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Where bikes are more than a marketing concept
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**Lexicon of the Eighties:** isms, celebs, events, & fads

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All the fads and foibles you wish had never happened, along with a few breaths of fresh air...

**ISMS**
- environmentalism
- monetarism
- economic rationalism
- postfeminism
- postmodernism
- postmarxism
- postlssmlsm
- Thatcherism
- deconstructionism
- pragmatism
- corporatism
- capitalism

**CELEBS**
- Bob Hawke
- Kylie Minogue
- Gorbachev
- Hacca
- Prince
- Paul Keating
- Saiman Rushdie
- Steve Waugh
- John McEnroe
- Bill Kelty
- Jason Donovan
- Julia Kristeva
- Joan Collins
- Michel Foucault
- John Elliott
- Madorna
- Margaret Thatcher
- John Dawkins
- Jacques Derrida
- Merv Hughes
- Tony Fitzgerald
- Allan Border
- Alan Bond
- Sylvester Stallone
- ALF
- Kate Cebrano
- Bob Brown
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- Jean Baudrillard
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**EVENTS**
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- glasnost
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- stockmarket crashes
- the Fitzgerald Inquiry
- black deaths in custody
- the environment
- Bicentenaries
- Greenhouse
- the ozone layer
- Joh for PM
- an Australian cricket victory
- a new left party
- the Beijing massacre
- Hungarian elections
- the Accord
FADS

yuppies
preppies
dinkies
airheads
rap
acid house
Reaganomics
Fatal Attraction
Ecstasy
Reeboks
Wall St
50s nostalgia
60s nostalgia
70s nostalgia

stockbrokers
consensus
the New Man
Run DMC
Guns'n'Roses
takeovers
the short-term money
market
junk bonds
WA Inc
bimbos
filofaxes
Bond Corporation
Quintex
AOR
boutique beers

baby boomers
LA Law
Soviet kitsch
jogging
Miami Vice
shoulder pads
the balance of payments
little ponytails on men
the corporate woman
home PCs
Hawkespeak
Johtspeak
Japan
the centre left
the hard left
Adidas
New French Feminists
the two-tier wage system
Neighbours
computer viruses
natural ingredients
alternative medicines
upmarket pubs
privatisation
advertising executives
the video nasty
A Country Practice
strategic unionism

Ray-Bans
Dr Martens
skateboards
100% Mambo
hi-tech
carphones
Thirtysomething
New Age
market research
flattop haircuts
the New Right
designer t-shirts
Option C
award restructuring
ghettoblasters
videos
aerobics
horoscopes
safe sex
New Directions
power dressing
Palm Sunday

workshopping
interfacing
accessing
power breakfasts
hacking
ethical investment
citizenship
TV business 'experts'
the J curve
designer stubble

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ethical Investment
citizenship
TV business 'experts'
the J curve
designer stubble

AUSTRALIAN LEFT REVIEW 3
Greening Medicine

Most people still consider alternative therapies to contemporary western medical treatments as their last resort. They have been shunted from specialist to specialist, run the gamut of tests, been operated on or prescribed a course of drugs, but they are still in pain or beleaguered by illness. The state of their bodies not their minds leads them to the naturopath’s door, the osteopath’s surgery, the masseuse’s or the acupuncturist’s table.

And often they come in for the quick fix. Their faces fall when they hear that it requires more than a couple of treatments to buffer (not necessarily cure) the body against years of abuse or the generally deleterious effects of prolonged, if not severe, ill-health. And they may be asked to consider the harmful effects of their lifestyle.

In the last few years, however, there has been a subtle shift in the general public’s perception of these ‘alternatives’. Like the environment, our bodies are seen to need more protection. Instead of meeting health crises - heart attack, high blood pressure, kidney failure, liver disease, cancer - with higher and higher technology, we are looking at how to prevent them from occurring in the first place. The concept of prevention is greening medicine.

General attitudes to diet, for example, have almost been revolutionised. These days, any food advertising worth its salt will claim its product is ‘natural’. ‘No preservatives’ and ‘no artificial flavouring’ are also writ large. The sugar industry is cashing in its crop with a series of ads set to convince us it’s as natural as ... sunshine. Not surprisingly, these advertisers do not point out that the snakes infesting sugar cane fields, plants like the deadly nightshades, or diseases like syphilis are also natural. No, Nature, like greed, is good.

Of course it’s not only big business that simplifies and romanticises this thing called Nature. Many practitioners themselves are just as culpable, if not necessarily as cynical. They are well placed within that European tradition of thought which deifies Nature as both pure and heartless, complemented by a yearning for the simpler values of a supposed past when culture was not so alienated from its natural base. Nature is therefore perceived as a haven from an over-sophisticated and increasingly decadent civilisation (read science).

Science, in both medicine and industry, has unfortunately done quite enough to deserve this demonic character, as well as fattening itself on the privileges accorded it by twentieth century western society. Gone are the glorious days of discovering penicillin: instead, thalidomide has grabbed the public imagination. In this context, it is easy to see why so many equate natural with safe. In doing so, however, they fail to consider that herbs can also produce their own ill-effects if not properly prescribed. Effective treatment from a herbalist requires skill. It is not magic. Meanwhile, health food shops and clinics providing ‘natural’ treatments are popping up faster than mushrooms in the forest of high technology. Some are making a considerable profit.

While this mythology of the natural is sustained, both inside and outside the industry, little progress or development within these alternative sciences will eventuate. There is a tendency among the practitioners of what’s known as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) - which includes the use of herbs, acupuncture and massage - to revere tradition at the expense of change (a problem not uncommon to other modalities as well), and East in defiance of West. But there are also practitioners and researchers who are working with what they recognise to be an exciting but limited, often self-contradictory, set of precepts.

These internal contradictions result from additions and alterations over thousands of years as well as the various social and political views which inform TCM theory. Describing the body’s workings as an analogue of an emperor state is loaded. Yet that is precisely one image of the body at work in TCM. Literally, the body politic. Knowing that helps to inform the parameters for contemporary research, and helps researchers to reap the benefits of discoveries or insights from another culture, discipline or time without being tied to them. And without losing the benefits of ‘modern science’.

It is also important to recognise that the alternatives are not a coherent body of philosophy or practice: not as ‘holistic’ as the body they all supposedly contemplate. (Holistic medicine views the body as a whole rather than as the sum of its parts, which is generally perceived by holistic practitioners to be the downfall of the highly specialised practices of twentieth century western medicine.) They come from a wide variety of traditions, both European and Asian. Some are as old as the hills, others are recent innovations. Any genuine assessment of their relative worth needs to be made on an individual basis, now that the general challenge to western medicine has been made and broad similarities noted.

