ELECTION FEATURE:
THE COALITION IN CHAOS
THE USSR GOING FOR BROKE
SALLYANNE ATKINSON
TRUCKIES

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BRIEFINGS

BALKANS BACKLASH: Now it's Yugoslavia's turn to explode.  
TRANSPORTS OF HORROR: Are the truckles really off the rails? 
LABOR PAINS: Is the NSW Left splitting asunder?  
NO ISLAND PARADISE: PNG in turmoil.

COLUMNS

PROFILE: Sallyanne Atkinson. A future Liberal leader?  
LETTER FROM EPHESUS: Nelson's column. 
CHINA SHOP: A regulation catch. 
CONSUMING PASSIONS: Browsing through Melbourne's bookshops.  
LOOSE CANNON: The latest in gossip from the left. 
DEAR DR HARTMAN: EEO co-ordinators needn't despair.

FEATURES

THE COALITION IN CHAOS: The Liberals' latest setback is their industrial relations policy. Tony Aspromourgos reads between the lines.  
MOSCOW BLUES: The Soviet economic crisis continues. Western expert Alec Nove speaks to the ABC's Tom Morton about the malaise.  
THE CAUCASIAN EQUATION: Is the Soviet Union breaking up? Or will Moscow hang on to its Asian territories, as Michael Humphrey argues?  
CROSSING THE RUBICON: Will another CP dissolve? The Italian Communist leader Achille Ochetto discusses the PCI's future with Eric Hobsbawm.  
AN EDUCATED GUESS: Is the Left losing the debate on education and training policy? Simon Marginson suggests some essential criteria.

MATTERS ARISING

AFTER THE LONG-HAIRED HEROINES: Carlotta McIntosh searches for today's Vietnamese woman.  
IN SEARCH OF THE NULLABOR LAPTOP: Jim Endersby looks at the laptop as lifestyle accessory - or necessity? 
CRICKET IN TANGLES: Part II of HG Nelson's musings - cricket as a thespian pursuit.

REVIEWS

AN ASIAN THREAT? Japanese economic expansionism.  
NINCOMPOOPS & HEROES: Cricket books, & more cricket books.  
LEST WE FORGET: Pursuing Nazi fugitives. 
BOY'S TALK: Is the victim the man or the woman?

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Balkans Backlash

Pierre Vicary is ABC Radio's correspondent in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. He spoke to ALR's Mike Ticher about the Yugoslav crisis in mid-February.

Every political issue in Yugoslavia at the moment is determined by the ideology of the two competing factions - the decentralists, who are mainly in Slovenia and Croatia, and the centralists - basically the Serbs.

The decentralists are saying that they would really like Yugoslavia to be almost like a confederation. Each republic would be almost totally self-contained, and would only give the federation certain powers - control of the army, a central bank, foreign policy - but all other political decisions would be made at the local level. Slovenia and Croatia have already gone a long way towards making that happen. There are multi-party elections in those two republics in April, and in both places the Communist Party could lose power.

One of the problems is that all the politicians are using nationalism in order to try and peddle their political wares, and in a multi-nation state like Yugoslavia that's extremely dangerous. This is particularly the case in Kosovo. Until last year, Kosovo was almost an independent province. As a result of changes in the constitution that were pushed through last March, Kosovo and Vojvodina have now come back under the control of Serbia. There is a crucial ideological division between the Serbian leadership, under hardline Stalinist Slobodan Milosevic, who want a hard line, and the Slovene and Croatian leadership, who say, as they do in everything else, that you've got to negotiate, have dialogue and allow a multi-party structure.

The latter argue that the hardline isn't working and cannot work - only 10% of Kosovo's population are Serbs or Montenegrins, there's no way that they can call the shots. And yet, the Serbian government in Belgrade says that they won't negotiate with the 2 million Albanians because they're all separatists! There's no way the Serbian leadership can negotiate, because their entire platform, the way they got power and hold power, is to insist on a hardline policy in Kosovo.

There is no doubt that the Serbs have not done very well out of the new Yugoslavia. Tito deliberately wanted to change the power balance because in the old Yugoslavia, under the King and later the dictatorship, the Serbs basically ran it, but I think he went too far, so that the Serbs really were disadvantaged.

And so initially, Milosevic's emphasis on Serbian nationalism was well-received. He is a very skilled populist and for a while he was widely supported, because it did appear that he was getting results. What's been happening over the last 3 months, is that more and more Serbs are now wondering where he's taking them. They accepted Milosevic because they thought it would help solve the Yugoslav problem, but now they feel that he is steering them to the edge of civil war, which is definitely not what they want.

The contradictions between the Serbian leadership will become clearer and clearer. Sooner or later they're going to have to go to the polls, and I think that the Serbian people by then might have had enough. The European train is pulling out of the Yugoslav station, and if Yugoslavia doesn't jump on to that train pretty quickly it's going to be left in the mud with Turkey and Albania. A lot of intellectuals in Serbia are beginning to realise that now.

The situation is further complicated by developments within Albania itself. Things are definitely happening there, although not the rubbish that's been in the press. People aren't hanging from trees, there hasn't been a state of emergency or a popular uprising. Nevertheless, despite the country's reputation, the Albanians are very well-informed.

They can pick up Italian and Yugoslav TV, so they know what's going on outside and what perestroika's about. They want change, there's no doubt.

The Ramiz Alija leadership has been doing what it can in the last few months to make change possible - limited private enterprise is allowed, not at an individual level, but at the co-operative level. So even inside Albania there's change.

As yet, however, the reforms have not gone nearly far enough to encourage the Albanians in Kosovo to look towards incorporation into Albania as a realistic option in the short or medium term. On the surface, they say they want to stay inside Yugoslavia, but when you've had a few drinks with them and they open up to you, they say that in fact what they really want, ultimately, is a greater Albania. However, they certainly don't want to go out and join Albania at the moment, because whatever you say about Yugoslavia, they've provided their people with a higher standard of living than the Albanians on the other side of the border. It's as simple as that.

Yugoslavia's economic development is of course only relative - their economy has been in a real mess, and the steps taken to rectify that have left Milosevic in a rather uneasy position. At the end of December the federal government took some very, very radical decisions, they made the money convertible, and basically did everything possible to allow a market economy to function.

Serbia has had to go along with these economic changes. In theory, Milosevic says that he accepts them, that he is for a market economy. But his performance in other areas leaves one to wonder whether that's not just propaganda, because the changes that have been made in the Serbian economy have been mostly the results of changes in the Federal system. The Serbian government itself hasn't real-
ly done very much. The whole thing goes together, you can’t have a market economy and a hardline centralist leadership.

These are the sort of contradictions which Yugoslavia is going to have to resolve quickly if it is to join the other Eastern European countries in achieving a workable political and economic system in the aftermath of communism.

Yugoslavia’s unique decentralised structure and the perpetual nationalistic squabbling is now giving rise to a good deal of pessimism about its future. As a joke currently going the rounds puts it: “By the year 2000 there will be only seven countries left in Europe - and six of them will be in Yugoslavia”.

Transports of Horror

Two catastrophic heavy vehicle accidents in the last five months have claimed more than forty lives and created a public realisation that something has gone badly wrong in the formulation and delivery of transport policy.

Exactly what might be wrong has prompted a large public debate; but after the initial shock over the scale of the carnage in the accidents at Cowper and Kempsey in NSW, only one notion appears to be rising to the top.

Driven by the well organised and powerful voice of the road lobby, an uneasy consensus seems to have been forged in the corridors of power that the main solution simply lies in the provision of greatly increased road funding. Thus, the apparent parameters of the problem have been reduced to questions of how much additional funding to provide and which level of government should provide it.

Of course, no one can deny that sections of the national road system have deteriorated rapidly during the 1980s and that additional funds are required to restore them to safe and serviceable levels. However, to define the current malaise as a simple function of inadequate road funding is to substitute a short term palliative for long term solutions to complex structural problems.

Heavy road freight and passenger transport has been growing exponentially to service the long distance markets, while rail services have been largely confined to medium distance haulage, mostly within state boundaries. It is only by examining and understanding the reasons for such a bizarre situation (which occurs in no other country to quite the same extent) that a basis for reformulating Australian land transport policy can be gained.

The most obvious reason is the federal structure of Australian rail systems; five rail systems currently interconnect, but each maintains its own (often incompatible) objectives and priorities.

Traditionally, the rail systems have been viewed by federal governments as state responsibilities (the Whitlam government was an exception) and this is reflected in the negligible financial support given by federal governments for national rail network development. The result has been a legacy of different track gauges, different rail system operational standards and communications systems, incompatible rolling stock between some states, steep gradients and restrictive tunnel and bridge clearances.

Not surprisingly, in the absence of federal government initiative, and faced with seemingly intractable coordination problems, as well as traditional state parochialism, rail systems have tended to maintain an insular focus on intra-state operations.

During the long post-war economic boom, interstate trade and long distance land transport in general came to assume much greater importance. Through the 1950s, growth in the long distance road freight industry promoted the development of fleet operations and freight forwarding.

A crucial factor consolidating the irrational structure of Australian land transport was a High Court case in 1954 (Hughes vs Vale) which effectively limited the capacity of states to levy road user charges on interstate trucks. Until 1979 (the Razorback blockade), the NSW government, for instance, never levied a charge of
more than $10 per annum on an inter-state truck for fear of being 'taken to the cleaners' in the High Court. Accordingly, interstate trucking began to be heavily subsidised for the damage done to road systems, and to the extent of that subsidy provided a cheap and lucrative (if economically and socially irrational) form of inter-state transport for consignors. Through techniques such as 'border-hopping' trucks registered for inter-state work also became able to provide cheap rates for some long distance intra-state transport.

In 1963, the establishment of the Interstate Drivers Award provided another means of consolidating the dominance of trucking in long distance transport. While the award was intended to protect the wages of inter-state drivers, the key forwarding companies (TNT, Mayne Nickless, Brambles, etc) who were also the largest fleet operators, began to off-load large sections of their long distance truck fleets to individual operators. By sub-contracting freight work to individual owner-drivers, the freight forwarders could obviate the Interstate Drivers Award and achieve lower costs through their oligopolistic bargaining position relative to the disorganised long distance owner drivers.

By the 1980s, railway deficits were burgeoning; road systems were deteriorating faster than planners had expected; and, under economic pressure from freight forwarders, speeding, overloading, abuse of hours of service regulations and pill popping had become endemic among long distance owner drivers (a fact which has been noted in eight major federal and state government reports since 1970). However, rather than read the signals and take remedial action, the federal and most state governments embarked on a course which has only reinforced the absurd distribution of the land transport task.

Deregulation has been a key feature of the 1980s, opening up additional long distance freight and passenger traffic to road transport. Moreover, since 1974 the federal government has fully funded the national highway system and, while road funding has only increased marginally in real terms since that time, an increasing proportion of available funds has been channelled into national highways. Road vehicle mass limits have been increased by 10.5 tonnes since 1976. Speed limits for heavy vehicles have been increased from 80 kph to 100 kph in the last four years. Similarly, hours of driving limits have been progressively relaxed.

With such a diverse range of productivity palliatives, it is not surprising that the number of six axle trucks (the main substitute for rail) on the nation's roads more than doubled between 1979 and 1985, from 10,100 to 23,200; or that industry sources in the road coach industry talk proudly of the number of long distance road coaches more than tripling since 1980.

The price of the massive imbalance which governments have nurtured in land transport has now come home to roost in the form of unprecedented heavy vehicle road carnage; cross-subsidisation by car owners of heavy vehicle road damage which the Bureau of Transport Economics estimates at $15 billion per annum; financial hardship for a large number of long distance truck operators; a spiralling road maintenance and construction burden; and a national rail network which suffers from chronic federal government neglect.

Peter Ferris
This story is not so much about ideological differences as about the methods of organising for social change. If ideological differences have divided the ALP Left in NSW they seem to have been clouded by the angry, often bitter, number-crunching debate.

Since November 1989, events in the NSW ALP Left have gone from bad to worse. What is emerging are two separate entities. On one side the Socialist Left, a hard-core group committed to preserving and strengthening union representation on the Left; on the other, a more amorphous group known as the Labor Left. Already the dispute threatens to destabilise the Left's control of one-third of the votes at the NSW ALP conference.

For now the victors in this strange battle are the Socialist Left which, at a tense meeting on November 10 last, in a 52/39 vote, managed to retain control of the Steering Committee, the former organisational centre of the ALP Left in NSW.

Irreconcilable differences have plagued the Steering Committee for years. More recently, the president-elect of the ACTU, Martin Ferguson, a leading figure in the breakaway group, has been portrayed in the mainstream media as locked in battle with George Campbell, national secretary of the powerful Amalgamated Metal Workers Union (AMWU), president of the old Steering Committee, and now president of the Socialist Left. Ferguson has lined up with two other leading Labor Party figures from the Labor Left grouping - deputy leader of the NSW Opposition, Dr Andrew Refshauge and Senator John Faulkner. Also included in the breakaway group is former NSW Minister for Education, Rodney Cavalier, who, while reluctant to speak publicly on behalf of a group that has no formal caucus, nevertheless has strong feelings about the necessity and reasoning for the split.

On the surface, the issues look clear-cut. At the November 10 meeting two opposing position papers were debated. One, drafted by Cavalier, was signed by the Miscellaneous Workers Union (FMWU) and represented the ideas of Faulkner - primarily to reform radically the constitution of the Steering Committee by abolishing the 'feudal' zoning system, replacing it with a much wider representative body called the Left Delegates Committee (LDC).

This meant the LDC would be open to all leftwing delegates elected from the branches, electorate councils and unions to the NSW ALP state conference. Faulkner argued this would allow three times as many party activists to participate in the Left's main decision-making forum.

For the trade unionists in the Steering Committee, Faulkner's proposals challenged their existing influence and attacked trade union representation in the ALP Left. George Campbell, while publicly calling for unity between the opposing groups, has clearly stated that the Socialist Left will be the major left group.

The second paper, put forward by AMWU assistant state secretary Doug Cameron, proposed to retain the existing Steering Committee zoning system which allows equal numbers of branch members and unionists, plus an 18-member executive. This was passed in principle and the newly-drafted constitution includes changes decided after the losers left the meeting - increasing union representation from 40% to 50%, proportional representation for elections and changing the name from Steering Committee to Socialist Left.

Anthony Albanese, assistant general secretary of the NSW ALP and a leading figure in the renamed Socialist Left, considers the split mainly a numbers struggle between two long-opposed groups within the NSW Left. "Despite all the rhetoric, this is about power and position, not about ideology, and it shows quite different attitudes to the trade union movement."

Albanese defends the increased union share on the Socialist Left, arguing that it reflects more fairly the 60%/40% trade union/branch delegate grouping at the state conference. No matter that most of the unions support the ALP Right, because the long-term strategy of the Socialist Left is to work for leftwing control of the trade union movement.

The emphasis on increased trade union involvement in the socialist Left is beginning to show results. Since November at least three 'uninvolved' unions in NSW have made advances to join.

This approach is an anathema to the Labor Left which considers the major role of the Left to fight rightwing domination in the ALP using the Steering Committee as the means to that end. For Rodney Cavalier, the ALP Left has no separate means of existence other than as a faction of the Labor Party. "The tragedy of the former Steering Committee was it had a structure that failed to recognise the central role of conference delegates..."
No island paradise

Since militant actions against the Bougainville Copper mineowners began 14 months ago, at least 60 people (both civilian and military) have been killed, more than 4,000 Bougainvillean have been interned in 'care centres', and more than 1,500 detained for questioning. Some of those deaths occurred while in police custody, contributing to the level of fear on the island.

According to reports from the Catholic Bishop of Bougainville, Gregory Singki, 3,000 people have fled into the jungle as a result of raids by the army or riot squads.

The mine has closed, depleting the PNG government's revenue by 40% and forcing the government to cut $A140 million from its budget. Bougainville has a certain amount of autonomy as a province within the PNG structure, but still depends upon financial support from the central PNG government.

In 1988 Francis Ona, leader of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, demanded $A13.7 billion in compensation from the mining company. (A 1974 agreement between the mine and the landowners gave the landowners 1.25% royalties. This was supposed to be renegotiated in 1981, but wasn't.)

Ona has not only demanded compensation, but also expressed his deep concern over the environmental and social effects of the mine.

Bougainvillians ethnically belong to the Solomon Islands, but nineteenth century colonialism destroyed this natural bond. The copper mine and its mining town were dominated by Papua New Guineans. A kidnapping, followed by an invasion?

The fact that Bougainvillians have a matrilineal structure where land is passed on from mother to daughter has received little attention in this present stage of the struggle; but then, the original agreements in the sixties and seventies on royalties were carried out with the men of Bougainville.

But the crisis has taken on much broader, more tragic dimensions. At this stage the PNG government seems to be seeking a military solution to the crisis, declaring a state of emergency last June and with more than 1,500 troops on the island; and has called upon the Australian government to provide more military aid.

Last month the PNG cabinet approved an increase in its defence forces to 5,200 over the next four years, with the pressures on troops on Bougainville.

This year Australia provided $41 million and the 1990-91 amount will be boosted to $53 million, an increase of almost 30%. Helicopters, provided by Australia with the assurance that they would not be used as gunships, are reportedly being used as such.

Faced with an increasing economic crisis, the government's militaristic stance combined with allegations of human rights abuses by security forces on the island does not augur well for a peaceful solution to the problem.

Jane Inglis
She was poised, Sallyanne Atkinson - if the timing should ever be right - to become Australia's first female premier. Alas, that ambition can be no more for Brisbane's fragrant Lord Mayor, doyen of those who like their politics dry and their women pearled and in twin-sets.

With Dr Carmen Lawrence having the premiership of Western Australia fall into her lap as the purge of WA Inc continues post-Bourke and now post-Dowding, Atkinson, it would appear, will just have to re-adjust the aim of The Ten Year Plan a smidgen - and head for Canberra, not George Street.

Not that she has an agenda or a career plan: there is no forward planning nor does she make many decisions about her life. In fact, she says she is rather opportunistic about it all. But first female prime minister of Australia would be nice, wouldn't it?

Atkinson's popularity is unquestionable up north. A poll taken just before the last state election indicated that the Liberal vote would soar by 50% if she, and not Angus Innes, was heading the parliamentary party.

This 47-year-old recently separated Catholic mother of five took over at City Hall in 1985, ending 24 years of Labor rule. At the last election she clocked 60% of the vote. Take away the Liberal endorsement and she would still beat everyone else home as an independent. The loves, as she calls the citizens of Brisbane, "my people", just adore her.

She has given them Expo and is at the forefront of the campaign to rid their fair city of the dreaded cane toad. They might have missed out on two Olympic bids (first to Barcelona then to Melbourne) but there will be others and Atkinson will be there for them, resplendent in gold suit with green trim, flying the flag on their behalf. She's like that.

Atkinson, in return for this adulation from the masses, "looks after people's future", heading the country's biggest and highest profile city council with shoulder pads that, like her hair, are never out of place.

In recent times she has been under increasing pressure to do the right thing by the party: turn in the key to the city of Brisbane and move to the state or federal sphere and win votes where they count.

