players were required to give the Nazi salute (Germany lost the match 4-2 so much for racial purity). More recently, the surge of national pride during the 1978 World Cup in Argentina, which the host nation won, has often been regarded as a highly successful distraction from the disappearances associated with the 'Dirty War' which was then in full swing.

In Mexico in 1986, the government hoped to profit in similar fashion. However, the presence of the opulent World Cup circus only served to highlight their manifest failure to secure more tangible benefits for the population. High ticket prices and the failure of the Mexican team fuelled widespread resentment of the competition among the poor. Their slogan, 'Frijoles, Non Goles' ('we want beans, not goals') was one of the few images which managed to penetrate the consciousness of a western media almost wholly indifferent to the social backdrop of the matches.

Much more pernicious than such blatant exploitation of football's popularity, however, is the violence engendered by the game's own followers. Indeed 'hooliganism' is certainly the first thing that most people in Australia associate with soccer. It wasn't all that many years ago that an English person in almost any foreign country could begin their attempts at communication with the words 'Bobby Charlton', in the sure knowledge that football was the most likely common denominator between strangers. These days, proclaiming yourself to be both English and a football supporter is more likely to land you in the local jail or hospital in many European countries.

Hooliganism is a parasite which seems to be beyond anyone's control. Football has failed completely to come to terms with the fact that it provides the perfect arena for young males to...
act out their aggressive fantasies. In England at least, the strong racist and nationalistic streak which accompanies hooliganism is spurred on by the tabloid press, with their virulent characterisations of 'Krauts', 'Argies' and 'Dagoes' in 60 point headlines. Such an unhealthy alliance of bigots can make World Cup time in England a thoroughly depressing experience.

The prognosis for this year's competition is particularly frightening, Italy being within easy reach of every hooligan in Europe, and England drawn with the almost equally notorious Dutch in the first round of matches. The prospect of drunken, bare-chested English Nazis spreading a trail of destruction around Italy this summer is almost enough to make you think that maybe Orwell was right after all. Almost. But soccer isn't some kind of belief system which you can accept or reject like Marxism or Christianity. No-one stops liking it because they don't agree with it. So, despite some of the unpleasant side-shows, thousands of perfectly rational Australians will be adopting the sleep patterns of the wombat for the next month in the expectation of being in on a truly memorable occasion.

What can we expect from the 1990 extravaganza? Seasoned World Cup watchers expect the winner to be either Italy, Argentina (the holders), West Germany, Brazil, Holland or the Soviet Union. The romantics among us will be barracking for some of the less fancied contenders. The 'Indomitable Lions' of Cameroun will carry the burden of representing Africa's much-touted football development, while Ireland have a good chance of gleefully humiliating England once again. No doubt Romania and Czechoslovakia, both in the finals for the first time since 1970, will attract a good deal of sympathy on political grounds. Thanks to the regionally weighted qualifying system, there will also be the usual quota of hapless no-hopers, including Costa Rica, America and the United Arab Emirates (whose supporters in Italy will include Yasser Arafat).

The Italians have had their problems in preparation. More than 28 workers have been killed in the rush to complete the new stadia, and many other World Cup projects will not be finished in time. Nevertheless, they will certainly stage the competition with a style and dignity which will be wholly lacking in 1994 when the World Cup has been awarded to the United States.

This is roughly the equivalent of running the Melbourne Cup in Ulan Bator.

For this reason, despite the worries surrounding the hooligan problem, the attitude of most football supporters around the world will be to settle back and revel in our 'sadistic pleasure' while we can - all 16 Billion of us.

MIKE TICHER is a former editor of the British soccer magazine *When Saturday Comes*.

* Coverage of the World Cup begins on June 9 with the opening game between Argentina and Cameroun (1.00 a.m., SBS)
Mistaken Identity


Hot on the heels of the controversial television documentary, The Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls (and further removed from the equally controversial film, The Last Temptation of Christ), comes this readable account of The Secret Life of Jesus. All three reinterpret the traditional view of Jesus put forward by the Christian church by emphasising the humanity of Jesus. This is an important corrective to lopsided ecclesiastical practice.

In tracing the life of Jesus, Macklin accepts the conventional account of Jesus as a travelling preacher, miracle worker, and political agent provocateur. Yet, despite the traditional, almost pietistic, style of the cover, the contents of this book are far from traditional, and certainly not pietistic. Macklin contends that, in addition to this familiar public life, Jesus lived a “secret life”. By extrapolating from various hints in the Gospels, Macklin reveals the causes and the course of this “secret life”.

This “secret life” of Jesus, born out of rejection by his own family, is compounded by his unattractive physical appearance. After intense study with the Essene community (the people of the Dead Sea Scrolls), Jesus attracts not only followers in Galilee, but also a coterie of disciples in Jerusalem whom he slips away to visit secretly, unbeknown to his Galilean disciples. Jesus is often drunk and enjoys sexual relationships with both female and male disciples. A fatally flawed psyche, derived from traumatic earlier experiences, drives Jesus to plot with Judas for his arrest, believing that God would rescue him from his inevitable fate and establish the New Kingdom.

