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Some years ago I walked through rainforest in Papua New Guinea's Oro province with Lionel Jandu, a young man who later became provincial Premier. He was sizing up timber for a house.

After we had walked a couple of kilometres through what appeared to be dense, undifferentiated bush, he said, "This is my land now. I'll choose between one of those three trees over there." Today, that forest's existence is threatened by logging.

PNG has been an ecological battleground for many years, from well before the environment became a dominant Western social and political focus. The constitution, adopted at independence in 1975, pursues a strongly 'integrationist' theme, drawing together social, economic and spiritual values. Its chief architects were Fr John Momis, MP for Bougainville, Minister for Provincial Affairs and leader of the Melanesian Alliance, and John Kaputin, MP for Rabaul.

PNG moved early to prevent its unique wildlife, such as Birds of Paradise, and the Dugong, from being hunted by other than traditional means. And it established a successful pattern of crocodile farming which preserved the species.

Industrial pollution has scarcely registered as a problem. The problem, rather, has been the country's failure to sustain economic activity, let alone to grow sufficiently to satisfy the job aspirations of the 40,000 young people leaving school annually. Only 6,000 jobs are available for them.

Nevertheless, the eccentric MP Hugo Berghuser, a German pig-farmer-cum-cabinet maker turned property developer and PNG politician, succeeded in defying the inconvenient health and pollution regulations required by the Port Moresby authority when he built a meat cannery in partnership with an Australian major. He built it next to his Disney-style schloss, just outside the city limits, where few rules applied.

In the late 1970s, a lobby combining young Papua New Guineans with embryonic Australian 'greenies' defeated plans to build a huge hydro-electric plant astride the Purari River in Gulf province.

The rate of population growth, at almost 3% one of the world's highest, has caused particular pressure on land use in parts of the Highlands, with traditional slash-and-burn agriculture increasingly feasible. Any flight over PNG nevertheless crosses great tracts of rainforest, one of the world's larger surviving resources with south-east Asia having been substantially milled out this century. This has been the prime source of wealth for a core group of politicians and their henchmen.

Timber companies, on the surface, have not fared so well. A handful of Japanese loggers and woodchippers, operating for several years in PNG, have apparently done so out of philanthropy, since they have not made sufficient profit to pay tax. More recently, a cohort of Malaysian, Singaporean and Indonesian companies has moved in following the banning of log exports from those countries. And while agreements, often containing stringent conditions including the provision of infrastructure, reforestation and downstream processing were signed, the national government had little power and less intention to enforce them.

Sir Julius Chan, now deputy Opposition leader, pushed through parliament more than ten years ago his Private Dealing Act whereby landowners could negotiate, as an alternative, directly with timber companies. Predictably, loggers have favoured such a route where pliable local leaders can be identified and accommodated.

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Following a series of articles in The Times of PNG, the government of Paias Wingti launched an inquiry into the timber industry. To head it, they chose perhaps as unwittingly as Bill Gunn chose Tony Fitzgerald - Justice Tos Barnett.

His massive, thorough inquiry indicted the system and many individuals who had operated it, notably then Forests Minister and former General Ted Diro. However, Diro shifted his 14-strong Papuan bloc of MPs across to Rabbie Namaliu in July 1988 before any prosecutions were initiated. He became the kingmaker. And since Wingti is today also looking for Diro to move to shift the balance back his way, Diro has remained untouched.

The clear-felling continued apace under his successor Karl Stack. But with most of the accessible, attractive timber stands already leased, and with the World Bank (on whose goodwill PNG substantially depends to bridge its balance of payments gap following the closure of the Bougainville mine) forced by its members to adopt tougher environmental guidelines, the strategy abruptly shifted last month.

At a meeting in Port Moresby of a tropical forest action program team led by the World Bank, Stack announced a two-year moratorium on new timber permits from July. Permits, he said, would be held in future by landowners, who would receive all royalties. Compensation for foreign logging, he added hopefully, would be sought from overseas.

This reinforces the trend propelled by developments on Bougainville whereby, in effect, the national government is rapidly withdrawing from its essential role embodied in the Eight Aims promulgated at independence - the role of redistributor of wealth and deliverer of services. Now, advantaged landowners are being given virtual carte blanche to determine projects given access to their areas, and to withhold the accruing benefits.
On Bougainville, the victory of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, and the paralysis of Port Moresby as it relies de facto on an informal blockade to restore sovereignty over the island, has been accompanied by a crucial change in approach.

The BRA appears to be prepared to live with a mine - as long as Bougainvilleans have a bigger say, and a bigger take. And although other interests, the rebels believe, are just waiting in the wings to take on the mine, CRA with a 53% holding, is unlikely to quit early. The mine owes no debt, and has a potential life of at least another 15 years.

It, and other miners, such as BHP at Ok Tedi, feel unfairly targetted by interest groups seeking enhanced revenues from resource companies that have met their agreed obligations with the national government - while the loggers have escaped scot-free, partly because they have freely resorted to corruption.

It is, however, easier to see the difference in a mined landscape than the more subtle and insidious effect of the loss of topsoil due to logging.

It is not only the physical environment that is forever changed by such projects, however - on which the PNG economy today desperately depends - but the human environment too. Structures previously fluid, subject to frequent fights and exchanges, were frozen in the colonial era. The sudden rush of cash serves to defrost these structures, opening the way for renewed leadership struggles.

Thus, on Bougainville, emblematically, the war that began with a mine is ending with unanswered questions about where authority legitimately resides.

"Logic," said a young landowner at an angry meeting in November 1988 to consider a survey of the environmental impact of the Bougainville mine that fired the civil war there, "is a white man's trick".

If there is a 'Melanesian' alternative to logic, it needs to be used with un-Melanesian speed. For the greater the deterioration of the the economic and social infrastructure on Bougainville, the less fastidious will be the emerging leaders about how revenue is raised.

Attitudes of industrial and developing societies differ on the use of the environment and on its very meaning in daily life. And Papua New Guineans are caught between maintaining their traditional values, while insisting on their right to those paths to development which countries like Australia have already trodden.

"All it took was the ability to sit down and recognise the legitimacy of the other point of view", said Alan Evans, head of Premier Field's office. This is a new approach for ANM and for the whole forest industry," according to David Quinn, public affairs manager for ANM. For the first time they (conservationists) are giving us a fair hearing and ANM has been prepared to admit publicly where it has not done a good job in the past. This is a major cultural breakthrough."

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will be the announcement of a site for its recycling mill in late April. The two most likely sites are Albury, halfway between Sydney and Melbourne, or Boyer, Tasmania, the site of the new $600 million paper mill. That Boyer is the preferred site of the Tasmanian Greens is not lost on ANM management. Quinn admitted it was even an advantage for the success of the new $600 paper mill proposal.

What has made all this possible? The blueprint for consultation (and, it was hoped, consensus) was set within two weeks of the state election last April. The Labor-Green Accord, between five Green Independents and a minority Labor government was to provide a mechanism for open administration and consultation with community groups.

Is it working? In terms of sheer achievements since last April, the answer would have to be yes. The Accord can claim credit for a new national park, world heritage nominations covering 20% of Tasmania, a cancelled fourth export woodchip mill, and no increase on the state's export woodchip quota.

The Accord set up the forum for the Salamanca talks to consider the fate of Tasmania's natural resources. Those talks created a cooling down period between opposing interests and allowed logging to continue in designated areas for 12 months to work out which areas are most in dispute.

But are Labor and the Greens really in Accord? On closer inspection it seems not. The Accord was written in a hurry to appease mounting concern in the electorate after an inconclusive election and to head off plans by previous Liberal Premier Gray to force the country back to the polls.

It now reflects an intense tug of war between five ill-prepared, under-resourced but fiercely committed Greens and a fledgling Labor government determined to maintain its agenda and appease other (influential) forces in the Tasmanian arena.

The hatchet has not been buried on the philosophical split over jobs versus environment. The Greens are not resting on their laurels, they want more and better results from the Accord. And the Labor government, while conscious of the need to have a working relationship with the Greens, is adamant that it has the final decision-making power. Alan Evans: "The government is in government because of the Independents and will consult. But in the end the government makes the decisions."

Almost a year into this unique partnership, the strain is beginning to tell on the ability of the Accord to deliver to the Green electorate. Perhaps most significant is the waning level of electoral support during the federal election. In 1989 the Greens polled 17% in the state. On March 24, that support dropped to 4.5% - much lower than expected and nowhere near enough to elect Michael Lynch, the Green Independents' co-ordinator, to the Senate.

Criticism from within government ranks suggests the big problem for the Greens is an inability to develop a structure that incorporates decision-making from their support base and a cohesive agenda for the next two years. The 'biggest test of their credibility with the government is whether they can articulate an economic strategy. So far, say government sources, that hasn't happened.

According to Wilderness Society director Alistair Graham, the Greens do have an economic strategy, the problem is turning around government and industry thinking to sustainable development. He considers the disagreements between the Greens and the Labor government to be surmountable but that means overcoming an inbuilt historical perspective, conflict with business interests and personalities.

"Anyone who thought the Accord would resolve all conflict is naive," Graham believes that Labor policies are changing toward the Green view, "but the government doesn't like being pushed too far too fast".

And there are some indications that it does not want to break with the industrial elite. Graham is under no illusions of the state government's commitment to environmental issues where it perceives jobs could be threatened by business closures. That awareness has taken the wider Green movement out of the state searching for federal support. Earlier this year a deputation to Canberra, asking for $13 million, scored $10 million for research into alternative forestry industries - plantation growth, thinning and re-growth to increase sawlog production, and efficiency measures in industry.

Specific economic issues have been taken up by the Greens. They have challenged the government on its refusal to publicly release bulk power prices charged to companies in Tasmania. In mid-April the government relented but would only release prices in broad categories for reasons of commercial sensitivity. The state's 21 bulk power consumers use 66% of the electricity. The Greens claim that at least four of these companies receive huge discounts on their power prices, at the expense of the general consumer.

Similarly, criticism for its reluctance to increase royalty payments from mining has met a blank from the Labor government for fear of companies opening more mines. Tasmania's royalties are the lowest in Australia. According to Wilderness Society documents, in 1986-87 Tasmania received $1.6 million in royalties on $415 million of minerals, or 0.37%.

"The Hellyer Mine, which is just about to hit full production of silver, lead and zinc is worth $4-6 billion. The company is believed to be making a profit of $70 million a year. The investment was $112 million and it produced about $120 million income the first year.

But Tasmania is entitled to only $3 million royalties", said the society's research officer Bob Burton. "If they gave us more information we'd find them about $50 million a year that could be redirected to other areas of the economy."

All parties agree there are no definitive answers to environmentally friendly industries that don't cost jobs. But despite the battles still to be fought, a start is being made - and maybe the plane rides should be compulsory.

CLARE CURRAN is a Sydney journalist based at Social Change Media.
"Like an iceberg, stalinism froze and preserved the social viruses of the past", argues Hungarian playwright and social critic István Eőrsi. "Now that that iceberg has melted, those viruses have come to life again."

In Hungary, where stalinism has been thawing since the 'sixties, historical patterns and long-latent national sentiments re-emerged strikingly intact in the country's first free parliamentary elections since 1947. After two rounds of voting, March 25 and April 8, the victory of the Christian-conservative coalition led by the Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF) ended a nasty campaign marked by anti-semitism, red-baiting and nationalist demagoguery. The election exposed the deep historical antinomies between the political cultures of Western liberalism and conservative nationalism that confront one another in Hungary, and throughout post-communist Eastern Europe.

The Forum's eclectic brand of populism, Christian democracy and nationalism struck a familiar chord in Hungary. Having captured 165 of the 386 seats, the HDF is set to form a government in partnership with the Christian Democratic Party and the Independent Smallholders Party.

The Alliance of Free Democrats (AFD), who finished neck-and-neck with the Forum in the first round, wound up with only 92 seats (24%) after the second ballot. Despite minimal differences between the economic programs of the two parties, the HDF ruled out a coalition with the Free Democrats, whose leadership includes many intellectuals, former dissidents and Jews.

Although grave economic and social crises face the country, the campaign was largely devoid of political content. The HDF relied primarily on nostalgic and nationalist themes neglected in the communist era. Top billing went to the emotionally charged Transylvania issue, the 'revitalisation' of the Magyar identity and, above all, the character smear of the AFD.

The Forum's direction and the traditions that it embraces raise justified concern over the form that democracy will take here, particularly in the absence of a traditional democratic culture.

The organisation was founded in 1987 by 160 intellectuals and professionals, led by the reform wing of the Communist Party, as a loose umbrella movement in opposition to the ruling hardliners. Over the past year, the Forum, now a party, has moved steadily to the right, with a stress on Christian values under its president and now the Prime Minister-elect, József Antall. Its tradition is romantic, with an anti-modern yearning for a mythical past and rural peasant culture.

One of the most outspoken representatives of the that tradition in HDF is the author István Csurka, whose anti-semitic innuendos and hysterical essays have provoked a flood of criticism. He argues for a strong 'Hungarian' leadership to rescue the country from its present 'state of anarchy'.

Although most of the present leadership refrains from Csurka's crass style, it refuses to distance itself from the poet-propagandist and other extremists. The moderates' testy defiance of its ultra-right elements reflects the lack of internal debate and self-criticism within the party, for which it has often come under fire.

Despite its own heavily ex-Communist membership and its roots in the party, the Forum's top brass itself is quick to associate the Free Democrats with former stalinist leaders of Jewish origin, such as Mátyás Rákosí and Károly Grosz. The Free Democrats' 'cosmopolitan' leaders, their rivals insinuate, is 'foreign' and 'other' to the true spirit of the Hungarian people.

The loaded words fall on fertile ground. "Well, you know, those Free Democrats are a bunch of Jews", is a common, if mild response. The AFD's election posters, many depicting the candidates themselves, have been covered in anti-semitic and fascist graffiti.

HDF's policies and style have deep roots in the historical resentment and thwarted nationalism that is embedded in the national consciousness here. Most Hungarians are only too eager to recount their country's lost glory, its territory reduced by two-thirds and 60% of its population lost to Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia under the post-World War One Trianon Peace Treaty.

The persecution of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania (culminating in the deaths of three ethnic-Hungarians in the Transylvanian town of Tîrgu Mureș in March) has been portrayed as Hungary's own national tragedy, dwarfing all other issues as the Forum's number one election theme.

The recent pogroms there have fuelled a storm of nationalism, which the party has milked for every ounce of emotion through its belligerent attacks on the Romanian government and people.

Some observers see the HDF developing into a party like the Bavarian Social Christian Union. However, the escalation of national tensions in Romania and Yugoslavia puits a Forum-governed Hungary into a different perspective, warns Eőrsi. "If the fascist movement cannot be stopped in Romania, then the whole region is going to be subject to the outbreak of ultra-right movements", says the former dissident. "For every Hungarian beaten on the streets of Tîrgu Mureș, 20 new Csurkas arise.

Horthy’s heirs?
here. In this atmosphere, hate and intolerance can spread like a plague.”

The HDF rationalises political, economic and cultural relations with South Africa, initiated by the ruling Communist Party last year. Antall ducks the question of international sanctions, responding defensively and noticeably irritated at a recent press conference: “Let me put the question another way. When did the international community ever protest against the treatment of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania?”

The party’s Christian values are based on the Ten Commandments and specious historical claims that Hungarians are a 1,000 year-old democratic people. The religious influence, as well as concern over the falling birthrate, informs HDF’s positions on women’s issues. The party objects to abortion on principle, although it has not yet called for changes in the existing laws which protect the right. Rather, it advocates a “Magyarisation of new morality” and a “re-education of society”, in which the “passing on of human life is of the highest value”.

The family theme is dominant in the kitsch campaign posters plastered across the country. In one, a five year-old, blonde and blue-eyed boy stares open-mouthed into the distance. Another uses a sentimental watercolour of a pregnant woman. Under both, the message: “A Hungarian future”.

The success of the Magyar crusade, however, depends on the longevity of the shaky coalition. With hard times ahead, Hungary’s Western benefactors had hoped for a broad coalition to ensure stability and prompt debt repayment.

Instead, the Forum opted for an alliance with the weak and badly-organised Smallholders and Christian Democrats, both right-wing historical parties resurrected for the vote but with next to no program or political experience.

The Free Democrats, nurtured in the culture of opposition politics, are certain to run rings around their clumsy opponents in parliament. In contrast to the sharp and charismatic AFD leaders, the HDF’s representatives appear provincial and bumbling. After years of collaboration with the old regime, the Forum’s convoluted logic and long-winded efforts to circumvent concrete issues bear the mark of its heritage.

Unfortunately, the Free Democrats do not constitute a left opposition to the country’s tutelage to the IMF and Western investors. But as the stalinist iceberg melts, the ills of Western liberalism look less malignant than the threat of war in Central Europe. Once the dialectic of nationalism has been set in motion, however, the moral protests of Eastern Europe’s liberals may perish quickly in the blaze of irrationality that nationalism ignites.

Paul Hockenos is a freelance journalist in Budapest.
Martin Ferguson

PROFILE

When it became clear last year that Martin Ferguson had been anointed to succeed Simon Crean as ACTU president, one newspaper declared breathlessly that Ferguson would be the peak union council's first ever leftwing president.

The error was not only one of fact - Bob Hawke, despite ending up on the right of the union movement's factional spectrum, was the Left's candidate when he defeated the Right's Harold Souter for the ACTU presidency in 1969. It was also one of interpretation - the Left-Right factional and ideological contests which dominated ACTU politics in the 'fifties and 'sixties have assumed far less significance under the Accord.

The reality has been that the key Left union officials on the ACTU executive have not only supported the Accord approach but, in many cases, have provided the intellectual input and industrial muscle that has underpinned it.