Still the hype continues, and ultimately it is damaging. Perhaps faith has always been supremely marketable, and it could be that society in general is looking for a new faith, something to replace the science that can no longer so confidently claim to have the answers for everything.

There is another way to look at it, however, suggested by the strong interest shown by young and politicised women (as both users and practitioners) in these alternative sciences. Western medicine has certainly let women down, particularly in its high-handed approach to their sexuality. And not just in the individual surgeries of male doctors, but also in its theories of the female body and psyche. Another body politic.

Other perceptions of the body, as well as the equitable atmosphere in which they are often practised - something western medical practitioners could easily take a lesson in - do offer real alternatives.

Not the least of which means women being able to claim more control over their bodies and more responsibility for their health.

It is not that these alternatives have the answer (the problem of what’s natural is also here), but at the moment they certainly allow more room for negotiations.
Going Green, Buying Brown

Try as I might, I haven’t quite fathomed the logic of the slogan printed on a brown paper bag in which were wrapped goods I recently bought from a health food shop: "Today’s paper bag is tomorrow’s tree - recycling for the future". But at least you can agree with the sentiment - and it marks the significant return of the brown paper bag, after years of being marginalised by plastic.

Paper bags aren’t the only things going brown. It started in the 'seventies with rice, sugar, bread and pasta. In the health conscious aftermath of hippiedom, everything started turning brown. And although some of us have now lost interest in wholemeal croissants, and raw sugar has been a veritable scam, the axiom that ‘brown is better’ has stuck.

It’s been good preparation for the ‘eighties. In the last year, with astonishing rapidity, shoppers have been targeted with one newly brown, unbleached product after another. Toilet paper, sanitary pads, stationary and even coffee filters, have all acquired what Sancella, manufacturers of sanitary pads and pantyliners, have described as a ‘not unattractive manilla folder sort of color’.

The reason for all this is simple: dioxin. Dioxins are the waste-product of the chlorine bleaching process used in paper production. They’re highly toxic, as anyone who followed the Wesley Vale pulp mill battle in Tasmania earlier this year will be aware. Unbleached paper products are easier on the environment and less hazardous to human health.

Accompanying the trend towards un-bleached paper products is a shift towards recycling. Many of us have probably been putting our newspapers out for years, with little idea of what happened to them. It appears that until recently most have gone into cardboard or, when there’s an oversupply, into landfill. With increasing public interest in deforestation and wilderness issues, the lobby for recycling waste paper has strengthened. Australian paper manufacturers have finally succumbed to consumer pressure and introduced a range of recycled papers. But consumers must keep the pressure on for de-inked, unbleached 100% recycled paper from the huge volume of office waste. Bleached recycled paper isn’t good enough - dioxins again.

Environmental groups are lobbying hard for an end to plastic production, at least of disposable, single-use items. They have plenty of good reasons - Greenpeace has publicised the dangers of plastic bags and six-pack tops to marine life, particularly marine mammals; and plastic, even the flash new ‘photodegradable’ variety, doesn’t ever fully biodegrade. Plastic recycling is

Guides For a Green Decade

Most of the literature available for consumers on environmental issues has been published by consumer and environmental groups, but the Victorian government deserves a green medal for their environmental campaigning. The Environment Protection Authority has released a guide to recycling and domestic waste management, and publishes monthly Green Spot information bulletins to promote environmentally sound products and practices. It is available from the Bookshop Information Centre, Ministry for Planning & Environment, 477 Collins St Melbourne 3000, Ph. (03)628.5061.

101 Ways to Protect Our Environment, by Frank Ryan & Stephen Ray, published by The Victorian Ministry for Planning and Environment and The Victorian Association for Environmental Education - Easy to follow booklet aimed at kids and households, promoting ways to recycle, re-use and reduce waste.

Australian Non-Buyers Guide, available from PO Box 368 Lismore NSW 2480. An aid to ethical boycott shopping. Details what companies have involvement in nuclear industry, South Africa, etc.

It’s Easy Being Green, by Rob Gell & Rosslyn Beeby, McCulloch Publishing, $12.95. Fairly detailed guide to environmental practices in homes, on the farm & in workplaces - for example energy efficient building.

Personal Action Guide for the Earth, published by the Commission For The Future, 1989, Available from the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, GPO Box 1562, Canberra, ACT, 2601 - short but comprehensive guide to environmentally friendly action, with useful contact list in the back and brief guide to further reading.

The Green Consumer Guide, John Elkington & Julia Hailes, with CHOICE magazine and the Australian Conservation Foundation, Penguin, $14.99. The most detailed guide available. Well researched and takes into account both environmental and social responsibility (ie. 40% of our orange juice is imported concentrate from Brazil, where deforestation is actually encouraged by the government). Includes a useful section on alternative holidays and gifts.

Jess Walker
only a partial solution - environmentalists advocate a return to more permanent containers like shopping trolleys, reusable glass bottles and BYO cup, plate and cutlery.

This is quite a lifestyle change and may well be resisted in a world now used to the convenience of throwaways. Nor is it as simple as it might appear. If we really did replace all plastic containers with glass or cardboard, that's a lot of containers. It will still be a strain on resources. Can recycling, if fully implemented, cope with the sheer volume of our consumer goods? And it's important that recycling processes be truly environmentally friendly and don't use too much energy or generate noxious wastes.

There are plenty of difficult questions, but it is a less hazardous direction than the one we have been going in until now. And that will mean some unpalatable challenges for industries which make big bucks out of disposable items and packaging.

Ironically - but perhaps it indicates where the contradictions lie in the greening of industry - 'friendly' products like unbleached loo-paper are sometimes packaged in plastic. There are some green initiatives that the industries concerned will fight tooth and claw. A deposit legislation and recycling conference in Melbourne last September proposed the elimination of brand name bottles from the market place. You can imagine how Coca Cola would respond to that.

The lobbying campaign set in motion by that conference for deposit legislation and the reintroduction of milk bottles is typical of environmental organisations' determination that government should shoulder responsibility for change. Being an environmentally friendly consumer is of little use if government isn't keeping tabs on industrial practices, and actively promoting green objectives - from buying 100% recycled paper to enacting deposit legislation.