There is, indeed, an important story to be told about the essential human nature of Jesus. Macklin’s book, however, does not tell that story. His thesis is based on misuse of psychoanalytic theory, misunderstandings of the world of the first century and misinterpretations of the Gospel accounts.

Assuming that the New Testament intends simply to record straight, factual history, Macklin reads the Gospels (as well as the Old Testament and the writings of Flavius Josephus) in a flat, literalistic manner. Scholars have demonstrated that this was not the primary intention of the Gospel writers. They write not to tell the history of Jesus but to explain his significance. (Thus, the problem of discovering the “historical Jesus”.)

Macklin presumes that each Gospel can contribute to an overall, synthesised picture of Jesus. Again, modern scholarship has demonstrated that each Gospel writer has his own perspective. Numerous passages are interpreted out of context.

The texts concerning “family rejection” are dealt with as absolutes by Macklin, whereas they should be seen as part of a wider picture. To understand correctly Jesus’ words about “hating family” we should see him as demonstrating priorities within a spectrum, rather than prescribing absolute norms. There is a polemical edge throughout this book, sharpened no doubt by Macklin’s personal antagonism towards his subject. Consistently, he prefers the viewpoint of any text not accepted as orthodox by the church.

He criticises the four canonical Gospels as biased, misleading, and incompetent, while accepting as completely accurate accounts dated far later than the first century. He misunderstands the way scripture was used in the time in which the Gospels were written, accusing Matthew of fabrications when he was simply interpreting sacred texts in the manner of countless zealous Jews of the day.

There is a scholarly veneer to this book (it contains endnotes, an index, a bibliography and references to scholarly works), but it is far from professional in its approach to interpreting the Gospels. The bibliography omits almost all the leading modern Gospel interpreters, notably ignoring Jewish scholarship about Jesus. To wander into the minefield of Gospel interpretation without knowing the pitfalls is dangerous. Too often another mine explodes and Macklin’s flawed method is revealed. In the section of the book devoted to “The Evidence”, Macklin purports to set out the evidential basis for the “secret
**Suburban Truths**


Nobody’s Home is a piece of serious sociological research that deserves a wide reading. As in her previous books, Having Families, Fathers at Home and Mothers and Working Mothers, Richards incorporates a significant amount of her interview material. She believes that the individual voice gives a special insight into the social fabric, especially when combined with a few sensible graphs and statistics.

The voices of the ‘real people’ are gems indeed; and they leap out and sparkle, giving the book a vitality that is missing in the majority of academic texts! The setting is Green Views, pseudonym for a newly built estate lying some 20 kilometres out of Melbourne, promoted by the developers as an estate designed specifically for country style living. The emphasis was on the family’s needs and the importance of community. Richards alerts us to the irony that lies embedded within these fantastic notions! Massive contradictions are inherent in the dream of a community of individual home owners, heightened within the context of capitalism. The essential individualism continually undermines the tenets of collectivism and inhibits the growth of community consciousness.

Richards is constantly struck by the enormity of these contradictions and, influenced by the various streams of marxist thought, she interprets the inconsistencies from a left perspective. The developers are seen for what they are - motivated by self interest. The notion of a classless society is questioned in the face of consistent reference to a complex life” of Jesus. However, this section contains a glaring inaccuracy which typifies his approach. Macklin contends that a description of the “decidedly unheroic appearance” of Jesus is to be found in the ‘Gospel according to Thomas’, one of the Gnostic texts discovered in 1945. Jesus was allegedly “under three cubits tall, with a very dark complexion, a bowed back, and a long face with bushy eyebrows which form a continuous line”. No specific reference in the ‘Gospel according to Thomas’ is provided for this description. This is certainly the case with The Secret Life of Jesus. We learn far more about the author than we do about the subject.

The description of Jesus is most probably being confused with a description of Paul found in the ‘Acts of Paul and Thecla’, another early Christian document which was not accepted as orthodox by the church. In this book, Paul is described as “a small man in height, with a bald head, bent legs, a ruddy complexion (i.e. swarthy, dark?), with eyebrows meeting in the middle, a little long-nosed, full of grace” (my translation of the Greek).

The similarities are obvious. Macklin has not checked the ‘evidence’ - a practice which may be acceptable in journalistic circles but is not befitting an attempt to write a serious life of Jesus. This life of Jesus, then, reflects Macklin’s own prejudices about Jesus and about faith. Before he went to Africa to become a world-famous medical missionary, Albert Schweitzer published a lengthy investigation into the “lives of Jesus” which had been written over the preceding 150 years. His conclusion was that each author wrote an account of Jesus which fitted best with his own preconceptions.

This is certainly the case with The Secret Life of Jesus. We learn far more about the author than we do about the subject.

JOHN SQUIRES is a minister of Waverley Uniting Church and lectures in New Testament at Sydney University and United Theological College.
system which distinguishes one from the other. And there is the paradox of ‘neighbourliness’. A community is defined as a group of people who are friendly towards one another. However, it appears that friendliness between neighbours must be constrained by explicit regulations and rules, for instance: “You must always say hello, but never invite a neighbour over for a meal”, explains one resident.

Out there, in suburbia, the gender roles have an historical ring to them and equality between the sexes is not high on the priority list. Yes, the men and the women are together, striving to secure the family home but, no, this togetherness does not extend into the realms of housework and child care.