The pressure has no doubt forced her to seek solace from her worry beads, a bowl of semi-precious stones and sea shells she keeps on her desk to finger with eyes closed at the start of each day, because "their shapes, colour and texture are soothing and calming. They help keep things in perspective by keeping us in touch with the earth."

Salt of the earth, is Atkinson. She walks by the Brisbane river for thirty minutes each morning in order to offset all those power breakfasts, lunches and dinners she has to attend.

The opportunity to lead the Queensland Liberals into the last state election slipped from her dainty grasp because nothing - bar the most unladylike use of political force - would have removed Angus Innes from the post. And she thinks he is a good man; she just couldn't do that to him.

She may end up being the Liberal's most popular, and longest serving, wallflower. The opportunity to go federal, with its lures of a promised cabinet post and maybe, just maybe, the chance to become Australia's first female prime minister evaporated, for the time being, in early February.

On the eve of a preselection deadline for the safe Gold Coast seat of McPherson, Andrew Peacock is alleged to have renewed his advances to Atkinson during a Liberal function in Brisbane. She demurred, claiming there was still just so much to do with her people, for her people.

But in Canberra, senior Peacock minders were a little amused by the headlines blazing across the front page of the Courier Mail, the day after the lunch: "Peacock Offer to Sallyanne - Mayor Asked To Take On Cabinet Post"; and the story's claim that Peacock had been "surprised" by the knockback.

The more cynical in the Liberal camp in Canberra were left wondering just why Atkinson was there in print the next day speaking of how flattered she was by the offer; how it was all a matter of timing; but gee, all this speculation about her future and the pressure from the party was making being Lord Mayor "extremely difficult".

And then there she was, popping up on prominent radio spots all over the place saying things like: "I get very frustrated in my job because we have all these wonderful, marvellous solid and important things here in Brisbane but nobody wants to know about them. And now something like this which is fairly hypothetical, you know, we hit the front pages. Anyhow, that's life I guess."

An unplanned life, of course.

Alicia Larriera
Have you ever written to a friend in a state of gloom, rage - or euphoria - describing whatever had made you that way? And have you then received a reply or even anxious phone call in response, days later, when the mood of that moment is long gone and you can't quite remember why you wanted to dance on the rooftops or, alternatively, slit your wrists?

That long-distance friendships survive this kind of dislocation is a constant wonder. Could it be something to do with the private world of the correspondence itself? It has its own timescale and codes of behaviour and is, perhaps, the last bastion of introspection and reflection in the fibre-optic, instant facsimile-transmitted world.

Imagine the difference there might have been in the quality of the relationship between Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West if they had faxed or phoned one another every day, instead of writing ... imagine having the time and inclination to do that anyway. Or is this a delusion too - that we have no time to write letters? No time to do anything but put one foot in front of the other, catch the bus there and back and simply get through from Weetbix to bedtime. There are still 24 hours in a day - apparently - but what do we do with them?

We get bullied a lot, for one thing. We get bullied into accepting that certain things matter, are urgent, world-shaking and demanding of our immediate attention, when they are not. This occurred to me some years ago when I'd been tucked away in a remote part of the world for a few weeks - without television, radio, phone or newspapers. During that time President Reagan had been shot and not killed. It had obviously mattered a great deal to him, Nancy and their astrologer. It had also mattered to television news programs which had secured fabulous ratings with the footage, and to newspapers who'd sold lots of extra copies on the back of the dramatic pictures. But to me, and anyone else out of the range of hysterical and story-hungry news media, it mattered little.

That was just about when news of great events used to filter through before instant electronic communication capability crashed into advertising dollars and TV ratings to create 'news shows'. These awful parasitical things have reached the absolute pits on our commercial channels - pick any one, any day of the week.

For instance, what the PM ummed and aaah-ed about, what the Leader of the Opposition moaned and smirked about, day after day, is not important. Indeed, placing microphones in front of their faces only encourages them to come up with even more platitudes and untruths. The release of Nelson Mandela is a case in point.

To refresh your information-bombarded memories, Nelson Mandela is released, what does Bob do? He sits down in his office and writes a letter (great photo opportunity this - very statesmanlike) telling Mandela how much he admires his courage and fortitude - what a pity that politics does not allow him to express materially his admiration for the courage and fortitude of Australia's Aborigines.

As for Andrew Peacock ... "tiraloo, tiralay, o happy day, we must lift sanctions immediately," he chirrups. Is this man for real? (Don't all snort at once, this is a rhetorical question.)

But perhaps the here-today-gone-tomorrow media reality of Nelson Mandela's release was best, if inadvertently, illustrated by Senator Gareth Evans. Not that you'd have seen it if your evening 'news' is seen through the lenses of the commercial channels. Only SBS rolled the tape from its piquant beginnings as the Senator was ambushed between his car and Parliament House: "Slow news day is it?" he inquired almost boredly and cynically amused. Is this man for real? (Don't all snort at once, this is a rhetorical question.)

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Cut to the Senator's newly-arranged press conference at which he expresses Foreign Ministerial gravitas (which is where the commercial channels picked him up) as he delivers his news grab. It went along the lines of how deeply pleased he was that Mr Mandela is out of leg irons and how lifting sanctions will be considered in due time - but not right now.

After 27 years in jail it must be depressing to know that you are going to have to be polite and play the game with people like these - to know that an invitation from George Bush to visit the White House is in the diplomatic bag - along with further instructions to CIA operatives in Pretoria to be sure to keep real tight tabs on the black bastard.

Nkosi sikelele - God bless Africa.

Diana Simmonds
The last few months have seen inverities about the up for grabs. All the old verities about the socialist/capitalist dichotomy are up for grabs.

More modestly, they have also marked a significant shift in the tide of debate over the Australian economy. Nor is the first of these occurrences entirely without consequences for the latter.

Until a few short months ago to argue against deregulation of the financial sector, or the entry of foreign banks, or the floating of the dollar, was to label oneself a voice from the past. At the same time industry policy was lumped with protectionism as an impure influence from the bad old days of the 'fifties and 'sixties - the years when, as Paul Keating would have it, successful Coalition governments fiddled while Australia burned.

The broad left-of-centre tradition in Australian policy making (with its emphasis on regulation, predictability in business and in finance, and protection from the low-wage economies of the region) seemed in eclipse. Of course, this didn't stop the Left from advocating such policies, and often in increasingly shrill and angry tones. But the possibility of them being taken seriously, either by the new policy-making consensus in and around Treasury, or by the media, seemed remote. Market forces and competition were about to put a new broom through the cosseted Australian economy, or so the story went.

The torrent of corporate collapses through the latter half of 1989 - which still threatens to become a flood - has changed all that. The first swallow of the summer was the renunciation by the solemn voices of the financial press of all the evil deeds of Messrs Bond, Skase, Herscu et al, whose borrowings were seen as symptoms of an past era of entrepreneurial profligacy, rather than of the new epoch of corporate dynamism. Financial survey after financial survey heralded the 'nineties as the decade 'conservative business values', with corporate ranking once again based on real assets rather than paper empires. There was talk of the need for greater self-regulation and even external regulation of management behaviour. At the same time what became known as the Pappas report, on Australia's manufacturing, made respectable again arguments about intervention which had been regarded throughout the 'eighties as at best eccentric and at worst simply the bleatings of vested interests.

The stage was set, one might have thought, for a change of gear on the part of the Left. A new atmosphere of social responsibility for business seemed at hand. Yet the Left has responded less with a bang than a whimper. Why is this? The most obvious answer is that the non-union Left has very little to say about what kind of regulatory regime do we actually think would shape the Australian economy more effectively throughout the 1990s, and why? And, while there's no shortage of left theory about the economy in general, do we have any propositions to advance towards a theory of regulation?

This brings me back to Eastern Europe. If the collapse of 'actually existing socialism' has meant one thing, it is that the old model of the publicly-owned industry as natural provider of the public good is at an end. Henceforward the debate will not be over the virtues or otherwise of the mixed economy, but over what kind of mixed economy we want to see. This suggests that levels of democratic influence over the economy, rather than the level of public ownership within it, is now the index of political radicalism on the world stage.

On the face of it, then, theories and forms of regulation should be as high on the Left's agenda today as forms of nationalisation once were. But that's obviously not the case. 'Defend and extend!' has been the main rallying cry.

Yet the old regulatory regime of the 'fifties and 'sixties is surely beyond revival. If regulation can't be recast in terms of the new industrial agenda of the 'nineties, as a creative economic tool rather than a fetter, it may be doomed to a renewed stint in the political wilderness.

David Burchell
The COALITION in CHAOS

The coalition is entering the election campaign in a shambles. After the health policy debacle, their latest gaffe is the much-revised industrial relations policy. But the election will still be desperately close. If the Coalition won, would the policy actually work?
Tony Aspromourgos reads between the lines...

Wage fixation and industrial relations were a crucial item on the agenda of the revitalised right of the 1980s. The controversy concerning the Coalition's industrial relations policy during the current election campaign suggests that the debate is now coming to a head.

Anyone familiar with the production-oriented economics of the classical economists, Marx, and the modern inheritors of these intellectual traditions would not find this surprising. Any rational attempt by the capitalist classes to shift the balance of economic power further in their own favour must attempt to alter the balance of forces governing wages, working conditions and work practices (or the distributional impact of the public sector).

This new right agenda has washed over into the policy positions of the federal Coalition. As a result, the Coalition’s industrial relations policy (CIRP) is a quite vigorous expression of the new 'economic liberalism'. If the conservatives gain power in the coming federal election will they attempt to implement this policy? It would not be unprecedented for 'idealist' conservative policies to evaporate in power as the stronger and more comfortable realities of big white cars and black leather chairs take hold. Furthermore, without the support of the employer organisations the policy is unimplementable. And as CIRP begins to look some prospect for implementation, they are becoming extremely cool about at least this version of 'labour market deregulation'. But it perhaps has never been more likely that the conservatives will actually practise what they are preaching.

What follows analyses the economic dimensions of CIRP in its three key aspects - wages policy and national economic performance, capacity to pay, voluntary agreements - and finally, considers the prospect of implementation.

To the extent that the Industrial Relations Commission will maintain a jurisdiction over wages policy under CIRP, the IRC will be required to determine wages and conditions in the light of capacity to pay and the requirements of national economic performance; in particular, employment, inflation and international competitiveness. (It apparently does not occur to the conservatives that there
might be a contradiction between these two principles: e.g. that improved national economic performance might require a wages policy which sends enterprises with an incapacity to pay to the wall.)

There is nothing inappropriate as such about gearing wages policy to national economic performance. Such a policy regime can be constructed in a manner which serves the interests of working people in general. The Accord, in fact, has been just such an institution. And whatever its failings, and dangers for the labour movement (most notably, co-option into regressive national policies), the Accord has served to bring the labour movement into national economic policy making, with two valuable aspects - wages policy has been synchronised with overall policy and economic performance; wages policy has been 'solidaristic' (geared to the interests of workers as a whole). This was and remains progressive.

But it would be a grave error to believe that CIRP, by emphasising national economic performance in wages policy, points to a convergence towards a similar 'Lib-Lab' wages policy. The differences relate both to the procedures by which wages policy is determined and the content of wages policy - and the former are no less important than the latter.

With regard to procedure, it is evident that the conservatives have no desire to see the labour movement play a role in national economic policy as an organised autonomous actor representing its own constituents (though, of course, practical reality may force a conservative government to accept something like this and negotiate). The intent of CIRP in this respect is that wages and conditions - and hence labour itself - are to be a mere instrument of economic policy; nothing more than an object of national economic policy, rather than a subject of policy, as under the Accord, however imperfectly.

This difference should not be underestimated. The entry of the ACTU into national economic policy making under the Accord, and the associated meshing of a solidaristic wages policy and national economic policy are the bases of a new maturity and legitimacy for the labour movement. CIRP will attempt to roll back the legitimacy of that role by making labour an instrument of conservative politico-economic objectives, while denying it the right to be an autonomous, collective actor, for itself, in national life.

How wages policy might contribute to improved economic performance does not only depend upon one's economic (and political) objective. It also depends upon one's theoretical understanding of the causal relations between key economic variables in a mixed capitalist economy, including wages and conditions, income distribution, investment (public and private), fiscal stance, interest rates, exchange rates, employment and so on.

Even with the same policy objectives different understandings of these causal relations will lead to different conclusions concerning appropriate policies, including wages policy. One could be forgiven for believing that the conservative understanding of how mixed capitalism works leads them to the happily self-serving conclusion that unemployment (and any number of other macro-economic problems) are always a prima facie case for real wage reductions, a view presumably based upon some thoroughly discredited axioms of traditional economic theory.

This is not the place to examine these theoretical issues. Suffice it to say that the fallacious idea that real wage reductions in general will lead to increased employment is based upon the refutable notion that reduced real wages in general improve the profitability of employing labour. The appropriate theoretical manner in which to examine the wage/employment nexus is by examining the relations between real wages, income distribution, effective demand and employment. This examination, it should be added, does not give the engagingly simple answers of the old conventional economic fables.

So the CIRP proposal to gear wages policy to national
economic performance may be read as a euphemism for little more than real wage cuts. It should be added, however, that a repudiation of the notion that unemployment is always due to excessive real wage rates does not mean that real wage reductions are never desirable. The real wage discounting, at the macro-economic level, in response to the 1985-86 external crisis, was broadly appropriate from the point of view of national economic management and the interests of workers in general.

This is not because 'cheapening' labour would push the system towards full employment by making it more profitable to employ labour but, rather, because it would facilitate a permanent real exchange rate reduction. This would assist improved trade performance, in turn necessary, though not sufficient, for the achievement of enduring full employment. Whether the conservative industrial relations regime could bring about such a macro-economic adjustment has been questioned, rightly, by many commentators.

It is evident that CIRP is, in part, informed by at least a vulgar version of conventional economic theory insofar as the policy places considerable faith in the capacity of deregulated markets to generate superior economic outcomes. Hence, in particular, more 'flexible' (decentralised) wages and conditions are supposed to generate superior employment performance - and even (incredibly) superior real wage outcomes via productivity improvement.

Because of this connection with the conventional supply-and-demand economic theory, one central aspect of the CIRP is worth particularly close examination - the notion that wage fixation should be geared to industry or enterprise capacity to pay. This notion has long been bandied about in the public debate by various liberal and conservative spokespeople, especially Mr Howard but, to the best of my knowledge, it has escaped the systematic rebuttal to which it is vulnerable.

From the standpoint of conventional economic theory itself, the idea that differential wage rates can, and should, apply to the same job description in different industries or enterprises is both empirically impracticable and socially undesirable (i.e. economically 'irrational'). (A comparison of the CIRP released in May 1986 and the CIRP released in June 1988 suggests that the ambiguity concerning industry versus enterprise bargaining has been resolved, more or less, in favour of the enterprise model - but much vagueness persists.)

The concept of competition implies that a free mobility of labour will, in fact, ensure that uniform wage rates apply to uniform job descriptions. (At this level at least the classical-marxian tradition of economic theory would take the same view.) An attempt to enforce differential wage rates for whatever reason, including different levels of profitability between industries or enterprises, would lead to inexorable pressure of labour mobility from low wage towards high wage employers.

Of course, involuntary unemployment, segmentation of work, 'search costs' and so on will impede the empirical tendency towards uniform rates of wages. But this does not alter the fact, worthy of considerable emphasis, that pervasive competition - which, one thought, economic liberals greatly favoured - is incompatible with capacity-to-pay wages policy. Even if unemployment or work segmentation makes such a differential wages policy practicable to some significant extent, it would remain an economically 'irrational' policy - again, even from the standpoint of conventional economic theory. This is so because such a wages regime amounts to price discrimination in the utilisation of labour and therefore leads to an unsatisfactory allocation of labour between different economic activities.

For example, different rates of profit on capital between enterprises within a single industry arise primarily from use of different 'vintages' of capital equipment. Enabling low profit, inferior technique of production enterprises (or industries) to pay lower wage rates encourages over-utilisation of labour in those activities. It is, in fact, economically equivalent to protection - which, again, one thought, was one of the deadly sins in the current conservative catechism!

Enterprises which cannot pay the wages paid (and the conditions provided) by other enterprises with better production techniques should go to the wall. That this outcome might be resisted by workers in individual enterprises who (under the proposed CIRP) perhaps will face the understandable temptation to try to save an ailing enterprise by accepting wage cuts or deterioration in conditions, does not obviate the point made here. Organised labour, whatever role it might play in national economic management, takes a dangerous and slippery path when it accepts responsibility for enterprise management failure.

Conservatives or economic liberals might object to the above rebuttal of capacity-to-pay wages policy by proposing that capacity-to-pay differentials would apply - not to uniform job descriptions across enterprises/industries - but rather to different occupations. So understood, the policy presumably would be about providing a mechanism for altering existing occupational relativities in accordance with enterprise/industry profitability - in large part in order to short circuit system-wide wage flows.

But this is implausible also for the simple reason that, in
a modern integrated production system, occupations are rarely peculiar to one or a small number of enterprises/industries. And this is what would be required for this latter, softer version of capacity-to-pay wages policy to have any greater practical implausibility than the aforementioned 'hard' version. It is not clear what adjustment of occupational relativities in accordance with enterprise/industry capacity to pay would mean in an economy in which the same or very similar occupations occur widely throughout the production system.

To the extent that 'voluntary agreements' are intended to provide this mechanism for breaking down system-wide wage flow-ons, the June 1988 version of CIRP places the focus fairly clearly upon enterprise bargaining. This basis for different wage rates between enterprises is, practically, even less plausible than industry-based differentials.

Competition itself integrates wage rates between occupations which are near substitutes for each other, across enterprises and industries. The insulation of wage rate changes within an enterprise or industry is therefore practically limited to job descriptions which lack close substitutes across the production system, or in other enterprises and industries.

What determines the formation of occupational relativities in general? They are bounded by some more or less objective factors such as (private) costs of education and training. However, this leaves a considerable degree of freedom for variations in relativities. Within these bounds relativities are best regarded as formed by social norms or conventions which are not technical data (e.g. like technology) in any conventional economic sense.

These norms are certainly subject to change, albeit usually slow. Indeed, an important part of the historic role of the labour movement precisely has been to change these norms governing work and wages in a progressive direction. Even putting aside our scepticism in the previous paragraphs, it is doubtful whether competition or differential profitability can exercise much influence upon these norms. Rather, these norms of social life in general, and work in particular, are the essential human framework within which market forces work themselves out - and without which economic activity would be unintelligible as a human phenomenon, as opposed to a mere profit maximisation problem.

The chief institutional vehicle for achieving the kind of decentralised bargaining implied by the capacity-to-pay doctrine is the proposed introduction of contractually
binding ‘voluntary agreements’ (VAs) between employers and workers or groups of workers. These contracts will lie largely outside the domain of the IRC - except to the extent that terms of employment are not provided for in the VA - with their enforcement a matter of contract law and contempt of court provisions. (There is also provision for private conciliation and arbitration.)

The manner of operation and practical feasibility of this mechanism is essentially a legal question. But a couple of economic aspects are worth mentioning.

To the extent that VAs find any wide application, there is an obvious contradiction between this leg of CIRP and the proposal to gear wages policy to national economic performance. There would, in effect, be a dual industrial relations system - an ‘IRC sector’ and a ‘contract sector’ - and national economic performance would be an irrelevance in the latter (unless one predicts that the participants in the latter sector will be overwhelmed by the conservative version of patriotism).