That said, if you place environmental friendliness alongside social responsibility, the political implications for industry of changing consumer patterns are undeniable. Progressive people have for years been putting their money where their mouth is and buying goods through alternative trade agencies like CAA Trading or Peacemeal Products and boycotting companies like Nestlé.

If you cast an eye over supermarket shelves you'll realise just how little you know about almost everything you buy - batteries, tampons, popper-style drink containers, paint, dishwashing liquid - and it becomes rather frightening.

A plethora of booklets and guides aiming to answer such concerns are now being published on the subject of green consumerism and, while the advice may be useful though often fairly superficial, at heart their message is extremely radical: Question everything you buy - what are the raw materials, are they a non-renewable resource, does it contain possibly toxic compounds, how is it produced, what is the packaging made of and is it necessary, what happens to the product and the packaging when you throw it away, and - do you really need it?

Ultimately, there should be no consumer item that we need view with suspicion. And that will indeed be a radical change.

Jess Walker

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**Curtains For Communism?**

Nineteen eighty began with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the birth, some months later, of Solidarity in Poland. The 'eighties have ended with the triumph of Solidarity and the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan.

In 1980, Brezhnev seemed at the peak of his power and his arrogance when he and a few cronies decided to invade Afghanistan. Today, Afghanistan is devastated, an estimated million are dead and many millions more maimed or are refugees. It was indeed the Soviet 'Vietnam' and the repercussions are still being felt.

When I spoke to Solidarity activists in Warsaw in 1981, some compromise between the reform wing of the communist party and Solidarity could have reversed the economic crisis which was bad, but not irreversible. Instead, under direct threat from Brezhnev of invasion, the rulers imposed martial law. Today, the Polish economy is near collapse, perhaps beyond redemption. It suffers from hyper-inflation on a scale reminiscent of Germany before the rise of Hitler. Today the US dollar is the only real currency in the country.

The crisis in the Soviet Union is only slightly less severe. Although its per capita international debt is not large, it requires 75% of Soviet hard currency earnings to service it. Unless something is done, and quickly, the USSR could soon slip into hyper-inflation, as the printing presses churn out even more paper roubles.

Glasnost has allowed the truth, or much of it, to emerge, yet die-hard bureaucrats still hold much power and are able to frustrate even the most pressing reforms.

The Soviet people today have lost their fear, but not their cynicism. Until they have some real, material and moral reasons to work, the system will continue to slide into chaos. Huge quantities of food rot through lack of transport and processing facilities, while the shops are empty. The Soviet Union would have no need to spend invaluable hard currency on food imports if so much of its own crop was not wasted. Yet huge sums are wasted on huge old-style stalinist constructions. The centralised bureaucracy is criminally inefficient to a degree beyond comprehension.

It should be no surprise that the frustrated anger of Soviet working people is being expressed through nationalism. Facing seemingly insurmountable problems, the easiest target is a local national minority or Moscow as the centre of power. The various republics and the regions within the huge Russian Federation desperately need economic autonomy, as well as cultural and national rights.
Is it the end of ‘communism as we know it’? Hopefully, because the communism inherited from Stalin and Brezhnev has never been more bankrupt. Hungary shows the way - the self-abolition of the ‘communist party’, carried to power by Khrushchev’s tanks, and now transformed into something between social democracy and a socialist party of a new type.

The other nations of eastern Europe and the USSR itself will have to follow the Hungarian example. Otherwise, a little down the track, they may well feel obliged to turn to the ‘Tiananmen option’ which East Germany’s Honecker was toying with prior to his recent sudden departure.

Many, including many communists, throughout the USSR and Eastern Europe now look to social democracy, particularly to the Swedish variety. But Sweden is clearly far from ideal, particularly given the large multinationals which dominate much of its economy. However, its social welfare system, the willingness of the State to intervene in decision-making, and its lively democratic framework with strong socially progressive institutions are all understandably attractive.

Few question that the Soviet and East European economies desperately need a strong dose of competition and private enterprise, with real prices and real money. They do not need huge multinational corporations bred from the centralised bureaucratic monopolies. The transition to this new sort of ‘mixed economy’ in which the socially-owned and co-operatively run enterprises will be much more powerful than in the West, but forced to compete on the market, will not be easy.

As Hungary and Yugoslavia have shown, half measures can also be disastrous. The state needs to develop new, indirect mechanisms for economic control after allowing the market to become the dominant force. Such indirect mechanisms are familiar to those in the West - control through taxation, incentives, legal sanctions, strategic state investment and import and foreign borrowing controls.

The implications for western socialists and communists is clear. Looking back on the ’eighties in Eastern Europe, the first half dominated by Brezhnev and his cronies, the second by an embattled Gorbachev, one can be confident that whatever the nineties hold, even if a Brezhnev clone once more takes power in Moscow, the old system has most definitely entered its death agony.

If western socialism is not to enter its death agony too, much old dross in our heads must be cleaned out. That does not mean socialists must become social democrats, but rather ‘socialists of a new type’, working for a mixed economy in which the socially-owned, co-operatively run sector is dominant but under pressure from the private sector in a market economy.

Denis Freney
Book Wars

The recent Prices Surveillance Authority (PSA) Report on book prices in Australia seems to be the best news our free marketers have had in quite a while. P P McGuinness in The Australian hailed it as "an excellent example of straightforward applied economic analysis", delighting in its attack on "the cosy deals of the British publishing trade".

The report recommends the establishment of a totally open market for books in Australia by abolishing the territorial copyright laws which have forced book-sellers to buy overseas publications through local branches of the British publishers who hold the copyright in this country.

Supporters of the report are hailing it as a new dawn for the Australian book buyer. We are promised a flood of books from all over the world, at prices up to a third lower than we are paying now.

British publishers will no longer be able to exploit their monopoly. Because of competition they will not be able to continue charging more for their books here than they do in Britain, the US, or even Canada, and they will have to get books here, especially new releases, far more quickly than they do now.

Some of this is accurate. There are plenty of examples of publishers protected in their incompetence and greed by the shield of territorial copyright. We do have to wait an outrageously long time for some new books, and do pay excessive prices for a lot of them.

The publishers and distributors responsible deserve to have a bomb put under them. The PSA recommendations could have effects far beyond that, however. Like most of the deregulation we have seen in recent years, the costs could substantially outweigh the benefits.

Book prices in Australia would come down if there were open competition between British and American publishers trying to sell different editions of the same book. But that is not the direction in which the publishing industry is going.