Women are compelled to earn an income to help pay the mortgage and traditional ideology still dictates the roles within the private sphere. The most shocking feature was the complacency of both sexes. When questioned on the importance of the family home, the woman responds, “I can’t look”, she laughed, “there are six people messing it up and only one cleaning it, there’s just not enough time.” He said, almost as if she had not spoken, “Well, I always look forward to coming home.”

Richards maps the trends that suck women into the workforce and notes a widespread dilemma. The contentment of women who decide to work full time is disturbed by money worries, and the satisfaction of women working outside the home is undermined by their anxiety over the kids. There seems to be no solution at hand:

Apart from these disturbing trends, Richards uncovers others and, in doing so, challenges many of the assumptions we make about the rate of social change, working mothers, the multicultural society and the benefits of a community.

The forces that unite groups of people seem to depend on unpalatable levels of uniformity. The effect of this “stifling community” is “vulnerability of women to competitiveness, gossip and surveillance”. Conformity is the name of the game and the key to belonging. In Nobody’s Home we read of the common belief in an easygoing Australian society marked by tolerance and acceptance. Yet, in the same sentence, we discover a festering underworld where migrants are acceptable only if invisible and silent, and the family who parks the work truck in the street is subjected to insidious intimidation and harassment.

Superficial notions of friendliness and support fracture, giving way to collective paranoia. Supposed classlessness emerges as a preoccupation with the fine distinctions that differentiate, not unite. The constant reference to being “all in the same boat” is cleverly rephrased by Richards as “all under the same pressure” and only then did the attitudes make some sort of ironic sense.

The findings of the research cover more ground than I have mentioned and are fascinating in isolation. Nevertheless, I would like to see further work done which integrates common ideology into a left analysis that aims to formulate policy and proposals for action. Clearly, the multitude of suburban dwellers are trapped in the sticky web of cultural and economic reality. It is also clear that they feel pretty well powerless and have low expectations in relation to their social and political rights.

If we wish to break down the barriers between those who live in the suburbs and who feel relatively relaxed about it, and those who view the suburbs as a dangerous breeding ground of apolitical inaction, then we must see reality from where they stand. Perhaps, then, we can begin to construct an alternative that appeals to suburban dwellers and aims to ease the difficulties they experience on all fronts. If you believe this is important, read Nobody’s Home.

JIL TOOVEY is a community sector worker in Melbourne.

Writing in the 1946 preface about the success of his play Pygmalion (first performed 1914), Shaw, then aged ninety, boasted that the popular acclaim of a play “so intensely and deliberately didactic” on a theme - linguistic reform - “esteemed so dry” proved “that great art can never be anything else” but didactic.

It is tempting to consider Michael Holroyd’s biography using Pygmalion to illustrate how the play embraces so many features of Shaw’s life. For it has them all: his puritanical industriousness and moralising, his concern with social class and self-improvement, his relationships with actresses and his representation of sexuality and marriage.

Shaw liked to think of himself as an artist-philosopher. Although the claim of philosopher was half conceit - another of his characteristics - Shaw undoubtedly achieved his central goal of becoming an important and successful artist. And, if the claim of artist-philosopher cannot be sustained, perhaps a claim of artist-politician can - not a ‘real’ politician but a simple man-of-affairs who played a very substantial role in establishing the modern socialist movement in Britain in the 1880s, and whose subsequent work as a playwright and writer of prefaces and other texts helped to spread socialist ideas far and wide.

Holroyd’s first volume of what is destined to be the definitive biography takes the story from Shaw’s mid-Victorian Dublin birth in 1856 up to his London marriage in 1898 to the Anglo-Irish Fabian heiress, Charlotte Townshend-Payne. Shaw had arrived in London at the age of twenty, having left Dublin soon after his mother. Born into a slightly run-down, semi-bohemian branch of an Anglo-Irish gentry family, with his formal experience of life limited to a little general education, a bit of commercial schooling and a few years of work, mainly in a land agent’s office, he came to London determined to shape his life in a completely different direction.

Establishing himself in the Reading Room of the British Museum, he set himself four goals in order to turn himself into a real subject: to acquire learning; to skill himself for an artistic career; to be a success by the standards of the time; and not least to turn the world upside down as recommended by Shelley, his first philosophical guide. Despite his partial estrangement from his mother, it was her small private income and her indulgence that enabled Shaw to contemplate such a self-centred undertaking.

Not that Shaw was any sort of layabout. The details are amazing but essentially Shaw freelanced to fame and fortune by dint of an iron will, an incredible program of self-development and an extraordinary degree of dedication and sheer hard work. Above all, he persisted where lesser souls would have given up. He poured an immense amount of energy into five novels, getting knockback after knockback; then he worked for a ten years writing play after play before getting the public recognition he craved.

“Learn to stand absolutely by thy self ... Leaning on nothing ... Fearing no power ... A little independent universe”, he wrote in 1878 in an early blank verse Passion Play. This intense individualism, while modified by his subsequent socialism, remained at the centre of his personality and character.