As the Treasurer rightly has pointed out, with characteristic vigour, laissez-faire wages policy is effectively no wages policy at all (though it apparently has not occurred to him that the same point applies, for example, to industry policy and exchange rate policy). Enterprise/industry bargaining within the framework of a centralised system of ratification may be consistent with a national wages policy geared to national economic performance, but this is certainly not true of the VAs regime.

The public controversy which broke out on February 5 concerning the scepticism of most employer groups towards CIRP, is a symptom of their justifiable uncertainty and fear as to what CIRP in general, and VAs in particular, might mean for them.

There is quite rightly a lack of confidence among employer organisations that a VA sector outside the domain of the IRC is capable of achieving both greater industrial flexibility and superior aggregate wage outcomes. Certainly employer groups overwhelmingly favour enterprise agreements being subject to the centralised system. The possibility of enterprise unions under CIRP is also sending a shiver up some employers’ spines.

These employer sentiments are reinforced by the disquiet of employer groups in NSW at the state government’s industrial relations proposals, which may be regarded as a rehearsal for the federal CIRP. According to the Financial Review (February 7) BHP has also warned that the proposed NSW regime will endanger restructuring of the steel industry. The NSW legislation is currently in parliamentary limbo.

The VAs mechanism no doubt will provide opportunities for some sections of the workforce to do better, e.g. where worker militancy is high and the enterprises/industries with which they bargain can easily pass on costs to purchasers. It is just this opportunistic anti-solidaristic possible outcome which would be most regrettable, with the strong gravitating to the contract sector and the weak to the IRC sector. If this scenario proved practicable it would mean the end of a national wages policy.

By a national wages policy I do not mean that union wages policy should conform to government wages policy or government’s view concerning the requirements of national economic performance. Rather, union wages policy should be conceived with a view to the interests of working people as a whole, including the poor and welfare dependent, and not merely the interests of sections of the workforce. This is a genuinely solidaristic wages policy.

Is the conservative blueprint implementable? What will be its likely effect?

The CIRP doctrine concerning wages and national economic performance is an elaborate euphemism for bending labour to the will of conservative objectives and denying the legitimacy of the kind of role organised labour has played in national economic life during the 1980s. In that respect it is quite the opposite of Accord political economy.

Whether this aspect of the policy succeeds depends, as usual, on the balance of political forces or “respective powers of the combatants”, to use Marx’s phrase. In any case, this dimension of the policy sits uncomfortably with the desire to shift towards decentralised VAs which would largely remove wages and conditions from macro-economic control.

To the extent that VAs do become a widespread phenomenon - and on the supposition that the strongest and better off sections of the workforce would have most to gain from VAs - any burden of adjustment to national economic performance imposed in the IRC sector will fall disproportionately upon the weakest and least well off sections of the workforce. Again, this is quite the opposite of the 1985-86 adjustment. But the notion that VAs could enable wages and conditions to be determined at enterprise level, by reference to enterprise conditions, does not seem capable of widespread application and, in any case, is not desirable.

As far as one can tell, the most likely prospect is for the emergence of a new dualism in the workforce - there will be ‘ins’ and ‘outs’ - similar in character to the British experience in the 1980s, though not with the same sharp regional dimension. This process will be greatly exacerbated if a policy-induced recession proves necessary in order to assist implementation of CIRP.

It must be remembered that the backdrop to all this will be an Australian economy which continues to walk a knife edge and remains extremely vulnerable to foreign debt as well as foreign ownership of domestic assets. CIRP does not seriously engage this central problem. The industrial relations agenda which matters lies elsewhere. Industrial restructuring (‘micro-economic reform’ to use the common cliche) has far more to gain from the shift away from trade unionism towards industrial unionism, reform of awards and the consequent reduction in demarcations, than from anything offered by the conservative pretence at an industrial relations policy.

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ALR is read all over. And it always manages to arouse strong emotions. Take the Financial Review’s very own voice of sweet reasonableness, Dave Clark, for instance. In a recent column devoted especially to us, Dave had some pretty lively things to say. Among them:

★ That ALR should set up a new left front called "Dykes on Bikes" - a result, it seems, of our profile on Sydney mardi gras president Cath Phillips and our column on mountain bikes.

★ That we’re ‘blissfully unaware’ of the real economic problems being discussed in the Soviet press.

★ And that we’re more concerned with helping ‘Balmain and Carlton pinks distinguish their reds from their whites’ than with the hopes and fears of ordinary suburban Australians.

And much, much more besides...But don’t take Dave Clark’s word for it. Appreciate ALR’s controversial blend of politics, culture and humour on a regular basis. You could even win one of those dreaded mountain bikes - or a shelf-full of books.
MOSCOW
Blues

Gorbachev may have won the political debate, but the Soviet economy continues to lurch from crisis to crisis. Alec Nove is the foremost western expert on the problems of the socialist economies. His Economics of Feasible Socialism predicted much of the present malaise. Here he is interviewed by the ABC's Tom Morton.

Alec Nove is emeritus professor of economics at the University of Glasgow. He is the author of numerous books on the socialist countries, including The Soviet Economic System, Was Stalin Really Necessary?, The Economic History of the USSR and Political Economy of Soviet Socialism. His Economics of Feasible Socialism, first published in 1983, became the definitive critique of state-planned socialism, and was widely read by reformers in Eastern Europe. Many of its then contentious points are now the commonsense of the new governments in the Soviet bloc. He was interviewed by Tom Morton in Glasgow.

After three years of perestroika, the Soviet economy is actually in a worse state than it was at the outset. Growth is down, consumer goods are even more difficult to find, and there’s a record budget deficit. How have things come to this pass?

There are several elements to this. Firstly, the economy was in crisis before the whole reform process began - which was of course why it began. Secondly, the attempt to reform it, which necessarily meant changing the habits of work and affecting the interests of millions of people in various groups of society from top to bottom, is an extremely difficult process. And while they’re trying to do it the old system is in process of disintegration.

On top of that, there is tremendous opposition to the reforms - and not only opposition from bureaucrats, as there always is with bureaucrats. Many ordinary people are worried by it, too. They don’t want price rises, and they want to retain job security. The old system didn’t pay them well but at least it paid them regularly, and it didn’t seem to matter very much if they worked hard or not. Finally, among those who are anxious to carry out the reform there’s a whole wide range of opinions as to what the reform should actually be. They’re still arguing about it.

Contributing to the crisis is the woefully unsound financial policy of the past, which involved running a gigantic budget deficit the existence of which they simply denied. That was only admitted less than a year ago. This has led to an increasing disparity between supply and demand. This, in turn, has resulted in hoarding, thus making the shortages worse and, finally and disastrously, it has meant a collapse of confidence in the rouble.

Now people are losing patience, the shops are emptier than they were, and the strikes and violence in various national republics add to the confusion. The result is, I
think, that everybody from Gorbachev down would agree that the present crisis is worsening.

One irony is that, while the reforms have given people greater freedom, what they have chosen to do is barter. As one Soviet economist put it, the rouble has ceased to be a currency; it has become a lottery ticket. And lack of confidence in the currency means that you try to barter - barter deals with other firms in the Soviet Union and barter deals abroad, thereby disrupting supply links. On top of that came the coal strikes of last year, cutbacks in nuclear power generation after Chernobyl, and difficulties with maintaining oil output which could all combine to threaten an energy crisis. There’s also trouble on the railways, and, in the Soviet Union, the railways are an absolutely vital link in the home power supply system. Gorbachev is visibly alarmed and said so when he proposed a temporary ban on strikes late last year.

How appropriate are the reform measures that Gorbachev has taken so far?

It’s very difficult to be realistic about this because some of the measures being taken are perfectly desirable in their own right and would work if the situation were not as critical as it is. Suppose you give greater powers to the Estonians or the Latvians to determine their own economic policy. They’re sensible people and in normal circumstances this would be an excellent measure. But with the rouble in the state it’s in they’ll try to do barter deals with the Swedes, the Finns, anybody who can provide them with the kind of goods they want.

But the key lies in the budget. In the short run they must balance the budget and stop printing money. They’ve got a whole program of economy measures, some of them extremely sensible. A cutback in defence expenditure goes hand-in-hand with the shift of the quite modern and well-equipped defence industries into the production of consumer goods, and also to the production of much-needed equipment for agriculture. They’ve revised the rather foolish policy of cutting back the output of vodka, which only served to reduce budget revenue and caused people to turn to various forms of illegal hooch. They’re buying more consumer goods in the West, despite the fact that it causes them to get further into debt. And there’s a number of measures to increase revenue and to cut back expenditure on gigantic and ambitious investment projects. All the things they’re doing to try to remedy the situation, in other words, are perfectly sensible as far as they go. The real question is whether the situation has not already deteriorated so far that these measures, desirable though they are, will prove insufficient.

For years they had a huge budget deficit of about 20-25 billion roubles (or about $A50 billion) and lied about it. Then, under Gorbachev, instead of turning to sound finance they only made things worse. Sometimes it wasn’t their fault: for example, the Chernobyl disaster or the Armenian earthquake. Again, teachers and doctors were miserably underpaid, the health service was in a mess, education had been underfunded, the housing crisis had grown very serious, and all kinds of public services and welfare were in a mess. So there were additional expendi-

A Soviet traffic policeman shows the flag outside the world’s largest McDonalds - in Moscow.

tures for these items without, unfortunately, cuts being imposed on other items. And on top of that, there was a fall in the price of oil on which the country relied for hard currency. So the budget deficit kept on growing and they kept on not admitting it. An eminent Russian economist said “the great deep black hole in the budget can bury the whole of perestroika”.

“How did they manage to do this?” I asked various Soviet economists. The answer I got was that they’re not accustomed to take finance seriously. They learned the hard way that this is a tragic mistake. Under the old system, money did not matter all that much. Enterprises were ordered to produce and to deliver, the customers were designated and if the prices happened to be those which caused a loss, the state simply subsidised the enterprise. Now they urgently need a complete revision of their price system. This is difficult because it means increasing the prices of a number of basic foodstuffs, for example, which are now subsidised. This means revising the whole financial system under which enterprises work. They’ve shied away from it and from the plan for 1990 it is quite evident that they’re putting the price reform off until 1991.
But, of course, much deeper than this, the entire system is not responsive to consumer demand. In the past they didn’t bother too much about the quality of goods because priority was given to heavy industry. They now say publicly that under Brezhnev the attempt to catch up with the US in the defence field took an awful lot of resources away from the consumer. Many of the consumer goods industries are woefully under-equipped, and the equipment is obsolete. The entire distribution network has been under-funded, and the people in it are underpaid, which explains a lot of the corruption which grew dramatically in this area.

How successful have been the kinds of micro-economic reforms which Gorbachev introduced - the development of small-scale co-operatives and so on?

Here again there is an extremely contradictory picture. On the one hand the reform measures relating to co-operatives read extremely well. The decree on co-operatives really is intended to encourage the creation of co-operatives which will genuinely compete with each other and with the state in the provision of all kinds of services and goods which have been sadly neglected. All this is excellent but, at a time of acute shortage, it has produced a sense of revulsion in the general public. People have been accused of speculation and profit-seeking, and some restrictive measures have been taken against co-operatives - not just because a number of bureaucrats don’t like them, but also because of indignant pressure from below.

In agriculture they are trying to encourage family leaseholds: a family can lease some land, acquire some animals and conduct operations as a family farm. But again this can be very unpopular. One Soviet cartoon showed a number of peasants singing and dancing. A passer-by asks why they are so happy. Reply: the leaseholder’s pig has died. Under the present conditions of shortage anybody who wants to revive them but they’re using artificial respiration on what, in many areas, has become a corpse.

You said before you thought the kinds of measures that have been introduced so far wouldn’t go far enough to avert the crisis. Yet they’ve now put forward proposals that would allow for developing market relations, for denationalisation, and for some forms of private property. Do you think this new package goes far enough, or do they need to go still further?

The new measures are perfectly sound, but the pressing need is still for some sort of price reform. They need a proper currency. You can’t operate a market of any sort properly unless you have a currency on which you can rely. This applies also, for example, to the government’s measures to balance the budget. They are floating various kinds of bonds and loans, but the bonds they are floating have a 5% rate of interest while the last estimate I heard of the real inflation rate is 9%.

If you want the market to operate you must have prices which have some bearing on supply and demand, and a scarcity of money is essential so that what is most urgently wanted by people is profitable to produce. Prices now are based on costs - usually on costs of about ten years ago, so there’s great confusion in the price system. The vast majority of prices ought, as Soviet reformers are now saying, to be the subject of free negotiation between customer and supplier. The subsidy bill to industry via phoney prices I would estimate at about 10% of the entire gross national product, and about 20% of the entire budget expenditure. It’s gigantic and it’s growing. The official price of meat has remained the same since 1962: since then people’s incomes have trebled. So of course there’s a shortage of meat. You can buy meat on the free market, but at three or four times the official price. To take another example, at the moment the cheapest bread is also the cheapest pig food. This is ridiculous. These prices have to be increased. Gorbachev spoke of it as necessary himself two years ago, but he then shied away from it because of fears of the political consequences.

That seems to be a major dilemma for all the countries in the Eastern Bloc which are trying to reform their economies at the moment. Poland shied away from price reform and Hungary seems to be doing so too. Will Gorbachev be able to face the problem?

My own feeling - which is shared by one or two of my Soviet colleagues - is that the way to tackle this matter is to have a two-tier price system: to have open rationing alongside the free market. Rationalise the rationing, so to speak, and have the minimum ration of necessities at fixed prices, and then put the rest on to free pricing. This would mean that pensioners and poorly paid people would still be able to get meat, milk and so on. I’m aware that this sort of compromise doesn’t look very economically sound. The counter argument I would give is that every other option seems to me to be worse and more dangerous.

"As one Soviet economist put it, the rouble has ceased to be a currency: it has become a lottery ticket."
People talk about inflation as the central problem. But it's very interesting to compare different kinds of inflation. In Hungary, for example, you can still get in the shops pretty well all you want to buy: the shops are full at prices which are rising. In Yugoslavia, the prices are rising at the ridiculous rate of 1,000% a year at the moment. But even at these prices, which rise every day, the shops are well supplied with goods. Soviet inflation is accompanied by a partially effective price control and so you have imbalances between demand and supply, both for specific items and now across the board. It's very difficult to get even quite simple things in the shops today.

So, basically people have plenty of money but they can't buy anything with it?

No, that's not quite true. There's too much money in the economy as a whole: too many managers have too much money in their bank accounts, and too many citizens have money they can't spend in their savings accounts. But millions and millions of people are woefully underpaid. Teachers when they're lucky get paid about 150 roubles a month. That's three hundred Australian dollars. There's too much money but it's extremely unevenly distributed between different groups of people. And that has political consequences now that there's so much freedom in the Soviet Union.

That is another very important point. Democratisation has gone much further in the Soviet Union than many people in the West realise. We're accustomed to think of the Soviet government as capable of anything because it's a totalitarian state. This is not the case. The government must now take public opinion into account. The consequences of taking genuinely unpopular measures can be drastic, and the problem is that they're in very great difficulties and there are no measures which can remedy the situation which are not, in fact, painful and therefore unpopular.

Your book, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*, was published in 1983, before the reform process in the Soviet Union had really begun. Since then a lot of what you suggested there has actually happened. Do you feel vindicated by this? And if you were writing the book now you would write it differently?

In certain respects of course I feel vindicated. In my first chapter, I argued that when Marx wrote of socialism he was either misleading or irrelevant because in these matters he was a utopian. This is now almost the consensus view in the USSR. When I say this to intelligent Soviet colleagues nowadays, they just nod their heads. This is not because they've read my book: most of them haven't. It's because they've come to this conclusion themselves. And perhaps some had come to this conclusion before but were not able to express themselves freely because Marx, like Lenin, used to be holy writ. Now in the Soviet Union itself there are interesting articles being published discussing what part of the ideas of Marx and Engels about socialist economies have been proved to be wrong. I also had a chapter on the lessons to be drawn from the Soviet experience. I wouldn't alter it at all because the Soviet experience that I was writing about is still that from which they are trying to escape.

But when it comes to remedies I would have to take into account a number of experiences since the book was published - not only the recent experiences in the Soviet Union, but also those of Hungary where the reforms have been around for a long time and have not worked as well as was expected. There are other new problems: the further experiences of the disintegration of Yugoslavia; and the dif-
difficulties in China, which have been substantial both economically and more recently in the political field.

Perhaps theoretically the most important question which has now arisen is this: can a market system coexist with the dominance of state property? In other words, is it necessary for the state, while retaining certain sectors, of course, to get out of owning the bulk of manufacturing and trade and distribution. A number of Soviet critics are saying that market-type reforms are inherently incompatible with state ownership. Then comes the question: what are the alternatives? Are co-operatives an alternative? Because the Yugoslav system of so-called workers' self-management doesn't work either. Co-operative property, employee buy-outs, employees owning shares in the property - all of these issues are now in the arena of discussion. Were I writing my book today I would pay much more attention to these issues than I did.

Linked with these is a question of the need for a capital market. I thought that people could borrow the money they wanted from the state banking system but experience in Hungary, and now in the Soviet Union, suggests that something more like a capital and financial market is also needed.

Finally, there is the question of the Western social democracies. One of the Soviet critics, speaking at a Supreme Soviet session televised to about 100 million people, actually said something like this: 'Here we've been all these years talking about socialism. Meanwhile in a number of countries such as Sweden and Holland they have not been talking about socialism, but the workers in these countries have four or five times the wages of our workers, their social security is much better, and they live much better. True, these countries do not describe themselves as socialist, but they're none the worse for that.'

So you have quite a school of Soviet and, indeed, Polish and Hungarian people who are saying that the whole concept of socialism and state ownership is wrong. And for some of them, the ideal is Sweden. In my book I said I do not think Sweden is a socialist republic. Maybe what some of these people are talking about is not a socialist but a social democratic ideal - one in which you do have capitalists and a powerful private sector, but you also have a good welfare state based upon high taxes and a strong and rather efficient state sector too.

Let's look at what seems to be the fundamental contradiction in trying to reform the socialist economies in the way Gorbachev's trying to do in the Soviet Union: introducing the market into a planned economy. How do you reconcile the two?

There are some who say the two cannot be reconciled. I don't agree. You can't say that it doesn't work. Take, for example Hungarian wholesale and retail distribution. It's run by a mixture of state, co-operative and private and leasehold operators who do a pretty good job. There is competition and there are realistic prices. Hungarian agriculture, which is largely co-operative, or a mixture of co-operative and private, works reasonably well.

But one must distinguish between two things when one is talking about the present situation in the Soviet Union. One is the question of how a system would operate once it is in place. The other is the immediate difficulty of getting there or, indeed, anywhere. Somebody produced the rather nice saying that you cannot jump across the precipice in two jumps. Obviously, it is essential to have some notion of the kind of system you would like to have. But right now the most immediate problem for the Soviet Union is how to get anywhere, how to prevent the crisis which we all recognise exists today from turning into catastrophe.