There has been a spate of takeovers and mergers in the last decade with the rapid emergence of huge international publishing houses, often linked to major media empires. These corporations are geared to produce what has been called the 'world book', which they can sell under different imprints in different parts of the English-speaking world. In the industry which is emerging there will not be any difference in ownership of British or US rights, at least on major publications.

Penguin Australia, for example, might choose to sell either the British or American edition here, but there will be no company marketing the alternative, so what will set the price?

The PSA describes the present situation: "Books are priced according to what consumers will pay. In Australia, the market will pay highly and books are priced accordingly."

Deregulation will not change this. There will be skirmishes for a while, till the major publishers settle on who is going to market which edition when there is a difference in ownership between British and American rights. But, in the long run, new Penguins, or Picadors, or whatever US imprints become common here, will be priced within a dollar or so of each other. And they will still be well above the comparable British or American prices.

Individual bookshops will be able to buy other editions direct from overseas, but will have to do so through wholesalers. They are unlikely to be able to sell substantially cheaper, especially on major titles.

There would be a price difference on shorter print-run titles, where the US price is usually much lower. The advantage to the Australian reader might not be what it seems, though.

One of the real dangers of the open market is that publishers operating in Australia will stop promoting or even stocking such titles since they cannot guarantee that bookshops will buy through them rather than import direct.

This would apply in particular to most progressive publications. The only shops through which they would be readily available would be those involved in direct importation. Smaller independent bookshops, even if they want to carry a reasonable range of books on social and political issues, or even good contemporary fiction, would find it extremely difficult to obtain anything other than the latest Stephen King or Virginia Andrews.

Most probably lack the capital to buy directly from overseas and would be under considerable pressure to transform themselves into newsagency-style outlets for the limited range of 'big' books readily available through Australian suppliers. That is a serious threat to the diversity of ideas and information available to Australian readers.

The big university and college bookshops, along with some specialist booksellers, have been the most vocal in support of the PSA recommendations. Surveys of the membership of the Australian Booksellers Association, which is largely composed of smaller independent booksellers, show a different feeling. Most support careful reform of the existing system. There is a deep suspicion that deregulation will not benefit them or their customers.

The open market is also a threat to Australian authors. The PSA is apparently confident that its recommendations would have little effect, but local publishers have pointed out that there would be no incentive to publish Australian fiction. It is only when authors reach the prominence of Elizabeth Jolley or Peter Carey that their books sell well enough to be profitable, and by then there are overseas editions of their books which could be imported to undercut the local publisher.

There is considerable pressure on the federal government to adopt the PSA recommendations. Rupert Murdoch's buying spree at home and abroad in recent years has given News Limited control of perhaps a third of the turnover of the Australian book trade, and his companies are geared up for the new world of book-selling. The danger is that this new world may see books marketed in the same way as cans of dog food, with about the same regard for the quality of what is contained in the wrapping.

Ken Norling
A Deaf Ear

On a cold winter’s afternoon at the University of Western Sydney, Kingswood, the Leader of the NSW Opposition, Bob Carr, met the young people of NSW. The meeting was designed to make sure that "the breadth and depth of knowledge and experience in the community" reached the ALP; to go to the next state election with a Youth Policy "relevant to existing and future needs". Or so the preceding publicity hype had claimed.

The event was part of a program initiated by Labor to assist it in developing the sort of policies that could see it returned to government in NSW. Almost a year after the disastrous defeat of the Unsworth government in March 1988, Bob Carr’s revamped opposition had launched the campaign to take the ALP back to an electorate which had shunned it, and cut a swathe through its parliamentary ranks.

The campaign, "Labor Listens", was to develop consultative mechanisms to allow the NSW Labor Party to create a more relevant and electorally viable policy platform. This campaign was based on the recognition that the current structure of the party does little to allow real input into policy development. "Labor Listens" was seen as a chance to polish up an image tarnished by the all too frequent indiscretions of officers of the NSW branch. It also feeds into the process of self-appraisal of the party begun with the establishment of an internal Commission of Review after the 1988 election defeat.

Yet, from the conduct of the initial stages of this process, it would appear that little has been done to encourage the party to "listen" to its own members, let alone the rest of the community. The Kingswood encounter seemed designed merely to enable Carr and other members of the Opposition front bench to present the party’s existing priorities on youth policy in the run-up to the next state election. None of the principal participants in the forum was actually present when workshops reported back to the group as a whole - presumably the time when the issues young people felt important would be raised.

The ALP in New South Wales appears to have taken little heed, and learned less, from the experience of a similar review process undertaken by the British Labour Party over the last eighteen months. The British "Labour Listens" campaign, launched by party leader Neil Kinnock in early 1988, provides a poignant example of the potential pitfalls associated with a review process which remains remote from the party’s rank and file.

In many respects both "Labour Listens" and the concomitant Policy Review were authentic attempts to confront the reality of the British Labour Party’s disastrous defeats at the hands of Margaret Thatcher. The Labour Party in Britain has spent more than ten years in the political wilderness. The 1983 poll of 27.6% was the worst since 1931. Britain’s "Labour Listens" was designed to inform the Policy Review and to turn the party outwards from talking among itself to talking to the general community.

Criticism of the process from within the party was almost immediate, and ranged from those who saw the whole review as a managed consultation with a predetermined agenda, to those who viewed it as a vehicle for the wholesale
revision of the party into a sort of pale pink version of the SDP. Groupings within the party, most notably that section of the Left identified with Tony Benn, opted out of the whole review process altogether.

Perhaps more constructive analysis of the "Labour Listens" campaign came from the New Statesman & Society which concluded that "the Labour Listens campaign and policy review are now being pressed into service to the same end - to keep active members of the party quiet while crucial decisions are being made in their name".

Still, it remains important to be sympathetic to the British experience in order to prevent the ALP from becoming bogged in the same political potholes. For the Commission of Review or "Labor Listens" to be effective they must be taken seriously by the powers that be in the ALP - they must involve real consultation with party members and the community, and a real commitment to implement the radical machinery and policy changes that both these groups are clearly calling for. It is unfortunate and disheartening that this would not appear to be the case.

The prevailing attitude towards the Commission of Review exemplifies the misguided arrogance for which the Right 'machine' has become renowned. Most political organisations would take it as self-evident that a regular medium for information and discussion is imperative in maintaining communication among party members. Unfortunately, in the last few years the ALP in NSW has had no regular journal, and those which it has produced (such as the inappropriately entitled The Radical) were clearly lessons in how not to organise a political publication. The revamped Labor Times, a monthly journal arising out of the Commission of Review's recognition of the need for a comprehensive program of communication, will hopefully fill that gap.