Shaw is remembered as a man of the Left, but his political activities, interwoven with his artistic and moral development, have often been ignored, or at best treated rather lightly. One of the strengths of Holroyd’s book is that he largely succeeds in bringing together the artistic, public and private sides of its subject. He shows that long before he finally came before the general public as a successful and controversial playwright, Shaw had embarked on an unpaid career in the 1880s socialist revival. At this time, as he later ironically remarked, he became a man whose business was socialism.

Shaw’s early unsuccessful novels expressed his heterodox ideas. From 1880 he advanced his program of self-development even more vigorously, frequenting all manner of literary, debating and heuristic groups, acquiring communicative skills unavailable to the bookish man. Among these groups was the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), founded in 1881 to promote surreptitiously Marx’s social democracy. After attending a couple of meetings in 1883, Shaw became a candidate member and spent several weeks studying the French translation of Capital, its impact being evident in The Unsocial Socialist, his last finished novel. However, while he continued to congregate with Social Democrats, he failed to join the fairly orthodox group, the newly-formed, rather select, Fabian Society.

Shaw preferred the Fabian Society because he wanted to work, so he said, with people of “equivalent mental training”. This was only half the truth because the SDF had its share of such people, but the Fabian Society had no working class members. It was made up of Oxford graduates, journalists, teachers, civil servants and the odd failed stockbroker or banker.

Shaw quickly became a force among the Fabians. He was not so much (in Lenin’s famous phrase) a good man fallen among Fabians as a principal founder of Fabianism, whose 1000-word manifesto (Tract 2) he wrote soon after he joined. Among
the first fifty Fabian Tracts the number written by Shaw (nine, including several key texts) was second only to the number written by Sidney Webb (twenty-three). In addition, Shaw organised and edited the famous Fabian Essays of 1889 and wrote two of them himself, significantly, those on economics and the transition to socialism.

Among the Fabians Shaw was on the left wing, having a particularly strong attachment to William Morris both as a socialist and as an artistic man. What cohesion this group had began to fall away by 1885. It was divided by temperament, moral and political judgments, ideological disagreements and the consequences of the social unrest brought on by a big rise in unemployment in 1885-87.

Unlike Morris, the Fabians including Shaw were leary of the SDF's agitation among the unemployed, the demonstrations and the violence. They increasingly looked for substitutes for marxist theories and concepts, shifting away from surplus value and the idea of the class-dominated state. Shaw remained ambivalent but at times showed his understanding of the problems involved in establishing socialism in Britain. In the 25 years from 1883 to 1908 he went through several phases: a quasi-marxist attachment to revolution, constitutional socialism, labourist and outright revisionist critic. From the appendix to Man and Superman (1903), his formula for a revolution based on the English constitution - an English general election is as good as somebody's else's revolution - is fairly typical of the paradox he cherished.

Apart from Annie Besant, the famous secularist orator (a Shaw recruit) who briefly played an important role in the Bryant and May's match girls' strike (1888), the Fabians were either repelled by or stood aside from the rising tide of industrial militancy and independent labour consciousness remaking the British working class in these years. By the end of the 1880s, a leading group of socialist trade union activists - Burns, Hardie, Mann, etc - had begun to emerge and, in one or two cases, they worked closely with leading Fabians. But to everybody's disadvantage the Fabians were not very eager to reciprocate the interest.

Unlike many provincial Fabian societies who sent delegates to the founding conference of the Independent Labour Party at Bradford in 1893, the London Society laid down preconditions for its participation, provoking the conference to question Shaw's credentials. From the gallery Shaw further upset the dour northerners with characteristic impish nonchalance. Not surprisingly, the trade unionist politicians concentrated on the new Labour Party and the struggle to convert the Trade Union Congress to Labour politics, and to win support for the Labour Party.

Unlike Engels, the Fabians at this time attached little importance to the political significance of the trade unions, preferring to pursue socialist permeation of the Liberal Party and the London Radicals with whom they shared many policies and ideas. As part of this London coalition, Shaw had a brief political career in local government, first as a vestryman then, after the 1899 reforms, as a St Pancras Progressive Party borough councillor. But this diversion from his principal goal - West End success - came to an end with a sudden triumph in the theatre in the United States, leading him to renew his siege of Shaftesbury Avenue and Drury Lane.

It is no doubt idle to dwell on what might have been, but both Hyndman and Morris retrospectively regretted the path Shaw took in the mid-1880s. Hypothetically, among Hyndman, Morris, Shaw, Webb, Annie Besant, Beatrice Potter (Webb), Burns, Hardie and Mann, there were the elements of a coherent, effective, broadly-based leadership of a major united socialist movement. Among this group it was acknowledged that Shaw had the best potential to weld these diverse personalities together around a set of agreed beliefs.

But shared understanding of the character and diversity of the socialist project would have been necessary. For the realisation of this consensus two things were required: a satisfying general theory of socialism and an effective application of the theory to the specific circumstances of British life. Neither, however, was evident and, despite a century of effort in which Shaw played a major pioneering role, they remain absent.

ROGER COATES is a Sydney historian.

PRODUCTION EDITOR

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The Festive Season

Film Festival season is upon us, and thousands of buffs retreat to primeval darkness. Martina Nightingale and Mike Ticher report on the Melbourne and Sydney film fests.