Martin Ferguson's elevation to the ACTU presidency, therefore, has little to do with the Left-Right number crunching of earlier decades. Rather, it is a signal of the growing influence of the younger generation of pragmatic Left union officials who have grown close to ACTU secretary Bill Kelty (nominally of the Centre), and of the increasingly non-factional nature of ACTU politics.

Like Simon Crean, Martin Ferguson will be a strong supporter of the Accord approach of using the union movement's ability to influence wages policy to 'trade' with the Labor government to win improvements in areas where it cannot influence directly, such as taxation and the social wage. He will also push strongly the ACTU agenda of restructuring industrial awards and revitalising the union movement through a round of amalgamations, rationalisation of membership coverage, and a recruitment drive.

The essential differences between the Ferguson and the Crean presidencies, then, will be differences of style rather than of policy. Where Crean presented as a smooth economic rationalist in the modern Labor mould, and seemed more comfortable addressing opinion-makers from business and financial markets than rank-and-file unionists, Ferguson will present as a more traditional, down-to-earth union official and is more likely to criticise publicly the ACTU's Accord partners in Canberra when differences emerge.

Ferguson's background, too, is down-to-earth. His father, Jack, had to leave school at the age of 12 during the Depression to find work to support his family. After the war, Jack Ferguson became a full-time union official, entered politics and eventually rose to become deputy premier of NSW under Wran.

Martin Ferguson studied economics at Sydney University, completing honours in industrial relations in 1975. He was immediately recruited as a research officer by the then general secretary of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union, Ray Gietzelt. He became assistant general secretary of the 'Micos' in 1981 and general secretary in 1984 on Ray Gietzelt's retirement. Many of his views on issues like wages policy, industrial tactics and union amalgamations have been forged out of the influence of Gietzelt and his experiences at the FMWU.

While some of the FMWU's members have industrial muscle, many of them are relatively weak industrially. So the union's industrial strategies have always involved working within the arbitration system and using its strong areas to build pressure for award changes that protect workers in its weak areas. His support for union amalgamations and industry-based unions is also a product of his experience at the FMWU which Gietzelt built from a small, insignificant union in 1955 to one of Australia's biggest by effecting more than 50 amalgamations.

In NSW, Ferguson and the FMWU have been deeply involved in the divisions which have dogged the NSW ALP Left for years and which culminated in the split in November last year over the restructuring of the Left steering committee into the Socialist Left. Ferguson lines up with the more pragmatic elements of the NSW Left, including figures like Rodney Cavalier, John Faulkner and Andrew Refshauge against the more hard-line Socialist Left grouping associated with figures like AMWU national secretary George Campbell and former NSW Attorney-General Frank Walker.

These tensions have meant that Ferguson has been a highly controversial figure in the NSW Left. But from a national perspective he will be firmly in the mould of such figures as Cliff Dolan, Charlie Fitzgibbon and, most importantly, his own mentor at the Micos, Ray Gietzelt - the Left leader who stitched together the Left-Centre alliance that elected Bob Hawke to the ACTU presidency just over twenty years ago.

Mark Davis
Chief industrial reporter for The Age.
That'll learn 'ya

Picture this heartwarming scene...a young boy sits at breakfast with his dad. It's a golden morning in Queensland; one of those that remind you of crusty bread ads or honey commercials. Outside, a bird-style sound tells us that we are in Australia's heartland - the bush - that salinated, eroded, dieldrin-saturated and generally degraded wide brown land that we love and sing about. The little lad is manfully tucking in to a well-cindered steak and a couple of fried eggs. His dad is doing likewise, only more of it.

"Dad," says the boy, "can I be an MP like you when I grow up?" Dad's cholesterol-enhanced chest swells even more. "Course, son," he says, gruffly, his voice choked with emotion and good Aussie beef. "You can have my seat." "Oh. Like Wayne Goss?" asks, as the brush strokes continue to swoosh rhythmically, calmly, beautifully across the taut, quivering, trusting rump.

"Yes dad...we learn things,..." says the boy brightly, trying hard, eager to please.

"Exactly. We LEARN things. But son. But...everybody learns things. That Fitzgerald bastard learns things. The electorate learns things. Everybloodybody learns things. Every flamin' poofaher greenie whinging commo in flamin' Canberra learns things. And they learn things about OUR flamin' business. That's what. And then what happens? All bloody hell breaks loose, that's what." Dad attacks his steak with renewed vigour, tearing at it in a way that instantly reminds him - pleasantly - of his last speech in the House. In his ears he can hear once again the howling and baying and stamping of his fellows as he had ripped into the then Opposition. He gulps, reluctant to dwell on that last fact, and continues quickly on down memory lane. The rousing reception given on his side of the House to that speech had made him muse later, to the Press Gallery, that he just didn't know why he'd waited 27 years to make his maiden speech.

Another - darker - memory crosses, cloudlike, his triple-disc furrowed brow. He fixes the remains of the steak to the plate with a fierce prod of his fork. "Flamin' mardi grass woofter penpushers..." he mutters to himself. "They were all in it. Mustabin."

"One of our teachers went to mardi grass this year, dad," his son says, "It's in Sydney."

This time, the apoplexy is for real. Dad slumps forward over the table, nose diving into the remains of his breakfast. It reminds the boy of his grandfather's famous prize Landrace sows.

After a few moments he leaves the breakfast nook and goes out to the back paddock where his mother has been tending her quarter horses for several hours already. "Mum," he says, tentatively, "I think dad is dead." "How can you tell darling?" she asks, as the brush strokes continue to swoosh rhythmically, calmly, beautifully across the taut, quivering, trusting rump.

"That flamin' commo smartarse poofaher..." rasps dad, steak juices flecks of foaming spittle spattering the oilcloth-style table covering, as he attempts to extricate himself from the confined space of the breakfast nook. "Where d'y think ya learnt language like that son? Eh? That flamin' poofaher school o' yours, eh?"

"Wayne Goss is the Premier, dad...he's going to visit our school next term," says the boy cautiously, wondering all the while whether 'premier' is also a common smartarse poofaher word. He gets something closely resembling an answer as his father's face turns plainly and purely purple.

"Visit! School!" he giberres, "I knew it was a mistake. Knew it. Do you realise, son, that nobody - NOBODY - on our side of parliament went to school? None of that poofaher HSC muck. And because of that we have ruled this state - man and boy - for 30 years. Do you know who held my seat before me?"

"Grandad?"

"Grandad. Exactly. And he never went to flamin' pre-school or kindy or poofaher muck like that, did he? No. He learnt everything he knew from sheep. Out the back paddock, that's where he did his schoolin'. And do you know what happens when people start messin' round with education? Do you?"

"Visit! School!" he gibbers, "I'm really disappointed. Really disappointed. What do I send you to that school for, eh?"

The boy sits silent. He is truly flummoxed by this question. His father nods, satisfied that the quiet indicates depths of remorse.

After a contemplative moment Dad attacks his steak with renewed vigour, tearing at it in a way that instantly reminds him - pleasantly - of his last speech in the House. In his ears he can hear once again the howling and baying and stamping of his fellows as he had ripped into the then Opposition. He gulps, reluctant to dwell on that last fact, and continues quickly on down memory lane. The rousing reception given on his side of the House to that speech had made him muse later, to the Press Gallery, that he just didn't know why he'd waited 27 years to make his maiden speech.

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This time, the apoplexy is for real. Dad slumps forward over the table, nose diving into the remains of his breakfast. It reminds the boy of his grandfather's famous prize Landrace sows.

After a few moments he leaves the breakfast nook and goes out to the back paddock where his mother has been tending her quarter horses for several hours already. "Mum," he says, tentatively, "I think dad is dead."

That Fitzgerald bastard learns things. And they learn things about OUR flamin' business. That's what. And then what happens? All bloody hell breaks loose, that's what.

Diana Simmonds
Just on a year in the job as Mayor of North Sydney, in 1981, Ted Mack decided to stand for his local seat in the NSW parliament. The seat where Mack lived was the base of the Liberal leader, Bruce McDonald, a former developer, a representative of everything that Mack had entered public life to oppose.

In order to make an immediate impact against the popular Labor Premier Neville Wran, McDonald had chosen to employ extravagant language with deliberately violent imagery. McDonald’s extremist language was a matter of shame for genteel conservatives, the very sort who inhabited his own constituency and who, for a decade, had been able to live with the liberal populism of councillor Mack.

The question was whether Mack could climb over the ALP, no mean feat as the ALP in 1978 had polled over 45% of the vote. However, the ALP leadership decided to make life uncomfortable for a Liberal who had aroused a rare degree of hatred. The party would continue to contest the seat but the effort to win would be minimal.

The Wran government duly won the 1981 election with a majority that broke its own record. North Shore meanwhile was close to a three-way tie. Mack’s candidature had dragged McDonald well below an absolute majority; his victory hung in the balance because the Labor vote had held over 30%. If Labor came second, enough of Mack’s preferences would flow to McDonald so as to elect him safely. If Mack came second, the Labor preferences would flow solidly to him and Mack would win. By the time that the last primary was counted, Mack was in front of Labor by a few hundred. From there he won.

Since then independents, serious about winning, have sought to employ Mack’s 1981 formula. The first indispensable factor is a safe seat - it does not matter which party. This is such an obvious piece of arithmetic that it has eluded most analysts. Independents waste their time in marginal seats. Every independent who has won has relied upon: (1) the winning party becoming so complacent that it overlooks the rudiments of local campaigning; (2) the losing party so battered and exhausted by the certainty of defeat that it has effectively stopped trying. That is when the arithmetic becomes awfully straightforward: if the independent can finish ahead of the other major party, he or she can ride the preferences to victory.

It is terribly easy right now to compete in the chase for cheers when the major parties are coalition of (sometimes severe) internal differences and umbrellas for all shades of mainstream opinion. In order to win a federal or state election in Australia, the parties have to draw the big picture, and local candidates have to fit inside that picture - with the odd exception like a Grahame Campbell in Kalgoorlie.

Modern Australia is a part of the world economy, for better, for worse. Contemporary statecraft requires a degree of economic literacy. The mainstream ALP Left - the “soft Left” as Stewart West has called them - is as attuned to the rhetoric of economic rationalism as any other player in the parliaments of the land.

Forty-five years after the end of hostilities, the undisputed success of planning for military victory and a better society has faded from memories. The prevailing wisdom is the flight from regulation; it is a hegemony that requires a response beyond slogans. Politics is more complex, its players cannot operate separate to the laws of mathematics, the fundamentals of limited resources, the popular resentment of taxation.

In this policy environment the Democrats at present are seeking to occupy rhetorical territory on the Left, vacated, they profess, by an ALP hungry for the middle ground. Yet independents are seeking to appeal to a regionalism of microscopic proportions, the region of the local borough. The Democrats have not succeeded in a Lower House anywhere. Janine Haines’ defeat reveals that they are not likely to. The independents’ narrower focus has worked handsomely for the more adept among them.

The rhetoric common to Democrats and independents alike is anti-party - the all-purpose swear word being “bureaucracy”. The national interest does not figure. The wicked aspect of this anti-party posturing is the pretence that independents can suspend the iron laws of politics - the need for negotiation, to compromise in order to achieve mutually agreed ends, leadership, an administrative arm to execute the will of the elected representatives in order to ensure fairness and consistency.

Take North Sydney Council itself under Ted Mack. It was completely honest, a model of open government. It was also the instrument of a tightly disciplined majority; it could not have functioned otherwise. That tight discipline was, doubtless, the product of reason and persuasion, not bribes or intimidation. North Sydney under Mack and any Council under a charismatic non-party

(Continued on page 45)
The Eastern European revolutions have been hailed as the death of socialism. Others have argued that they offer a new start for the democratic Left on the world stage. So, is it a moment of defeat or a cause for relief? We assembled a roundtable discussion to confront some of the burning issues.

Yvonne Preston is a feature writer for the Sydney Morning Herald. Peter Baldwin is the new federal minister for Employment and Education Services, and Labor MP for Sydney. Sylvia Lawson is a fulltime writer of history and journalism. Eric Aarons is a former joint national secretary of the Communist Party who now sculpts and writes. George Markus left his native Hungary in the 'seventies: he now teaches in General Philosophy at Sydney University. The discussion was chaired by Adam Farrar.

The events of the last few months in Eastern Europe have been widely interpreted in the media as the definitive end of socialism. How persuasive is this depiction?

PETER: Gareth Evans and Bob Carr both travelled in Eastern Europe earlier this year. They have argued strongly since that the events in Eastern Europe are a comprehensive vindication of the social democratic position in the Labor Party and a final and complete defeat of the contrary viewpoint. That's a view which somebody aligned with the Left of the Labor Party has, I think, to take very seriously. And for this reason these events, though they may seem remote, will have a pervasive effect on ideological debate within the Labor Party, as well as beyond.

There are certain things that we on the Left have to acknowledge. I think it's very clear that you can't operate a modern economy without a substantial degree of market determination. That's a reality that people on the Left are going to have to come to grips with. On the other hand I would continue to maintain that there is a case for substantially more intervention in the economy, particularly if we are going to achieve the sort of goals that we want to see Australia achieve - that is, a restructuring of its economy in a way which is both socially benign and environmentally responsible. Reliance on market forces alone isn't going to deliver that. We have to reconstruct a case for those sorts of interventionist policies. It's a major challenge.

Is there any chance that further down the track these developments in Eastern Europe might lead to new forms of politics there which might in turn provide a pole of attraction for the Left of Labor and social democratic parties in the West?

GEORGE: I must say my feelings on that score are rather
The Soviet Union is to some extent a special case. It's clear now that some of the smaller East European countries will integrate into a liberal democratic Western capitalism. And others, in all probability, will be 'Latin Americanised'. They will develop nationalistic autocratic regimes, highly dependent on foreign capital.

In 1956, in last days of the Hungarian revolution, completely spontaneously, workers councils emerged in a mass way. In Prague in 1968 the same movement was much weaker but nevertheless it really was not clear to what extent it was officially organised and to what extent it was spontaneous. But today there is in none of these countries a spontaneous movement for anything like workers self-management.

Some months ago in Gdansk there was a general strike. There was one big enterprise which did not go on strike: the shipyards, the origins of Solidarity. It did not go on strike because some months earlier a large Western corporation made a very big investment in the shipyards and the workers didn't want to antagonise them.

That's the outlook of the founders of Solidarity now. To understand this I think you have to take their experiences into account. There is no doubt, for instance, that Hungarians in the late 1930s definitely lived better in relation to Western countries than they do now. Nowadays Hungary has one of the world's highest infant mortality rates and one of the world's highest suicide rates. People there understandably feel they've been guinea-pigs in a vast social experiment which has failed. And they are determined above all to make a break with that past.

ERIC: I think George is right to be pessimistic certainly in the short term, perhaps even in the long term. A number of people have said to me in recent months concerning these upheavals in Eastern Europe that we mustn't throw out the baby with the bath water. This prompted me to reply: what is the baby? Is there actually anything worth holding on to in those societies and their values?

When I look back on my past, speaking as one who's been a communist for many, many years, I come to these conclusions. The first thing to understand is that the events which shaped the epoch of the formation of the Soviet Union all happened in a relatively short period. First, there was World War One, which changed so much for everybody on the Left. Then, only 10 years after, there was the Depression, and all the privileges and inequalities which it threw into relief. Then there was the rise of fascism throughout the world, the struggles against colonialism, and the threat of a new world war which eventuated only 20 years after the end of the previous one. The opposition to those cataclysmic events defined the values of the left for a generation or more.

So many things were promised by the socialism of that era, and you could almost say the opposite was delivered. And it wasn't just because of individuals, or even Stalinism. It went deeper than that, I believe, because it has affected so many countries in approximately the same way. And events have now shown in the countries of Eastern Europe other than the Soviet Union - which is a slightly different case - not just the bankruptcy, but the absolute bankruptcy of the Communist parties there. They had been able to exercise all that power for all that time, yet as soon as Soviet might was withdrawn they collapsed like a pack of cards. And now there is no likelihood whatever of them reviving, I wouldn't think. It is a massive defeat.

PETER: Obviously, the demise of Eastern European socialism is something that is going to take a long time to live down. But it does also provide an opportunity to once and for all discard a lot of ideological baggage. For ex-
ample the notion that there's some kind of historical inevitability about the acceptance of socialism no longer has any credibility. For so long now socialists have predicted the demise of capitalism on the basis of the incompatibility of the capitalist mode of production with the development of productive forces. There's a certain irony in the fact that it's the centrally planned economies of Eastern Europe that have shown themselves incompatible with modern productive forces. There has been a technological transformation of the basis of production and services in the West which has largely bypassed Eastern Europe.

There's another task which I think is critical. For a long time the Left tended to take at best a fairly condescending view of the importance of formal democratic freedoms and the liberal democratic order. Large sections of the Left, both outside and inside the Labor Party, have tended to downgrade the importance of genuinely free elections, a press where people can express themselves without fear of being put in a psychiatric institution, and so on. I think it's clear now that without a liberal democratic order you have nothing. Those 'formal' freedoms are more than formal: they're absolutely fundamental.

YVONNE: What is very hard to comprehend, though, is how little recognition there was of quite how bad these societies were and why it seems to have come as a kind of revelation to so many people. I worked in China as a journalist in the 'seventies. We had a succession of people from the rich Western countries, trade unionists, workers, all kinds of people - all of whom would say this society was utopia. Nobody seemed to see what we kept describing - that there were people (we now know millions) who were starving and millions who died during the Cultural Revolution. I spent several stints in the Soviet Union as a European correspondent before the current changes, and even then you could find people who would tell you what it was really like. You could use your eyes and see: those queues of people, those empty shops, those empty lives, this dead hand. How was it that so few on the Left understood quite how bad things were?