But the final report of the Commission of Review also fails to address adequately the serious question of party membership. No mention is made of the quite alarming decline in membership which has occurred in recent years, and the reasons behind it.

The Commission of Review begrudgingly acknowledges the fact that at both a federal and state level Labor governments perennially ignore the party's established policy and suffer significant electoral difficulties as a consequence. The committee's final report does make constructive suggestions regarding policy development, but fails to tackle this crucial issue.

Other omissions from the report are equally surprising. The Commission of Review makes absolutely no mention of young people in the ALP, or of the need to review the structure of its youth wing, the Young Labor Council. Yet, almost immediately after the ALP State Conference in June this year - before any of the initiatives of the Commission of Review were adopted - the Administrative Committee of the NSW branch set in train radical changes to the structure of the Young Labor Council. The ALP in NSW, it seems, is more interested inousting the often critical Young Labor, and thus jeopardising the already precarious youth support for the party, than attracting more support from young people.

If Labor is to regain government in NSW, the complacency of the head office 'machine' will have to be addressed. Allegations of impropriety have already been responsible for the development of a public perception that the NSW branch of the ALP is both corrupt and inept, and make processes like the Commission of Review and "Labor Listens" all the more imperative.

Let's hope the Labor Party can approach the Review, if not with open arms, then at least with open ears.

Michael Dwyer.
Dear St Paul

Diana Simmonds

Sometimes, when rage or disbelief threatens to engulf, it helps to sit down and write a letter to or about the object of one's fury. It can be very cathartic - especially if you don't send the letter. Something like:

Dear St Paul, no doubt I'm not the first to tell you this, nor will I be the last, but you have a lot to answer for, you misanthropic, old, dead creep. And I'm glad you're dead, make no mistake about that. It's just rather a shame that some of your followers aren't pushing up the daisies with you. Yrs truly, etc, etc....

If this notelette seems uncommonly harsh, take a look around. There is something very rum going on in the scheme of things. For instance, when a man like Archbishop David Penman of Melbourne dies at 53, while Fred Nile appears to be flourishing in the hatred and ignorance with which he surrounds himself.

And while on the subject of Nile and ignorance, what is it about Australian politics that has attracted such a moronic breed of candidate to seek public office? We have, on the one hand, an elected representative who believes not only that Australia's economic ills are God's retribution for Sydney's Mardi Gras but also that you can catch AIDS from a dunny seat. And I'm glad you're dead, make no mistake about that. It's just rather a shame that some of your followers aren't pushing up the daisies with you. Yrs truly, etc, etc....

But what of the ex-horrible criminal... you? So lately a monster, now simply a casualty of the hour. How do you go back to work, home, friends, the pub, after being plastered across the nation's consciousness labelled murderer/rapist? How will they look at you? How will you cope? Will you still have a job? Friends? Family? Life? It might be OK, but it might not.

"There's no smoke without fire," a neighbourhood sage will whisper, and other wise heads will nod as they appraise you, discreetly, before closing heads to restoke that same fire with the hybrid slanders that will haunt you for years. "You're right!" you might yell at them. "There is no smoke without fire! But I didn't start it. I'm just the mug who got held over the flames and I'm the one who's been burned."

And if you think it couldn't happen to you, think again. Of course it could. Think about Lindy Chamberlain or Harry Blackburn, tried and convicted before they ever got anywhere near a court room. Think about John Friedichs, the "death truckie" or Tim Anderson, consumed and spat out by forces that make ravening dingoes look benign. A media pack bent on a colourful story, not black and white facts; a public accustomed to blood, thrills and catharsis; administrations desperate for credibility and kudos in the face of a history of ineptitude and stupidity - these three social powers come together to overthrow reason and the course of justice. In their place, we get mob rule.

Perhaps that's what really should be spelled out by the doctrine of the separation of powers: keeping apart the media, the public and the law-enforcement industry. In harness on the wrong road, their energy is quite evil. Humanity loses out to sensation and anybody who accidentally falls foul of it is lost - trapped in the spotlight and shot down, no questions asked, like so many worthless bunnies.

So what happened to our right to innocence, to proof beyond reasonable doubt? And why has the Day of Judgement been accelerated and pre-empted? What's going on around here?

Dear St Paul ... I write to you from the sewer of the Pacific....
While the former has some pretensions to being a cultural journal, the IPA Journal is produced by Australia’s first “think tank” and post-war progenitor of the Liberal Party. In a recent edition of the IPA Journal Danby outlines the “trail of disinformation” about the Fiji coup, i.e. the “left wing fantasy which sees the CIA presence every time a neutralist or anti-American government loses office”. (Bavandra didn’t so much “lose office” as have it untimely ripped from his hands, but let that pass...) The article appears well-researched. It shows how the “left wing fantasy” of CIA involvement popped up in many newspapers and radio stations around the world in the days following the May 1987 coup. It is well researched. But not by Danby. In fact, a good half of the article is lifted from US State Department press releases. How else would Danby be able to quote “disinformation” by the Press Trust of India, radio broadcasts from Moscow’s world and domestic service, and the West Samoa Observer (for Christake)? Danby’s use of State Department handouts was demonstrated by Owen Wilkes’ Wellington Pacific Report which compared his article with State Department cables. Using State Department info is OK if you acknowledge it. But Danby didn’t. Instead, he gave us a self-righteous lecture which included: “To be successful, disinformation requires the concealment of sources”. Early in 1987 Danby contributed another article to the IPA Journal on “Moscow’s South Pacific Push”. In it he spoke of the danger of the Fijian Labor Party winning office and attacked the Lange government’s nuclear ships policy. “Vanuatu’s radicalisation will only be halted by firm action”, he said, “otherwise we may well have another Grenada on our doorstep.” The irony for today is that the IPA Journal was also favoured with articles by Professor David Kemp, Danby’s Liberal-endorsed oppponent for Goldstein, in its Autumn 1984 and Winter 1986 editions. Michael has also been a contributor to Quadrant, edited by failed NSW Liberal leader Peter Coleman. As well as his contributions in the July and August ’85 editions, Danby paid tribute to Quadrant’s founder Richard Krygier in November 1986.

Who was Krygier? Ask Humphry McQueen who outlines Krygier’s long list of begging letters to the Congress for Cultural Freedom in From Gallipoli to Petrov. In 1966 the CCF was exposed as a conduit for CIA money. Other testimonials to Krygier came from Sir John Kerr, B.A. Santamaria, W.C. Wentworth, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Leonie Kramer and Frank Knopflmacher.