What about the kinds of economic and political inequalities that are going to result from these sorts of changes? It seems that the corollary of market reforms is that there will be people who will become poorer and people who will become richer. How does a notion of socialism deal with that?

It's certainly an important question. The first point to make is that under the traditional stalinist system there were great inequalities. But they were based very largely on rank. If you were sufficiently senior you had the necessary privileges and got things which others didn't get. There are consequences from the replacement of privilege based on rank to privilege based on money. Those who are successful in the market make money. Those who are unsuccessful need some kind of safety net, but are going to be poorer. The question of the degree of inequality is not just a function of economic policy, but also of the level of culture in the country concerned and the level of development. Inequality in Sweden is far, far less than it is in Britain or the Soviet Union because the lowest levels of Swedish society are in fact literate people and even the basic unskilled jobs are reasonably well-paid. I had Sweden in mind when I thought of a 3:1 ratio as the kind of thing that might be acceptable in a highly developed country.

The essential point about pay is this: a labour market in which people are attracted to jobs because they are attracted by the conditions under which they work is the only possible alternative to the direction of labour. And the direction of labour is, of course, socially and politically disastrous. Now, a labor market necessarily involves inequality. That doesn't mean that you must have the gigantic inequalities of property ownership or, indeed, of some of the almost obscenely high incomes that you get today in the West when somebody 'earns' a million pounds a year largely by reason of their position in a merchant bank rather than their marginal productivity - whatever that could possibly be.

That raises a basic question. In the last ten years we've seen in many of the most developed countries a major redistribution of wealth upwards; an expansion in the wages of the most highly paid; and a contraction in social services and, on a wider level, social justice. How do we reconcile that with the kinds of criticisms you've been making of the socialist economies? Is there a happy medium?

Of course, in a number of countries - Britain is an obvious example but Britain is not alone - there's been a tendency to demolish part of the welfare state and to
increase inequalities. But this is not inevitable. It hasn’t happened in the Scandanavian countries to my knowledge. It’s been taken further in Britain than in West Germany. So I see no reason why the sort of reforms that I have in mind for the East European countries should drive them to extremes.

A Hungarian sociologist argued that, if you switched to the market, the amount of inequality may actually become less or, at any rate, become visible. A simple example: supposing there are very few good hospitals and good hotels and you never get into either unless you are a senior official and you have pull. Now obviously there are still, after the reforms, not enough good hotels, and some hospitals would be better than others, and those with money would be the most likely to be able to get into them. There hasn’t been a growth in inequality as such, but it has become more visible and more market and money related, rather than rank related. My own belief, and this is shared by the reformers that I know in the Soviet Union, is that this is a healthier situation.

What about socialism? Shouldn’t we simply dispose of the notion now?

That is certainly the private view of a number of my Soviet colleagues. They identify socialism with the mess that they are now in, and with the excesses and horrors of the past, about which they are now very frank. They would prefer some other word. I’m not sure myself. In my country we have a prime minister who says there is no such thing as society and is widely reported as crossing out the word ‘society’ from government documents. All that matters in her world is the pursuit of private profit by private individuals, plus charity. That’s enough at least to make me feel there is still something in the socialist ideal.

But this is a matter for argument. Marxist socialism, I think, is irrelevant and wrong. One of my motives in writing The Economics of Feasible Socialism was to say that the kind of socialism envisaged by Marx and the so-called socialism that they established in the Soviet Union are not the same, but both are unacceptable. So, either one drops the entire notion or one looks for some other model. And I tried to sketch out a possible alternative model. I then went on to say, in the introduction to the second edition, that people have a perfect right not to want something like this: that the only socialism that is tolerable is a democratic socialism. If the citizens prefer the existing situation then I’m perfectly happy to spend my remaining years listening to Mozart operas and Schubert quartets. It’s their business.

I still think that the future of socialism as a concept depends on the breakdown of the existing economic system. Unless things go seriously wrong in the West I don’t think democratic socialism has a hope of really getting anywhere in the near future. Oddly enough, that is one of Marx’s correct thoughts. He once said no system ever passes from the scene unless its potential is exhausted. He thought, of course, that the potential of capitalism was already exhausted in his time. How wrong he was. But our own economies are not in a totally healthy condition. Let us see what happens to our own societies. ♦

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Gorbachev's problems escalated in January when 'near civil war' broke out in the Caucasus. The Soviet Union seemed to be breaking up. But Michael Humphrey argues that Moscow's not about to give up control of its Asian territories.

The flare-up of hostilities in December between Azeri and Armenian nationalists in the Caucasus is yet another incident in the growing tensions in Soviet Central Asia over rule from Moscow. In December 1986 there were nationalist riots in Alma-Ata (Kazakhstan), during February and March 1988 Azeris and Armenians clashed over territorial disputes which were tied to nationalist aspirations for greater autonomy in Stepanakert (Nagorno-Karabakh) and Sumagait (Azerbaijan) and, in December 1988 Azeris attacked Armenians in Baku (Azerbaijan), leading to 'near civil war' in the region.

The recurring themes of protest in the Central Asian republics have included anti-Islamic policies, russification, immigration into the republics and nationalist demands for greater political autonomy.

The Armenian-Azeri clashes have the added dimension of ethnic rivalry fuelled by territorial disputes over the regions of Nakhichevan and Nagorno-Karabakh. The disputes over these territories date back to the early 1920s when their political status and boundaries were determined by the newly established Soviet government. Nakhichevan, an Azeri majority region separated from Azerbaijan by the Republic of Armenia, passed from Azerbaijani to Armenian control and was finally included in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1921. Nagorno-Karabakh was carved out of the newly formed Republic of Azerbaijan as a majority Armenian enclave. However, it continued to be administered from Baku, the Azerbaijani capital.

It is the question of administrative control over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh that has been the catalyst for the most recent Azeri-Armenian clashes. The Azeris have strongly opposed Armenian nationalist efforts to have Moscow award control over Nagorno-Karabakh to the Republic of Armenia. The clashes over the same issue in early 1988 saw a negotiated settlement and the appointment of a 'special representative' from Moscow in Nagorno-Karabakh. This action and the continuing flow of Armenian immigrants into Nagorno-Karabakh and other Azerbaijani cities have raised Azeris' fears about a gradual dismemberment of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

On top of this, Azeris feel that they have come off second best in dealings with Moscow because of the historical links of the Russian centre with the Christian Armenian minority. Formerly, the link was religion. Tsarist Russia
was the protector of the Christian Armenians during the period of Ottoman Turkish rule. Today the link is no longer religion but the issue of political reliability and dependency in the face of growing nationalist aspirations in the Muslim republics. Recent change in the political geography of the region with the Islamic revolution in Iran and Mujahedidin resistance in Afghanistan simply reinforce Armenian ties with Moscow. The Armenians remain a minority in a Turkish/Muslim region.

The growth of nationalist sentiment in Soviet Central Asia has certainly alarmed Moscow. One response has been to try to rein in nationalist sentiment by replacing ethnic members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party with Russian appointments. But more generally the growth of nationalist sentiment represents the failure of its nationality policy which sought to incorporate traditional regions into the larger Soviet nation through socialist social engineering. The transformation of the Muslim regions proved particularly difficult, even though radical political and legal reform based on the liberation of women from the tribal Islamic culture of Central Asia was vigorously pursued. Social engineering still continues in the Muslim republics. Muslims are encouraged to have fewer children, marry non-Muslims and emigrate to underpopulated zones of the Soviet Union.

Azeri claims of favouritism towards Armenian nationalist interests misread Moscow’s policy in the region, which is much more ambiguous. Moscow does not ultimately wish to support any ethnic nationalist expression. As some Azerbaijanis have already pointed out in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, the idea of creating ethnically homogeneous regions is against leninist principles. During his visit to Armenia after the earthquake in December 1988, Gorbachev made his position clear on the rise of nationalist sentiments. He warned Armenian nationalists against capitalising on the earthquake crisis and pushing their claims over Nagorno-Karabakh. Conservatives and reformers alike still favour strong central rule from Moscow. Gorbachev’s use of Soviet forces in Baku in January 1990 to put down resistance by the Azerbaijani National Front and break the blockade of Baku harbour further underlines this view.

Any apparent support for one ethnic/national group or another must be understood as a continuation of Moscow’s policy to undermine nationalist movements by the use of ethnic rivalry in order to divert attention from Moscow’s overlordship. Divide and rule has long been used as a strategy of regional control with the aim of creating an internationalist (ie, pan-Soviet) culture and identity. The formation of the autonomous enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh itself is an example of this policy. The decision to create the enclave reflected the dominance of central power through the party apparatus over the local state apparatus.

The boundaries of the enclave were drawn in order to create a majority Armenian population in an ethnically mixed region of Azerbaijan in much the same way as Lebanon was created as a Christian majority state by the
French. This occurred despite the strong objections of Azerbaijani whose republic was theoretically independent. The result was the creation of an unresolvable point of tension between Azeris and Armenians.

But why has the resurgence of hostilities between Azeris and Armenians at this time sparked so much more interest than previous clashes both inside and outside the Soviet Union? Obviously the political upheaval in Eastern Europe with the demise of regimes and communist parties in the face of popular movements has raised the real possibility of greater political autonomy for republics within the Soviet Union itself. Nationalist Fronts have become active in the Baltic states, Central Asia and Mongolia. This has made the 'nationalities' question a focus of contest between conservatives and reformists over the future of 'glASNost'. For the West, the emergence of nationalist fronts heralds the possibility of 'the disintegration of the Soviet empire', the triumph of capitalism over socialism.

There is a rather ironic convergence of interpretation of the events in Azerbaijan from Moscow and Western capitals. Both choose to interpret nationalist unrest in Central Asia as a product of the growing power of Islamic nationalism spilling over from the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Mujaheddin's resistance of the Soviet army's occupation in Afghanistan.

In fact, President Bush's comments acknowledging the Soviet military's right to restore order in Azerbaijan is in part based on the shared perception of the threat of radical Islam. Similar Soviet military action against National Fronts in the Baltic republics would certainly not be met with the same US support!

For the West this represents a remarkable slippage from cold war discourse, and resort to the cultural essentialism of ethnic primordialism, religious fanaticism and the view of Islam as a monolithic cultural entity. These are the same explanations offered for conflict in Middle Eastern states. Soviet criticism of religious revival and nationalism are discussed in similar language but from an ideologically different viewpoint. Religious revivalism for the Soviets is seen as an anachronism requiring greater diligence in the education of youth and closer monitoring of public opinion.

The shared perception of the conflict has become very obvious in the reporting of events. The Azeri-Armenian clash has been characterised as a Christian-Muslim conflict. The Armenian genocide has been invoked as an ominous precedent which threatens the Armenians once again. In the eternal search for a simplified dualistic view of events the media, Soviet and Western, have made the Azeri Turks the bad guys and the Armenians the good guys. But has political Islam been such an important factor behind the emergence of national fronts in Azerbaijan and the other Central Asian republics? This is a difficult question to answer but there are some indicators we might consider: firstly, the character of contemporary Muslim culture and Islamic institutions in the Soviet Central Asian republics and, secondly, the influence of Islamic movements and institutions in Iran and Afghanistan across the border.

In the Soviet Union there are two kinds of Islamic culture, official and unofficial. Official Islam is organised by the state under four Muslim Spiritual Boards in Tashkent, Ufa, Makhach-Qala and Baku which control the appointment of the 1,500-2,500 clerics and the approximately 365 mosques for 50,000 Soviet Muslims.

Official Islam seeks, through diplomatic and cultural activities, to represent the Soviet Union as a significant Muslim country and part of the community of Islamic states. Unofficial Islam, or 'popular' Islam, is represented by the Sufi brotherhoods which operate as secret societies, and the growing practice of Islamic rites. The most popular rituals are the observance of the nikah marriage ceremony, the payment of bridewealth and the burial of relatives in new Muslim cemeteries and, in some cases, tombs (mazars) on which are inscribed the clan and tribal origins of the deceased.

Another recent development is the increase in pilgrimages to the shrines of saints are common throughout the region including Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan in the Soviet Union, and also substitute for the impossible compulsory ‘jaj’, pilgrimage to Mecca.

Soviet concern is that the growth in the observance of personal and group rituals is becoming an important catalyst for the emergence of ethnic and nationalist sentiment. As one Tadzhik expert observes: "The deep penetration of Islam into the daily life of believers has a double consequence: on the one hand, it gives an ethnic colour to religious customs and rituals and, on the other, it gives a confessional colour to national traditions". Issues about Islamic culture and history are also concerning Soviet authorities because of their subversive role in stimulating Islamic and nationalist sentiment. Hence, from the Soviet perspective, Islam remains a tool of reactionary forces both inside and outside the Soviet Union.

The view that the growth of Islamic practice and ethnic nationalism has been actively stimulated from outside must not, however, be overstated. All the states on the southern Soviet border share a common feature in conflict between the state and ethnic/religious minorities. Each is
as vulnerable to manipulation of ethnic nationalisms as the next. In fact, relations between all the neighbouring states in the region, including Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, have ethnic/religious minorities which can and have been manipulated. The issue of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, Iraq and Iran is a case in point.

Another important point is that no particular ideology or identity can be assumed to be dominant in determining the allegiance of these minorities. In the course of the Iran-Iraq war there was the assumption that the Iraqi Shi'ites, who represent around 60% of the Iraqi population, would side with Iran. This did not happen. In the conflict in Afghanistan it was thought that the withdrawal of the Soviet military would be fatal to the Najibullah regime and bring victory to the Islamic alliance. However, a shift in allegiance of Hazaris, a stigmatised ethnic minority by the dominant Pakhtun group, from the 'Islamic forces' proved militarily crucial for the government in Kabul.

Iran, in the past keen to export Islamic revolution, has an ambivalent attitude towards the Azeri-Armenian conflict. President Rafsanjani's visit to the Soviet Union in July 1989 epitomises Iran's present policy. On the one hand, Rafsanjani paid a symbolic visit to Baku and gave a sermon in the Tazapir mosque but, on the other, he signed bilateral accords in Moscow worth $6 billion for the joint development of dams, nuclear power plants and railways. Discussions were also held over the reactivation of building the pipeline to Baku to carry three billion cubic metres of natural gas, a deal negotiated with the Soviet Union at a time when Iran had become economically isolated during the Iran-Iraq war. In addition, the Azeri Turks are regarded as a troublesome minority in Tehran. When the Soviet military recently moved to close the border with Soviet Azerbaijan the government in Tehran expressed relief, not anger.

At the heart of the Azeri-Armenian conflict is Moscow's concern about the growth of nationalist movements in Soviet Central Asia. It appears that the manipulation of ethnic conflict forms part of strategies for control of the demands for national independence. Whether the outcome of the negotiations in Azerbaijan is seen as a victory for Gorbachev's reforms or for the conservative elements in the party and state is yet to be seen. Both share the concern about the maintenance of central control though they perhaps differ in their strategies to achieve it.

On the issue of the growth of religious and nationalist sentiment in the region, perhaps we should take a broader view. It appears that the inequities of development in both capitalist and communist Central Asia and Iran have left the great majority of people disaffected. Islam may be the common cultural background of the region but perhaps the experience of US and Soviet political and economic imperialism is the more potent underlying force for the assertion of national autonomy in the region. The shared Soviet and US view of the threat of Islam is thus a product of politically similar enterprises in the region in the past.

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CROSSING THE RUBICON

The events in Eastern Europe continue to reshape the Left worldwide. This month the Italian Communist Party (PCI) stages a special congress to discuss a new name, a new form, and perhaps a new party. Here, the PCI's leader Achille Occhetto is interviewed by Eric Hobsbawm about the Italian debate.

We are talking at an historic moment: the Eastern European systems have collapsed, there is a dangerous situation in the USSR, we have become aware that a whole tradition, to which we dedicated part of our lives, has come to an end: the tradition dominated by the October Revolution. Do you agree that we are today at a profound historical turning point?

Yes, I feel that we are at one of those turning points which demand total change, not only in practice but also in theory. I would say that at such a time it is no longer enough to find new answers - we need to ask new questions. I believe that 'really existing communism', by which I mean not the set of ideals which clearly maintain their value, but that communist movement which was born with a specific vision of the party, the state, of organisation and of society, faces a historical crisis of enormous dimensions.

This has brought about the collapse of the state system it gave life to and which had wrongly created the belief - and internationally the whole of the Left has paid for this - that the struggle between Right and Left, between socialism and capitalism, could be concentrated into the struggle between the two blocs. Identifying first with 'socialism in one country' then with defending the bloc forged after World War Two around the Soviet Union, created the belief that this contained socialism's future. This brought about an historical tragedy, at least in large areas of the world, from which it is going to be difficult to recover.

So why does the PCI seem to us abroad very much on the defensive? Why does it feel responsible for things for which it has no responsibility?

For the PCI the need for change does not arise from the fact of a joint responsibility for what has happened in the East. However, let us be accurate. We have had basically three stages: first, we were the most critical component of the international communist movement; second, we were in open disagreement and, third, we left the movement and declared ourselves an integral part of the European Left.

I think the real problem today is contained in your first question. The world of 1945 has changed radically. In a certain phase we acted as critics within a world divided into two blocs. Today, the Left in Italy, Europe and internationally, faces restructuring.

That means going back beyond 1945. What is in question is the entire perspective of the movements which were stamped with the experience and outlook of the October Revolution. What's left are perhaps the traditions - there are several - of the pre-1917 socialist movements, but also the tradition and experience of
There has been a major shift in two significant areas: over time. The Socialist International under Brandt is no longer the International stained with the guilt of voting the 1914 war credits nor the Socialist International reborn after the war and very much tied to bloc alignments. In the '50s it often even looked like an instrument of American policy. There has been a major shift in two significant areas: Ostpolitik and North-South relations. This was linked to two men: Brandt and Olaf Palme. One can say that the whole theoretical perspective of international socialism is moving. The issue for us is not one of passing from one tradition to another. What we propose is taking part in an international movement for rethinking the function of the Left. We can do this because we are the communist party which embodies a great reforming and reformist tradition.

It is no accident that we are strongest in the two regions of the country with the richest tradition of reform, but we have brought to this something new and original, namely, the communist vision, not of a subaltern reformism, but of the working classes as autonomous and of their capacity to become the state.

But hasn't the PCI for some time been changing in a reformist direction? What remains is more a formal acknowledgment of changes already taking place, not completely, because we still see some of the old traditions in the party, but which have for some time now been dominant.

In our party, elements of innovation and of double thinking have lived together, which is why we have not been able to exploit fully the potential of a policy capable of presenting our party as the fulcrum of an alternative to the present ruling class. And I don't mean because of the turning point of 1989-90. Unfortunately, for 10 years or so our vote has been in continual decline. Our situation among young people is particularly worrying. This is not due to reduced militancy, as some maintain. I believe our problem is not so much a communist problem but one of the function of leftwing parties.

Our troubles began at the same time as those of the Labour Party in Britain, the SPD in Germany and of all those parties who did not just want to manage neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies. There are socialist parties which made the other choice. So left culture and the very manner of being a party needs redefining. We need to find a new form for a party so it is capable of drawing into action and struggle the subjects of today's contradictions, those of the year 2000 and not of the 19th century.