SYLVIA: I think you did hear about those things. As early as the 'fifties people returned from those countries and wrote things which exposed the extent of the tyranny, and the extent of spiritual and social damage you're talking about. But I don't think they were heard distinctly enough as against the tendency of the Left in numerous countries to project onto communist countries their disaffection with their own countries. There is an intense desire on the part of many people to react against where they are and project what they want to see onto other countries, and a lot of people have done that onto the Soviet Union and the socialist countries.

Another question these events have highlighted is the difficulty of disentangling what we mean by left and right now on the world stage. In Hungary or the Soviet Union or Poland now to be on the Left, as far as I can tell, is to be pressing for what we all perceive as reforms. It means to be pressing for more social democracy - not so much socialism but certainly social democracy - more pluralism, more freedom to speak, more freedom to be and live in different ways.

I remember the shock and pain when in Stalin's Soviet Union Pasternak was axed from the writers union - and we tried to work out what to do with that. Of course the right always instantly knows what to do with it.

I'd like to ask two questions here. Sylvia, you noted that Eastern Europe was for many years used by the Left in the West as a screen on to which to project a utopian alternative to all those things which we have opposed in our own societies. Does that mean, as I
think Peter was arguing earlier, that we need to find ways of arguing the case for progressive politics without a screen to project it onto? Because it seems to me it's a very real question as to whether that's possible.

Another consequence of the Eastern European events, as Peter also mentioned, is that some of the crucial left concerns within the Labor Party and on the Left generally have been in the public gaze seriously discredited. If Eastern Europe stood as a model for anything, it stood as a model in our eyes, for social security, secure housing, for a welfare system which was at least utterly pervasive. And yet it seems that this too was to a large extent a myth. What does that do to projects for social justice which we may want to advance?

ERIC: On your first question, I think there are a number of things which can be visualised fairly clearly without a 'screen'. The first is the affirmation of democracy and its extension. Secondly we would want a greater degree of equality, a concern for social justice: I think we know roughly what we want to say about those, without needing a screen to project them onto.

The biggest difficulty is I think the economic question. The ownership question is an example of the dilemmas involved. The question of non-private ownership of the means of production is clearly a problem for the Left. The whole concept of 'public' ownership has lost credibility, because if you're talking about the state owning or government running an industry, then obviously the political system is inextricably bound up with it. I have heard from media programs reporting from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union that they are discussing seriously not so much ownership of the means of production, as their custodianship. I don't know that this solves the question but it could be a very important way of thinking about it.

Furthermore, anyone who nowadays talks about doing away with the market is not going to be listened to by anyone beyond their own small circle. And if you are going to have markets, you've got to have entrepreneurial people; people who know how to operate within that environment. Again many leftists think it's easy: rub a few marxist truths together and you know how to run a business. Leaving aside the experience from the Soviet bloc - which is I think overwhelming - our own very small experience here tells me that parties and governments cannot run enterprises. However, this doesn't mean that the only people who can run them are capitalists. At present capital employs workers but maybe workers could employ capital?

GEORGE: I can recall and understand those processes of self-deception on the Left that Yvonne mentioned. People on the left were in trouble in their own countries and wanted to identify with something - with something that is not merely a utopia but something real. One of my uncles was an American communist. And for me one of the most unpleasant things as we became more and more disenchanted in Hungary was to see him suffer. He loved us but on the other hand Hungary was for him an ideal. He used to say: "but the children are smiling!"

Yet the result was a moral discrediting of the Left. I think what has happened in Eastern Europe can be useful to the Left if two things happen which are completely contradictory. On the one hand, the left has to become more pragmatic, more concrete, less doctrinaire. Yet on the other hand the Left has to reclaim some long term image of a juster society - not the just society, because I don't believe that the just is possible, but a more just society than this.
Because otherwise the Left is just a rag bag of one issue movements. The difficulties there are enormous.

The East European experience is more devastating in this than in any other respect. For example the Hungarian reforms clearly resulted in nothing because you cannot have market forces unless you also have capital markets. Now capital markets and nationalised enterprises just don't go together. So in this sense, when we say that we cannot do without the market, we are making a very strong statement indeed.

We have to rethink all these questions and as far as I can see there are no theoretical answers at present. We need to have a much more pragmatic politics, the development of some completely new model of what we think by a more just society and keeping the two apart - not subordinating either theory to politics or politics to theory.

PETER: I think George's emphasis on the need for a pragmatic approach, where we espouse a set of values and we look to the most effective ways of pursuing them, is of primary importance. One of the questions worth pondering was posed by Chalmers Johnson in his book MITI and the Japanese Miracle. How is it, he asks, that there has been a manifest failure of planning and intervention in Eastern Europe, while on the other hand you've got highly interventionist economies in East Asia, and in Western Europe to some extent, which are generally perceived to have been highly successful? He makes what struck me as a very interesting distinction between two types of planning. One he calls 'plan ideological': this is where you seek to run a society or an economy in accordance with an ideologically determined blueprint. And so, for instance, to take the Soviet example, you try to construct a pricing scheme based on the labour theory of value.

He contrasts that with the type of planning carried out in Japan and the newly industrialising countries, which he calls 'plan rational'. And the essence of 'plan rational' is a preparedness to use intervention - as opposed to an ideological commitment to allowing the market to do what it will - but to have a very pragmatic, empirical approach to it.

Obviously people on the Left are seeking different goals to those whose goal is maximum economic development and the maximisation of Japanese economic power. But what this does seem to suggest is that we need to adopt this empirical, pragmatic approach to planning and intervention. If that is the basic approach to intervention it ought to play a more prominent role in restructuring the Australian economy than at present.

ERIC: Another problem, taking up George's point, is the question of the world capital market, something which makes it still more difficult to resolve the economic side of the Left's equation. There are unbelievable amounts of money awash in the world nowadays that can be transferred from country to country virtually in an instant. Five years ago Max Walsh put the figure at two million, million dollars, and you could probably multiply that by an order of five or ten now.

Some on the European Left see one aspect of a solution to this problem as to be more active in Europe, creating links between various national economies moving in a progressive direction. In that I think they're probably right.

Yet Australia has no evident prospect of an alliance of that kind. We're isolated as a small and vulnerable economy in our part of the world, and we're at the mercy of these international money flows. But if we just let that process take its course, then, as Keating said, we will be Latin Americanised. We do have to think pragmatically as well as theoretically about it. The fact that an economy like
Australia’s is so dependent, small and weak actually makes intervention more important.

SYLVIA: On the question of the balance between the pragmatic and what I'll call the idealistic - surely this means that the left in future has got to come to terms with ideas which have been just off the agenda in the past. Maybe a mixture of privatisation with regulation and intervention is in order. Do we perhaps simply have to face the prospect of being able to accept privatisation in some areas while resisting it in others?

I'm thinking here also of the question of individualism, and how it correlates in the market. Some people have for years now been urging the British Left to understand the kind of chords Thatcherism has struck in the populace and the real appeal the rhetoric of individualism has had. These people have appealed to the Left to understand that the individual as a concept must have a place in the thinking of the left. Perhaps some of the developments in Eastern Europe challenge left ideas so completely because they're so much focussed around the question of individual liberty.

ERIC: Also lurking in the thinking of the Left, and also derived from Marx, is the elevation of class relations above all other relations. There has even been thought to be a direct causal relation, with class in some last instance determining everything else. Now we can see with our eyes in Australia that it's not like that. Class does not unite people to that degree, and in our society people do have in varying degrees prospects of self-realisation and self-development. People are not just workers: they are also consumers, travellers, lovers, writers, whatever...

"People there feel they've been guinea-pigs in a vast social experiment which has failed."

YVONNE: There is another tendency still active I think in the Left - to want to project a utopian ideal onto people. There is a great deal of criticism from the Left of the rise of nationalism in Eastern Europe - because, we are told, this is going back to the past and because it goes against the internationalist approach. But if you look at the situation for people like the Estonians, it’s impossible to say that they should not express their legitimate national aspirations.

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What we need from the Left in the West is not exactly a mea culpa, but realism. When you look at the circumstances for people in large parts of Eastern Europe, it's just not good enough to say how dreadful that they were reported as just rushing after consumer goods from the West. If I lived there and could get so little, the first thing I would be after would be nice clothes for my daughters or a decent square meal.

But I also want to ask a simple question. When we list all the problems these events have raised in the Left's traditional analyses, it doesn't seem as though there's a great deal of socialism left. The class struggle is dead. We can even accept privatisation. There's no clear notion of nationalisation. What is actually left in the socialist vision?

SYLVIA: I agree that to carry on about the selfishness of consumerism is a bourgeois luxury for people in our kind of position. But on the other hand if you read some of the writing coming out of the Soviet Union at present you can see an incredibly strong idealism which is not just about consumer goods but is also about the enormous pleasure and adventure of helping things change.

When there was the exodus from East Germany, some people rushed across the border to stay but others went back. I remember one young woman, an anthropologist, interviewed on radio saying 'Yes, it was great fun. But I'm back'. What she and others so clearly meant was: it's much more fun to be here helping things change than to go over there and be hanging around and struggling for your place in a world which belongs to other people.

PETER: I remember back in 1980 I was involved in a debate with Gareth Evans over the ALP's socialist objective and Evans' argument was that these days socialism should be about a set of values, such as greater social equity and so on. The Left counter to that view was that in order
to pursue those values it is necessary to bring about some structural economic change. Yet now the parliamentary Left in the Labor Party has as one of its highest priorities the notion of social justice. That represents a major change from the sorts of things we used to say in those debates.

I think Yvonne poses a very important question. Given all those changes in our thinking - once you throw out the bath water, is there actually a baby left in it? One of the things which drew me to defining myself as a socialist seemed to be encapsulated in the descriptions of the cooperatives which function in certain parts of Europe. Here is a network of enterprises that are able to produce goods capable of being sold in a market environment and which are completely viable within the context of a market economy. Yet they do so with structures of ownership and decision-making which seem to be comprehensively democratic. That does indicate that there are alternatives to the old dichotomy between public and private ownership, and that it is possible for something other than conventional private ownership to be compatible with a market economy.

Again I think we can renovate our thinking on the public sector. We've had a terribly sterile privatisation debate dragging on in the Labor Party for some time. On the one hand you've got those who assert that public ownership is desirable for its own sake. They deny that they assert that, but when it comes down to it their arguments are simply arguments about ideological principle. On the other hand you've got senior ministers who want to sell off all public enterprises supposedly in order to be able to provide higher levels of recurrent government expenditure than would otherwise be feasible.

And yet in economic terms that is nonsensical. So you've got two nonsensical positions being posed against one another. In reality I think we should be having a very different debate about privatisation. We should be asking questions of what particular function is served by public ownership of this or that enterprise. Do we want public ownership of an enterprise in order to have the enterprise performing differently, to in some way free it from the dictates of market forces in ways which might be difficult if it remains private ownership? Questions like that need to be asked, instead of this rather futile debate that we have at the moment.

SYLVIA: On the question of what's left for socialism - I think there is one principle in particular which is, if you want to put it this way, philosophic. The debate around socialism reminds me a lot of the debates around feminism. There are lots of sectarian sections within socialism, as within feminism, who do seem to want very insistently and determinedly unitary and collective goals. I see the socialist or social democratic trends in the pre-

"Maybe a mixture of privatisation with regulation and intervention is in order."

viously dissident and presently ascendant movements and groups in Eastern Europe to be asking primarily for the right to diversity, the right to be different people. Not for the right to have just one voice in a country but the right for that country to have a lot of different voices speaking and allowed space to speak. By a rough kind of analogy, I see the same spirit among those feminists who see feminism as a set of moves to liberate an entire diversity of female voices rather than to have us all in separate boxes agreeing with each other.

The Left still has a different concept of the person - without dismissing the notion of class in all its determinations. The person in left thinking as I understand it is a citizen with rights, obligations, a capacity in public and private life, and a capacity for action and participation which can't be pre-empted or summed up in phrases like 'the masses don't understand any of that' or 'the masses want this or that'. In so far as the movements in Eastern Europe seem to be, among other things, cries for diversity, moves to pluralism, and moves not least towards the freeing up of cultural institutions so that the unprivileged can do more speaking in journals and in literature, in music and performance, I think this left notion of the citizen should be congenial to them.

GEORGE: The question 'what's left of socialism?' reminds me of an episode from my own past. In the latter 'fifties the then Polish marxist Leszek Kolakowski wrote an article which consisted of a very long list of what socialism is not. It ended with the question: "Well, then, what is socialism? I don't know". When I read it in Hungary in the 'fifties I disliked this article immensely. In retrospect I was a very dogmatic young communist, though I then considered myself and I was considered by others to be a very revisionist one. Yet I have to say that I'm not quite happy with Kolakowski's answer even today. I don't of course, any longer expect a blueprint of a just society. But (and perhaps this is my professional malady as a philosopher) I would like to know a little bit more about the means of going where we want to go in the longer run.

Here in Australia I know that I support land rights for Aborigines, let's say, as well as many other causes. But I'd like to be able to go a little bit beyond merely pragmatic concerns. I'd like to have some kind of vision or visions of a society which is structurally more appropriate for the realisation of these values.

I would like to have this type of vision and I must confess that I don't have. That of course is the result of my history and experiences and the historical experience of Eastern Europe. But it does also seem to me as an objective description of the situation that such a vision is simply not around in our epoch.

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FEELING the PINCH

Its opponents argue that Labor's seven years of government have overseen a massive cut in living standards to restore profit share. Bob Hawke insists that households have benefited, and that social justice will be his government's legacy. So what's the answer? Or is there an answer? Greg Mahony contends that neither the picture nor the solutions are as simple as the critics believe.

At the height of his popularity, former New York Mayor Ed Koch would warm-up approving crowds with a rhetorical: "How'm I doin'?" Last year a much less popular Koch was dumped in the Democratic primaries and was replaced as Mayor by David Dinkins, the first Afro-American to hold this position.

Other than for the Profumo scandal, Harold Macmillan is remembered for little if not his assertion to the British of the 1960's that: "You’ve never had it so good!" After seven years of Labor in government, cabinet ministers, pollsters and political commentators have re-worked the old question of just how are they doin'? And the legion of undecided voters of early March have now spoken on behalf of the country and given us an answer. Unlike Mayor Koch, Labor has won a reprieve but the response of voters to the Macmillan type challenge seems no clearer now that the people have spoken.

Our perceptions of how well we're doin' no doubt influences our opinion of how they're doin'. In the recent election working women and men weighed up their individual and collective positions over the life of 'their' Labor government and living standards must have been an element in their calculus. Like the counting of the polls the calculus might not be so straightforward. Certainly there is a view in some trade union and left circles that the reductions in the real wage (that is wages adjusted for inflation) have not been matched by gains in other areas for working people. This perception is hard to dispel when households see their living standards declining for one reason or another. A vocal concern with your absolute and relative position in terms of income need not reflect narrow self interest. It can and should reflect a class interest.
In the face of conflicting anecdotal evidence regarding the course of living standards and income inequality in Australia over the last seven years, the need for a round up of the available evidence is clear.

The academic view doesn't always gel with either popular conceptions or with political priorities, but I need to stick with what I know.

Economists discuss income distribution in two ways. First, discussion of income inequality focuses on the distribution of income between individuals or households and how this distribution changes through time. The major factors thought to have an influence are changes in wage rates, hours worked and levels of employment, access to and levels of government assistance such as family allowances and unemployment benefits, taxation scales and indirect taxes and government charges, housing costs, and changes in income streams from the ownership of property such as dividends, rents and interest income. This kind of examination of income distribution between individuals in households is referred to as the personal distribution of income.

Patterns in the personal distribution of income are no doubt intimately intertwined with changes in the so-called functional distribution of income. This is the second way in which economists discuss income distribution. The general idea enters into popular discourse via pronouncements on the wage or profit share of national income. Broadly, the formal discussion centres on income in the form of wages, rent and profits flowing from the sale of labour power or from the ownership of land or capital. This is not to say that these analytical categories exactly correspond to income classes, as it is evident that many individuals and households derive income from more than one of these sources. The immediate concern with changes in the functional distribution of income is not with individual household incomes but with the effects of changes in the shares of national income going to wages, real and profits on the overall growth rate of the economy. For example, the ‘restoration of the profit share of national income’ that we have experienced since 1983 was lauded as an essential step in providing corporations with relief from a financial constraint on investment. That is, increased income flows for private capital was meant to assist in accumulation and provide an (economically) sustainable higher rate of growth for the economy and thereby allow for improved living standards in the longer term.

In spite of the recent upsurge in investment it is often doubted whether it is flowing into the sectors of the economy that most require restructuring and expansion if sustainable growth is to be achieved. The bulk of the investment boom appears to be in finance and construction and concentrated in data processing areas of the non-financial sectors. Furthermore with the slowing rate of growth of the economy even this investment boom appears to be petering out if surveys of business intentions are any guide. Will the labour movement view a collapse of investment as a betrayal of the restraint they have shown over the last seven years?

It is well known that the Accord from 1983 has heralded in a period of sustained reductions in real wages. That is, nominal wages buy less even though they are growing and wage earners find they are falling behind because of price increases. In spite of the fact that this was not the stated intent of the original Accord document, wrangles such as the Medicare adjustment, discounting for the effects of the depreciation of the Australian dollar associated with the deterioration in the terms of trade in 1985, and various labyrinthine devices relating money wage increases to productivity and tax/wage trade-offs have resulted in reductions in real wage rates.

Such rates are not, however, the sole indicator of earnings. The path of real earnings has been more steady with only slight reductions in some of the last six years. Things other than wage rates affect earnings, such as overtime worked, an increased proportion of part-time jobs, career structures that contain annual increments, and possibly over award payments. (Those in cash or kind are of course not recorded by the statistician.) These factors have probably had differential effects on earnings under the period of the Accord. Among the pluses, it could be argued that the increased probability of finding and holding a job since 1983 should have eased some of the pain from any adverse effects on the welfare of working people.