In May 1986, the Sydney Morning Herald reported that Danby was one of five consulting editors for Exchange, a rightwing information-sharing service. His fellow editors were: Richard Krygier, B.A. Santamaria, rightwing medico John Whitehall, and Australian journalist Greg Sheridan. In March 1987 The Age reported that Michael had popped up at the Hoover Institute’s “Red Orchestra” conference on Soviets in the Pacific.

This time his bedfellows were former Liberal staffer Gerard Henderson, “freelance harranger” Anthony McAdam, another Lib staffer, Colin Rubinstein, the aforementioned John Whitelaw and Australian writer John Wheelon.

Just for balance, the “Rambo Right” as The Age dubbed them, included Michael Easson, secretary of the NSW Labor Council.

All of which explains the joke doing the rounds of Melbourne: that Liberal state president Michael Kroger has two candidates in Goldstein.

### The whacky world of Geoff McDonald

The defeat of the Building Workers Industrial Union’s recent vote on amalgamation with the FEDFA saw some strange bedfellows, among them lefties from the BLF and one Geoff McDonald.

McDonald, a hoist driver and FED member, has an interesting history for someone who passes himself off as a rank-and-file unionist.

Just after the election of the Labor government in 1983, McDonald was busily promoting his book Red Over Black in rural Australia. The book describes itself as “chilling and almost unbelievable (sic) story of the marxist manipulation of the Aboriginal ‘land rights’ movement”.

According to Amanda Buckley in the Sydney Morning Herald he “has played a part in the intensified campaign organised by the Australian League of Rights against government Aboriginal policies and Asian immigration”. Buckley’s interview with McDonald reported at length his conspiracy theories about Aborigines forming a separate state and army and “inviting in North Korea”.

His whacky world view got him into trouble when he gave evidence in the 1971 federal ALP intervention in Victoria.

Clyde Cameron recalled “McDonald played a key role in nearly bugging it up for us” because of his wildly conspiratorial evidence against the left state ALP.

In the ‘eighties, however, McDonald felt quite at home with the Libs. The Pilbara Times (4.8.84) reported his tour of Western Australia “accompanied by Liberal Party Kalgoorlie division executive officer Joe Kerekes”.

Red Over Black praises Joh Bjelke-Petersen and the Victorian RSL’s Bruce Ruxton.

The book, incidentally, was published by Veritas Publishing of Bullsbrook, Western Australia. Veritas promotes books on “raciology” with the aim of assisting it to take “its place among the sciences”.

No prizes for guessing the conclusion of The Testing of Negro Intelligence.
It's 36 and she is the youngest member of the Tasmanian parliament. One of five Green Independents who have held the balance of power in Tasmanian politics since April, she rose to political prominence through a much publicised and successful fight to save the prime rural land of Wesley Vale from environmental destruction from pulp giants North Broken Hill and Noranda.

But the woman who took on the multinationals and won is discovering that leading the vanguard of Australian Green politics does not always deliver big returns. Just six months after her triumphant sweep into state parliament, Christine Milne, school teacher and history graduate, is exhausted and angry.

Her anger is directed at the Tasmanian Labor Party which holds power in the state parliament only through the Green-Labor accord, the terms of which Labor already shows signs of disregarding.

Already, the government has twice attempted to renegotiate the accord. It has balked at revoking mining licences in the Jane River goldfields in the nominated World Heritage area of south-west Tasmania, and recently attempted to reopen negotiations on the state’s woodchip quota.

"I am disillusioned with the government. At the time the accord was drawn up we made some big compromises and they agreed to what they saw as a reasonable price to pay for being government. Now they’re secure in their ministerial suites and they’re moving away from making the hard decisions, the ones they agreed to in the accord."

If the Greens are confronting hard political reality, Christine Milne is one who will take the challenge head on. "We have to redefine our role and develop a mechanism to move the agenda and be seen to move the agenda. The ALP is already taking credit for our hard work and I’m daunted by that."

Christine Milne has been on the Australian political scene barely two years - first appearing when she successfully lobbied federal Environment Minister Graham Richardson to save some small bushwalkers’ huts in Tasmania’s Cradle Mountain National Park.

Despite stories circulating that she was once a member of the ALP (spread, she says, by former Liberal Premier Robin Gray), Milne says she has no political background. Her parents both voted Labor, and becoming a politician was never her ambition. In 1976 she worked briefly on Michael Field’s election campaign "when he was a bright young man who opposed uranium mining".

Her criticism of the Tasmanian ALP is summed up in her opinion of Field’s political metamorphosis. "I received a lesson in his view of compromise, that politics is only about compromise. The Greens believe that’s not the case.

"I never saw myself getting involved in the political system. But the (Liberal) government kept making decisions I couldn’t agree with. It’s inevitable that government would continue to make those decisions."

The campaign to save Wesley Vale from a billion dollar chemical pulp mill was a response to one of "those decisions". Milne stepped onto a treadmill when she was elected spokesperson for CROPS (Concerned Residents Opposing Pulp Mill Siting) in March 1988, spearheading a campaign that concluded with the federal government ruling that environmental guidelines covering the proposed pulp mill, already accepted by the Liberal state government, were not strict enough. The partners withdrew from the project saying they could not comply with the new guidelines.

Still on the treadmill, Milne moved into mainstream politics with her decision to stand for the state seat of Lyons, the largest and most conservative Tasmanian electorate. Six months after stepping into parliament, Milne is overwhelmed by the workload.

Officially a backbencher, Milne, along with the other Independents, has responsibilities and a workload which far outstrip those of an ordinary MP.

She holds three shadow portfolios: primary industries, education and tourism. She concentrates her energy on pushing sustainability in primary industry, involving more teachers in decision-making, and developing a "much-needed philosophical framework around the appropriateness of the Tasmanian tourism industry".

The Greens are also pushing social justice issues - homosexuality, Aboriginal justice, domestic violence - up the government agenda. According to Milne, the government is beginning to move, though slowly. "The ALP would never have had the courage to run these issues on their own. Their track record indicates that."

The Tasmanian Greens have another level of responsibility - maintaining the momentum of their national leadership role. "People look to the Greens for a lead, giving them some hope for the future."

But in practical terms this involves a mountain of work for five individuals with minimal resources. For Milne and her colleagues, the price of commitment is high.