Melbourne

For all but the truly dedicated film buff, perusing the Melbourne Film Festival program can be a daunting experience. With 160 features and shorts from all over the world, how do mere lovers of film make their choices?

But according to the Festival director, Tait Brady, the program offered this year will yield many rewards for those brave enough to venture into the various designated art house cinemas around Melbourne between June 7 - 23. He says the program is designed to make it physically possible to see all the films for a mere $165. And if that sounds like pushing the pleasure principle to the limits of endurance, the more casual filmgoer can purchase three session tickets at $36 which then entitles the bearer to buy single tickets to films of their choice.

It is in the nature of festival programming that the definite arrivals of films from such diverse countries as Finland and Taiwan are not certain until the eleventh hour. But ALR managed to gain some inside information on some of the films likely to have particular appeal to those with a taste for both form and substance.

According to Brady, a definite must comes from Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien. Those who have already seen The Time to Live and the Time to Die will need no convincing that this year's festival offering City of Sadness will be well worth the two and a half hours of intensive viewing. The film is set during the political turmoil of 1945-49 and centres on the Vin family, following the destinies of three very different brothers. Brady says it is impossible to describe what it is about this slow-paced film that makes City of Sadness so compelling. It has been variously described as "brave", "poetic", lyrical, and Hou Hsiao-hsien heralded as one of the most talented filmmakers in the world today.

Another feature film likely to be of interest to watchers of the turbulent changes in Eastern Europe is Larks on a String. The film's director Jiri Menzel has enjoyed international recognition by winning, in 1967, an academy award for Closely Watched Trains.

This film, made only two years later, has been securely locked away from public scrutiny for over twenty years following the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The film takes a satirical and bleakly humorous look at the re-education of 'bourgeois elements' in society after the advent of the communist regime in the 'fifties.

It's hardly surprising that Larks on a String did not please the authorities. Some critics claim that this film does not quite match the perhaps inflated expectations raised by Menzel's previous offerings and its long incarceration. But they agree that it's definitely worth a look for its place in history alone, as well as for its memorable moments.

Among the many features demanding an audience is Andi Engels' political thriller with a difference, Melancholia. Its theme is the moral and political dilemma faced by an ex-ultra leftist German radical whose comfortable if angst-ridden life is shattered by an unexpected phone call. The central character, Jeroen Krabbe, played by David Keller is asked to put into action the pledges of his youth by carrying out the assassination of a Chilean torturer.

An interesting juxtaposition to the issues raised by the 'sixties revolution in Germany is Mark Kitchell's documentary Berkeley in the 'Sixties. Much more then just a nostalgic look at bygone radicalism, this documentary examines the impact of the civil rights, student and black movement by interviewing fifteen people who were actively involved at that time. Its significance for the Left is that the interviews dispel the well-worn myth that all 'sixties radicals turned into middle-aged yuppies. It shows that many people in fact remained committed to their ideals and lived them out through involvement in a whole range of politically motivated projects. The interviews are interspersed with fascinating archival footage of the demonstrations and the key political figures of the 'sixties including Martin Luther King, Huey \[image\] James Baldwin taking tea, in a scene from The Price of the Ticket
Newton, Ronald Reagan and features clips from Joan Baez and the Grateful Dead.

A devastating issue of the ‘eighties and ‘nineties is tackled in Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt. The directors, Robert Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman interviewed five individuals who subsequently died from AIDS. Through photographs, home movies and testimonials from friends, families and lovers, the film celebrates their lives and shows how those closest to them came to terms with their loss through involvement in the quilt project. It is said to be so powerful and moving that even those most distant from the reality of AIDS cannot help but be affected.

This year’s program also includes several documentaries which focus on the lives and experiences of women in vastly different cultural contexts. Trinh T. Minh-ha’s Surname Viet, Given Name Nam promises to be as fascinating and unusual in its unconventional approaches to the documentary form as its theme. Trinh T. Minh-ha has gained a reputation for innovation for her unusual camera techniques, her use of subtitles, quotations and staged interviews in questioning the notion of truth which is a central concern to independent documentary filmmakers.

In this documentary she focuses on women from her own country and their experiences as Vietnamese women, and women living as exiles in America. Much more than just a ‘factual’ documentary, Surname Viet, Given Name Nam has been described as “a raw sensual and emotional experience” which conveys the displacement of women in their own and their adopted country.

Half the Kingdom is a documentary about seven Jewish feminists and their attempts to incorporate a feminist perspective into Judaism. The directors, Francine Zuckerman and Rousell Goldstein gathered together a diverse group of extremely articulate women including the novelist Esther Bruer and Shulamit Atoni, a member of the Israeli parliament. They discuss the ways in which women are challenging traditional roles as they search to claim their half of the kingdom. The film graphically depicts this struggle when a group of women come together to pray at Jerusalem’s western wall while being harassed by ultra-Orthodox Jews.

Many more films and documentaries featured in this year’s Melbourne Film Festival should at least rate a mention. According to Tait Brady, an important criterion for making the final choice of films has been to select those considered too rare and too uncommercial to gain a screening season even in the alternative cinema. He says we can be assured of a unique film feast and if this glimpse is anything to go by, who are we to doubt his word?