For instance, our traditional idea of the social alliance of workers and peasants is meaningless today, even if it is still represented by the emblem of the hammer and sickle. Today the decisive problem is the relation between the world of work as a whole and cross-class contradictions such as those of ecology, women's liberation, etc.

We feel we need to reconsider the way of being political, the political party as an entity, the programs of the Left. And not as Italians alone but in an international context making our own contribution to a reorganisation of the Left, starting with the Euro-Left.

Agreed, the problem of the PCI is a national aspect of a wider problem, the crisis in the socialist and labour movements during the last 20 years. But is there not also a crisis in the concept of the party?

The party as a means for people's free political association is a basic fact of democracy. But there's no doubt that in Italy, too, the parties have degenerated. There's an attempt to make all decisions through the secretariats of governing parties. So even in a multi-party system like ours, there's an element of party supremacy which stifles real ability, even true entrepreneurial activity. Italian democracy, unlike other parts of Europe, has its specific problem. Since 1945 our democracy has been blocked by permanent Christian Democrat domination, with other parties as satellites, and a major Communist Party excluded from power. Now a political party cannot go on for centuries, just preaching ideals. We are not the Catholic church. We are a political party and, as such, the Italian constitution imposes on us a duty to compete for the leadership of the country. So the great political problem is how to create conditions for an alternative in our country. We have started a big shake-up in Italian political life so as to draw out all those left forces which are not with Craxi, not with the Christian Democrats, do not want to be on their side, are not Communists, but who favour opening up this question of an alternative.

But the centre of an alternative would have to be the relation between the Communist supporters and those who support the Socialists. Without the Socialists you cannot have a left alternative.

Of course there is no alternative without the Socialists, but as long as we remain constant the Socialists say they do not want an alternative with us.

Why?

For them we are unacceptable unless the Socialists have become the party which wins more votes than the communists, as everywhere else in Europe. This is the negative position of Craxi, and unfortunately it is blocking the political life of the country.

In your congress resolution you propose a new political formation. If in fact an agreement now with the Socialists is ruled out, who will make up the new grouping?

An agreement with the Socialists is not ruled out. We say that the new formation challenges the Socialists to take the alternative seriously and in fact the very moment we announced this option a discussion opened up within the Socialist Party for the first time in years. Although for the time being that discussion has been discontinued because the socialists are awaiting the outcome of our congress.

Let us suppose that the party has come in out of the cold, and suppose you are now within the span of possible government. The people, public opinion, ask you to represent the alternative. But has the PCI or other socialist parties - for this is not a problem specific
to the PCI - have we a concrete perspective, something beyond which all men and women of goodwill share, opinions on the environment, on feminisms, the South, down with the Mafia...?

Sorry to interrupt you. Everyone agrees, so long as you don’t connect the problems. By that I mean that everyone wants to defend the environment so long as you don’t question modes of production and consumption. Everyone agrees on women’s liberation as long as you don’t question their particular domination at work and in the organisation of society. There’s much social hypocrisy today. In fact, all the world supports many of the same ideals; even those which are considered communist values are quietly approved by any democrat. The problem is to find a political project and, at the same time, a party format which can join those different needs in a credible alternative plan on a government level.

But we must never forget one basic fact. In recent years the Communist Party has been in clear decline. Not so much in the percentage vote, which at 27% is still large. It is the fact that the percentage of young voters keeps declining that worries me. From 1945 the young voted for us disproportionately. Now they vote well below our average. How do we speak to these young people?

This is a great problem. What positive reasons are there for choosing this great party? You can see why people vote for Craxi’s Socialists, because he and his followers have a whole patronage system and are the managers of a new capitalism. It’s not very moral, but it is a reason.

Yes, but the positive reason is also very closely correlated with the changing situation. In the course of time a sort of political stabilisation has occurred. Consumption and job security have improved for a majority of the population. The minority is large but remains a minority. In terms of votes, they are not immediately available for an alternative and can, in fact, be influenced by patronage politics. As long as its internal contradictions do not erupt more visibly, it is a system which has its own inertial force. Even more lively, dynamic, more open political initiatives will not necessarily make any immediate mark on this state of affairs or break it. Nevertheless, it is an effective strategy to bring forward certain positive ideas which, in our opinion, open perspectives on another way of life in our country.

Thus we want not more markets, but a better state for a better market. More certain rules are needed in society for all who operate in it - public, private and voluntary entities alike. That means that state and public entities should manage less, and should provide everyone with the chance to express their own possibilities. This new framework of social relations is linked to the question of public morality and crime which is one of our central problems.

I think that many people would favour a positive project which is not statist but wants to give greater decision-making opportunities to the public, for it is they who must put in motion what is already alive and creative in Italian society, but suffocated by the party system. Even this type of language that I am using, which is not traditional, can open up a consensus which previously we did not have. So we open the gates to wider support, opening up contradictions in the Socialist Party, but also new processes of unity with the Socialist Party. Open up contradictions in the Catholic world and facilitate unity with very important elements in it. In short, we want to get the Italian political situation moving. Of course, this is not something to be done in a day.

This leads me to the prospects after the collapse of the East European systems, including the very worrying situation in the USSR itself. What’s your opinion of this?

In part I have already said that the situation is so dynamic that it is very difficult to make forecasts. It is very important how one intervenes in this situation. I think the European Left has a strong responsibility to control the democratic processes in the East in agreement with Gorbachev.

So far as possible.

Yes, but up to what point is it possible? I don’t know. I was in Poland recently and I spoke to everyone: Solidarity, Prime Minister Mazoviecki, Geremek, Cardinal Glemp, Jaruzelski, and the thing which struck me was that everyone had the same will to control the process. Everyone agreed, the Prime Minister, communists, Solidarity, etc on the fact that even German unification must be seen in the framework of wider European integration. This is the way of controlling the situation. But they tell me that, for example, territorial claims towards Poland are at this moment stronger in East Germany than in West Germany because the Nazis are more important there. Nazism had not been eliminated there but merely frozen.

Still, it is a positive fact that for so many decades the nationalities haven’t massacred each other.

On the one hand they imposed control, but on the other they have left the problems unresolved.

I have two further questions. The first is the big question of a change in the party name. What is the justification for this?

Really, we didn’t start with the idea of changing the party’s name, even if this is how it got to the media. We are not ashamed of our name. The proposal was for a constituent assembly for a broader political formation with the participation of other forces with whom we would deal on all matters: the program and, if necessary, the name.

This is not the first time in our history that we have suggested a different formation. Togliatti did so before the cold war set in, Longo himself spoke of a working people’s party which should unite the whole Italian Left. Later Longo and Amendola raised the question again, although of course it was different from the present day.

Now it is seen rather emotionally, particularly by those who oppose the political proposals. Certainly, from an emotional point of view, I too am moved. I started as a communist and have done nothing else in my life. I’ve said many times that I approach a new political formation as an Italian communist. I haven’t suddenly become something else. The problem is to assess the validity of this broaden-
ing-out, and of this different form of politics. You can consider, for example, a democratic, popular union which represents different forces, in which the Communist Party remains a determining force even if representation at the level of electoral participation - local, national or European - is of the union itself. Or there may be other ways which can be discussed with the other participants. It is an act of political initiative, something to break the deadlock in Italian politics.

If this political initiative, which has brought us to the centre of attention and has opened discussion not only among communists but in all Italian families, if it is considered as a disaster, a sell-out, a betrayal, then certainly it won't work.

The problem is not that of the name change in itself. Would one pay that price in certain circumstances? Certainly. If you can form this great progressive alignment, fine. But I am worried by the impression of defensiveness.

So many will say: "Oh, they've finally recognised that Craxi and the others were right. There is not communism, they've admitted their error." But the PCI has a wonderful tradition as the PCL. What one judges is the contents of the bottle, not the bottle itself. In short, what happens if the congress does not accept your majority report because of this - in my opinion, peripheral - element?

First, we must start from the assumption that there was already cause for concern. We were already in a defensive and dangerous situation. In some of the recent administrative elections we lost between 10 and 20% of the votes. That is difficult enough, not to mention what I said about the youth vote. What does this mean? We keep an electorate that knows all these things, and we don't win any new voters. Among the young the party vote in some areas is 12%.

It is very worrying.

It has been of great concern for many years. We have lost millions of votes over the years. So the situation is this. The choice is intended to improve it. We'll have to see. A choice for a renewal doesn't mean immediate improvement. One must have the courage to opt for renewal and accept a period of difficulty for later advance. I think the communists and our supporters are much more intelligent than is believed. If there's no excessive drama at the top, then the political idea of winning, of not feeling isolated, of opening a new phase, is an idea that will be accepted.

Anyway, I say and will continue to say that our proposal is not a retreat. During the European election the question of the name came up and I said we were not ashamed and we would not change the name unless we decided that political events made this useful. If some counter-proposal defeats mine it won't be the end of the world, but I think we shall gain a little. There's a whole dynamic part of Italian society that could abandon us, or follow us only with difficulty.

One last word. How do you view the prospects of socialists in the widest sense, all those who identify with that great secular movement in the last decade of the century, not in terms of organisation but as a whole?

I think that, in reality, all socialists must reconstruct their outlook. Not just the communists. I am very firm on this, we are issuing a challenge. Craxi is not right. On the contrary, he is wrong. Once again we are in the vanguard. Doing this we demonstrate that we are again in the avant garde. It is the Socialists who remain in the 19th century, who talk of Proudhon while they manage Italian capitalism at a truly modest level. As for socialism in general we must reopen the debate.

As I said before, we must start with new questions and no longer look only for replies to old questions. In the end I think the collapse in Eastern Europe can even bring back on the agenda a stronger European Left, even give life to the US Left which has been ruined by the division of the world. And this can be a new experience for the Left.

ERIC HOBSBAWM is the author of Politics for a Rational Left (Verso, 1989). A much longer version of this interview was published in the February issue of Marxism Today. It is reproduced here with permission.
An EDUCATED Guess

The federal government has targeted education and training as the engine of industrial recovery. Yet we already have more skilled workers than we use. Simon Marginson argues that it's time the Left got out of the educational trenches to meet the challenge.

With award restructuring in motion, Labor's full policy for education and training is revealed. It is an ambitious policy - nothing less than the integration of education and training with the labour process in all industries regulated by awards. This is something both governments and markets have failed to achieve in the past.

Employment, Education and Training Minister John Dawkins is driven by economic objectives which are external to the education sector, primarily the production of "a more highly educated, competent and flexible workforce". The assumption is that, as the OECD puts it, "human capital has become even more important in recent years", meaning that improving the quality of labour - rather than, say, capital investment, long term planning, or product development - is seen as the key to export growth and international competitiveness. Hence the importance of education. It's assumed that a more educated labour force would be a more productive labour force.

The government is trying to create a more productive labour force in two, sometimes contradictory, ways. First, it wants a general lift in skills, assuming that a more educated labour force will be more 'flexible' and more 'responsive' - particularly in relation to technological change. Hence the idea of multiskilling, to create workers who can take different roles in production, and more easily adapt to changes in the process of production. The government's thinking here is conditioned by neoclassical economic theory which draws on studies of the behaviour of farmers to indicate that educated people adapt faster to new technologies.

But the government also wants to create new high-skill export industries, to better integrate science and the work process in order to facilitate a shift from primary industry to sophisticated manufacturing and services. This is where the 'sunrise industry' rhetoric comes in.

So where does award restructuring fit in? It is essential to the strategy. It aims to construct a grid linking education and training, work classification, rates of pay and productivity, and incorporate individual incentives for improvements in education and training.

The changes to industrial awards are designed to rearrange work functions (classifications) in a hierarchy of skills. The higher the education, the higher the classification and the higher the level of pay. Workers covered by awards are thus being offered identifiable career paths (many for the first time), provided that opportunities exist for training and retraining in order to increase the level of skills and move up the hierarchy - and provided that the
boss is interested in using higher skills. Under such a system, individual workers would have a strong incentive to seek education in order to better their position in life.

Meanwhile, work classifications are also being rearranged horizontally through broadening and multiskilling - broader classifications of skills that synthesise the separated, highly specialised trade classifications of the past. For example, the pace-setting metal award now recognises eight broad skill categories - though it remains to be seen how far the reform will extend elsewhere. Industrially, it is argued that employers should support award restructuring because education and training will increase the value of work. In time, it is argued, this will justify a higher level of wages because it will translate into higher quality, more productive labour.

Thus there are now enormous expectations placed on education. Since the 1950s education has been sold as a source of higher wages and better careers for those students (mainly from middle class backgrounds) who have finished secondary school, gone on to higher education and entered the professions. Now it is to be sold as a source of higher wages and better careers for everyone, though in the form of industrial training as much as higher education.

For employers, it is now being described as the key to competitiveness. For the nation as a whole, it seems to be responsible for transforming a fading agribusiness-based economy into a model competitor. (Sweden? Germany? Hong Kong? Japan? Korea?) It is a tall order.

The revival of interest in the economic relationship between education and productivity has led to renewed attention to the human capital arguments of the early 1960s, despite the dubious nature of many of the claims made by human capital theory. For example, appearing in the Victorian teachers’ award restructuring case last November, ACTU secretary Bill Kelty cited US human capital economist Edward Denison’s 1962 argument that "advances in knowledge were the biggest single source of economic growth". Few economists still regard Denison as gospel. But the point is that Kelty, like the government, assumes that there will be a large direct economic pay-off from increased investment in education.

Many commentators within the universities have claimed that the government’s policies constitute a classic instrumentalist view of the role of education: in other words, that they see education as merely a means to an end - the end in this case being a more skilled labour market and boosted economic growth. This is correct, but the political impact of those policies cannot be turned aside simply by labelling them ‘instrumentalist’.

The instrumentalist view can be contrasted with the cultural view which takes education - especially higher education - to be an end in itself. Most of the criticism of Dawkins’ policies by university academics has been conducted in terms of the cultural view of education, so that the Minister and his critics have been talking almost entirely at cross purposes.

The debate between the instrumental view and the cultural view is a long-standing one: it goes back at least forty years in Australia. From the cultural viewpoint, the education system understood by Dawkins and Kelty is unacceptable narrow.

It is hard not to agree, even if some of the criticism of Labor’s policy is characterised by elitism and refusal of social responsibility (as I discussed in ALR 106). To focus only on what the government’s policies ignore is, in large part, to miss the point and to fail to connect with what is happening educationally and industrially. Those policies produce as well as deny. A polarity between ‘economics’ and ‘education’ is not very helpful as a guide to interpretation or as a guide to action.

The government’s policies are unpopular with many academics and teachers who have little trouble getting their colleagues to agree with them. But the Minister, variously described by his critics as a barbarian and a Luddite, has to a considerable extent won the argument with the general public. To opt out of the education-economy relationship is to leave control of this relationship in the hands of the government, the economists in the federal public service and the large private companies.

This is not simply because Dawkins, Keating, Walsh and others are able to connect with anti-intellectual themes in Australian culture. The economic argument for the role of education simply has much broader appeal than any other - it talks about benefits to all. It speaks to the interests of the ‘whole nation’ and not just to those who are no longer educated, or to those who are educating them. If only because we should have qualms about the government’s economic policies (driven by growth economics and the new ‘threat from the north’, fear of Japan and Asia) it is necessary to enter this education/economy debate.

The issue being posed by many educators is: ‘What is wrong with the government’s policies? What damage will they do to education?’? But, from the viewpoint of other people, the relevant question is: ‘Will these policies deliver what the government has promised? Will education produce more exports and greater prosperity?’.

That is the mainstream of debate about education. The government argues that, suitably reformed - through higher participation, award restructuring, performance-driven management, quality incentives, the selective installation of market exchange - education can be an economic bonanza. The New Right argues that all of that is only possible (and will follow automatically) if a free market in education and training is created. What is the Left saying?

Two issues that are not being raised, issues that provide an opening for the Left, are whether and under what circumstances education and training can deliver the economic objectives and what other economic (and cultural) changes are necessary in order to maximise and modify the economic contribution of education and training. A left intervention in the education sector should attempt to recast the education/economy and education/society relationships. But to intervene in this manner, Left activists need to accept that education can have economic effects, and that it is not necessarily reactionary to focus on those effects.
It is relatively straightforward to establish an award-based relationship between education and wage levels (although harder to fix the relative position of wages in particular occupations in the longer term). The real economic weakness in the government's strategy, even within its own terms, lies in the next stage of the human capital logic - the alleged link between education and training on one hand, and improved productivity on the other, and the associated link between productivity and wage levels.

As we have seen, government and ACTU thinking is shaped by human capital theory which has enjoyed something of a revival in recent years. Human capital theory was formulated by the Chicago school of economists, including Milton Friedman, in the early 1960s, and was then central to arguments in favour of the expansion of education.

Human capital theory argues that education directly and specifically contributes to economic growth, and that this contribution can be measured. It sees education as investment by individuals in their own future earnings. This investment has a specific and calculable rate of return, and is interchangeable with other investments. In the human capital universe, investment in education produces a quantity of human capital which becomes intrinsic to the individual, automatically increasing his/her productivity. In turn, it is argued, this productivity leads to higher wages which pay for the private costs of investment in education.

There are philosophical reasons for disagreeing with the idea that individual human beings should be treated as units of capital. It is significant that human capital theory has been most useful in analysing the economics of slavery: "The one example of an explicit market that trades and prices human capital stocks rather than simply the services yielded by these stocks" as Becker put it in *Human Capital*.

There are also economic reasons. Fundamentally, education cannot itself create productivity because productivity depends not on the intrinsic human capital embedded in individuals, but on the concrete use to which their skills are put. Productivity is collective more than individual. It is determined by physical capital as well as labour. Most importantly, it is a function of work organisation and therefore of management and also industrial democracy.

The potential of skill and knowledge is no more than that. Education and training may contribute to productivity improvement, but only if the educated labour is effectively deployed in the workplace.

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the existing skills of the workforce are not being effectively utilised. In the last twenty years the proportion of the workforce holding post-school qualifications has risen from 24.6% (1969) to 49.6% (1989). The proportion holding degrees has risen from 3.2% to 11.2%. But the number of jobs in the middle and upper professions has not expanded at the same rate. More fundamentally, in most workplaces work has not changed to match the more educated labour force, to utilise the greater labour potential that has been created.

The government's policy is based on the assumption that Australia is experiencing a shortage of skills. In most areas of work the opposite appears to be the case. With the exception of certain identifiable areas where demand for skilled labour is rapidly expanding (computers, accountancy, electrical engineering, for example), the main education/economy problem is not an insufficient supply of labour. It is inadequate demand for skilled labour.

Take the case of the present massive under-utilisation of Australian scientists. At 50.4 per 100,000, Australia has one of the highest rates of science graduates to total population in the world; and the proportion of people who are either scientists or engineers (73.0) is only just below that of Japan (79.7). But it is an understatement to say that these scientists are not fully utilised in manufacturing industry. Most trained science graduates are not working as scientists at all. In this context, the Dawkins vision of sunrise industry driven by brain-based exports seems rather foolish. And as the demand for skills presently stands, we cannot even assume that the new broad-banded trade skills will be adequately used in manufacturing industry.

There are two problems here. The first is the profile of Australian industry. There simply are not enough firms requiring highly skilled labour. It is not a matter of convincing employers that they need more scientists and engineers. As industry is presently constituted, they don't. This requires different policies on industry and investment, and a much more interventionist public sector than the current policy status quo accepts.