The material effects of this increased probability are perhaps best revealed in the data on household disposable income. Here, as when discussing earnings, there is the trap of the average and the risk that it obscures more than it reveals. Treasurer Keating is quick to trot out the data on household disposable income when his credentials as a defender of traditional Labor values are challenged.

But what is the full picture with respect to trends in household disposable income? The Prime Minister, in the ‘Great Debate’, approvingly quoted research carried out at the University of New South Wales by the Social Welfare Policy Centre to the effect that lower income households have significantly improved the circumstances of the poorest groups. The rise in capital incomes for governments, median income families also have not done so well, particularly when incomes after housing costs are considered. Unfortunately for governments, median income families also tend to contain median voters.

Whilst the limited nature of our analysis does not allow a conclusive response to the statement that ‘the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer’, we do feel confident in asserting that increases in employment and income support for families with children over the last seven years have significantly improved the circumstances of the poorest groups. The rise in capital incomes does seem to have benefited the very rich and those with significant savings (e.g. the middle class aged). Middle income families however, have not done so well, particularly when incomes after housing costs are considered. Unfortunately for governments, median income families also tend to contain median voters.

Andrew Peacock could have easily drawn directly on
these last two sentences for one of the opportunities to respond that he passed up in that TV debate.

So a fuller picture of living standards as measured by household disposable income demands some account of government income support for families, income from capital assets and housing costs. Let's have a brief look at the experience under Labor in these areas. Income support for families is part of the broader social wage concept that under the Accord is seen as a means of supplementing household income in a time of restraint of wages and earnings.

The period since the Social Security Review of 1985 has seen substantial increases in rates of Family Assistance Supplements and Family Allowances. Many social welfare payments are now indexed to inflation. Some attempts have been made to remove so called poverty traps in the social security system. Changes to unemployment benefits have meant increases for most categories with the cuts or changes in the youth dole being the obvious exception. Fiddling with the payments for young unskilled unemployed people with tags such as Job Research Allowance may rankle any anti-Victorian attitudes to poverty but perhaps these moves need to be judged against the achievement of higher retention rates in secondary education and allowances that encourage these higher retention rates. On the other hand, the large number of homeless youth on the streets of our major cities probably have a less kind assessment of the equity of some of these changes.

Upper middle income families may perceive themselves disadvantaged by some of these changes principally when they are means tested out of one or another benefit. These same families (or high income earners) neglect to mention the disproportional benefit they receive from the tax deductibility of some family related expenditures.

Hawke's rash 1987 promise that "no child will be living in poverty by 1990", may appear to have been met if one is very pedantic about the parameters of that original promise. But that pedantic nuance is not what the electorate heard. Rather they understand, quite reasonably, a promise to eradicate child poverty. The government will continue to be hounded by their transparent failure to do what the electorate understood they were promised. Still, unlike the median voters referred to above, those who see the eradication of child poverty as a top priority of any government don't tend to swing elections.

Unlike the children in or out of poverty, the position of those with income earning assets appears to have improved. This is especially true of the middle class aged but may be questioned in the case of sole parents in this category. For every young household struggling with high mortgage payments it is worth remembering that there is an asset holder or two out there enjoying higher interest income. Among these, the new rentiers, our superannuants, you may find your own parents or grandparents. For those with wealth who are still working, the fringe benefits tax and the capital gains tax changes don't seem to have had dramatic effects on disposable income.

What impact there has been was more than compen-sated for by reductions in marginal tax rates on personal income, changes to the taxation of company dividends and the reintroduction of negative gearing. Those on lower incomes no doubt gained from the reductions in personal taxation rates as long as they were working. Again and again the sole parent, unemployed, with no access to child care and in rented accommodation appears to be the one who fails to benefit substantially from across the board changes in social welfare or taxation policy. Employment, housing and child care (not necessarily in that order) appear as intractable problems for so many unskilled people who happen to be single parents. That the lack of improvement in their relative (or even absolute?) position is not easily discernable is an example of the trap of the average.

Rapid rises in house prices and high mortgage interest rates have meant that housing costs have had a substantially detrimental impact on the welfare of most low income householders. The major exception is those owner occupiers who fall into the low income groups.

Is there a connection between the taxation changes that affect and even benefit the rich and the acceleration in house prices (and therefore housing costs) that impact on the poor? In relation to the exemption from capital gains tax that owner-occupied housing enjoys, a prominent economist who also specialises in the field of housing economics observed: "it is almost certainly no accident that the current boom (i.e. early 1989) in house prices can be related to the tax reform of 1986".

Compounding the pressures on housing demand of this loop-hole in the capital gains tax we had the added pressure from the off-again, on-again negative gearing of borrowing to finance property purchases in the income tax act. Those who rent their accommodation may receive slightly lower rents as a result. An increase in the stock of public housing financed through the foregone tax revenue would seem to be a more efficient way of meeting the housing needs of low income households and taking some of the pressure off the rental market.

If abolition of the exemption from capital gains tax for the family house is not politically viable then placing a upper limit on the value of houses entitled to the exemption (eg. $150,000) should be considered.

This sketch of the factors that have influenced income inequality under Labor might strike some readers as too rosy a picture. They may acknowledge that Brian Howe was a most successful Minister of Social Security in the face of tough opposition within the cabinet, but they still see offensive inequality all around them. They can rightly refer me to international comparisons that show that the degree of equality of income and wealth in Australia is not as fair as most Australians would like to believe. By some measures we're on a par with Britain rather than the Scandinavian countries to which we prefer to be compared.

In the face of this persistent inequality of income and wealth, to argue for focussing the debate on the maintenance of economic growth in the economy as a whole is to invite the jibe that increasing the size of the cake rather than redrawing its slices will only tend to perpetuate that
inequality - that the proceeds of growth never 'trickle down'. But this is just what I want to do, and I will argue the case on two grounds.

The first takes us back to the functional distribution of income and its relationship to growth and therefore employment. In the light of the balance of payments constraint on growth it would seem certain that under either a Labor or a Liberal/National Party government tight fiscal policy will be pursued as part of an austerity program. In this climate of fragile growth a fully fledged attempt to directly and substantially increase real wages or labour's share of national income seems doomed to failure.

The openness and added vulnerability of the economy since financial deregulation makes a collapse of output and national income almost certain. This would be accompanied by capital flight and an indefinite suspension of investment plans, or what more colourful commentators like to call a 'strike of capital'.

My second reason for arguing the priority of economic growth is linked to the first in a narrow economic sense but also has a broader and perhaps longer lasting political dimension. We now have a framework in the Accord and the social welfare system to make sustainable improvements in income distribution and sustainable improvements in living standards at least as quickly as feasible in the current political climate and with the existing ownership of capital in this country. So we need to maintain the existing focus and demand the restructuring of the economy and the development of the manufacturing sector in particular.

Future bargaining within the above framework should include growth of jobs through restructuring and industrial policy to promote overall growth of the manufacturing sector. The tax/wage trade-off has extended the legitimacy of trade union concerns into federal government fiscal policy. This is just one of several areas where such legitimacy has been won. It needs to be further extended into such areas as housing policy, child care and even public transport - the very areas that have a direct impact on living standards and the welfare of low income households. I see the maintenance and extension of this legitimacy as the best bulwark against the campaign of the Right against all forms of collectivism. The next Liberal/National Party government will have learnt something about the rise and fall of Thatcherism in Britain. That is, that the strategic significance of Thatcherism has been less to do with any viable economic program than with a political program to aimed at destroying collectivist institutions and at denigrating collectivist strategies for political change. If progressive forces fail to thwart these attacks on collectivism then inequality of income can only get worse.

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The grand vision of Vietnam’s revolutionaries has soured. The economy has spent years in a state of entrenched crisis. Now the Vietnamese Communists have embarked on radical reforms. But can they avoid the malaise of the other former centrally-planned economies, asks Graham Larcombe.

The fall of Saigon in 1975 was one of the significant events of this century. With the defeat of the South Vietnamese regime, the Vietnamese had aspirations to rebuild their country in a form “ten times more beautiful” and to reconstruct their society according to socialist principles. Despite the suffering and disruption in the north and south, there was also a sense of optimism that independence from foreign domination would enable the country to unify and recover from the devastation of 30 years of war.

The north, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, had begun the process of socialist transformation of the economy in the ’fifties, following a model of development that emphasised central planning, the collectivisation of agriculture and giving priority to heavy industry. With this experience, the task of transforming the ‘capitalist’ south was not seen as too arduous, particularly given the fact that the revolutionary forces had militarily defeated the world’s most powerful nation.

Fifteen years later, the vision of a prosperous and reconstructed Vietnam has soured. The country remains one of the poorest twenty countries in the world. The economy has been in chronic crisis with inflation soaring to 300% in 1987. Unemployment statistics are unreliable, but estimates range from between 13% and 20%. This excludes underemployment, with people accommodated in tasks with very low productivity. Economic growth follows a stop-go pattern and, in recent years, has been declining.

Of course, an overriding feature is the economic and
social consequences of war. Not only are they paying for defeating the US militarily, they have also paid heavily for their intervention in Cambodia, through isolation by the West, and cessation of aid and trade opportunities. But the development strategy pursued by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) after reunification has nevertheless had disastrous economic consequences.

Since the late 1970s a reformist leadership has struggled to bring about a reorientation of the economy, away from the command economy influenced by the orthodox Soviet model, and towards decentralisation of decision making and market reforms.

Like their counterparts in many Third World countries such as Angola, China, Cuba, South Yemen, North Korea and Mozambique, the Vietnamese revolutionaries were overwhelmingly influenced by the Soviet experiences, particularly the "building of socialism in one country" approach adopted by Stalin, aimed at forcing the development of the productive forces of the economy in a hostile international environment.

The key component of the Soviet model is to replace market transactions, where resources are allocated according to the law of value, with planning, where resources are allocated in theory according to the priorities of society. In simple terms, under central planning, key enterprises are supplied with resources from the state and directed to produce a certain quantity of output. A centralised bureaucracy develops, which has responsibilities for drawing up plans, choosing priority sectors, and setting targets for individual enterprises.

Profits and prices are not particularly important in guiding economic activity. Key prices are set by administered decision, and may be designed to achieve social objectives, such as cheap agricultural products for industrial workers rather than reflecting the forces of supply and demand or the cost of production to the peasantry. In the orthodox model, enterprise losses are subsidised by the state. Profits over a certain level are transferred to the state. Wages are kept low to support the maximisation of the surplus available for investment and wage differentials are compressed.

It is all too apparent, however, that the orthodox socialist model, with its dependence on a powerful centralised bureaucracy, is in deep crisis. The political developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have reverberated throughout the socialist world. The Vietnamese have their own version of perestroika, 'doi moi', meaning renewal or renovation. In addition, they have become more critical of their own mistakes.

Although encouraged by trends in the Soviet Union, the Vietnamese had embarked on a process of economic reform in 1979 prior to perestroika. This process accelerated over the 'eighties. Developed socialist states such as Hungary, and underdeveloped socialist states such as China, Vietnam and Mozambique, have been forced by circumstances to modify, or, indeed, to dismantle central planning mechanisms. This suggests that central planning generates certain intractable economic problems.

As well as actual experiences, there are now some substantial economic works analysing the internal dynamics and limitations of centrally planned economies - those of British economic historian Alec Nove and Hungarian economist Janos Kornai are two of the most prominent. This body of thought suggests two laws of motion for these societies:

1. state socialist systems have an innate tendency to underproduction and shortage which is related to a series of macro- and micro-economic conflicts over the distribution of resources, including industry versus agriculture, and investment versus consumption;

2. state socialist systems are marked by innate political tendency to the assertion of state control, eradicating all autonomous elements in civil society.

Both these features are crucial in the Vietnamese case.

When the South Vietnamese regime collapsed in April 1975, the country was devastated. In the north, the industrial base and supporting infrastructure which had developed with Soviet assistance between 1955-65 had been severely damaged by US bombings between 1965-68 and 1972. As a consequence of the bombings, industrial production had been dispersed. It also declined. Although the DRV had given special attention to heavy industrialisation, the sector was in disarray at the end of the war. In addition, the agricultural sector in the north was characterised by low productivity and small surpluses resulting from the priority given to the war effort, but also to the lack of incentives given to the peasantry. Trade was hampered by the poor transportation system.

The south, of course, had developed within a capitalist framework, and was highly dependent on US aid. Over 30% of the population was urbanised, the rural sector was more orientated to market transactions, and a large proportion of the workforce was engaged in activities dependent on US support, in the military and service activities.

Given the disruption caused by the war, the new national leadership in 1975 initially emphasised gradualism and acceptance of the importance of the private sector in the south as a means of minimising disruption to the post-war economy. But the pragmatic period did not last long. The Hanoi leadership moved quickly to develop policies for the socialist transformation of the south. The reasons for the change are unclear. It may have been due to a combination of factors including: resistance in the south, the belief that the country could only be unified with one model of development and the DRV model was the most appropriate, and deteriorating relations with China and Cambodia.

Formal reunification took place in 1976 with the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. This was followed by an intensive drive towards socialisation. The Second Five Year Plan (1976-80) established very ambitious targets. The plan followed the orthodox socialist model. It accorded priority to heavy industry and the establishment of national institutions modelled on the DRV, and exerted pressure on southern peasants to join production collectives and on industrialists to offer their enterprises to the state. In 1978, 30,000 private businesses closed. Large scale industries were brought under the control of central ministries, and central planning became
the norm. Enterprises were allocated targets for outputs, and inputs were determined by administrative decision. The state took control of foreign trade.

In the view of the authorities, the market would play a much reduced role. The State paid low prices for agricultural products and, in turn, would provide the peasants with subsidised consumer goods. Under the central planning approach, decisions relating to inputs and outputs were made with disregard to costs and capital return. Loss-making enterprises were supported by the State. Profitable enterprises returned their surpluses to the State. For enterprises and individuals, there was little scope for material incentives.

The experiment in accelerated 'socialist transformation' had disastrous consequences. In the late 'seventies there were several contributory factors to Vietnam's woes: natural calamities, war and the refusal of the US to provide reparations and the cessation of western aid. These all hindered Vietnam capacity to rebuild. Nevertheless, enormous mistakes were made in the handling of the economy over this period. Firstly, there was an enormous gap between what was expected and what the country could achieve after the shattering experience of war. There was an implicit belief that the country could leaptfrog over different stages of development. Management by exhortation is a characteristic of many models of accelerated socialist transformation. The Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) was assisted by the fact that there was much goodwill towards it, being the political force which had unified the country. On the other hand, there are limits to the sacrifices a war weary population can make.

Secondly, there is evidence to suggest that the economic structure and social relations in the south were poorly analysed. Thirdly, the strategy of reliance on socialist ownership of heavy industry created a number of inefficiencies and imbalances in the economy. Low prices and lack of material incentives discouraged agricultural production. Enterprises were not free to choose their inputs which tended to be unreliable and of low quality. Given unreliability, enterprises began hoarding in an anticipation of shortages. The gap between what was expected and what was possible was so unrealistic that requirements came to be disregarded. Underproduction became a characteristic of the system. Poor management and lack of capital exacerbated the problems.

The State supported a growing number of loss-making enterprises by printing more money. The shortages of planned activities created opportunities for speculators and corrupt party officials to make private gains on the black market. Inflation quickly rose to 50-60%.

This situation could not continue. Living standards had declined. People had less food in the north than during even the most testing periods of the war. Annual growth slumped to 1.5%. Industrial output stagnated. A chronic balance of payments crisis emerged.

The rapidly deteriorating economic and political environment forced the VCP to re-evaluate dramatically its development strategies. Indeed, according to current VCP secretary general, Nguyen Van Linh, the error committed by the party and government in the past was that during the transition period to socialism they had tried to ignore objective laws of economics.

The Sixth Plenum of the Fourth Congress in 1979 became a watershed in this process, with the new program that marked a shift away from the orthodox socialist model. The program recognised that the rapid pace of socialist transformation was disrupting the economy and needed to be slowed down. The party acknowledged that some state-produced goods can be better produced by the private sector. Most importantly, they began to emphasise material incentives as a means to boost productivity. A contract system was introduced in agriculture, giving greater incentives to families and individuals. Piece rates and bonuses were introduced in industry. Greater autonomy was given to enterprises.

The congress and interim plenums over the 'eighties strengthened the momentum towards reform. The Fifth Party Congress in 1982 confirmed the move away from heavy industry and engaged in criticisms of the economic and financial management of enterprises. In 1985, the Central Committee passed a major resolution dealing with the problems of price, wages and a national currency, moving them towards market determined rates. Given the severe economic difficulties and political problems that have persisted during the 'eighties, the Sixth Party Congress, December 1986, adopted the slogan 'Renewal or Death', emphasising the urgency of the reform measures.

The current development strategy uses the slogan 'commercialisation' of internal and foreign trade, i.e. economic resources are to be exchanged through commercial transaction rather than through administered means. Major attention in productive activities is now given to food, consumer goods, and exports.

How effective have these reforms been? Initially, there was a slow response. Bureaucratic inertia, inefficiency, poor communications, and vested interests delayed the implementation of the reform program. Although there appears to have been a degree of consensus within the party regarding the need for reform, there were differences regarding the pace of reform.

Conservative views within the VCP have expressed concerns about the slow pace of socialisation, about the increase of 'negative phenomena' such as speculation and corruption, and about the dominance of private traders, inflation and the emergence of class inequalities.

In terms of economic performance, however, the reforms began to stimulate a recovery in the economy. During the period 1981-84, annual growth averaged 5.7%. Industrial output increased by 14.2%. However, major problems persisted and some, in fact, intensified - for example, the continuation of subsidies to state enterprises, low productivity and continuing shortages.