Martina Nightingale.
Sydney

Those emerging stiff-limbed and bleary-eyed at the end of this year’s Sydney Film Festival (June 8-22) will have had the opportunity to see a mouth-watering selection of new films from all corners of the world, including such diverse locations as Burkino Faso, South Korea and Iran. However, it is the emergence of both Eastern Europe and South America from years of dictatorship which is the strongest thread running through a program which contains a high proportion of films with political themes and references.

As in Melbourne, Larks On A String is among the most prominent of these, and should make an interesting contrast with The Tender Revolution, a hastily put together record of the events of November 1989. Dekalog, a series of ten one-hour films by Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski, is less overtly political than either of these, but probably more arresting from a purely cinematic point of view. Two of the ten films, which are all set in the same depressing apartment block in Warsaw, have previously been shown in feature length form, but the screening of the series will be one of the most eagerly-awaited events of the Festival.

Two West German films provide evidence that the imminence of reunification has done nothing to quell the obsession with the Nazi period. The Trail of the Fathers is the story of a young German’s discovery of this father’s part in the Ukrainian campaign in World War Two, while Michael Verhoeven’s “viciously funny” The Nasty Girl examines the refusal of a small German town to come to terms with its past.

Argentina heads the South American contingent with Secret Wedding directed by Alejandro Agresti, the story of what happens to a ‘disappeared’ political activist when he unexpectedly re-emerges; and Permission To Think, a study of the Peron cult. Chile is also represented with a documentary, Dance of Hope, featuring interviews with eight very different women whose relatives disappeared during Pinochet’s rule. American films dominate among the documentaries. They include The Price of The Ticket, a biography of James Baldwin, the Oscar-winning Common Threads - Stories From The Quilt and Mr Hoover & I, an idiosyncratic study of the FBI chief by Emile De Antonio.

However, it needn’t be a fortnight of unmitigated seriousness and heavy political content. Many people unable to afford either time or money to sit through the main festival will appreciate the availability of separate tickets for special nights of new British (June 13) and Scandinavian (June 20) cinema, Australian Short Films on June 8 and, above all, the two all-night shows. Round Midnight on June 16 features jazz on film, while Australian TV: The First Decade (June 9) should prove irresistible for many.

Mike Ticher

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Only a few months ago, eating a tuna sandwich was no big deal. But there came a time when the person next to you at the sandwich shop started muttering darkly about driftnetting as you placed your lunch order. Friends who spotted you serving up Snappy Tom Tuna in Jelly to your cat shrieked in horror and disgust. Dinner guests paled and turned away from the tuna casserole or the sashimi. Suddenly tuna was on the list of ‘bad guys’ for the ideologically sound - or even just plain sentimental - consumer. The reason? Dolphins.

Greenpeace estimates that, since 1959, 6.5 million dolphins have been killed by tuna fishing practices of purse seine netting and driftnetting. Schools of yellowfin tuna often swim below herds of dolphins, and fishing boats will deliberately track, chase and capture the dolphins, so that tuna will come up with the catch. Dolphins, as well as other marine mammals, tortoises and sea birds, also get entangled in the enormous driftnets set to catch tuna. They suffocate. Driftnetting has been likened to stripmining the oceans. One driftnet may be up to 56 kilometres long and 15 metres deep. It’s also estimated that 1,000 kilometres of these plastic, non-biodegradable driftnets are lost or abandoned in the Pacific each year. Greenpeace has been campaigning against these practices for many years. Their goal is a global ban on both purse seine and driftnet fishing, and the development of alternative fishing methods which do not kill dolphins and are not so ecologically damaging.

Driftnetting is banned in Australian waters. South Pacific countries ban drift net fishing within their coastal waters and their canneries will not buy driftnet caught tuna. The anti-driftnetters’ most recent success is impressive. The world’s largest tuna supplier, Starkist (a Heinz subsidiary) has announced it will now only buy “dolphin safe” tuna.

In Australia, Heinz markets the Greenssea and Seahaven brands of tuna. Heinz claim that their tuna is already “dolphin safe”, as it’s caught in areas where no dolphins congregate with tuna schools - the Eastern Tropical Pacific (ETP). They have embarked on an aggressive marketing campaign to reassure consumers and are negotiating for Greenpeace Australia’s seal of approval. Greenpeace are withholding this approval until Heinz agree to allow Greenpeace observers onto their boats to verify the claim. So don’t go rushing out to buy Heinz brands just yet.

Greenpeace are lobbying the government for a labelling law to force companies to specify the origin of their tuna and the way in which it was caught. Australia imports fish canned in Thailand and the Philippines, much of which may be caught by driftnetting nations - Japan, Taiwan, Korea. It’s impossible to tell the source just from reading the label. Some brands don’t even have a company name, just a distributor. This is the Ministry for Consumer Affairs’ rationale for not enforcing such strict labelling laws as Greenpeace would like to see. But surely that lack of accountability in the industry is the best reason for introducing such legislation.

Greenpeace surveyed 25 companies last year to try to establish the sources of their tuna. The results - which have been published in the Greenpeace Australia News and the Green Consumer Guide, are not altogether satisfactory. Only Seakist and Sirenia claim to use only locally caught Australian tuna. But if you peruse the Sirenia tins you’ll find that many are stamped “Product of the Philippines”, or “Product of Thailand”. As for Seakist - the can says the contents are “processed in South Australia from imported fish”. So their claims must be treated with caution.