The problem of Australia's industry profile cannot be solved by education. To assume that the production of more skilled labour will create use of that skilled labour, as the government sometimes appears to do, is to commit the fallacy of Say's Law - 'supply creates its own demand'. This approach is entirely one-sided, focussing on production and ignoring problems on the demand side of the equation.

The second problem is the under-utilisation of labour within industry due to inadequate work arrangements and poor management policies. This is a problem we can do something about within the longer time span required to reconstruct the industry profile. The one person who appears to have recognised this second point is ACTU assistant secretary Laurie Carmichael, who occupies a unique position in the debate. He is determined to upgrade the economic performance of education, and his unashamed instrumentalism is one-sided and worries many educationists.

But Carmichael is more realistic than are the human capital theorists about expectations of education, and a more active reformist than his critics on either the Right or the Left. The ACTU assistant secretary situates the economic role of education and training in a much broader social policy context. To him, the essence of the economic role of training is what happens in the workplace itself. What is required, he argues, is:

a shift from Tayloristic patterns of organisation, with their fragmentation of work tasks and layers of supervisory management, towards multi-skilling and the devolution of responsibility. Such change will require
the retraining both of management and of workers ...In a nutshell, it is the organisation of work which must change.

It is an egalitarian proposition. Multiskilling does not abolish the contradictions between capital and labour. What it can do, under some circumstances, is create the potential for work that is more complex, collective and satisfying, as well as being (again, potentially) more productive in economic terms. The challenge for Left activists is to raise the related issues about work process, work design and management that will put the pressure on employers and open up their practices to public and union scrutiny. We should have no illusions that award restructuring in itself is going to deliver more than a small fraction of this agenda.

There are also some other issues, somewhat harder to tackle. They relate to our longer term concerns about equality, distribution and justice - and, hence, power and privilege.

The restructuring of all awards would still leave unchanged the self-employed professional occupations. Moreover, following restructuring, the skills of higher education trained workers (including the majority who are under award regulation as public servants) would not be regulated as closely as those of the traditional blue collar workers and the lower-paid white collar workers. The higher the level of status and pay, the higher the level of autonomy and the more ambiguous the classification of skill and function. Unfortunately, management is to be less regulated than shop floor work - but what's new?

Therefore it is essential to strive to integrate, to link the two separate professional and 'non-professional' domains. Otherwise award restructuring could actually increase the degree of separation between the two types of work.

Clearly, there are limits to the possible changes to individual economic positions that can take place without major social changes which would lift the economic position of the whole working class. The danger here is that people will channel all of their efforts into succeeding in a competitive and individualistic way, at the expense of each other.

There is also a danger that, if accreditation is not as open as possible, then new work classifications and skill levels could act to close off areas of work and levels of pay, rather than increase opportunities and create greater flexibility. This problem will increase if the present commercialisation of training gathers pace. Fees act as a barrier to those who cannot afford to pay them, and high fee courses can therefore be monopolised by small, relatively privileged, groups - whether self-financing (as in medicine) or employer-financed (as in the upper echelons of management training). Commercialisation of training could create quasi-craft barriers all the way down the skills hierarchy.

At present, management training is the classic form of this type of development. One consequence is that it will be harder for a democratic approach to skill deployment, work design and industrial organisation to develop - certainly, it won't be management driven! With management being prepared in exclusive training programs, the management/worker division will remain a social division as well as an occupational division of labour.

The halting of privatisation is therefore integral to the success of the award restructuring strategy. Public sector training has the potential to be more economically, industrially and culturally advanced than does private sector training. But does the government realise this?

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An era past. 'Seventies student radicalism is in eclipse.

ALR: MARCH 1990
Vietnamese women were icons of the revolution. But today little remains of the legend. Carlotta McIntosh set out in pursuit of the new Vietnamese woman.

The midday sun traces dark leafy patches on the city streets and the hum of bicycle traffic fills the lunchtime air. At the pavement restaurants of the commercial centre of old Saigon, office workers sit on low wooden stools, eat noodles and sip tea in the dense shade of tamarind trees. A young office worker in a cream silk tunic over wide bottomed trousers passes on her way home to lunch, her waistlength hair a flash of black silk in the noon sun.

It’s Graham Greene’s Saigon. The Continental where he stayed in the 1950s is being renovated for the current influx of tourists and the Americans have gone. The names of the hotels may have changed but the French-built government buildings remain. Cheeky cyclo drivers still hustle for customers outside the old Caravelle, Rex and Majestic hotels – and on Sundays the Cathedral bells ring out across the shaded boulevards and walled gardens of the residential quarter.

To millions of Greene aficionados Phuong, in The Quiet American, represented all Vietnamese women. She was the ultimate stereotype - gentle, sexy and patient; impatient only for an American husband who would give all the security and comforts she lacked. Behind that cliched image lies a different story.

As the last US helicopters lifted off the American Embassy in 1975 the liberation fighters, many of whom were women, advanced towards the gates of the Independence Palace. They were equal partners in their nation’s struggle, but were soon to find out that the battle was just beginning. The so-called “Long Haired Troops” bore arms, spied, killed and defined by traditional values and the old Confucian saying: “one man is worth a hundred women”.

After the war the former ‘long haired ones’ turned their attention to improving the ordinary fortunes of women, their health and the education of themselves and their children. The deputy commander-in-chief of the Liberation Army of the south was a woman. Now, the former Viet Cong general, Nguyen Thi Dinh, heads the eleven million strong Women’s Union.

Its Saigon headquarters is a graceful mansion in the residential quarter where rich businessmen and foreign diplomats once lived surrounded by servants, well kept gardens, Mercedes Benz and chauffeurs. Today, former guerrillas carry out social programs to address the array of the problems confronting Vietnamese women.

While the Americans may have gone, the poverty remains. Prostitution is one problem that hasn’t gone away. Up to one million prostitutes plied their trade on the streets and in the bars of the war-torn Saigon, which gave refuge from aerial bombings and the terror of the US scorched earth practices. The Women’s Union has developed a working strategy for dealing with prostitutes. First offenders get a stern lecture on the spot, second offenders are given a stiff choice: re-education in a reform school, or manual labour on outlying communes.

But a greater problem is the popula-
Family planning is a priority for the Women’s Union. With an economy in dire straits - as the constant flood of Vietnamese refugees testifies - the post-war population explosion calls for desperate remedies. Despite these pressures Vietnam has resisted drastic measures like that in China which forbids more than one child per family. The union has developed a complex set of strategies aimed at encouraging, rather than forcing, people to limit the size of their families. Government workers whose families go over the three children limit are penalised with the loss of their yearly bonus. The Vietnamese government tries to encourage sterility by offering a bounty of two thousand dong (equal to about a third of a government worker's monthly salary) to men who volunteer to have a vasectomy.

But in 1988, when I was in Vietnam, the deputy-chair of the Women’s Union in Saigon, Nguyen Ngoc Van admitted that the family program had failed in the countryside, where larger families mean more hands to help on the farm. Male children are preferred by families. Government workers whose families go over the three children limit are penalised with the loss of their yearly bonus. The Vietnamese government tries to encourage sterility by offering a bounty of two thousand dong (equal to about a third of a government worker’s monthly salary) to men who volunteer to have a vasectomy.

Nguyen Ngoc Van is an elegant woman, her black glossy chignon pulled back tightly in the style favoured by the women of Saigon, her cream silk shirt a perfect foil to her merry black eyes. During the war she commanded a network of reconnaissance troops, mainly women, who posed as waitresses, army drivers, and prostitutes - any guise that would serve as a cover for gathering information about the enemy’s movements.

While fighting on the battlefield has ended, the Vietnamese people now are fighting a different war. Dioxin was one of the chemicals in the defoliant, Agent Orange, dropped on forests and paddy fields by US troops trying to flush out the Viet Cong. Today young women born during the height of the war are lying in a cancer ward in an ill-equipped hospital in Saigon. Eighteen year old Rose Hong was a victim of the war. When I saw her she lay on a narrow cot in the cancer ward of the Tu Du Hospital for Mothers and Babies - her complexion sallow from anti-carcinogenic drugs, her pregnancy terminated and her future prospects of motherhood dim. As a baby in Tay Ninh Province, in what was then South Vietnam, Rose suckled dioxin-laden milk from her mother’s breast.

There’s an unforgettable room at the Tu Du Hospital for Mothers and Babies: the walls are lined with shelves of bottles containing deformed foetuses. Vietnam cannot afford to research to prove a direct link between the cancers and dioxin, but the incidence is abnormal and much higher than in the north where no defoliants were dropped.

The social workers of today were the guerrillas of yesterday, but long before them the first wave of women fighters attained much fame and recognition. These were the women who fought in the Viet Minh, the national liberation army that humiliated the French at the Battle of Dien Ben Phu in 1954.

Some of that first wave of revolutionary heroines included Madame Ho Thi Bi, a legend in her lifetime. At 70 years of age Madame Ho looked harmless as she posed proudly for a photograph in the garden courtyard of the Women’s Museum, her toothless gums stained red from chewing betel nut. But this grandmother wasn’t ordinary. As a young woman and a peasant who could neither read nor write, she led a platoon of battle-hardened escapees from the French Foreign Legion against French army outposts and won. Ho Chi Minh dubbed her the ‘Heroine of the East’. Vietnamese women have lived through many hair-raising experiences of adventure and romance. Yellowing photographs of nationalist war heroines stare from the museum’s glass cases, their stories mostly undocumented. Madame Ho is lucky. Her story has been carefully recorded by a team of young women historians.

Madame Ho and Greene’s Phuong belong to the past. Phuong no longer waits in the apartment on the Rue Catinat to light Fowler’s opium pipe. The war is finished, the “quiet American” is dead...the revolution is old hat.

Enter the new Vietnam woman. Picture a dinner at the Hall of Unification - formerly Independence Palace. The heavy chandeliers tremble as a female rock singer stomps out a tribute to the De An hydro-electric power station for the foreign visitors. Hill tribe women perform a stylised song and dance routine dedicated to the Motherland. Slender bodies bend, eyelashes flutter and heads tilt provocatively to songs of patriotism and romance.

No clenched fists or agit-prop theatre here, and absolutely no feminism - the red velvet flag and gold star of the revolutionary forces above the stage are the only visible symbol of revolution.

CARLOTTA McINTOSH is a Sydney journalist.
In SEARCH of the NULLABOR Laptop

Once upon a time we were told that computers would eliminate all the drudgery from our lives. Now it seems they've become lifestyle accessories. Jim Endersby muses on the rise and rise of the ubiquitous laptop.

Surprisingly, perhaps, there are a few of us over the age of ten who are actually ‘computer literate’. You can easily tell who we are: we can distinguish a ‘bit’ from a ‘byte’ and lace our conversation with (barely-understood) terms like ‘ram’, ‘risc’ and ‘dos’.

Those of us who read the computer section of the paper before the sports news are beginning to notice a few things stirring in the hi-tech undergrowth.

Of course, even the most computer indifferent are aware that the beastly machines are increasingly invading every area of human life. From the ones that thud and whine as they blast aliens in the laundromat, to the ones that retain your cashcard advising you to ‘contact your branch’ (at three am on a Sunday morning), computers are getting hard to avoid.

Well, speaking as a computer semi-literate, I can assure you that this is just the beginning.

Consider, if you will, the laptop.

Assuming that you’ve been trekking in the Himalayas for the last three years and consequently don’t know what a laptop is, they are small, battery-powered, portable computers. Smaller than the average briefcase, more expensive than the average secondhand car and rapidly taking over the personal computer market.

Toshiba - in Australia at least - sells only laptops and now sells 15 different models, with two new ones launched this month. Their newest laptops are every bit as powerful and sophisticated as the great big heavy ones that take up most of your desk. As soon as a new processor chip (the real guts of any computer) comes onto the market, the laptop manufacturers incorporate it into their latest model, making it as fast and powerful as the latest desktop. Toshiba now dominates the laptop market - which is the fastest growing section of the computer market.

But the real beauty of the laptop is not that it leaves you more deskspace to cover with desktop photocopiers, personal fax machines and the sort of telephone that now requires a training course before you can operate it.

Those are just fringe benefits.

The real advantage of laptops is that you can take them anywhere. The batteries will allow you to spend several hours away from a power point, and you can recharge them from the cigarette lighter in your car.

Real freedom, however, comes when you add a modem to your laptop. A modem is a little box, small enough to slip into your pocket, which allows you to transmit computer information down an ordinary telephone line. Add to the modem and laptop a portable phone - and you can sit in the middle of the Nullabor, buying and selling shares in Hong Kong, playing chess with a mate in New York, cooking the books for your subsidiary in Melbourne, even writing articles for ALR. You are ‘on-line’ and the electronic world is your oyster.

But of course most of us who use computers are not going to be out and about in the Nullabor; we’re going to be working from home. Maybe. Ever since the modem first appeared there have been predictions of a massive growth in electronic homeworking. We were about to be liberated from the drudgery of commuting. Office blocks, we were asked to believe, would be a thing of the past. Even the days of cities were numbered.

So far these predictions appear to be unfulfilled, perhaps because we all hate the bloody machines - or maybe it’s just that the variety of jobs which directly use computers is still fairly limited. But that may be changing.

As the power and speed of computers continues to increase, the range of jobs they can tackle will expand. There are two things that everyone expects will totally transform the things computers can do which, in turn, will revolutionise the way computers use us - oops! - that we use computers.

Although modern computers are fantastically fast, chomping through several thousand calculations a second, they are still far too slow for certain uses. Things like DeskTop Publishing (DTP) and Computer
Aided Design (CAD) soak up huge amounts of memory and require very fast processors, but they fade into insignificance compared with the demands of computer information systems.

The current state of the art solution to information storage is a very sophisticated device. It permits users to absorb the data at their own pace; pick it up and put it down whenever they like. You can start at the beginning and go through the information in sequence (serial data) or skip bits, read the conclusion first, check the index, absorb several different sources simultaneously (parallel data); the system uses no power at all and the whole device is compact enough to fit in your pocket. It's called a book.

For computers to equal books as sources of information, never mind surpass them, they'll have to do a lot of catching up. Computers are getting smaller and faster but they'll need to be a lot easier to use before we'll for-sake libraries.

A book, in computer jargon, is 'user friendly' - few of us are frightened by them - whereas computer information systems range from 'user indifferent' to 'user downright bloody hostile'. Even having the words 'Don't Panic' in large friendly letters on the cover of an electronic 'book' isn't going to solve all the problems.

The two things that will really make the difference are optical computers and optical data storage. Currently (no pun intended) computers use electricity to send messages to and fro within the computer and from one computer to another. The optical computer will use lasers, mirrors and lenses to make light do the same job - but about a thousand times faster. As every schoolchild knows, there's nothing faster than light.

Optical data storage is basically the same technology as the compact discs now being used to play music. When applied to computers it will mean more information, in a smaller space, that can be retrieved much faster.

Computers that can 'think' even more quickly than the today's fastest supercomputers will be able to perform some of the clever tasks that science fiction writers have only dreamed of - like talking to us and understanding what we say. Then the computer information system becomes library and librarian rolled into one and even the most timid of us will be able to cope with it.

Computers have already transformed much of the technology of printing (ALR uses DTP, for instance). Linking-up computer information systems with all the other innovations already around in the publishing world - CAD, bubble-jet printers, WYSIWYG screens, etc - could mean, for example, that bookshops may disappear. The computer would simply print you a copy of any title when you want it.

Students could simply 'grab' the electronic pages they need from books, magazines, reference works, or wherever and insert them directly into their essays or theses. Our electronic journalist, sitting in the Nullabor with the laptop, modem and portable phone, could zap copy directly to the office, where it's edited and assembled into pages (all on a computer screen, of course). And the 'newspaper' is then 'published' into the electronic data storage and retrieval systems which will by then infest every home, school, library and workplace.

People will read their paper (probably complete with moving pictures, soundtrack and coffee-making facilities) on a computer screen and only take a printout of any sections they actually want to keep.

The other spin-off from the optical computer will be that the world's first genuinely unbeatable chess computer will finally be built. An optical computer will be able to analyse every possible move in a game, while the hapless Grandmaster is still considering his opening.

But you don't need either to panic or celebrate just yet: the world's first optical computer has only just been unveiled by Bell Laboratories, in the USA (the people - incidentally - who invented the transistor). It may well be a revolution in the making but at the moment it can't do much and still looks like a heap of expensive junk.

I reckon Gary Kasparov has a few years at the top yet.

JIM ENDERSBY is a computer autodidact.
CRICKET in a TANGLES

In the second of a two-part series, H.G. 'The Immortal' Nelson looks at the thespian tendency in our contemporary wielders of the willow.

I was out in the shed last weekend, feet up on the deck with a lite handy wondering if all those big boof-headed sports stars clogging up the TV with beer ads are the answer to letting us know there is more of the same down at the local in the walk-in cool room.

After an hour or two camped in front of the crystal bucket I spat the dummy.

This current spate of mindless drivel that ropes in anyone who has played sport in the last twelve years to promote some brand of tins or other has gone too far. It's a farce, a sham-mozzle, a joke!

In the old days there were just two former greats flogging the brews. They were glimpsed playing golf with big clubs, scaring birdies; or breaking club house windows; having a go at lawn bowls; or playing darts with a bunch of rowdies; or bobbing up in a boat fishing and catching ... surprise, surprise, old boots. Talk about... Laugh.

Talk about product identification.

You remember them. The latter day Hoges and Strop, the Zig and Zag of the 'eighties, Freddie and Tangles, Maxie and Dougie, Walker and Walters. Is it too long a bow to draw to say these were the finest exponents of the beer flogging caper ever?

Somehow, I doubt it.

Sure, Max and Doug's supremacy was challenged briefly by that magnificent even if prophetic They said you'd never make it' series with the likes of The Great White Shark getting among them on the greens and off, and Wayne Gardiner laying rubber and belting down beers on a Mediterranean boat.

Beautiful blokes doing beautiful things and drinking themselves stupid if they weren't stupid to start with.

Then there were the impossible mission ads. You know the sort of thing, the scoreboard at the MCG shows Australia staring down the barrel of defeat in a one-day fixture. The last two are in. Twenty-two runs are needed from the fiftieth over. Up one end the gormless youth from the Hay plain playing in his first international and up the other the tubby, but wily, Tasmanian opener with the drooping mo who has carried the bat.

I don't have to go on, in the next sixty seconds Australia wins. The tension is so great and the ad is so wonderfully crafted that everyone deserves a beer. No, everyone needs a beer.

But what are we offered today? The Bob Shearer putting lesson because the plane is delayed? The Graham Wood mini-series where an elaborate gag is played on Woody based on his liking for the suicide single at the top of his dig, often resulting in him or his partner scurrying back to the rooms before the beer has had time to get cold?

The Whit's big night out where a man and mates are out on the tear, cutting the rug and painting the town puce?

There are cameo appearances from Swampy Marsh, who just happened to be standing around signing a few autographs and a host of others who, quite frankly, should know better.

You can call me old-fashioned if you like, but none of these efforts says to me: Do it, HG. Get down to the pub and put another slab on the tab'.