As the Vietnamese economy moved down the road of market oriented reforms, there was a massive surge in inflation which soared to several hundred percent by the mid-'eighties. Given the acute shortages in the economy, it was inevitable that price liberalisation would lead to inflation, with increasing supply (resulting largely from
the reforms) being outstripped by faster increasing demand.

Vietnam had few options. Faced with accelerating inflation due to price reforms, other socialist countries such as China have tended to put a brake on price reforms.

The Vietnamese government, on the other hand, implemented drastic measures to cut inflation, yet continued along the road of price liberalisation. The subsidised system of administered prices had been virtually abolished and replaced by market determined prices, and currency reforms had brought official exchange rates in line with black market rates.

To reduce inflation dramatically, the Vietnamese introduced drastic fiscal and monetary measures. In the fiscal area, grants to enterprises were curtailed and subsidies to producers and consumers were eliminated. The most dramatic measure was in monetary policy where interest rates were set above the inflation rate, initially over 100%. This is like putting an economy into 'cold turkey'. As a result, lending to enterprises virtually ceased, and deposits soared.

By late last year these measures were beginning to have an effect. Inflation had, to a large extent, been squeezed out of the system. Enterprises were forced to take drastic action to remain viable. They could no longer depend on subsidised material supplies, maintaining large stocks, and grants from government. Although there has been pressure to relax the squeeze, the authorities are determined to continue with measures to liberalise the economy. As a consequence, there are likely to be a number of economic and social costs; enterprises will close down and unemployment will increase.

In the last few years the Vietnamese have gone further in acknowledging the need for a private sector and encouraging private investment. In 1988, the Council of Ministers passed a resolution accepting the "positive role and long term existence of the private and individual sectors". In 1988, a new foreign investment law was promulgated. Some enterprises can be entirely foreign-owned. Foreign investors are given tax concessions, as low as 10% for the first four years. Investors can repatriate a proportion of profits and guarantees are given against nationalisation. Officials say they looked to South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong for models.

To traditional supporters of central planning, state socialism, and a dominant role for communist parties, the rapid liberalisation of the Vietnamese economy must be seen as a retreat to capitalism. In response, a couple of points should be made. Firstly, the victory of liberation forces in small, underdeveloped countries does not guarantee the ending of economic problems. Underdevelopment, characterised by lack of capital, shortages of skills, and poverty, is a reality. Secondly, being cut off from the rest of the world can hamper development prospects. There is a global division of labour. Policies directed at selectively encouraging investment and trade can assist in expanding the productive forces of the economy, a pre-requisite for socialism.

Finally, the discrediting of orthodox models of central planning does not mean that planning becomes irrelevant. Planning is a key instrument in overcoming underdevelopment. It enables resources to be focused on those areas which can boost economic performance - it may be infrastructure, boosting export industries, or improving research into agriculture productivity.

The Vietnamese have recognised the limitations of orthodox models of socialist development. It remains to be seen, however, whether their new road can avert the sense of major crisis now deepening in other formerly centrally-planned economies around the world.

GRAHAM LARCOMBE is an economist on leave from the Victorian government.
In recent weeks East Germany's veneer of socialist culture has been stripped bare. It may now become the more conservative half of a united Germany. But that's not all. Paul Hockenos reports that neo-fascism is alive and thriving in the anti-fascist state.

Two decades after the East German state officially declared "Nazism extinguished from its territory", the voice of rightwing extremists at demonstrations across the country is clearly audible. Since the hardline regime's fall last November, the anti-fascist state's poorly-kept secret has become public: organised neo-Nazi and fascist groups are an active and potent force in the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Small neo-Nazi organisations have operated conspiratorially in the GDR for years. But now, for the first time since the war, the fascist groups' efforts are no longer confined to the backrooms of local bars or the bleachers of soccer stadiums.

Although neo-Nazism represents only a fraction of the nationalist fervour here, recent events have accelerated the extremists' strategy by years, giving those close to the movement reason to take their advances very seriously. The vacuum created by the unexpected pace of political change has confronted a depoliticised people with choices over the future of their society that they are ill-prepared to face.

With the possible exception of the late 'forties, when the country was founded as a socialist, parliamentary democracy, East Germans have only two traditions from the past five decades to draw on: fascism and stalinism. In the absence of a democratic culture, many have simply fallen back on the authoritarian party structures. After years of unquestioned order, people are now suddenly confronted with a chaotic situation, explains Brigitte Steinborn, a professor and criminal sociologist at East Berlin's...
Humboldt University, who has researched fascist movements in the GDR since 1986. "They feel helpless and disoriented. The fascists' ideology and the manipulative mechanisms that they are using are very attractive to the present mass psychology. Order, nationalism, anti-communism, foreigners out - at least a third of our youth can be brought to their feet with that agenda."

The country's young people between the ages of 15 and 24 show the greatest susceptibility to reactionary ideas. Steinborn and colleagues at the Central Institute for Youth Research in Leipzig estimate that 6% of Berlin and Leipzig youth and between 1% and 2% of young people nationwide already identify with an ultra-right politics.

A recent study from the institute showed that 64% of those who rejected extremism nevertheless embraced at least some fascist values. Steinborn figures that one activist is now in the position to convert at least 10 to 20 co-workers, depending on the area. The nascent movement, they conclude, is ripe to expand.
Their numbers concur with those from the district attorney’s office, from experts in the West and from neo-fascist organisations in the West, such as the Republican Party (REP). Under their leader, former SS officer Franz Schönhuber, the REP’s in recent regional West German elections have consistently captured over 10% of the urban vote, and twice that in some areas. Their overtly racist, anti-Semitic, nationalistic Weltanschauung appeals to large sections of the lower middle class. Preaching law and order, and a return to a bloc-free, fully-militarised Germany, including parts of Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, Schönhuber won himself a seat in the European parliament last year. The REPs, as well as a handful of like-minded groups, see even greater support in ‘Mitteldeutschland’ or the ‘Soviet-occupied zone’, as they alternately refer to the GDR, as central to their overall strategy.

Although fascist parties are prohibited from organising in the GDR, the REPs have already established footholds in East Berlin and across the conservative South. Reams of propaganda have been confiscated at the border and dozens of REP activists arrested. The lax border controls, however, have enabled neo-azi-guys to circulate millions of pieces of literature. In Leipzig, Schönhuber’s troops report that one afternoon 90,000 were “ripped out of their hands”. On the other side of the wall, leafleters openly greet the hordes of East Berliners visiting the West with directions to the local recruitment office. So great has the response been that the REPs are setting up a special GDR office in West Berlin.

Other neo parties, smaller and more militant than the REPs, also back similar GDR organisations. Slipping over the southern border from their headquarters in Bavaria, they’ve met a response more enthusiastic than their minor-scale organisations can muster in the West. “I was simply mobbed,” said Michael Kühen, 34, self-heralded Führer of the Federal Republic’s neo-Nazi scene and president of German Alternative (DA), a group that advertises itself with the slogan: ‘The Fourth Reich is Coming’.

The leader of the German Free Workers Party (FAP), Friedhelm Busse, 60, argues that the neo-Nazi’s uncompromising reunification demands fall on receptive ears in the East. Unlike the REPs, the FAP and DA aim their hate message explicitly at youth, mostly skins and soccer hooligans. While they claim to have bases in Weimar, Cottbus, Dresden and Erfurt, electorally their membership is insignificant.

East Berlin producer Frank Neumann recently shot the first GDR television documentary on the formerly taboo issue, entitled ‘The Sad Month of November: The Danger of Neo-nazism in the GDR’ which tracked the phenomenon in the southern Thuringia region. “Even before the war,” Neumann said, “this area was a centre for nationalism and reactionary thought. Now, school kids, 7, 8, and 9 years old, have already begun to scrawl swastikas and ‘SS’ on the walls. They have even tried to knock over Jewish grave stones.

Even though the site of the Buchenwald concentration camp is right next door, most children are told little or nothing about the Nazi era. When they vandalise a Jewish monument or harass one of the 170,000 African, Asian, Cuban or Polish guest workers, parents and police take little notice. From films that run at least monthly on West German TV, they get a harmless, if not benevolent, picture of German fascism during the War. skinhead officers are depicted as tall, intelligent and heroic. The allies are cast as the ‘Other’, foreign forces on German soil.

And then there is the eldest generation, now in their seventies. There are some who “stashed away fascist books and other material, waiting for a crisis when they would become useful again”, says Neumann. “They’ve been waiting for their hour and now they think that it’s come.”

The fascist movements in the GDR tend to fall into three overlapping categories: skin-heads, neo-Nazis and ‘fascos’. Skins, usually in their teens, express the crudest and most militaristic form of reactionary protest. Clad in steel-toed Doctor Martens’, rolled-up jeans, bomber jackets and razor-thin haircuts, their style is identical to that of their West German counterparts. Most estimates put the number of organised skins in East Berlin at about 600 with another 2,000 or so hangers-on. Their bigotry is vented spontaneously and violently - on the streets, at discos and at sporting events. The young thugs move in packs, showing a fierce loyalty to one another, particularly their leader, and a reflexive hostility towards their enemies. At the top of their long hate list are foreigners, leftists, punks and gays.

Street violence has become so common that many punks are afraid to venture out alone. “You can’t talk with these people, they just come at you swinging,” says Jahn, an 18-year-old punk with a black and red ‘Against Nazis’ arm-band on his tattered jacket. “You know, it used to be the cops who’d knock you around for something like this,” he explains, pointing to the insignia of a smashed swastika.

He and his friend Dirk, with whom he shares a squat in the run-down Prenzlauerberg district of East Berlin, are members of the Prenzlauerberg Anarchist Antifa Project. As most of their group, the two have had some hasty tangles with skins. After a hardcore concert one evening, a few skin gangs had planned an ambush. “We ducked most of it,” says Dirk, 19, hair hennaed and ears laced with silver rings. But “on the way back we found one punk lying in the street, really bloody and unconscious. We thought he was dead. Twenty skins jumped him for no reason.”

The two youth cultures are diametrically opposed. East Berlin-Friedrichshain, one of the city’s many high-rise cement ghettos, is typical of the Stalinist planning that breeds alienation in youth. Friday evenings, at its self-contained centre, the Kalinker disco opens its doors.

For years a notorious skins hang-out (a Mozambiquan worker was stabbed to death on his way past the building last winter), the club’s clientele illustrates the overlap between a large segment of East German youth and the much smaller percent who endorse fascist ideology. In the sterile, cavernous room, a cafeteria by day, clean-cut, smartly-dressed boys and girls dance listlessly to ‘seventies pop tunes. They recognise me immediately as a foreigner, become impatient when I order beer at the lemonade counter,
The good and bad sides of Adolf

Max, a 19-year-old window washer, was brought up by his mother in a Berlin suburb. His father in jail, a “total Asi” - state slang for ‘anti-social’, he looked up to his grandfather, a former pilot in the Wehrmacht. “I learned about the Nazis through books that my Opa gave me. He’s not a Nazi himself any more, he just thinks he lived better than now, earned more for his work,” says the boy, outfitted in a snazzy track suit. His mother knows about his politics, but is primarily concerned that he doesn’t wind up in prison.

He identifies closely with the goals of National Socialism, but feels that it can be done better, more effectively than it was by the Nazis. “There’s a good and bad side to Adolf,” he explains with a disarming ease. “Bad was to gas the Jews. He could have just sent them away, and if they wouldn’t leave, lock ‘em up. Good was that he said what he wanted and did something...”

call the bouncer when I prop myself against a table. “What d’you think chairs are for?” Nothing non-identical is tolerated in their rigid, accustomed order.

Before I’m asked to leave for having carried my drink into the hallway, a few regulars agree to chat. “I ain’t a Nazi, I’m just German. There’s nothing wrong with that,” says Willi, 17, a ‘mode-skin’ who distances himself from the explicitly fascist identity of ‘Nazi-skins’. He and his mates sport crew cuts, less uniform and militaristic than the skinheads, dark baseball jackets and high-top basketball shoes.

In varying degrees of articulation, they express the politics of many of their peers. One “non-socialist Germany for Germans only” is the common denominator. “Punks, they’re dirty,” he explains unmaliciously. “You know, they don’t work and want anarchy. There must be order. Or else who’d work?” he reasons. The same goes for guestworkers: “For little work, they make a lot of money. We don’t need them to rebuild Germany.” The maintenance of ‘racial purity’ is also an underlying factor. The most oft-heard slight is against foreigners involved with German women. To different degrees, the real skinheads profess allegiance to the ideals of National Socialism. Some demand global German domination, others a Germany with 1937 or 1939 borders. Some advocate reopening the concentration camps, others favour racist legislation. Most have no solid politics at all, only gut emotive aggression.

The skin ethic, as well as that of the other extremists, draws on traditional German values which, they feel, the state has betrayed. Virtue, discipline, industriousness and obedience are values that paid off in the Third Reich, they claim. In contrast to the resignation typical of GDR youth over the past decade, the new übermenschen are proud to want to achieve something, to have ideals and goals. By and large, they subscribe to a petty bourgeois German mentality. They keep family obligations, pay rent on time and are hard workers. Many sign up for extended military duty. Older people consider their public behaviour exemplary.

The growth of fascism in the GDR is inextricably tied to the policies and structures of the stalinist state, argues dissident Freya Klier, author of the forthcoming book Fatherland of Lies: Growing Up in the GDR. Klier, who now lives in West Berlin, was expelled from the East in 1987 for her work in the leftwing underground. “The German values of discipline and strong forms of authority and so forth were also the values of the communist party (SED). The GDR claims to be an anti-fascist state, but it simply took over these values uncritically from German history,” she explains. “These kids were educated with a militaristic, old Prussian value system and, not surprisingly, their protest against the system is in fact the system’s failure to live up to its own values.”

The suppression of “creative, original thinking co
bined with the state’s dogmatism about its own accomplishments gave frustrated young people no social alternative,” explains Klier. Some opted for the illegal peace and human rights movement as a constructive form of opposition. But others felt that if this was as good as ‘socialism’ got, then the only way to turn was right. “Their alienation was indigenous. First it was just released as rage in the schoolyard, and then they found the whole skins movement in the FRG which gave it expression,” she argues.

The state’s policy of Abgrenzung, or ‘delimitation’, attempted to shield the population from western influence through strict censorship laws. Its orthodox line on aesthetics narrowed opportunities for cultural enrichment, while the prioritisation of the European, particularly German, tradition in the humanities engendered a feeling of European superiority. Before November, the vast majority of young people had travelled only in Eastern Europe and most possess only a smattering of a foreign language.

Inherent in the Abgrenzung policy was the suppression of German nationalism in favour of a political, statist identity. In contrast to the Federal Republic, the GDR maintained that the relationship of the two Germanies was one of two unreconcilable states, one capitalist, one socialist - a distinction that nationalism blurred. Through constitutional changes in 1968 and 1974, East Germany dropped references to a ‘German people’, one ‘German nation’, or unification. The socialist identity imposed from above, however, never took hold. Nationalism was artificially blocked, festering beneath the surface in its old forms. Suppressed and frustrated, German nationalism today, as it did between the wars, has taken an extreme form.

Historically, the re-emergence of fascist ideas in the ‘eighties, four decades after the war, is no accident. It is in the third generation since Germany’s capitulation, born between 1963 and 1975 and educated in the Honecker era, that the ideology has again found open expression. The deep-seated fascist values of their grandparents were never properly addressed as the East was transformed from part of the Third Reich to a ‘socialist, anti-fascist state’ in a matter of years. Those beliefs, often unconsciously, were passed on to the second generation, raised in the orthodox ‘fifties. The values of National Socialism and national stalinism became intertwined. There they simmered until today’s young people, unburdened by war guilt, exasperated with the East-West discrepancy, and with more room for expression, gave the old values a new form.

The anti-fascist process was effective only in the early years of the Republic, before the party monopolised the movement and power, argues author and filmmaker Konrad Weiss, 42, a co-founder of the opposition group Democracy Now. “Once the party asserted itself as the sole anti force, bourgeois, Christian and Jewish traditions of resistance to the Nazis were omitted from school books.”

Anti-fascism and the SED became synonymous, leading students to identify their distrust of the latter with the former. The anti-fascist idea became functionalised through its official representatives, the Union of Nazi Victims and the Anti-Fascist Resistance Fighters, both tied to the party bureaucracy. These groups “were so far from any grassroots basis that their rhetoric lacked credibility,” says Weiss, whose independent documentaries on the German resistance challenged the party line. “Old bureaucrats lectured at high schools, but in the long run it proved counterproductive.” The authoritarian party apparatus also perpetuated fascist principles. The top-down hierarchy - democratic centralist in theory, bureaucratic centralist in practice - was controlled by a small old guard in Berlin.

Its power rested on the maintenance of a system of privileges, domination and party obedience. “The Führer ethic lived a renaissance under a different label,” argues Weiss. “First the Stalin cult, then the unconditional allegiance to the communist party vanguard under (the GDR’s first party secretary Walter) Ulbricht and Honecker.” Founded as a pacifist state, the practice of violence was central to its modus operandi. A feared secret police force, Stasi, presided over the banning of books, the jailing of dissidents and the general intimidation of the population.

The first skins began to appear in East Berlin around the early ‘eighties, still scattered and wholly unorganised. By 1986, however, a new pattern clearly emerged: trained martial arts techniques dominated in assaults. The skins had begun to organise. Almost overnight, troops outfitted in boots and bombers worth hundreds of scarce West Marks popped up. They had also solidified contacts with the West. Since the 1968 constitution declares the GDR to have “extinguished Nazism in its territory”, the police could only deal with the offenders as common criminals.