Brands which use imported fish, but not from the ETP, are John West, Safcol, Home Brand, No Frills, Payless, Black and Gold and the two Heinz brands. But here’s another thing to consider if you’re ideologically pure, and not just sentimental. John West is a subsidiary of the giant corporation Unilever, renowned for its continued dealings with South Africa. Heinz International and Seakist also have South African connections according to the Non-Buyers Guide. Your shopping list is getting smaller by the minute. On Greenpeace’s list of companies to boycott, either because they refused to answer the survey or because their fish is of unknown origin, are Trident, Coles Brand and Coral Reef.

An alternative is to buy tuna caught and canned in the South Pacific. Fiji and the Solomons both have big fishing industries - Fiji’s IKA corporation and Pasco cannery account for exports worth $50 million. The industry is the country’s third top income earner and a big employer. Tuna are caught using pole-and-line. You could go looking in Fijian and Indian groceries for brands such as King of the Sea, (Solomons) In Sydney Pasco brands Ovalan Blue and Sun Bell are available at the Fiji market, 591 King Street, Newtown.

For the ideologically sound cat, Greenpeace favour Whiskas, Dine, Whiskettes, Sheba and Kit-E-Kat, as they are assured that the manufacturers only use waste materials from tuna caught in Australia. Snappy Tom and Pounce use imported tuna, but are both produced by Safcol, which claims to be dolphin safe. The brands to avoid are Go-Cat and Black and Gold.

Jess Walker
Islam and Women

As the Vietnam war was drawing to a close, I attended a meeting where several Vietnamese women told of their experiences. After the meeting had proceeded for some time and questions were put to our guests, one Vietnamese woman said that, having attended several meetings, she had gained the impression that Australian women were at war with their men.

After a great deal of discussion, the women assured us that they had no intention of being pushed back into the kitchen after hostilities had ceased. It was with this in mind that I felt disappointment after reading Carlotta McIntosh's "After the Long-Haired Heroines" (ALR 115).

This is the second article I have read by Australian women visiting Vietnam and both articles failed to convince me that those Vietnamese women have not been betrayed. Perhaps Carlotta's reference to Vietnamese peasant women being defined by traditional values and the old Confucian saying, "one man is worth a hundred woman" says it all!

I would also like to comment on Michael Humphrey's "The Caucasian Equation" (also ALR 115). There can be no doubt that there is much disaffection among Islamic people as there is disaffection among all alienated people. However, there is far more to the fanaticism of fundamentalist Islam as there is far more to fundamentalist Christianity than believing in Christ.

As a woman, I am terrified of all fundamentalist religions but more so of Islam with its ultra-oppression of women, its cultural clitoridectomies, infibulations and total ownership of women by men. I am also afraid of the slow but pervasive extension of Islam all over the world by increased populations (male ego enhanced by number of sons) resulting in the ultimate takeover when in a majority as in Nigeria and Lebanon, among others. The Soviet Union, too, is experiencing this uncontrolled increase of population in the Muslim area.

Fundamentalists, because of their fanaticism, view other people's tolerance as weakness, a trait to be despised. Already we have witnessed how strongly intimidated people feel. The Salman Rushdie affair exposed this intimidation across the world. Even the Left under the guise of religious tolerance seems to fall over backwards in what appears to be a 'let's not offend them' attitude by going to the trouble of trying to analyse events to explain the upsurge of fundamentalism while ignoring the extremely threatening side of fundamentalism, be it Christianity, Judaism or Islam.

For how long will we delude ourselves by choosing to ignore what is happening world wide while continuing to appease the monster?

Fay Nishri,
Port Macquarie, NSW.

Cocky S***

On the expiry of my ALR sub I will not be renewing. In my opinion, over the past year only occasional articles rendered worthwhile reading. There have been all too few articles contributing to debate of the vital problems of our times - these are buried in a hodge-podge of fancy verbiage that does violence to the English language and the already tortured brains of serious political thinkers. How the editors of a journal claiming to come from the ideology of the Left can waste space with unutterable rubbish is beyond my understanding. These high-falutin' columns can only be described in the colourful language my brother uses to describe them - to wit: "a load of hot cocky shit".

Vic Bird,
Forster, NSW.

Clerical Error

April's "Loose Cannon" (ALR 116) included a sustained attack on the "incompetent and conservative" leadership of the Federated Clerks Union. Your columnist rightly took issue with material published in the FCU national journal, The Clerk.

Unfortunately, "Loose Cannon" failed to point out that several branches of the FCU, representing a majority of FCU members, have progressive leaderships which do not support the Maynes national FCU leadership. These branches have been locked in a bitter battle with the Maynes group for control of the FCU nationally for almost a decade. Subject to possible amalgamations, this battle will culminate in August 1991 in the first ever direct membership elections of national FCU officials. The FCU is not a "lousy union" with "incompetent and conservative officials" in Victoria, Queensland and South Australia (other FCU branches can speak for themselves). I would suggest that your columnist does a bit more research before commenting on trade union affairs in future.

Lindsay Tanner, State secretary, FCU, Victorian branch.