Milne is positive about the environmental commitment shown by the federal Labor government - particularly supporting Hawke’s and Richardson’s statements on Antarctica and Kakadu. She would like to see that commitment to understanding and supporting Australian environmental issues broaden internationally. "You’ve got to grab people’s imagination and reinforce their views. Tasmania’s only the start."
Farewell to the 80s

For many on the left it was the bleak decade. But how did we manage to lose our way? David Burchell ruminates...

It's tempting to think of the 'eighties as the decade of anticlimax. Indeed, for many of those tutored in the wildly optimistic politics of the early 'seventies ('the anti-Vietnam RSL', as Paddy McGuinness would have it), it has seemed a gloomy decade of faded hopes, of defeat and disillusion.

Politically it could be seen as a decade dominated by the newfound 'sexiness' of big business and corporate values, by the startling populism of the radical right, by the host of altered assumptions about polity and economy which goes by the shorthand term 'economic rationalism', and by the defence of many gains long assumed to be permanent. In the socialist world, as has by now become painfully apparent, the decade has seen the eclipse of almost any remaining self-confidence in the traditional socialist vision, and by the defence of many gains long assumed to be permanent. In the socialist world, as has by now become painfully apparent, the decade has seen the eclipse of almost any remaining self-confidence in the traditional socialist vision, and - among the more open leaderships, at least - a weary return to the more humdrum dreams of Western social democracy.

Culturally the great artefacts of the 'eighties have been the rehashed musical emblems of the 'fifties, 'sixties and 'seventies, from Motown to Merseyside and back again. Intellectually, it most characteristic currents have described themselves ubiquitously as Post- this or that, suggesting a loss of identity paralleling that of retro-music and the splintered profusion of 'lifestyles'.

It would be easy to view the decade exclusively in this way - with the foresight of the 'seventies, as it were, rather than the hindsight of the 'nineties. But that would be too easy, too explicit in the tendency only too apparent on the Left to wish that some of the genuine new realities established in the 'eighties would somehow just go away, or to pretend that they'd never happened at all.

Indeed, with hindsight the 'eighties may well come to be seen as a watershed decade in modern life. This is most obvious in the international sphere, where the frozen compromise known as the 'post-war world' for more than forty years now has been dramatically split apart by the rise of Gorbachev and disarmament, by the decline of the USSR and the socialist world, and by the decline of American leadership in the West. We are now in a post-'post-war' world, and it is a measure of our loss of intellectual direction that we have no idea what to call it.

But in the individual nations of the (at least materially) 'advanced' world it has been equally significant. On the one hand it has seen the completion of the vast social transformation of the capitalist democracies over the 1950s-1970s, from societies of mass deprivation to societies where (again, at least material) deprivation and oppression has become the preserve of outcasts and minorities. On the other hand it has seen the embedding of changes in political life in the last few decades: the fall of the old mass movements of the Left, as movements (in the sense that the trade union movement once was); the dissolution of the political significance of 'the working class' as a unitary collective entity; the fragmentation of the subject of the old socialist vision into the much more complex set of identities by which people nowadays make sense of their lives. All of these things were apparent tendencies over the thirty years of postwar history up to 1980: at the end of the decade they can mostly be viewed as accomplished fact.

Even the one guarantor of the traditional socialist vision, the world of 'actually existing socialism', has ceased to provide succour to that myth. Who knows but that there may be more voters of the Left in 1990 in Western Europe than in its Eastern neighbours? Conversely, one sign of the times (at once immensely refreshing and disturbing) is that there are actually fewer subjects off-bounds to the Left in Hungary or Poland today than in many, if not most, parts of the Western socialist movement. Now that the spectre of 'actually existing socialism' has been laid, the last figleaf for the pretence that 'social ownership' + egalitarian rhetoric = the good society has been blown away.

Standing at the vantage point of 1990, the milepost of 1940 conclusively seems an epoch away. To watch 'thirties films on TV now is to watch a different world. Listen to the memories of the generation now in their seventies: the taboos, icons, social stereotypes and expectations of several generations have become unhinged, and all in the course of thirty or so years. Certainly there is no shortage of racism, sexism or reaction in our lives today; and the urge towards egalitarianism may well be
weaker than fifty years ago. Yet the whole complex of assumptions which sustained a rigid and impoverished physical and emotional life for the mass of the population fifty years ago has splintered. Few people of today could be moved to other than mild hilarity by the social and military propaganda associated with the 1940s. Indeed, the foreign policy of the US in the 1980s has been dominated by the realisation that the myth of the nobility of dying for one's country, once the summit of social 'belongingness', has almost entirely vanished in our times. Now the only wars the US can practicably fight are those which solely kill other countries' citizens.

None of these trends have been lessened by the perceived 'conservative backlash' of the 'eighties: on the contrary, they have accelerated. Cynicism about socialism has been paralleled by heightened cynicism about capitalism's claims to moral virtue. Advertising companies, for instance, now genuinely worry that consumers are becoming too sceptical to believe anything told them by advertising methods. And while much excitement has been generated about the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, there has been noticeably little flag-waving for the moral superiority of its erstwhile rival.

Nor have the 'new social issues' nurtured in the fertile climate of the early seventies retreated in the 'eighties - even if the movements associated with them have not always prospered. We are about to enter an election campaign featuring manifestoes based, however opportunistically, around Green issues (Labor) and childcare (the Coalition). What was once the stuff of youth rebellion now nestles in the middle-aged suburbs, as well as the inner-city 'ghettoes'. The spread of 'subcultures' has become another postmodernist playground: rather than delineating 'outsiders', as they did in the Beat and hippie eras, they have splintered to the extent that few sixteen year-olds nowadays actually realise the specific cultural origins of their particular (to use a revived 'sixties' word) 'scene'. Rap, one of the few 'new' musical subcultures of the eighties, is a transparent combination of reggae, funk, heavy metal, even punk, along with an ethos which variously summons up 'sixties idealism, 'seventies hedonism and 'eighties cynicism. The 'vocal minorities' of society, the various 'lifestyle' misfits whom the cultural homogeneity of the 'forties and 'fifties stigmatised as weirdos and oddballs, may today collectively constitute something approaching a majority. Not even Middle Australia is safe...