Not a word appeared in the party newspapers about the problem. The state stubbornly refused to acknowledge the phenomenon’s indigenous social roots. Police cracked down harder, trial after trial followed, but the movement proliferated.

A more organised, political faction of ‘neo-Nazis’ broke off from the skins. The neo, slightly older, shed the skin
regalia, opting instead for street clothes and close-cropped Hitler-style haircuts. They stress physical training and abstain from heavy drinking and drugs. Unlike the predominantly working class skins, their social backgrounds span the GDR spectrum. For example, on Hitler’s 100th birthday, April 20 of last year, several groups of assorted neo-rented out a bar for a celebration. A police raid arrested dozens, but charges were not pressed - the ringleaders were sons of prominent SED members.

The group known least about, and potentially the most dangerous, are the fascos. Older, more educated than the neo, they work conspiratorially with a specific, long-term political program. Confiscated documents make their goal clear: the complete abolition of sodalism as well as bourgeois democracy, and the re-establishment of the German Reich.

They are as anti-American as anti-Soviet. The fascos view the ‘tragedy of Yalta’ with the same bitterness with which their grandparents saw the ‘treason of Versailles’. Ambitious and intelligent, they are “the over-achievers that the system held back,” says Klier. “And they’ve put their minds to bringing it down.” With a solid knowledge of Fascist theory, the fascos consider themselves the elite of the movement, its future leaders. According to several sources, they have been recruiting, planning and making contacts with the West, including neo-Nazi organisations in the US and Canada, for three years.

Violence has been an integral part of fasco strategy from its inception. At first, they attempt to convince acquaintances of their program’s logic. If they meet with resistance, the trouble-makers find a brick through their windows or are beaten up on their way home from the pub.

The recent events have presented the vanguard with legitimacy much sooner than they had anticipated, over-taking their former long-term strategy. The manipulation of neutral, nationalist-oriented citizens is now critical to their program, says Steinborn. There is also “proof that since 1988 fascists have been infiltrating social organisations. You can be sure that in all of the newly-formed parties there will be infiltrators.” The existence of extremists in the SED and Stasi, she and others confirm, has long been public knowledge.

Of late, many skins and neos have gone underground, likely joining up with more organised groups. Although there are still street assaults, the level of violence has dropped conspicuously since November. The criminal police report that the number of prosecutions against rightists tripled from 1988 in the first nine months of 1989 alone. But lately “It’s become strangely, unnaturally quiet,” Neumann as well as insiders have noticed. “The right is concentrating and organising itself. They realise that now there’s much more to be gained from strengthening their internal structures and from working within.”

Opposition parties argue that the days of secret police and the repression of ideas are over. The content of political movements won’t disappear through its prohibition or censorship, asserts Weiss. “Democratisation must really be a process and the legal expression of all political opinions is part of that process. If the constitution allows room for non-violent right parties, incorporates them rather than excludes them, their power and attractiveness will be neutralised. This seems to work quite well in Western Europe.”

The extremists’ popularity in the West and potential in the East, however, must be confronted as more than a healthy expression of pluralism. The tolerance that mainstream West German and French parties show the right effectively condones its bigotry. The extreme nationalism that could accompany German unification presents yet another variable that multi-party structures might prove unable to contain.

Fascism made its rise once before through a fragile democracy. With only the Christian Democrats, who had functioned for years as one of the government’s rubber-stamp bloc parties, on the right side of the political spectrum, plenty of space is open to the ultra-right. Although it is unlikely that they will be able to form a legal party anyway, their patient, conspiratorial strategy perhaps suits their aims better in the long run. Their numbers are still small, but armed extremists with violent philosophies can inflict considerable damage. The anti-fascist state must now embark on the extermination of Nazism once again. But this time the task will be even harder - the new fascism is the product of its own system.

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Post-Fordism has become an influential model of the current watershed in the Western economies and societies. In Australia its most passionate advocate has been John Mathews. But Barry Hindess remains sceptical. Here he critically assesses Mathews' work on post-Fordism and democracy.

In the summer of 1989 a relatively junior official of the US State Department with (by his own assessment) “little impact on policy” published “The End of History” in the conservative American journal *The National Interest*. The article became a cause celebre in America and in other Western societies. It was also, in the author’s view, widely misunderstood.

In reply to his critics Fukuyama suggested that the most common misunderstanding involved “Hegel’s use of the word ‘history’”. History, he claimed, is less a matter of worldly events than it is a matter “of thought about first principles, including those governing political and social organisation”. The end of history then means that human thought about such first principles can go no further: it has reached the end of the road.

The principles in question, of course, are those of liberal democracy - the legacy of the French and especially the American revolutions. Fukuyama does not claim that the struggle for democracy is now complete. On the contrary, he believes that it has been widely resisted and that we should expect such resistance to continue for some considerable time. Fukuyama’s point is rather that there is no prospect of the liberal democratic trend being permanently reversed or superseded.

Fukuyama’s reply closes with a series of rhetorical questions. The most important of these asks if it is conceivable that a system of slavery or of aristocratic or monarchical government could, in the future, have moral foundations “as secure as those of present-day democracies”. The question of what is now conceivable exposes the limitations of Fukuyama’s (and Hegel’s) confidence in the end of history. The way in which we now think can tell us nothing about how we or others may think in the future. The outer limits to what is now conceivable are inscribed in our present patterns of thought and, without departing from the present, there is no way that we can hope to move beyond those limits. There may be a touch of bravura, but the implied confidence will always lack ultimate justification.

No one on the Left would accept Fukuyama’s account of the end of history, and few would wish to express themselves in his ‘Hegelian’ terms. Nevertheless, there is an important sense in which ‘democracy’ has come to occupy a similar place in the ideas of many on the Left as that of ‘liberal-democracy’ in Fukuyama’s discussion. For a decade or more socialist thinkers in the West have been busy reworking socialist arguments in terms of ideas of democracy and civil society. Socialism, it seems, is now to
be understood in terms of a radical democratisation of the political, social and economic institutions already in place in the "democratic" capitalist societies of the modern West. Electoral democracy and its associated political liberties will be left intact under this program, but the major institutions of civil society and the State together with the political parties and interest groups that mediate between them will become far more democratic. Socialism represents, on this account, the culmination of the democratic revolution: it is the end of an history, if not of history itself.

John Mathews' work is unusual among variations on this theme in that it explicitly relates the argument for radical democratisation to an account of fundamental changes of economic organisation now taking place in advanced western societies. In *A Culture of Power, Tools of Change* and *Age of Democracy*, Mathews has set out to provide social democracy and the labour movement with a new paradigm, a coherent alternative vision embodying a set of principles and assumptions intended to serve as a guide to practical politics. The paradigm itself derives both from a commitment to enhanced democracy and from a particular view of Fordism.

Following an idea suggested by Gramsci, Mathews uses the term 'Fordism' to refer not to mass production alone, but rather to a "combination of mass production and organised mass consumption". The assumption is that successful mass production requires a corresponding level of mass consumption that can be sustained only if there are high levels of employment in the major industrial economies. Fordism in the organisation of production must be complemented by a Keynesian political agenda at the level of the national economy. Mathews claims that social democracy in the years following World War Two "was completely subservient to the requirements of Fordism" both in its political agenda and in the character of its organisational structures.

Like other systems, however, Fordism contains the seeds of its own destruction. Internally it came up against workers' resistance in the intensification and fragmentation of labour. Externally, its own success led to increasing competition from mass production industries first in Japan and later in what are currently called newly industrialising countries. Finally, these pressures on the Fordist regime have been strengthened as a result of the emergence of new, more flexible forms of work organisation in several of the advanced capitalist economies.

The decline of Fordism opens up the possibility of new paths of development for advanced Western societies. It also presents new opportunities and new dangers for the labour movement and for social democracy itself. Mathews divides these paths of development into two polar types.

One, associated with the New Right, is based on a strategy of neo-Fordism. This involves a polarisation of the workforce into a skilled and highly-paid elite on the one hand and a mass of semi-skilled and unskilled workers on the other; authoritarianism in the workplace, a tendency towards deregulation in government approaches to the economy and the long-term decline of unionism and of social-democratic politics. The other, Mathews' preferred alternative, is post-Fordism, a trend which involves the development of flexible specialisation in the workplace, increased worker participation in production decisions, and a focus on quality, skilled worker input and product innovation.

In contrast to neo-Fordism, which entails a clear division between management and workers, post-Fordism offers a real prospect of overcoming the zero-sum character of Fordist industrial relations. The democratic character of industrial organisation would serve workers' aspirations to greater control in the workplace and, at the same time, provide management with a more flexible and dedicated workforce.

Furthermore, just as Fordism has ramifications that go beyond the workplace, so also does post-Fordism. A workforce committed to product innovation is a workforce that is willing and able to live with the impermanence not only of its skills but also of many of its current fields of employment. Just as a viable Fordist economy presupposes Keynesian economic management and a welfare state, so a viable post-Fordism will require its own regime of economic management and social welfare programs. If the emphasis on product innovation and flexibility in production is not to lead to a neo-Fordist polarisation of the workforce, there must be public intervention with regard to new capital formation to ensure the emergence of appropriate new fields of employment and suitably generous provision for the unemployed. Here, too, Mathews sees the need for considerable further democratisation, with the institutions of the labor movement playing a central role.

Although he hesitates to describe his paradigm as socialist (and in *A Culture of Power* was ambivalent about the use of the term), Mathews' argument that there is a clear economic foundation to political change suggests a continuity with older traditions of socialist thought, and especially with marxism. His proposals for a greatly expanded democracy are those of a socialist, not a radical democrat.

Mathews' determination to tie his reworking of socialist ideas with an account of the political and social consequences of current developments in the advanced Western economies is one of the strengths of his work. Unfortunately, the manner in which he attempts to carry out his project generates a host of problems. The most important are: Mathews' view of the role of theory; his inability to escape from the use of the term, Mathews' argument that there is a clear economic foundation to political change suggests a continuity with older traditions of socialist thought, and especially with marxism. His proposals for a greatly expanded democracy are those of a socialist, not a radical democrat.

An underlying theme of Mathews' recent work is that the social democratic labour movement is in danger of losing its way. He therefore sees it as necessary to articulate a vision of the future which can guide the practical activities of that movement and its allies in the struggle to create a better world. The vision that Mathews presents us with is the paradigm of associative democracy: this brings together electoral democracy and a plurality of associations, each of which is democratic and internally self-governing. Mathews insists that elements of the new
paradigm already exist in fragmentary form in many of the practices and innovations of the labour movement and other social movements.

However, there are several presumptions within Mathews' paradigm which could bear further scrutiny. We can begin with an idea that is still widely accepted on the Left, namely that we desperately need a coherent "vision of a new social and economic order". The appeal to such a vision is problematic in at least two respects. First, it strongly suggests an image of the new order and, at least by implication, of the status quo which it will one day replace, as unified social wholes or totalities. There is more than a hint of essentialism here, and I will return to this later.

Secondly, the vision is usually presented as providing a means of unifying many, or all, of the diverse groups and interests on the Left. It is intended as the foundation of an ideal unity based on a common long-term purpose. This type of unity can be distinguished from its limited and merely prosaic counterpart - this latter being fostered by the pursuit of immediate and short-term objectives, or by the structures and procedures and the behavioural norms of organisations like the Australian labour movement or the European Community.

An overarching and long-term unity of purpose has long been a figment of the radical imagination. However, as Gramsci observed, the strength of the Catholic Church in Italy was that it offered not one but several doctrines, each of which could be taken up by a different section of the population. A similar point could be made about political movements: they have always drawn their support from a variety of different interests and purposes and such unity of action as they are able to achieve is constructed across those differences.

The dream of an ideal unity has never been realised, but it survives despite that. Worse: it contradicts the commitment to pluralism that is now ritually invoked by any self-respecting position on the Left. A pluralist society is one containing a real diversity of interests and purposes and such unity of action as they are able to achieve is constructed across those differences.

A fundamental problem for all but the most single-minded of authoritarian politics involves the construction and maintenance of a practical and prosaic unity of action in the face of such diversity. Mathews himself notes that "parties are social organisms where a number of interests intersect". Quite so. To appeal to a vision as the basis of political unity is to deny the reality of the differences between those interests.

In fact, the idea of associative democracy has rather less to offer such a vision than Mathews would have us believe. Associative democracy refers to a type of society which consists of a plurality of independent associations, the great majority of which should be internally self-governing and democratic, and in which disputes would normally be resolved by negotiation. What such a society provides, in other words, is a framework in which a great variety of purposes and interests might be pursued, and procedures for resolving many of the differences between them. In that respect the prospect of associative democracy has something to offer almost everybody.

As a vision of the future it is singularly lacking in substance. Apart from its claim that matters will be dealt with democratically, it tells us nothing about the substantive content of social arrangements. A more democratic society may produce humane and civilised social welfare policies, but it will not necessarily do so. Democratic arrangements may well produce the industrial, investment and economic policy decisions that will lead us into Mathews' post-Fordist future, but they cannot be relied on to do so as a simple outcome of their democratic character.

The pressing economic and social problems now facing Australia, and other countries with an influential social democratic tradition, are not directly addressed by the appeal to associative democracy as a desirable way of doing things. In fact, many of the distinctive features of Mathews' future post-Fordist society are linked to political decisions that in no way presupposes greater democracy. Mathews' vision contains two very different components: one says that things should be done democratically; the other outlines desirable substantive outcomes. One does not follow from the other, and the connection between the two remains obscure. Mathews' problem lies in presenting them as belonging to the same coherent vision.

Mathews is rightly critical of the role of "such fugitive abstractions as the 'capitalist system'" in much political analysis of the Left. However, while he explicitly rejects marxist essentialism, his own analysis retains many of its features. A related problem appears in Mathews' treatment of Fordism and its neo- and post-Fordist alternatives. Fordism is described not only as a technique for organising the production of certain types of commodity but also, and more generally, as a total system of social and economic organisation "standardising the world of consumption, politics and culture in its own image". Indeed, it is as a system that Fordism contains the seeds of its own destruction.

These totalising tendencies cannot be dismissed as unfortunate but relatively minor aberrations. They play a central role in much of Mathews' argument. The 'capitalist system' and other such fugitive abstractions may have been banished from the text, but their consequences remain.

The neo- and post-Fordist futures are presented as total social packages, representing distinct and opposed principles of social organisation and corresponding to distinct and opposed sets of social interests. On the one side we have the anti-democratic principles of the New Right and its associates, and on the other the principle of enhanced democracy supported by the social democratic labour movement and its allies. The choice of post-Fordism would require a transformation of the labour movement; it must move from "a culture of opposition to a culture of the responsible exercise of power within a democratised system".

Yet the notion of democracy is not without ambiguity. Remarkably different understandings of democracy coexist in the modern world, and there is little point in
trying to establish that any one of them provides a truer account than any of the others. In Western societies the term 'democracy' is often used to refer to a package of positive features that are believed to be exhibited in the political arrangements of those societies. Precisely what it is about the arrangements in question that should be regarded as either democratic or as desirable often is not clearly identified. In addition, whatever is so identified can vary considerably from one section of society to another and according to context. In the democratic societies of the West, then, democracy may be regarded as a good thing for a wide range of reasons.

Because the reasons are so diverse a very broad cross-section of the society is able to justify current political arrangements. Yet that same diversity can generate considerable conflict when proposals to change current political arrangements are at issue. What appears as an increase in democratic control from one perspective can appear as a corruption of democracy by sectional interests from another. Three issues are particularly worth noting in this respect.

First, there is an obvious tension between, on the one hand, the desire to bring what are thought to be significant aspects of society under democratic control and, on the other, the liberal concern with the institutional conditions required for the maintenance of political liberty. A democracy without individual liberty would have few attractions in Australia and elsewhere. Yet any worthwhile liberty presupposes real and effective constraints on the actions of government and other centres of power. The Left has often been accused - not without justice - of paying insufficient attention to this issue.

Secondly, any program of democratisation must address the issue of the institutional arrangements through which that program is to be realised. An appeal to democracy tells us nothing about the precise definition of the constituencies that should be involved in the management of, say, a university, a public hospital system, or the transport industry in Australia. Nor does it provide the procedural rules by which any organisational framework in which the representatives of these constituencies might be expected to work together. However, the more important point to notice is that any decision concerning how democracy is to be institutionalised will invariably advance some of the interests involved and disadvantage others. Here, too, the idea of democratisation can be a source of conflict.

Thirdly, there is a closely related problem in the program of associative democracy itself. That program envisages a society in which electoral democracy coexists with a plurality of democratically organised, self-governing associations. Leaving aside the problem already noted with the idea of democratisation, that program also contains, although in a rather different form, the tension between democracy and liberty indicated above. The role of the State remains profoundly problematic for the advocates of associative democracy. The problems involved cannot be wished away by the claim that the State will "play the role of the 'association of associations'".

Imagine, for instance, a society in which corporations such as Ansett and BHP are democratically organised, self-governing associations. In certain respects we might well prefer it to Australia as it is today. However, such a society would still contain private business corporations, and the difficulties that these now pose for democratically elected government - viz, the limitation of its capacity to determine what matters affecting the economic and social life of society should be decided by the people themselves or their elected representatives and what matters can safely be left to others. Organisations of various kinds have become an increasingly important part of the life of Western societies over the past hundred or so years. Many of these are influential political actors in their own community, or even in several communities at once. The political power that they wield would remain even if they were to become internally democratic.

This brings us to my final set of comments. Democracy in the modern period has generally been conceived of as operating within some well-defined community: either a nation state or some association, organisation, or smaller community within a nation state and subject to its laws. Democracy proposes to deal with an unpredictable world by bringing that world within the collective control of members of the relevant community. The internationalisation of economic activity (and of much else besides) suggests the need for a different approach, one in which the governance of the world and the design of institutional constraints need not be conceived as operating within self-contained communities.