Back up

Nearly every time my ALR arrives there is something in it that gets my back up. In February it was the cover and article "Death of Communism". If I wanted to read what Murdoch's hacks think about what is happening in the world I'd buy The Australian, not subscribe to ALR. And Brian Aarons' article didn't properly debate the issue raised by McGuinness.

In the March issue Carlotta McIntosh refers to Ho Chi Minh City as Saigon and calls the NLF 'Vietcong', a term which was used by the US invaders as a derogatory term. I don't know how old or where she was during the 'sixties, but surely the editorial collective should have picked that one up, especially after she did the same in a previous article. And this in the year that we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Vietnam Moratorium. I'm sure I'm not the only reader who found this offensive and upsetting in a journal that calls itself a LEFT review.

While I'm at it, here are a couple of other things I think ALR could do without. Like that silly article about Diand Fergie, "Letter from Ephesus" (the significance of that title eludes me), Dr Hartman and the last page "Consuming Passions". We can read about food and wine ad nauseam in the daily press and umpteen magazines. Can many of your readers afford the stuff anyway? I certainly can't! It makes me wonder if ALR shouldn't change its name to Middle Australia Review.

Ruth Berman,
Middle Park, Vic.
DEAR DR HARTMAN

Poopy nappies

I had a childcare activist come into my clinic this week in a shocking state. She had this extraordinary idea that all Australian children have the right to good quality child care regardless of their parents’ ability to pay. What a load of nonsense! I mean, we don’t all drive BMWs, we don’t all eat at Berowra Waters Inn and we don’t all go to Scots and Grammar, or Geelong Grammar and Scotch College - so why on earth should we all expect to have a nanny as good as mine!

Anyway, this lass was quite unhinged, so I put her in the intensive care padded unit and began to analyse her problem. Her dilemma boiled down to this. For 13 years she had been obsessively following each new twist and turn in government childcare policy. She had sniffed out every nuance of the shifting political wind. But throughout these years she had suffered mental torment because of one basic flawed assumption - that there was some ultimate method in the political madness.

All this week she has rolled about on my clinic floor and cried out repeatedly, “If only I could read enough policy documents! If only I could lobby the right people! If only I could question and agitate enough! Then I will finally be initiated into the deep, inner mysteries of the political process and I will find the key to unlock the door which blocks parents and kids from access to quality child care!”

Poor fool! Every sane person knows that there is no logic to the system at all. Trying to find a pattern in the shifting sands of childcare funding procedures is like trying to find a runaway toddler in the baby animal pavilion at the Royal Easter Show. It can’t be done!

Actually, I have seen quite a few childcare activists over the years and I have found the most severe levels of psycho-sexual distress in patients who still hold out hope for the Australian Labor Party. In the most extreme manifestation of this condition the patient may even still cling to the fancy that the Labor Party represents the true interests of Australian women.

It is distressing to watch the effects once the patient realises that, regardless of Labor policy, the key decisions affecting the future of childcare services in Australia are made by men who live in bachelor flats in Canberra. Intermittently, these men pop in on family life back in their electorates where their wives are living and looking after the children. The very few women involved in making major policy decisions usually haven’t had time to have any children themselves. Or if they have had kids, they discovered long ago the advantages of highly trained private nannies. These nannies are expensive, but on Canberra wages the senior bureaucrats can afford them.

But none of this is much help to those legions of poorly paid childcare workers out there in the community where people are breeding like rabbits. Let me offer a simple solution to the chronic problem of poor funding for childcare services. Quite frankly, no one who matters really gives a damn about all your rundown centres crammed with women and children. And so this is what you must do to win your political battles.

Immediately sack all nurses and teachers and childcare trained staff working in the industry. Get rid of the lot of them! From now on only employ male doctors in all the centres, preferably medical specialists. There are plenty of orthopaedic surgeons around who have never returned to the public hospitals. Also, immediately sack all the progressive do-gooders in community advocacy organisations like Community Child Care and, instead, employ Dr Bruce Shepherd to run all your campaigns.

Remember to instruct all your new medical staff to wear white coats at all times. This will give them a lot of authority when talking to the media. In fact, all the children, including the babies, should wear white coats and stethoscopes as well. Trust me, this strategy will work.

Now the real hotheads in the childcare industry might prefer a little direct action. Such political anarchy is not, of course, to my taste, but for the sake of this discussion I will share with you the following plan. It was outlined to me by a childcare patient just before we gave her ECT.

Her proposal was that all the childcare staff, all the parents and all the children from all over Australia, should get into buses and drive to the new Parliament House in Canberra. Then they should all live there for a week. This patient claimed that a lot of Family Day Care staff want to see the Prime Minister’s private swimming pool. “That should get some media attention for childcare issues!” she shouted just before her grand mal fit.

Just before we applied the electric current to her temples, my direct action patient cried out that the parents should hang nappies in all the politicians’ offices, they should put Leggo all over the floor of the House of Representatives, and they should wash the really awful poopy nappies in the Prime Minister’s private swimming pool. “That should get some media attention for childcare issues!” she shouted just before her grand mal fit.

Patients, if you identify with any of her symptoms, I look forward to meeting you at one of my clinics.

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