And so last weekend I found myself asking when is the Australian Cricket Board going to bite the bullet and demand that all cricketers go to acting classes and get degrees in drama and fine arts before lurching out of the nets and onto the nation's TV screens.

It's all very well hailing the arrival of a next Don Bradman and lauding new stars like Greg Campbell, Darren Lehmann and even Mark Waugh. I have no doubt about their cricketing skills. But can they cut it when the director calls action?

I think we should be told... because as sure as my name is H G Nelson, we are going to see their bonces on the crystal bucket down the business end of my games room sooner or later.

In conclusion, there is one name missing from this ordinary line-up of talent that I set out mid-spray; one man who has the runs on the board lager-wise; a man who even now holds the record for the number of slabs downed on the Sydney/London leg. He is a man who knows beer and could persuade me. That man is one Stumpy Boon. And who knows, Stumpy may even be able to act.

H.G. NELSON is the alter ego of Greg Pickhaver, and along with Roy Slaven, present This Sporting Life on Saturdays, 2-6pm, on ABC Radio, JJJ-FM.
You’d be a Mad Bunny if you didn’t hop in for New Era’s MAD MARCH SALE

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An Asian Threat?

The Third Wave: Australia and Asian Capitalism, by Abe David and Ted Wheelwright (Left Book Club Co-operative, 1989).


Reviewed by Gavan McCormack.

It is a fact of late-20th century life that Japan is the world's major creditor nation (and the US its largest debtor); and that Japan's banks, stock exchanges, securities companies, and even advertising agencies, not to mention manufacturing industries, tower colossus-like over the world.

Intelligent and scientific-minded citizens might be expected to be intensely interested in understanding what this means, how it arose and what significance it holds, particularly for us here in Australia. Yet, by and large, intellectual and political attention remains fixed on the culturally familiar worlds of Europe and North America.

The Australian economic dependence on Japan is decades old. No one objects to Japan's buying Australian coal and iron ore, wool, wheat and beef, though some are not happy with their buying uranium and wood chips. But, for the most part, Australians seem not to want to know more.

The recent Japanese proposals for the construction somewhere in Australia of a Future City, to be known as a 'Multi-Function-Polis', will not have much impact on the existing economic relationship; but it may turn out to be a momentous issue anyway, because it is being seen as symbolic.

As such it may be the issue which draws public and political attention, and which will cause people to want to study and understand the issues.

When this happens, it will be necessary to turn first to the literature generated in recent years in the United States, the so-called 'revisionist' Japanese scholarship. In the US the 'Japan Problem' has long been seen as central, even before the collapse of the 'Evil Empire', and much of this new scholarship is trenchantly critical of Japan's internal and external policies. The analytical and policy prescriptions of scholars like Karel van Wolferen, Chalmers Johnson, James Fallows and Clyde Prestowitz might be considered extreme by many in this country, especially in our Japan lobby, but they are studied and used as the basis for policy debate at the highest levels.

Garnaut, in the government-sponsored report, thinks the best Australian approach to what the other book calls the 'Third Wave' of Asian, particularly Japanese, economic influence in Australia is basically to let it roll in, remove barriers, open the poratism, or even communism in Japan's make-up. Chalmers Johnson accuses it of "adversarial" trading practices and calls it a "supply-side monster", while James Fallows calls for a policy of "containment" to be directed against it. 'Containment' is the policy which, for long, was directed at the Soviet Union.

Little of this debate is refracted in Australia, where the books themselves are expensive and hard to find. But a starting point for Australians wishing to consider the issue of Japan is provided by two recently-published works, Abe David and Ted Wheelwright's The Third Wave: Australia and Asian Capitalism and the federal government sponsored Garnaut Report entitled Australia and the North-East Asian Ascendancy.

These two works complement each other nicely from diametrically opposed viewpoints. One is the inaugural volume from the presses of the Left Book Club; one author is an economist with long and close links with the labour movement, and the other a worker, indeed, a construction rigger at that. The other volume was launched by the Prime Minister himself and reflects some very high level thinking on strategic economic questions for the nation.

It is instructive to look at the similarities and differences between the two approaches. Both agree on Pacific dynamism and the shift of power to the Western Pacific, on the importance of the rise of Japan and the Asian New International Economies, on the dangers of protectionist trading blocs, on the weakness and vulnerability of Australia, on the crisis of foreign debt. But the agreement stops there.

Garnaut, in the government-sponsored report, thinks the best Australian approach to what the other book calls the 'Third Wave' of Asian, particularly Japanese, economic influence in Australia is basically to let it roll in, remove barriers, open the
sluices, learn to swim. It is a liberal, free-trade prescription. As Australia liberalised its financial markets in 1983, so now it should liberalise everything by the year 2000 and integrate itself fully with the North-East Asian dynamos of the world economy.

Wheelwright and David, however, do not see any panacea. The basis of their position is solidarity with, and closer co-operation with, Asia; not with the economic and political leadership so much as Asian, especially Japanese, workers, consumers, farmers and ordinary people. However nice a sentiment this is, it has to be said that this is not really very helpful.

Garnaut, and David and Wheelwright, agree that Australia has to learn from Japan and North-East Asia. But whereas Garnaut sees the lesson as more opening, David and Wheelwright see it as the opposite, pointing out that the growth of Japan, South Korea, and other countries owed little to free trade and a great deal to militarisation, centralised bureaucratic control, the 'developmental state' and nationalist policies even, indeed, to the late and unlamented 'Cold War'. Free trade, as they point out, is the prescription by the strong for the weak, and commitment to it is a very recent phenomenon in Japan.

David and Wheelwright also claim that "much of the analysis of reconstructing the Australian economy has neo-fascist overtones", and they note that, while Japan's leaders join the chorus calling for Australia to change its ways, at the same time Japan fiercely resists calls from outside to do the same. They note that "fully-fledged global capitalism means the end of democracy as foreign investors and capital markets really run the economy, not the elected representatives".

The wave of foreign investment from Japan in particular, which Garnaut welcomes, they point out is flowing not to manufacturing industry where it might be welcome, but to real estate, tourism and construction where its need is doubtful, and the social and environmental impact great. But presumably Garnaut would draw the line somewhere before accepting a Japanese offer such as that which David and Wheelwright report: to buy all the private golf courses in the Sydney area. The "casinoisation" of the world economy is also discussed by David and Wheelwright; it is something that Paul Keating did not predict and to which Garnaut pays little attention.

Everyone would agree that foreign investment which helped to foster a truly productive culture rather than the service sector would be nice, but neither of these books has any real suggestions on how to achieve such a result.

And although David and Wheelwright raise the question of how much the delicate ecosystem of this country can stand in terms of 'development', with its implication of resource depletion, pollution and population increase, neither they nor Garnaut seriously question the conventional assumption that more growth is the only way to go.

These are, however, two important documents attempting to respond critically to a world which has changed fundamentally. Their perspectives are different, but they deserve to be read together.

GAVAN MCCORMACK is Professor of Asian Studies at the University of Adelaide.

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**Nincompoops & Heroes**


Express more than a passing interest in cricket and you're fair game: cricket books for your birthday, and more for Christmas. Each of these books is a fabulous gift for wildly different reasons.

I first discovered cricket about ten years ago, when studying for university finals and putting the finishing touches to essays - or was supposed to be.

There, on TV, was an intriguing game which went all day - for up to five days at a time! What better way to disguise procrastination? Though the game was shrouded in mystery and seductive ritual, the TV commentary was less than enlightening (still is, really) unless one is interested in - indeed, found great significance in - the field placing of seagulls relative to various fielders. But once a friend put me on to the ABC radio commentary I was hooked.

These books have come along not a moment too soon in my cricket education. From Green's wonderfully written socio-political history of the sport's development; to Huxley's account of the 1989 Ashes Tour replete with records and statistics and a fair smattering of action photos; and with Barnes' mad parody of cricket writing 'by' such greats as Shakespeare, PG Wodehouse, Dylan Thomas and Hunter S. Thompson, to name a few.

Each book has its singular appeal, but Green's is perhaps the best, particularly as it provides an understanding of cricket as more than a game.

For those who may scoff at cricket and its devotees (through ignorance, of course) A History of Cricket gives an appreciation of the sport in its various guises: as a clear expression of class divisions; as a useful tool, along with
religion, for colonialist expansion and suppression of other cultures; and, more enduringly and importantly, a cultural pastime. Throughout its development, the sport has demanded an increasingly high degree of physical and tactical skill, and is one in which homicide is undesirable, unlike American gridiron or even rugby. (No correspondence will be entered into.)

This book serves to confirm such bias towards the gentleperson’s game; though Green makes no bones about the dual role of team games in Imperial policy. Cricket, in Green’s hands, is more than a metaphor through which Imperial Britain lampoons itself. He only queries whether “the pacifying, colonising, apostatising potential of team games” was sheer good luck or part of a “grand design.”

“If its very illogicalities were endearing, and as for the tight formalism of its rules and regulations, what better engine to train subject races in the etiquette of polite submission?”

Through the export of cricket Imperial Britain flew its double standards high alongside the banners of the Horse Guards. The ‘code of conduct’, as expressed in cricket, was sacrosanct.

The English gentleman didn’t have to behave like one because, Green states, he was one and remained “confident in the knowledge that (he) was expected only to administer (the code), not to live up to it. The code was an account of their own conduct, not as it really was, but as they liked to imagine it, and perhaps in some extreme cases of moral dementia, sincerely believed it to be.” Indeed, as Green points out “The English taught on the field of play all men were equal, and were still insisting on white captains for West Indian sides nearly forty years after Grace’s death.” - truly reflecting English society’s hypocrisy. Green cites an example of British imperialism imbuing a respect for “the canons of an imported code”, as one colonial subject stated:

“Before long I acquired a discipline for which the only name is Puritan. I never cheated. I never appealed for a decision unless I thought the batsman was out. I never argued with the umpire, I never jeered at a defeated opponent. My defeats and disappointments I took as stoically as I could. ... From the eight years of school life this code became the moral framework of my existence. It has never left me.” This subject also said:

“We lived in two worlds. Inside the classroom the heterogeneous jumble of Trinidad was battered and jostled and shaken into some kind of order. On the playing field we did what ought to be done ... Eaton or Harrow had nothing on us.” - Marxist historian, Trinidadian cricketer and strong advocate of independence for his country, CLR James.

A La Recherche Du Cricket Perdu is highly entertaining, even if one doesn’t know much about cricket or its more infamous/famous practitioners. A passing acquaintance with those writers whom Barnes, a sports columnist for The Times, feels ought to have been cricket commentators will suffice. For example, The Importance of Being Captain’ by Oscar Wilde:

LADY PETRONELLA MAY (leader of the selectors) to Jack Worthing, cricketer: What is your record against Malcolm Marshall?

JACK: I was out lbw twice while offering no stroke.

LADY MAY: To be out lbw while paddling up once may be regarded as a misfortune. To do so twice looks like carelessness.

Or “The Tale of Gatti the Dwarf and Lubo the Elf by JRR Tolkien:

“which was told in the Latter Days whenever the hairy-toed race of Journos gathered. It was a tale told with many a merry laugh and many a tankard of goodly ale. It tells also of Bothorn, son of Bothogom, and of the mighty wizard, Brears the Grey.”

Huxley’s Border’s Heroes, of coffee table size and glossy appearance, is self-explanatory. The Aussie heroes won back the Ashes for the first time since the 1934 tour (still under the cloud of the infamous Bodyline tour).

The book is full of statistics, test scores and performance biographies of all the players. There’s the unavoidable urge to compare the 1989 and 1934 teams, but Alan (The Game Is Not The Same Without...) McGilvray provides a cautious and thoughtful assessment of players and playing styles.

Well worth a look.
Lest we forget


When Michael Pawlowski, 72, was recently sent to trial in Canada for the murder of 410 Jews and 80 non-Jews in Byelorussia in 1942, his neighbour was asked what the old man was like. Was he evil? Was he psychopathic? Was he grumpy? "Well," said the neighbour, "he kept a nice garden."

To many people, that is all that needs saying about those among us, who, having spent their latter years tending their rosebushes in the nondescript suburbs of Toronto, Chicago, Manchester and Melbourne, now find themselves before the courts charged with mass murder. We're talking about old men here. Surely it's time to forget.

It is illuminating to hear the explanations which surface when these old men come to judgment: it was all so long ago, there was a war on, a lot of cruel things were done on both sides, it's a witch-hunt, why don't the Jews let it be, ad infinitum, ad nauseam.

Mark Aarons tackles these concerns in Sanctuary! Nazi Fugitives in Australia. The book arose from Aarons' 1986 ABC Radio documentary series Nazis in Australia, which exposed the presence of numerous Nazi war criminals and collaborators in Australia, as well as the official deceit employed first to allow these people entry into Australia and later to encourage them to remain here.

And as Aarons shows, Australia is littered with minor and not-so-minor functionaries of puppet regimes throughout Eastern Europe.

A number of questions arise from the history, most of which Aarons answers ably. How do you define a Nazi? Most of the cases referred to by Aarons are not Germans but Central and Eastern Europeans, willing tools of Nazism. "The Nazi war criminals and collaborators you will meet in these pages were not draftees, they offered their services to the Nazis voluntarily and eagerly, either from ideological conviction, racial prejudice or because they saw the chance to advance themselves," Aarons writes.

How do you define a war criminal? Can a propagandist, no matter how offensive his or her writings, be bracketed in the same category as one who has dashed babies' heads against walls?

Aarons at times appears to take this for granted, devoting considerable space to the wartime activities of people like NSW Liberal Lyenko Urbancic, who wrote and broadcast anti-Semitic and anti-Allied propaganda for a pro-Nazi puppet regime in Slovenia.

The propaganda was particularly vile. Urbancic spoke of "the truth which is older than I, which is already centuries old. That is the truth about all the vile intentions of the chosen people, the 15 million Israeli race roaming the world. Rarely is one of their number a tradesman, labourer or farmer, however it is an everyday and common fact that these people are dealers in arms, owners of the film industry, and people who have in their hands practically the whole world press."

That is the language of genocide - vile enough when uttered at any time - profoundly evil in June 1944 as thousands of Jews were being sent to their deaths. But does that make him a war criminal?

This has been asked by some critics of Aarons, such as the former editor of Australia/Israel Review, Michael Danby, who argues in the December issue of Quadrant that Urbancic, "currently working out of a seedy railway carriage to influence a few NSW Liberal Party branches, does seem on a different moral plane to a mass killer". Yet in light of the unwillingness by some to accept the need for war crimes trials, such dilemmas must be answered one way or another for the successful prosecution of the real criminals and collaborators who made it to Australia.

Danby also accuses Aarons of "dubious taste, to say nothing of ethics, to use a topic as sacred as the Holocaust for profane issues like Australian domestic politics. Jewish corpses must not be used for the cheap aims of discrediting conservatives or security services".

That is not, I would think, Aarons' reason for exposing the curious alliance between collaborators and conservatives since the war. There is surely nothing wrong with demolishing the poisonous myth that all op-
ponents of communists have the one cause. Such a myth allowed people like Urbancic to thrive in the Liberal Party for many years.

Nor is Aarons’ anger solely directed at conservatives. “The real genesis of the illegal immigration of ostensibly barred fascists is found in the immediate post-war period when the ALP was firmly in power in Canberra,” he writes.

At times, the book is difficult going. Wading through the complexities of Central and Eastern Europe’s politics has provoked more than one reviewer to question Aarons’ aim: is he writing a book about Nazis in Australia or the wartime politics of Balkan neo-fascism? I would have thought the answer was simple: regrettably the two are intertwined.

Indeed, the suggestion that these are little countries far away of which we know nothing is unfortunate: so, for that matter, is Australia (which could explain why so many of their less savoury citizens turned up here).

The day after the Queensland elections, I was sitting in Brisbane’s King George Square, watching a hundred or so Croats parade past. It was probably the first demonstration of the post-National era, which added a certain touch of irony to the scene. Some of the marchers carried banners denouncing the Belgrade government as fascist, a suggestion at best impudent, at worst obscene.

One of the demonstrators, who appeared to be in charge, wore a T-shirt featuring a picture of the Croatian Ustashi leader Ante Pavelic. Beneath the portrait was the Ustashi slogan “Za Dom Spremni!” (“We are ready!”).

Ready for what? Let Mark Aarons tell us. “The Ustashi would sometimes gouge out the eyes of their victims before killing them; in other cases they cut off limbs, lips, noses, ears and women’s breasts. Sometimes the entire population of a Serbian village would be herded into the local Orthodox church which was then set alight. Ustashi guards in the concentration camps were notorious for their propensity to kill inmates by smashing their heads with sledgehammers. By the end of their four years of power, Pavelic’s followers had slaughtered over half a million people.”

If we can’t recognise evil when it yields a sledgehammer, we will be unlikely ever to recognise it. Those who wear T-shirts fondly remember mass murderers haven’t forgotten. Nor must we.

DAVID GREASON is a sub-editor on the Sydney Sun-Herald.

Boys’ Talk


Sea of Love is a man’s film - but that isn’t necessarily a criticism of it. Its strength lies in how openly it investigates the violent and manipulative aspects of masculinity from a male point of view. By that I mean that Sea of Love thoughtfully uses a flawed central (male) character within the structure of a thriller to reveal the subjectivity of men’s perceptions of women.

From its beginning Sea of Love immerses us in the world of the New York Police Department. There are few women in this force, which simultaneously brings into focus how male-dominated policing in the US still is and the peculiarities of male bonding in this environment. Because much of the dialogue is in the local vernacular I found Sea of Love initially alienating. Not only did I find the particulars difficult to follow, but considering the inane, childish attitudes of the policemen to sexuality, I wasn’t sure I wanted to.

In this way, however, Sea of Love effectively sets its scene. None of the dialogue is gratuitously violent or sexist. The obsession with dicks, the inextricably violent attitude to sex in the word ‘fuck’, highlighted in the phrase ‘Fuck you’, is emphasised. Fully a part of this world is Frank, a man struggling with a drinking problem.

Alcoholism, with its particular sets of behaviour, and yet so socially widespread and so often implicated in men’s violent behaviour towards women, makes an interesting locus for Sea of Love. Frank is at the centre of the action, as the investigating reporter in a series of murders and as a man unsuccessfully living with divorce and seeking, yet fearing, a new attachment. That need for, and fear of, intimacy is what propels the plot. The murder victims have all been men, they have all sought female ‘companionship’ through the singles column, and they have probably all met the same unknown woman. She becomes the main suspect.

Is it Frank’s daring and effective approach to policing - an example of which opens the film - or his need for...
intimacy which shapes his plan for catching this woman? He and his partner go undercover. Noting that all the murdered men had written in verse for a particular singles column, they insert their own. As it happens, it is a poem written by Frank's mother when his parents were courting.

When Frank becomes sexually involved with a major suspect, the personal and public inextricably mesh. Frank's fear of intimacy is played out as the threat of murder. Helen, the woman with whom Frank is becoming involved, is shown to be assertive - sexually and otherwise. Is this another Fatal Attraction? No, because we are made to doubt Frank's perceptions.