This suggests that there will be at least one set of problems in the modern world that cannot be effectively addressed by the democratic focus on the nation state and what goes on within it. It is not difficult to find other issues of contemporary society where democracy as traditionally conceived has little to offer - these include gender relations and the constitution of human individuals as gendered subjects as well as forms of social regulation and surveillance involving law, medicine and psychiatry.

While the idea of a considerably more democratic society may well be worth supporting, it does not take us very far. Not only does it fail directly to address pressing social and economic problems, but there are important contemporary issues for which the theme of radical democratisation seems somewhat beside the point. Nevertheless, Mathews, and all too many others, propose to make that theme the centre of an updating of the socialist project, in order that it might be rendered appropriate to the conditions of the advanced Western societies in the 1990s and beyond. For all its up-to-the-minute talk of post-Fordism and new technology, the appeal to radical democratisation represents a failure to come to terms with some of the most significant political issues to have emerged in these societies in recent years. In this respect the program of radical democratisation, like Fukuyama's proclamation of 'the end of history', reads more like a failure of the imagination.

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Pastures Green

Jess Walker talks to Charles Birch - scientist, environmentalist and recent winner of theology's equivalent to the Nobel Peace Prize.

To many environmentalists, it's possible that Charles Birch is a complete unknown. He shouldn't be; he's part of their history. Charles Birch was espousing environmental issues way back in the early 'seventies when 'green' just meant the colour of grass, not a political complexion.

Perhaps it's partly because the environment finally has become fashionable, and not fringe, that Birch, an ecologist and theologian, was recently awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. This is in spite of radical theological views that prompt him to such aphorisms as "two very important forces in the world today for good and evil, are religion and science". But Birch has long been regarded by his peers as something of an outsider, a tag he doesn't mind at all. "In a way I'd be afraid to be put up in the fold too much", he reflects, using an appropriately biblical metaphor.

His environmentalism developed as a natural consequence of his profession as an ecologist. (He is emeritus professor of Biology at Sydney University.) A friend and ally of Paul Erlich, his analysis of the environmental crisis is similar: that the human impact on the environment is completely unbalanced. In the early 'seventies he was part of a World Council of Churches committee which examined the Club of Rome's 1970 report, Limits to Growth. The concept they came up with, at a 1974 conference, was 'ecologically sustainable development', the now familiar catchphrase that has, Birch thinks, been much abused. And its fellow notion, 'sustainable economic development', (of Mr Keating et al), has rather missed the point.

Needless to say, Birch is critical of unbridled growth and says that the rich world, as he calls it, must reduce its overall standard of living. "The standard of living is just a measure of material goods and we need a certain level of that. But once it keeps on going up, the quality of life goes down. I bet Mr Bond's quality of life has really shot down in recent years!"

The challenge really is how to globally redistribute wealth - a familiar problem for the Left.

But Birch doesn't talk very much in the concrete terms the green movement has had to become used to - of jobs, the economy, utilisation of natural resources or electoral politics. Values and ethics are his preserve. In this respect he's part of a new trend that seems to be emerging in green politics: the call for a fundamental shift in values and worldview. Environmentalists with the clout of Peter Garret or David Suzuki say that this is essential to our surviving the looming environmental crisis. In an interview with Simply Living last year, Garret made this point: "I think what we're trying to see happen is not simply the replacement of one group of pressure politics by another...That's not going to be sufficient to save this earth. Something deeper, something which requires a greater shift in perception and action has got to take place."

Though the green movement has secular roots, environmentalists seeking to justify their actions and to develop a theoretical base have looked to moral and religious philosophy. Many have felt a need to express their relationship to the natural world in spiritual terms - and are frequently derided for it.

Birch believes the greens have found little comfort in Christianity, and is not surprised that they generally turn away from it. Greens are more likely to look to Eastern and indigenous religions, (or in the case of eco-feminism, to matriarchal mythology), for inspiration and validation.

Some, like David Suzuki, draw spiritual inspiration from science itself, and seek to reform science in much the same way that Birch attacks Christian dogma.

Birch believes that Christianity can offer something to the greens, but not in its present form. Christianity, he
says, must be radically reformed to become “bio-centred”, or life-centred, rather than remaining a human-centred religion with no respect for the rest of creation.

Clearly, there’s nothing wrong with making the elimination of human oppression and poverty a priority but this need not exclude environmental concerns. Christianity should not exclude them, for its own health, according to Birch. The greens, on the other hand, could broaden their agenda to include these traditionally Christian concerns of social justice. Birch would like to see the two get together.

The problem, as he sees it, is that Christianity and western science share a materialist, mechanistic tradition which sees the world as a machine leaving no room for the mind, consciousness or emotions - all the facets of life which are beyond measurement. Nature exists to be exploited, the mechanistic world view doesn’t consider that it has an intrinsic value.

Hence what Birch sees as the neglect of an important argument for conservation: “let’s look after nature because it’s valuable in itself, to itself”. This is the sort of argument that’s brought up in defence of preserving places like Antarctica or the Tasmanian south west forests as pristine wilderness. It doesn’t seem to make much headway. Even the slightly utilitarian ‘think how much we can learn from them if we leave them intact - we might find a cure for AIDS’, usually brought up in defence of tropical rainforests, doesn’t get very far in bulldozer economies that want or need an immediate return.

The complexities of it all are enough to give anyone a headache, but Birch is cautiously optimistic about the future. “Things are changing”, he says, “because individuals form grassroots movements around the world. In the last decade, all changes have come from the bottom up.” Governments have only responded to change, not initiated it. There are also movements for change in both science and religion, but these are not generally supported by the scientific and religious communities. Anyone who challenges the accepted dogma - Birch in Christianity, Suzuki in science - is out on a limb.

Through public lectures, books, and his position on a sub committee of the World Council of Churches, (for Science, Technology and the Environment), Birch has been trying broaden the Christian agenda. You might say he acts as Christianity’s environmental conscience. “Humans aren’t the only pebbles on the cosmic beach”, he says, and all life has value to God. Buddhism and many forms of Hinduism recognise this. If Birch had been born in Asia perhaps he would now be a Buddhist, but in Australia it’s Christianity that’s necessarily provided his spiritual inspiration and support.

Being committed to a religion of which he is strongly critical is not such a contradiction. Birch is trying to remind the church that Christianity does have a “bio-centred” tradition that reaches back as far as the Old Testament, and is certainly present in the teachings of Jesus. Unfortunately for Christians, he says, there aren’t many Christian books on the theme of reverence for life. (His most recent book, On Purpose, is a contribution to that small collection.)

Another problem is what you might call the church’s daggy image. Birch put it rather more kindly, “when the churches do speak (on this issue), they speak in such a funny language - all ‘glory of god’ and that sort of thing”. His judgement is that “the church is miles behind, and it should be right up the front”. If the ideas of Charles Birch have any influence, it probably will be.

JESS WALKER is a Sydney freelance journalist writing about environmental issues.
Worms are turning in Little England. Travelling down from Heathrow Airport to the Sussex coast by way of the Surrey Weald and the South Downs, I was reminded of the important role that this sort of landscape has played in English political culture.

A preferred and dominant image of ‘Englishness’ is to be found in this rolling green landscape, in the well-organised and deferential dormitory towns of London’s southern ‘gin and tonic belt’, in the seventeenth century hamlets and villages and the occasional twelfth-century church. The more like a tourist brochure it looks, the surer you can be that this is conservative heartland. At least this used to be a fair rule of thumb.

But the ancient tranquility has been disturbed. At the Parish of Eriswell in rural Suffolk, street lights are going out on US servicemen’s estates. In Oxfordshire, Tory councillors have resigned en masse. The sturdy and blue-rinse members of the Morecambe Conservative Club in Lancashire have just voted overwhelmingly to withhold their dues from the local Conservative Association. The reason? What one of the members of the Morecambe club, a lifelong Tory and retired pensioner, called “unjust, unfair, and immoral, based on hypocrisy, lies and greed”; the Community Charge or, as it is universally and pejoratively known, the poll tax.

The poll tax is the Thatcher government’s scheme for funding the activities of local government. It replaces the old domestic rating system where revenue was raised on the basis of property values and introduces a system where individuals over the age of eighteen are levied at a flat rate. Hence the designation ‘poll tax’ since it is based on all of the names listed in the electoral register rather than those designated as householders. While putatively egalitarian insofar as it applies to everybody of voting age, the charge is not income or asset related. To return to that journey through the South Downs, if you were to drive through a small and ancient town called Petworth, you would pass an enormous Elizabethan Manor House. On the way out of the town you would pass some nineteenth century labourers’ cottages and, further on, some twentieth century council houses.

After the introduction of the Community Charge on April 1, you may be sure of one thing: that all is equal in this quiet town, that the occupants of all of those dwellings who are of voting age will be paying the same amount towards local government expenditure. In the most frequently cited case, the Duke of Westminster, owner of large tracts of London real estate and Britain’s wealthiest man, will be paying the same Community Charge as his gardener.

This extraordinarily inequitable scheme has become Margaret Thatcher’s potential Waterloo, and a political and administrative nightmare. The lights on the US servicemen’s estate in Suffolk are going out, not in protest at their presence on British soil, but because they cannot be levied under the poll tax whereas previously they did pay domestic rates. The local council just cannot afford to provide free street-lighting under the new scheme. The same is true of Upper Heyford in Oxfordshire where the loss of US
servicemen’s contributions has meant a 400% increase in average parish rates. Compounding the problems is the parallel introduction of a new Uniform Business Rate whereby rates for businesses will go straight to central government rather than to the local authority. Thus, the Parish of Winfrith in Dorset will lose 80% of its income because it can no longer levy charges on the UK Atomic Energy Establishment within its boundaries.

The government claims that these inequities will be ironed out through various rebate schemes for those on low incomes and through enhancement of central government funding enabled by the Uniform Business Rate. But Scotland, where the poll tax was introduced last year, would suggest that this is wishful thinking in the extreme. The Strathclyde region with about 1.74 million or 40% of the total eligible Scottish population has registered 394,000 defaulters on the tax. This is a default rate of 22%. Wages and bank accounts are being ‘arrested’ but this is going to be an enormously costly exercise, and not isolated to Scotland.

There are various street-level indicators of the extent of popular concern about, and resistance to, the poll tax. One of these - a real measure - is the extent to which the poll tax, as one of my relatives pointed out, has displaced the weather as the main topic of conversation. Another indicator is the fact that local papers, usually filled with flower shows, fetes and minor misdemeanours, have suddenly sprouted new genres like the political essay, opinion columns and ‘we say’ letter pages. In the politically quiescent Home Counties it is a revolution indeed.

It is not so much the ideological content of the Community Charge which is surprising as the extent to which it has been so poorly thought through. The central government has estimated that the average national community charge would be £278 per annum ($610) whereas, now that local government authorities have set their charges, this turns out to be £364 ($800). This, remember, is per person and not per household.

No rebate or subsidy can be claimed against anything in excess of the average £278, leaving the great majority of low income earners and fixed income recipients subject to charges of between 20% to 100% higher than their previous rates bills when calculated as a household budget. In addition, rebates can only be claimed on the basis of a two-adult household so multi-occupancy charge-payers, those living in crammed bedsits in a single property or overcrowded homes with adult children, will suffer accordingly.

And so to another poll: the Mid-Staffordshire by-election which some have dubbed the ‘Poll Tax Election’. This took place in exemplary Thatcherite country, a combination of semi-rural areas and new housing estates occupied by the skilled working class and lower middle class voters. When it was announced by the Returning Officer that a safe Conservative seat with a majority of 15,000 had been transformed into a Labour seat with a majority of 9,000, the face of the Conservative candidate was something to behold.

If he could have stamped his feet and spat he would have. He denied the victorious Labour candidate Sylvia Heal (a magistrate from Surrey as it happens) any credit and accused the Labour Party of being sham and devoid of policies. It was not the extent of the swing away from the Tories (18%) that mattered since they have suffered swings against them of up to 24% in by-elections before, and still gone on to win General Elections with a landslide. Rather, as political analyst Ivor Crewe argues, “it is the scale of Labour’s success, not of Conservative failure, that stands out”. Labour gained 24% in the Mid-Staffordshire election. The centre and independent vote for the Social Democrats and the Liberal Democrats which had been the home for disaffected main-party voters for the past seven years or so was effectively obliterated. As the political commentator Peter Kellner put it “the collapse of the centre has moved the winning post at the next General Election”. Whereas in Australia a centre vote of around 16% can matter a great deal, in Britain with a first past the post system, it doesn’t count for much.

This is, in effect, the biggest swing to Labour for more than 50 years and may signal the return to two-party politics, notwithstanding fragmentary Green gains here and there. These latter will never, of course, amount to anything in a first past the post system. The by-election was followed by a number of national polls. These put Labour between 19-28% ahead of the Conservatives nationally, 61% of voters, including 37% of Tories believe that Thatcher should go before the next election. But there is a tendency to make too much of mid-term by-elections. Dramatic language has been
used. Sylvia Heal, victorious candidate at Mid-Staffordshire, hailed the "beginning of the end of the Dark Ages of Thatcherism". Commentators have spoken of Rubicons being crossed and of the middle-classes of England being prepared to vote Labour without dallying with centre parties. There is a certain amount of historical amnesia here (forgetting 1945 and 1964, for example). But there may, nonetheless, be evidence of a qualitative shift in voting patterns and a signal that Labour is about to be considered again as a plausible party of government.

But before that point is reached Labour will need to come up with its own answers to the problems which the ill-conceived poll tax was destined to address. The old domestic rating system had many inequities and inefficiencies and local authorities are being progressively deprived of funds. There is much necessary and justifiable debate on what is the most appropriate form of funding for local government; on whether it should be levied on individuals or households in circumstances where the 'household' of the traditional male breadwinner with dependents is no longer a useful statistic.

Some Labour shadow ministers are predicting that something like the poll tax will have to be retained, but amended to account for income and assets. For some reason, the idea of a local income tax remains anathema. Perhaps if it were to be called a 'Community Services and Amenity Rate', means-tested against income and assets and evaluated against actual provision of amenities and services, this would not be such a problem.

This might entail and, indeed, encourage additional means of contact and liaison between communities and local government in the parishes, towns, districts, counties and shires, boroughs and metropolitan authorities.

The possibilities of new political forms of community-based organisation in tandem with the levying of community charges are not being considered at the moment by either of the main parties and this leads to a large gap between the economic realpolitik of revenue-raising and the popular sentiment from which Labour is currently benefiting enormously. It will be a real test for Labour to develop a strategy which can fill that gap convincingly by revitalising local government and community recognition of its role.

There is, in other words, a political argument to be mounted and won here which does not rely on the purely economic logic of 'burdens' on tax- or rate-payers. Back to the journey through southern England again. There are lots of 'For Sale' signs around. The high streets in the small towns have many building societies and banks but few cafes or general stores.

The communities here are being progressively evacuated and replaced by dormitory or commuter populations and this imbalance is having its effects on the custodianship of the surrounding environment which is more and more being designated as of purely 'heritage' or tourism attraction.

The issues raised by the uproar over the Community Charge may at least lead to some rethinking of what is involved in being and living in a community and may also serve to tip the scales somewhat against the tendency to turn Britain's green and pleasant land into a very large theme park.

COLIN MERCER was living in the south of England during the introduction of the Community Charge.
Brian McGahen, gay activist, communist, former City councillor and community activist, and AIDS sufferer, died in Sydney on April 2.

While at high school, Brian joined a suburban peace group, motivated by his belief that the Vietnam war was wrong. A number of communists in that group had a significant influence on him and, at age 17, he joined the Communist Party.

Brian's experience and activities in the moratorium days were a significant indication of his deeply felt convictions on a range of issues throughout his life.

He was one of a few who actually became a draft resister - refusing to register at all. As his brother Paul McGahen said at Brian's memorial, Brian was a severe asthmatic and had undergone corrective surgery on his chest. He would never have been called up.

He also signed an appeal calling on others not to register. This act of civil disobedience, termed sedition by the government of the day, combined with draft resistance led to a period of arrest, jail and hiding out.

When still a teenager Brian recognised that he was gay and engaged in gay politics within the Communist Party, when the gay and women's liberation struggles began confronting the orthodoxies of the Left, and within the broader community. As Mavis Robertson recounted at his memorial, "Brian took on the fact that Cuba was punishing and jailing gays. It was a time when, within the Left, criticism of Cuba was unusual, to say the least, and when most gays still hadn't come out. Then as now he showed integrity and courage."

His role in the gay liberation struggle in Sydney is renowned, particularly his involvement in establishing the Gay Mardi Gras in 1980, now the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras with its parade, Sleaze Ball and Arts Festival with an international reputation.

But even before that, Brian was a busy activist: in 1973, at a World Youth Festival of young communists in Berlin, Brian and Peter Thatchell handed out a gay liberation/gay rights pamphlet! In 1973, he was involved in David Widdup's campaign in the federal election for Lowe against Billy McMahon, under the slogan 'I've got my eye on Billy's seat'.

In 1985 the AIDS Council of NSW was established, following campaigning by the ad hoc NSW AIDS Action Committee in which Brian was involved.

As David Buchanan said at Brian's memorial service, "Brian saw AIDS as as significant to the gay community as the Holocaust was to the Jewish community. He feared it would decimate the community and would reduce activism. Brian shared the view of all of us that the HIV crisis called for political organisation of a high order." Brian instituted a successful campaign, taken up by ACON, to have made available to a lover or friend of a patient the Carers' Pension, formerly restricted to members of the patient's family. This was only a part of his constant campaigning for empowerment of gays and pride in themselves; as was his belief in euthanasia: "his concerns were the lack of dignity being inflicted by HIV disease and by those who would deny ill people any control over their destiny - not to speak of the pain and suffering being endured by those for whom there was no useful outcome of such torture," David Buchanan said.