Frank's treatment of his ex-wife early on provides clues to how we must read his subsequent behaviour. Sufficiently drunk, he will ring her at three o'clock in the morning and make up stories of appendicitis. She is now married to one of Frank's colleagues, whom Frank baits and on one occasion bashes. Distorted with guilt and his sense of inadequacy, Frank knows only how to lash out and blame others. Drawn within this perversity of hatred is the image of a female murderer.

It is this doubt which makes Sea of Love a far superior thriller - perhaps even a rejoinder - to Fatal Attraction. In the latter film, of course, a woman's need for love and fear of ageing and infertility were raised to the level of psychopathic disturbances. The film allowed no compassion for her, siding unquestioningly with the 'hero' and his set of values.

Sea of Love does ask us to view Frank with compassion, but not unquestioningly or without compassion for those he injures - most particularly Helen, who may or may not be in the image of the murderer he has created. As the film proceeds, her reactions unsettle preconceptions about her character. Her increasing fear of Frank is justified by his wild behaviour, her confusion by his lies. Because she is a suspect, Frank does not tell her he is a policeman. Although he has some qualms about this, he proceeds warily with their affair. Despite the advice of colleagues, Frank does not take the other option - not to embark on the affair at all - by which he would both protect himself and protect Helen from an exploitative relationship. He is too needy and too selfish.

Undercover or under the covers, Frank has access to powers as a police officer and a man that he refuses to acknowledge. He prefers to see himself as a victim. Is he flirting with death? Ultimately, however, we question who, if anybody, is the victim.

In posing these questions, Sea of Love is a subtle and clever film. While it does put the lid on some of them with a typical Hollywood conclusion - though I hasten to add there is a twist - others are highlighted. Perhaps it is most successful in the way in which it makes (particularly male) viewers complicit with Frank. Not only is he the 'hero', but he displays some likeable characteristics and there is the strong evocation of male camaraderie which opens the film. Having fallen in with that camaraderie, even from a cinema seat, have some felt the questions hit home?

LYNDELL FAIRLEIGH is a freelance journalist on film.

APOLOGY

In Tim Rowse's article 'Do-Gooders and Blow-ins' in ALR 113, several passages of citation were mistakenly rendered as part of the text of the article. This was an unfortunate side-effect of our changeover to desktop publishing late last year. The following passages in the article should have been indented as citation:

1. From 'It would have' to 'representative' on p 67, col 1.
2. From 'The purveyors' to 'socialist' on p 67, col 2.
3. From 'those (including)' to 'oppositional' on p 68, col 1.
4. From 'Given this' to 'white hegemony' also on p 68 col 1.
5. From 'Thus do-gooders' to 'the solution' on p 69 col 2.

Apologies to Tim Rowse and to readers.

Readings
366 & 338 Lygon St,
Carlton
710 Glenferrie Rd,
Hawthorn
153 Toorak Rd, Sth Yarra
73/75 Davis Ave, Sth Yarra
Fine Books and Music. Open 7 days (Carlton and South Yarra till late 7 days)

Grub Street Bookshop,
317 Brunswick St
Fitzroy
(03) 417 3117
For Melbourne's best selection of books on Latin America, as well as an extensive range of politics and current affairs titles and all the latest fiction.

Friends of the Earth Bookshop,
222 Brunswick St
Fitzroy
(03) 419 8700
Melbourne has always had a reputation as a city of bookshops. The uncharitable might say it has something to do with the weather - all those dismal damp days we spend stuck inside. The locals prefer other, more intellectual explanations; but whatever the reason, it is still true that the city has an outstanding range of bookshops.

For a start it has the International Bookshop (17 Elizabeth St, Melbourne, phone 614.2859), sadly now Australian’s only major left bookshop. It’s a bit hard to find at first, hidden away on the second floor of a shabby city building, but it is well worth the trouble.

International and Australian politics, socialist and feminist theory, contemporary culture, gay politics and literature - it has a range of books and magazines unequaled in this country.

While you are there have a look at the records - folk music from all over the world, with a strong feminist leaning - and the secondhand books and pamphlets where there are always a few gems to be found.

The rest of the city centre isn’t a wasteland either. Among the big general shops and the discount barns full of books that should never have been printed on trees that should never have been pulped, there are some good ones.

The Greens Bookshop (247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, phone 654.4833), attached to the Environment Centre, is not large but carries an interesting, largely Australian, selection on environmental issues. It also has an excellent range of T-shirts and posters.

Another city shop worth a particular look is the Paperback (60 Bourke St, Melbourne, phone 662.1396). It is a general bookshop, but has a touch of quality to its selection of contemporary literature, and carries a good range of books on history, politics, philosophy, and much more. Located near the centre of the entertainment area, it’s open till 11.30 at night if you are into evening browsing. And it’s next door to Pellegrini’s, still the best coffee bar in the city.

For those with other things to keep them busy in the evenings, the Little Bookroom (185 Elizabeth St, Melbourne, phone 670.1612) might be worth visiting. On its shelves you’ll find more books for children of every age than you have ever seen in one place before. A lot of them are the usual tedious mulch, but the range is so broad you can always find something worthwhile while without trouble.

A stroll around Fitzroy can also be rewarding if you are looking for sustenance for the mind. Shrew Women’s Bookshop (37 Gertrude St, Fitzroy, phone 419.5595) has an excellent range of books by and about women, both fiction and non-fiction, in a light and pleasant shop that doubles as an information exchange for women.

A few minutes’ walk away is Friends of the Earth (222 Brunswick St, Fitzroy, phone 419.8700). The bookshop takes up part of a converted factory, and provides a pleasant place to browse though all the gloomy titles on the greenhouse effect and other impending disasters. That is not all the shop stocks, though. Current political and social issues, both Australian and overseas, are covered and there is a small but lively selection of fiction.

Further along the street is the Grub Street Bookshop (317 Brunswick St, Fitzroy, phone 417.3117). It is mainly a secondhand shop, but one of the best in Melbourne, well organised and labelled, with a good range of political titles along with lots of literature. One of its strengths is its material on Latin America, both fiction and non-fiction, an area which they are trying to expand even further.

From there it is a short walk across to Kalkadoon Bookshop (94 Smith St, Collingwood, phone 419.3361) recently forced to move from the city by rising rents. When it moved its emphasis changed a bit, so there is not so much on China now, but a lot on Australian history and politics, especially Aboriginal issues. It’s also the place to go if you are looking for Eureka flags, and all the other bits and pieces the Australian Independence Movement made popular.

Alternatively, just one suburb away is Readings Records and Books (338 Lygon St, Carlton, phone 347.6633). The shop has changed a bit with its shift down the street, and probably with the change in character of the suburb to an inner city alternative to North Balwyn. But it’s still a very good place to find the best of contemporary fiction, including a lot imported from the US, which you won’t usually see anywhere else, and you can readily see from the window display the extent of its support for new Australian writing.

Of course, if you are out for an afternoon stroll, the best place in Melbourne to do it is St Kilda, and it also has a shop that provides many good hours of browsing, Cosmos Bookshop (112 Acland St, St Kilda, phone 534.4568) is a bit of an institution, but like Readings has changed with its move into new premises. Mainly for the better - some of the atmosphere may be gone, but it is a lot easier to find what you want, and the range of stock is big enough so that you should be able to, whether it’s a good novel or something on current political questions.
irrigation water. Then there was the dream of cheap, clean hydro-electric power.

A dream indeed. These days the Snowy is merely a puny reserve power supply for the massive coal-fired plants which provide over 90% of NSW’s power. The price has been the despoliation of a truly unique sub-alpine area. Roads and transmission lines criss-cross the high plains. Dams and tunnels provide an intricate marvel of engineering, built at a cost of some 300 lives and billions of dollars for a small percent of electric power needs and an ecologically damaging water control system.

Quadrant’s punchline? "Judging by the treatment being accorded the Very Fast Train project, the third runway at Mascot or mining in Coronation Hill, it is a safe bet that no such scheme as the Snowy now stands a chance in Australia until the same majority of Australians put the greenies in their place."

Eric still hates Jews

Eric Butler’s League of Rights is often thought of as a rather quaint far Right group of Empire loyalists, a kind of British lion with its fangs drawn.

No so. The League is active and virulent as ever, largely in the bush, so perhaps the perception displays urban bias. The League has always stoutly denied its anti-semitism and usually keeps it under wraps. But occasionally it slips out. In their newsletter On Target (February 9) the following is printed under the heading ‘War Crime Trial Obscene’:

"An old man of Polish background, who has lived a quiet and law-abiding life all the years he has been in Australia, is being charged with crimes, not against Australians, but against Jews, which allegedly took place in another part of the world nearly fifty years ago. It is symbolic of the state of the nation when the announcement of Australia’s first war crime trial came on Australia Day. Australia Day commemorates the birth of a new nation of British origins. Those Zionist Jews and others who have called for War Crimes Trials have demonstrated their rejection of the Christian foundations of the British judicial system. The "justice" they talk about is the same type of justice which Shakespeare’s Shylock called for."

The bosses’ junket machine

For years there have been rumours about the Harvard trade union program and the various figures who have attended it. Not surprisingly, considering the incandescent intellects it has attracted. These include former NSW Premier Barrie Unsworth; Vehicle Builders Union secretary Joe Thompson, Harvard Foundation has long been a source of junkets for the NSW Labor Right. The source of the largesse includes some of the top companies in Australia - many of them American-based multinationals.

A recent pamphlet by the Foundation (aimed at the business community) lists some of the corporate sponsors, including: Amatil, Woolworths, Bond Brewing, TNT, Macquarie Bank, Caltex, Esso, James Hardie and Westpac.

NCC takes its ball home

Further to Loose Cannon’s report of the Left successes in Victorian unions, Newsweekly offers the following fascinating insight into power-games on the Right in Victoria.

"In a small way, there is a lesson in the total defeat of Centre Unity forces. Some of their leaders have made it clear that the NCC was not wanted as a force in Victorian unionism.

"Centre Unity could do the job better. For the NCC to be active would split both the effort and the vote. So, in Victoria it has abstained. Result - Centre Unity thrashed everywhere. That policy, at least, has no future and changes will be necessary."
DEAR DR. HARTMAN

EEO - ei, ei, ohhhh ....

Hello patients...
The topic for discussion this month is EEO - Equal Employment Opportunity.

Now I should make it quite clear from the start, I do not in any way support the fanatical aims of this silly feminist legislation.

I certainly never needed any of this workshopping nonsense when I was in training to be a neurosurgeon and part-time model.

But in recent weeks my clinics have been flooded with EEO co-ordinators on the verge of psychosexual collapse as the direct result of pressure at the office.

Here is a typical case.
A young lass rushed into my office just the other morning. She had huge padded shoulders, a very short hair cut, and she'd just been to her weekly power breakfast. I'm sure you know the type.

She sobbed as she told me this story.

Every day she has to walk into the offices of senior managers to discuss strategies for change. And every day she is confronted by unmitigated bigots who oppose even her most petty bureaucratic reforms.

She says that when she talks to these managers it's like communicating through a thick perspex screen.

She speaks in a very loud voice and never uses words of more than two syllables.

The managers smile and nod and appear to speak English.

But when they finally respond to her carefully researched presentation on systemic discrimination within the organisation, it soon becomes clear that they haven't really understood a single word she has said.

They just don't seem to 'hear' her in the Californian sense of the word.

According to my frantic EEO co-ordinator, all the average senior manager wants to talk about is how he hasn't noticed any problems for women among the 'girls' in his office. And, anyway, his wife has always been very happy at home looking after the 12 kiddies.

What really drives my EEO patient to distraction is that she can never say what she really thinks.

When she is confronted by these old dinosaurs she is expected to conciliate, negotiate, arbitrate and educate. Until, finally, she feels so burnt out by it all she makes those bush-fires in the Adelaide Hills a few years ago look like a backyard barbie by comparison.

Fear not, my EEO patients, doctor is here!

At my clinics we have devised a series of Action Learning Role Reversal programs designed to rocket the EEO-resistant manager into the shoes of the target group.

For example, many EEO co-ordinators have enormous difficulty convincing senior executives that there should be disabled access to all buildings. Here is a simple solution to this problem - a solution recently put into practice in a major Australian city.

We locked them up and we starved them for a week. Not a single morsel of food passed their lips.

Then we put each of them in a wheelchair and we chained them to the seat. And we dumped the lot of them right in the centre of town.

We then placed a ham sandwich on the third floor of every building. If they wanted to eat they had to get these sandwiches.

Within six months of this exercise there were ramps and rails and disabled toilets in every public building in that city. It was so simple it was frightening.

In another Action Learning Role Reversal program we were faced with a senior executive who refused to allocate any money to language classes for his non-English speaking staff.

In this case we simply airfreighted the chap to Japan and left him alone in Tokyo for six months to compete for a job on the open market.

He briefly gained employment as a chauffeur for a junior manager at Mitsubishi. But he got the sack for failing to obey an instruction to bow a little lower.

After a period of near starvation, he donned a kimono, masqueraded as a woman, and began training as a geisha.

You remember the scandal last year when the Japanese Prime Minister, Mr Uno, was thrown out of power because of the revelations of a loose-lipped geisha.

It's not widely known but that indiscreet geisha was, in fact, a senior Commonwealth public servant engaged in an Action Learning Exercise initiated by my clinic.

If you identify with any of these problems, please write to me here at the Australian Left Review.

Send your problems to Dr Hartman's secretary, Julie McCrossin, c/o ALR.

ALR: MARCH 1990
The New Economic Policy (NEP) of the mid-Twenties saw a brief flowering of market socialism in the USSR, just prior to Stalin’s crackdown. Sponsored by Nikolai Bukharin, a figure much in vogue with the reformers in Moscow today, the NEP fostered a renaissance in commercial design as well as increased artistic and literary tolerance. ALR’s new t-shirts feature three commercial designs from the NEP period, artfully reproduced in red, grey and black.

Looking left to right, the designs are: the bold trademark of Dobrolet, an aviation firm (1923); ‘Read this Book’, a stylish placard for bookshop customers (mid-Twenties); and a striking ad for Mozers watches (1923). All t-shirts in high-quality 100% Australian cotton, ranging from Small through M and L to a roomy XL.

Please send me:

□ Dobrolet trademark t-shirts (item no. TAE) at $18: size

□ ‘Read This Book’ designs (item no. TBO) at $18: size

□ Mozers watches designs (item no. TCL) at $18: size

Total: $………………………... (includes post and packing)

I enclose cheque/money order for the above amount, or

bill my Bankcard/Mastercard no. (delete whichever inapplicable):…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

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Send to: ALR Merchandising, PO Box A247 Sydney South NSW 2000.
NEW BOOKS
on Cultural, Social & Political Issues

THE DIALECTIC OF CHANGE
Boris Kagarlitsky

Boris Kagarlitsky's follow up to the highly-praised The Thinking Reed is a sweeping analysis of the interplay between reform and revolution in Western and Eastern Europe in the 20th century. At once both theoretical and polemical, Kagarlitsky attempts to develop a dialogue between the emergent Soviet left and radical forces in the West in pursuit of a coherent and consistent strategy of change.

Kagarlitsky reviews the crucial lessons of Solidarity in Poland and the Brezhnev period of 'stability', corruption and stagnation, against the backdrop of profound social changes which render the question of Gorbachev's democratisation and reform vital for both the future of the Soviet Union and the world.

Boris Kagarlitsky is Co-ordinator of the Moscow Popular Front for Perestroika.

Verso April 1990 272pp
ISBN 0 86091 973 0 Pb $29.95
ISBN 0 86091 253 1 He $79.95

JOURNEYS THROUGH THE Labyrinth
Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century
Gerald Martin

In recent years, Latin American literature has gained in international stature as the works of writers such as Borges, Garcia Marquez, Armado, Llosa and Asturias are increasingly widely translated.

This book provides a valuable account of the ambiguous relation between history and fiction in Latin America, and surveys the main critical responses to this distinctive body of narrative.

The author focuses on the shift which occurred between the first great wave of social realist fiction after the First World War and the emergence of so-called 'magical realism' after the Second, a movement which culminated in the 'boom' of the Latin American 'new novel' in the 1960s and 70s.

Gerald Martin is Professor in the School of Languages at Portsmouth Polytechnic and translated Miguel Angel Asturias's Men of Maize, published by Verso.

Verso March 1990 384pp
ISBN 0 86091 318 8 Pb $37.50
ISBN 0 86091 953 8 He $99.95

GETTING RUSSIA WRONG
Gorbachev and the Shock of the New
Patrick Cockburn

As Moscow correspondent for the Financial Times, Patrick Cockburn spent the years 1984 to 1988 in the Soviet Union during a time of extraordinary change and upheaval. In this collection of his incisive journalism from that period, Patrick Cockburn argues that traditional Kremnlinology, with its model of the Soviet Union as an immobile, totalitarian order bent upon world domination, ill-prepared the Western public for the dramatic disarmament diplomacy and bold moves towards democratisation of the Gorbachev era. Whilst conceding that Soviet reformers face formidable problems, Cockburn finds a more useful model in the dynamic and developmental approach to Soviet society found in the work of writers such as Moshe Lewin and Isaac Deutscher.

Verso April 1990 160pp
ISBN 0 86091 977 3 Pb $24.95
ISBN 0 86091 247 7 He $79.95

BUREAUCRATS, TECHNOCRATS, FEMOCRATS
Anna Yeatman

This collection of essays in political sociology and public policy contents some of the fundamental features of the contemporary state as it is manifested in Australia. Among the themes explored are:

* the development of the complex interventionist State, functioning as a central site of struggle over the distribution of social, economic, political and cultural resources;
* the impact of the so-called new social movements - the women's movement, the various multiracial and multicultural movements, and the environmentalist movement - which make new claims on the democratisation of the distribution of resources;
* the impact on the State of the pressure for economic 'restructuring' arising from the new terms of competition within a global economy in recession.

Anna Yeatman teaches sociology at Flinders University.

Allen & Unwin Australia January 1990 160pp
ISBN 0 442103 6 Pb $18.95

CRITIQUE OF ECONOMIC REASON
André Gorz

Translated by G Hardysside & C Turner

Critique of Economic Reason has been widely hailed as a profound analysis of industrial society, a radical new perspective on the future of work and leisure and a remarkable synthesis of socialist and ecological ideas.

The book begins with a history of work and an analysis of present day conditions which the author sees as marked by a sharp divide between a dwindling number of securely employed worker-producers and a growing mass of insecure and powerless worker-consumers. He offers, in contrast, a vision of a liberated future society based on 'an ethic of free time'.

André Gorz is widely recognised as one of the most influential radical political and economic theorists.

Verso March 1990 300pp
ISBN 0 86091 568 4 Pb $29.95
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THE FORCE OF REASON
An Introduction to Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action
Arie Brand

The work of Jurgen Habermas occupies a commanding position within contemporary social theory. His two-volume opus, The Theory of Communicative Action, is the key text for an understanding of his contribution to current theoretical debates.

However, the central importance of this massive and audacious work is not matched by its accessibility. The Force of Reason attempts to deal with this problem; it is written for students and for those who are called upon to assist students in studying Habermas' main work.

By tracing the main outlines of Habermas' theory, The Force of Reason provides an intellectual map which introduces key features of the theory of communicative action.

Arie Brand teaches sociology at the University of Newcastle.

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