He passionately believed in the right to control one's own life; the manner of his own death was a testimony to that. As Mavis Robertson said "courage marks the manner of his death" and "he commands our respect for living and dying by such values."

In 1984 Brian was one of three openly gay people elected to the Sydney City Council. Mavis Robertson said that "he will always be an example because he was the first person in Australia to campaign successfully for public office as a gay activist".

These are only some of the achievements for which Brian will be proudly remembered. Others include: his role as a consultant for the Family and Children's Services Agency during the International Year of the Child; his role in initiating the Social Welfare Workers' Union and being its first secretary; his solidarity work - particularly through producing and selling goods, through the Peacemeal Products venture, with proceeds going to the various groups, and allowing him a degree of financial independence to pursue his interests and commitments. Brian was a member of the New Left Party and was also one of the 21 initial signatories of the Time To Act statement.

Perhaps his finest achievement, however, was the recent establishment of the Sydney Pride Centre. "If anything is testimony to Brian's vision and his role in advancing our interests as a community" it was that, according to David Buchanan.
Despite Rumours

Despite occasional rumours to the contrary, Australian women have not, over the last two decades, achieved equality. Statistics on the distribution of wealth, poverty, good jobs and housework all show that women's position has improved only marginally or even worsened in some areas.

And yet many of the gains initiated by the women's movement are truly remarkable. In the early 'seventies, Zoneo notes for the first women's studies students emphasised the fact that few 'properly' published books mentioned women, let alone feminists and their ideas. In contrast, between September 1989 and March 1990 Allen and Unwin published eight new women's studies titles and reprinted another one. The three books reviewed here are a part of this series. Together, they demonstrate the range and sophistication of contemporary feminist writing in Australia.

Frogs and Snails deals with the way pre-school children understand some popular non-sexist children's stories. The theoretical understanding which helped inspire the writers of non-sexist children's stories revolved around sex-role stereotypes. In the trade, this came to be seen as a feminist version of behaviourist theory. Bronwyn Davies criticises such theories from what the trade would call a materialist reading of poststructuralist theory. In case you are wondering, this does concern you. The author argues that many of the non-sexist stories don't work as they are supposed to because children give them a meaning considerably different from that intended by the author, or the feminist parent.

To make her case, Davies actually went and talked to the little people themselves; read them stories and watched them at the pre-schools. The main point of her argument is that feminist writers and parents can make life difficult for children who come to understand that there are only two genders in society, and that people have to be unambiguously one or the other to be seen as normal. Given this predicament, life can become difficult if one is not allowed to use some of the most obvious and 'easy' signs of gender identity like guns or dolls. The way out of the swamp is more difficult.

Davies argues convincingly that the insistence on two mutually exclusive gender categories is a product of our society, an arrangement which can - and should - change. But she says little about the political implications of such change, and her recipes for achieving it sound neither convincing nor practical.

A book which explores just these issues, Household Work, is a collection of essays dealing with women's varied contribution to the household economy, and the economy as a whole. The book analyses, from different perspectives, the activities carried on within households, the complex position of women within them and the extent to which 'their' work can be passed on to others, and the different forms of income support available for households.

The authors do not present a unified 'correct line'. Instead, there is a series of brief and clear overviews, statements of approach and reports of interesting projects, followed by a brief commentary and critique. Many of the questions raised have significant political implications (not least for Bronwyn Davies' general

The most serious virus which infects the world of computers is enthusiasm. It affects people, predominantly writers, rather than the machines themselves and produces a number of distressing symptoms.

Consider this, the first sentence from Inside the IBM-PC by Peter Norton: “This is the beginning of a marvellous voyage of discovery into the secrets, wonders, and mysteries of the IBM Personal Computer”. The use of words like 'secrets', 'wonders' and 'mysteries' are all certain symptoms of galloping enthusiasm.

Later on the same page Norton, who's one of the world's leading experts on the IBM-PC, says: “In this book, we - you and I - will set off to discover the mysteries and wonders of what the PC is and what marvels it can perform. I am excited and enthused about the PC and the PC family, and I want to lead you into understanding the workings of this marvel and sharing with me the excitement of knowing what it is, how it works, and what it does.”

By this stage normal (ie. non-enthusiast) readers will have put the book down. Like tourists who've stepped into an Indian restaurant only to find themselves surrounded by shaven-headed people in saffron robes chanting 'Hare Krishna', normal readers will realise that they've inadvertently got mixed up with a bizarre cult, whose mysteries they have no desire to share.

Enthusiasts, with their wide-starving eyes (from having stared at the screen too long), their extraordinary prose style (from having read nothing but computer manuals for the last ten years), and their almost complete inability to speak anything that resembles normal English, are the biggest problem confronting computing.

Computing enthusiasts infest all computer magazines, they write all the instructions for computers and their programs, and they run all the businesses that make and sell computers. Walk into the local computer shop and ask a simple question, like 'what would I do with a computer'. You will get the same sort of reception as if you'd tried to buy a condom in the Vatican City.

If you have computers at work you will almost certainly have an enthusiast who hovers around the machines, like an anxious mother hen. Ask your resident enthusiast a simple question, like 'why does it bleep when I do that?', and you will be overwhelmed by details of CPU speeds, register stacks and hardware interrupts.

Yet most of us don’t want to know about Mhz, Mb, or MIPS, nor about RAMs, ROMs or EPROMs; most of us would prefer to know what the machine does and what threats to ourselves, our jobs and the ways we live it offers. Computers in the Human Context will tell you.

It's a collection of more than forty essays whose topics range from "Computers and gender" to 'The dangers of information control', from "Brazil's independent computer strategy" to 'Why computers may never think like people'. Some essays are written by enthusiasts who extol the virtues of Information Technology (IT) and explain how new technologies will revolutionise everything from the ways we work and play, to the ways we vote and educate our children.

But the 'enthusiast' essays are fol-
lowed by debunking ones which examine the hopeful hi-tech predictions in greater detail. The debunkers both pull-apart the enthusiasts’ predictions, looking for alternative ‘facts’ that imply different futures, and look for the darker side to IT.

The ‘information revolution’ does, for example, offer the possibility of easy access to unlimited sources of knowledge and information and, in theory, that could mean a far better-informed citizenry. But it’s far more likely that the new technologies will lead to far greater centralisation of knowledge and information, and thus greater control over it.

We all know how the junk mail industry has boomed as a result of the growth of computer lists of names and addresses; the same technology allows everyone from ASIO to market research companies to keep more and more detailed files on more and more of us. For example, by the time the Baader-Meinhof gang’s attacks came to an end, the West German police computers had a list of possible suspects and sympathisers with over ten million names on it. The Baader-Meinhof propaganda that

Independents’ Day

(continued from page 9)

figure, is controlled by a discipline identical to the control that exists in a party chamber.

Wherever independents or third parties have held the balance of power in our state parliaments, one of two dynamics prevailed: the instability brings a rapid termination of the parliament (South Australia 1970, Tasmania 1972) or the independents become an extension of the government party on a de facto basis (Tasmania and South Australia now). Indeed, the Greens in Tasmania are observing the model of Australian Labor in the 1890s and the early federal parliaments - support in return for concessions. The Tasmanian Greens are displaying a respect for

West Germany was becoming a police state had been fulfilled.

The impact that computers are having on our lives is already enormous. They have radically altered many areas of employment, abolishing some jobs and transforming others into boring ones.

Understanding the implications of technology is essential if the debate isn’t going to be dominated by those who have a vested interest in seeing computers used ever more widely.

Computers in the Human Context has over 500 pages of fairly small print. Few people are going to read all of it, but its organisation into sections on different themes makes it easy to pick out the essays on topics that interest or affect you. It’s a valuable contribution to a debate that the Left needs to get much more involved in. Computers are far too important an area to be left to the enthusiasts.

JIM ENDERSBY is almost a computer enthusiast.

COMING-UP

★ Enterprise bargaining: the great debate.
★ Yoshio Sugimoto on the Japan controversy.
★ US battles over IVF.
★ Post-Fordism: John Mathews responds.
When I first started riding, and breaking, bicycles the shops which sold and repaired them were small, dingy and run by surly old men in grubby overalls.

The bike parts (they didn’t have ‘accessories’ in those days) were kept in a rabbit-warren of tiny drawers and cupboards behind the counter, along with the proprietor’s decades-old collection of miscellaneous nuts and bolts stripped from ancient machines but never discarded because they “just might come in handy”. Shop decor tended to be limited to the occasional black-and-white postcard of the local sprint champion from the 1920s.

To the mechanically incompetent teenager, such places and their proprietors (who were always called either Reg, Stan or Alf) inspired not much affection as naked terror. Being able to sense immediately whether or not you knew your bottom bracket from your derailleur mechanism, they would dismiss you with just a faint sneer of contempt. Nowhere else could the words “it’ll sound more threatening.

These days, grumpy Reg seems as much of an anachronism as a coster-monger or a village blacksmith. His cramped and gloomy surroundings have become, in most cases, spacious, gleaming showrooms, resembling design studios more than workshops. Cycling has become a marketing person’s dream - technology and fashion combined in a product which is both healthy and environmentally friendly.

As you’d expect in Sydney, Paddington leads the way at the trendy end of the market. I felt more than a bit self-conscious about wheeling my rusty old racer across the immaculately-polished wooden floor of Woolys Wheels (82 Oxford St, Paddington, phone 331 2671). Woolys caters not just for those who want a good bike, but also those who want to be seen to have a good (or at least an expensive) bike. In fact, many of their customers settle simply for being seen and don’t bother about the bike at all - more than 20% of Woolys’ sales are in clothing and related accessories, with bike gear apparently still popular on the Sydney dance club scene.

Customising is a speciality and in Paddington they know how to pay for it. You can buy a frame at Woolys (not a whole bike, mind you, just the frame) for $3,000, if you’re so inclined. Their most expensive complete custom job wound up at $7,000. Not the sort of machine you’d want to leave tethered outside the pub on a Saturday night. If you’re the sort of person who thinks that a computer, to measure heart and pulse rate, etc., is a useful bike accessory (you can buy them for $50-80), then Woolys is for you. However, be prepared to pay a good bit more than elsewhere for parts and clothing and don’t expect to pick up anything second-hand.

For competent repairs, good advice and a rather less intimidating atmosphere, I prefer Calypso Cycles (404 King St, Newtown, phone 517 1655). They stock all the flash gear and cater for the triathlon masochists and yuppie customisers too, but not to the exclusion of more mundane jobs for the less committed. The staff are particularly helpful and not patronising. Recommended.

The friendly approach is also much in evidence at Inner City Cycles (31 Glebe Point Road, Glebe, phone 660 6605). Run as a co-operative, Inner City specialises in mountain and touring bikes, but is also one of the few shops in Sydney to provide a hire service. What’s more, they offer maintenance classes ($90 for six two-hour sessions) and sell not only second-hand bikes, but even second-hand parts. I was gratified to find that they keep these in a welcoming jumble of old wooden boxes, albeit downstairs and out of sight! This is a goldmine for the cheapskate cyclist who doesn’t care too much if she or he doesn’t have matching designer trademarks on every component. For personal service and a great attitude, Inner City is unbeatable.

Finally, right at the opposite end of the scale to Woolys is Gilbert’s Cyclery (16 O’Brien St, Bondi, phone 30 5216). To walk into Gilbert’s is to step back into an age before skin-tight lycra shorts, aerodynamic helmets, fluorescent jerseys and orange-tinted sunglasses. The shop is barely wide enough to walk through, crammed as it is with new bikes, old bikes and, most of all, bits of bikes, which litter the floor and the counter; and compete for space on shelves already stuffed full with unidentifiable clothing, miscellaneous tools and the inevitable boxes of useful nuts and bolts. The carpet is worn, the decor nil.

Gilbert himself, an ex-Algerian pied noir, is more than willing to expound at length to customers on the evils of the Australian government, greenies, Arabs, cars and Sydney’s other bike shops, of which only five, he claims, are not run by crooks, shysters or incompetents. He recounts with derision how Woolys allegedly charged a customer an extra $200 to paint a new bike pink (“pink!”). Political discussion is not recommended, but at Gilbert’s at least you can be sure of old-fashioned service with a scowl. He knows his bikes (repairs are his main business), prices are reasonable and you even get a free lecture on General de Gaulle thrown in if you’re lucky. Now that’s what I call a real bike shop.

Mike Ticher
The Treasurer, The Secretary, His Strategist and Their Agenda

ACTU secretary Bill Kelty likes to talk about his friends. Especially if they happen to be Paul Keating or Laurie Carmichael.

In the aftermath of the federal election, the Treasurer and the union strategist are definitely ‘the favoured ones’ in Kelty’s books. Not only are they responsible for much of the Accord, they have kept the industry restructuring line on track and helped propel Australia into a new era - “mature industrial relations”, says Kelty.

And that’s the way it will stay, if he has anything to do with it. Kelty has no intention of wavering from the master plan laid down for the union movement after the return of the Labor government.

Speaking to a Fabian Society dinner in Sydney soon after the election, Kelty warned that the momentum of industry restructuring and union amalgamation will not falter and that opposition will not be tolerated either outside or inside the union movement. “We have never given up, and we will win...as long as there’s a long memory and a hate, you can beat anybody”, he said.

Friends are a different matter altogether. And Kelty and Keating go back a few years. “When I first met him I thought he was a typical NSW Labor Party right-wing pragmatic who wanted to be in government but had no ideas. I thought he wanted to be able to retire and say ‘I was treasurer’.”

But all that changed when Kelty realised his mate Paul was one of the ‘true believers’. “His values are uniquely Labor. It was Keating who kept the Accord together. Not because he had to be convinced but because he believed in it.”

Carmichael and Kelty go back even further. Despite an initial reluctance to back the Accord, Kelty claims Carmichael was a “closet supporter most of the time”, who eventually became the “intellectual boss of award restructuring”. Laurie came out of the closet when “over one of those Christmas lunches” (with Kelty) he decided there was no mid-way course for restructuring “either do the lot or none”. The blueprint for restructuring all awards was cooked up with the Christmas pudding and with Keating’s support there was no stopping them. “We just slaughtered the employers. You’ve never seen such a bedraggled lot in your life, with the exception of the MTLA which huffed and puffed a bit.”

Union opposition didn’t stand much chance either. “We got agreement at a special unions conference. They did it partly by default, partly by ignorance. Some of them thought award restructuring would be a bit hard. But we won. We knocked them all off. Most of them couldn’t muster a speech after we’d finished with them.”

Election losers, the Liberal opposition, also came in for some stinging criticism, for their free market approach to life and for Fred Chaney “who is basically a wimp. Andrew (Peacock) said I was a thug. But he basically believes in nothing but the Essendon Football Club. He’ll be happy he almost became prime minister for the second time.” But most worrying about this election, said Kelty, was the handful of people produced by the Liberal Party who really do believe in something - “crushing the unions. They are a different brand, zealots of the right.”

Kelty has a clear message for any union leaders who doubt the long-term value of the Accord, restructuring and the need to create industry unions. “We have to consolidate so we have every position covered. Unions cannot be totally dependent on governments. A public image is nice and it does help. But our real strength is having organisers on the job working with workers.

“That’s what we have to recreate. A lot of union leaders are not committed to their members. We have to face up to either changing that commitment or changing the leaders.”

Clare Curran
If you are feeling powerful but lonely, I suggest you pop along to one of my clinics. We'll teach you how to spend your working day fighting for progressive social change, and then come home and transform yourself into a simpering sexual kitten to arouse and satiate your man. All this without the aid of drugs, wires or special diets.

BE EQUAL BY DAY, AND A WOMAN BY NIGHT!

It is my clinical experience that the supportive man who is influenced by feminism can also be in trouble. Perhaps you are the sort of silly chap who works with feminists, mixes with them socially, reads the books and supports their causes. If you do all these things you will inevitably develop a genuine understanding of a woman's point of view. And then you will learn the bitter truth: NO WOMAN WANTS A WIMP!

You pop along to my clinics as well and we'll show you how to put lead back into your pencil.

While we're on the subject of feminism and the psychic damage it can do, I'd just like to mention another patient of mine. This mother of two was brought to the edge of collapse by reading a whole lot of psycho-sexual bondage that you share with your partner is counter-revolutionary because it reinforces the supremacy of men. My patient has taken this zany idea to heart and it's gone through her marriage like Cyclone Tracey.

Andrea Dworkin has written a book called Intercourse in which she asserts that the act of having nooky with your partner is counter-revolutionary because it reinforces the supremacy of men. My patient has studied very closely the power of men's psyche. As that great fellow Burt Baccarach put it in his immortal song - a guy with a pin appears to have burst Ms Dworkin's bubble. If Andrea Dworkin is serious about these clinically silly ideas, then what she really needs is a good inter-course!

My extensive research has shown conclusively that women are not passive doughnuts who are acted upon by a dominant and erect male member. Not at all. My research has proven that the modern woman sucks in and powerfully encloses the limp and rather pathetic male appendage. She then crushes it in her pulsating, muscular cave.

It's just like when a man is flying at 30,000 feet in a jet and suddenly a window is broken and SLURP! He is sucked into the void. So in the sexual act a man is pulled irresistibly into the depths of the modern woman.

What is the origin of this uncanny power? Well, patients, for countless generations, women at home have studied very closely the power of their vacuum cleaners. They have experimented in order to achieve maximum suck, and alone in their homes they have emulated this action of the Hoover with their innermost parts.

The true blue, full-blooded Aussie woman is not troubled by a little submissive pleasure. She is not worried by a little stimulating collaboration with a sexy enemy. The healthy woman acknowledges the contribution made by the great feminist intellectual Janis Joplin when she said, "GET IT WHILE YOU CAN".

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