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The left has made a mess of the 'eighties. Historically it has had a tendency to move in generational waves: the last decades of the nineteenth century sustained the culture of the early twentieth; the 1930s and 1940s sustained left culture, more or less adequately, for the following thirty years. Likewise the rites of the late 'sixties and early 'seventies have dominated much of the twenty years thereafter. But this last has been a less socially cohesive, more fragmented culture, and one associated in the body politic with more 'marginal' causes. And without the myth of the Soviet Union to sustain it, it has been perilously vague on its preferred utopia. Like its predecessors it has slowly exhausted itself: it has seemed steadily less able over the 'eighties to comprehend the shifting mood of the times. Its countercultural roots have been pushed aside by new moralities, new political realities, and the evacuation from the field of politics generally of the transcendental One Big Cause, whichever particular cause that may have been.

Yet, paradoxically, the legacy of the 'seventies Left is still 'ahead of its times'. Only recently has environmental politics become a mass concern, but when it has the effect has been dramatic. And while the feminist movement itself may not have prospered in the 'eighties, its focus on the fabric of women's personal lives has been echoed by the increasing self-confidence and assertiveness of a new generation of girls and young women. Indeed, the
very fabric of political life itself has shifted from parties and towards movements, as the Left predicted. Yet the Left has not prospered from its foresight. And as a result it has become a culture more than ever out of sympathy with its times, and with little empathy for the worldview of young people outside its own ranks.

Why is this? One potent symbol of the 'eighties is the word 'yuppie' - a word originally coined in the early years of the decade in the US to describe the explosion of the professions and the ranks of tertiary educated from the 'seventies. In fact in this original, broader meaning it probably covers most of the 'seventies Left itself. Yet the word was very quickly taken up by journalists and others as a generalised swear-word against people ultimately very similar to themselves. And in the latter part of the decade it has been further reduced to a term of abuse directed against the profitiers of the decade - the young money men, stockbrokers and ad quacks who've acquired their BMWs before the age of twenty five. The key to this evolution of the word 'yuppie' is that it was used overwhelmingly by people who fitted its original description. It was a self-distancing device. Thirtysomething Lefties in tastefully designed homes with all the contemporary knick knacks could use the word to keep a distance between themselves and the despised 'new materialism', the fruits of which they were very likely enjoying. This urge to put oneself somehow 'outside' the social and material trends of the day was one telltale sign of the Left's loss of grip on the tenor of the times.

Another was attitudes towards the ALP, and particularly the federal government. Who has not at least once succumbed to the thought 'They're all the same as each other'? In a decade when Hawke and Keating have jetisoned much of the baggage of traditional social democracy even before it was really ingrained in our political culture, such instincts are entirely understandable.

At the same time, of course, the rise of the radical right has meant that in reality there is actually more of a distance now between the major parties on many questions than in the mid-'fifties, when a gentle middle of the road policy consensus largely reigned in practice, whatever the rhetoric. Hand in hand with this has gone a spurious nostalgia for the 'traditional' values of the ALP, selectively remembered: not patriarchalism and the White Australia policy, but a rose-tinted vision of social justice, it seems. And by a mental sleight of hand we've often enacted a spurious self-alignment with the discontented blue-collar voters of suburbia, as if our shopping lists of social justice and social planning have somehow miraculously matched theirs of mortgage payments and law-and-order fears. The ALP in itself has been treated as the problem, rather than the wider political culture of matriarchy and suburban xenophobia which has traditionally shaped it and guided its values. The other, pragmatic, trend on the left has basically buckled down to take what it can get from the Hawke years, often without too much wider analysis. The result has been, in the first case, impotent outrage and, in the second, an atrophy of vision.

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It's never easy to try to trace the trends of a decade ahead of its time. For a start, the shape of parliamentary politics in Australia will obviously be crucially affected by the result of the election in February or March: a win for the Coalition could well give them a decade in which to take social and industrial policy by the throat. But if we're looking for signals we could do a lot worse (for the first time in decades) than look East. The dramatic events there have more to say about our own visions than we may care to admit.

In the first place it is becoming increasingly clear that the old gulf between socialism and social democracy has finally been swallowed up. We might not find the face of contemporary Western social democracy to our liking, but we can no longer pretend that we inhabit a separate world. The recent events in Hungary have now made this inescapable. From here on the achievements of socialism will always have to be viewed as incremental increases on the old legacy of social democracy. This does not obviate the pressing need for a wider and more human vision than that of parliamentary parties of the centre-left, but it does mean that the policies aimed to fulfill that vision will have to be translatable into a common language of political debate. Socialism as the moment of the magic wand -when problems such as balance of payments, tax trade-offs, even wage restraint are to magically disappear - has passed forever.

Again, it is now blindingly apparent from the voices of Eastern Europe that any social transformation, however rapid or slow, must be measured first and foremost by its effect on civil society. It is no longer enough to talk airily of 'dramatically extending democracy', 'increasing workers control' and all the rest as if such things could ever be enacted by legislation alone. The problems of the socialist world at present are very largely those of the nineteenth century dream of rational progress: the dream of creating an orderly world.

Socialists will never make people feel free: as conservatives (for once rightly) argue, that kind of experienced freedom is largely a negative effect of the absence of control. Socialism of the old style can engineer technical miracles, can generate economic growth (for a while at least) at high levels, can increase social services (up to a point). But it suffers badly in comparison with the wealthier societies which, however unequal and unjust their social mechanisms, give people a felt sense of autonomy in their daily lives. The economist Geoff Hodgson once spoke of the 'messiness principle' in economic organisation: meaning that the economic building blocks of society should not be designed according to some pre-arranged 'public', 'private', 'co-operative', etc, proportions. We need a similar 'messiness principle' in our visions of civil society.

These are all questions which find echoes in the forms and styles adopted by the Western Left, or at least parts of it, since the 'seventies. What is chastening is that we have really got no further down that road in the last decade - at least partly because of our unease with the rites and rituals of our own civil society, particularly as it has exhibited itself in the 'eighties. Meanwhile some of our own questions are being answered for us at present in the socialist world - and the answers are often bleak. The grand task for the Left in the 'nineties is perhaps to conceive of a socialism so liberal, in the best sense of the word, that even Eastern Europeans would want it.
The October stockmarket plunge marked the end of the era of the highly-geared corporate tycoon. The debt bubble of the 'eighties has finally burst. But what does this mean for our economy in the 'nineties? Will we still be paying the price for the binge? Michael Gill speculates...

It became fashionable not long after October 1987 for business people to observe that a smart investor was one who looked at the covers of business magazines and struck from their list anyone who appeared. Heroes who were widely sought for TV interviews, fashionable parties or magazine examples of conspicuous wealth have become much less magnetic.

There was a share market boom and a takeover fever that would match anything experienced in nineteenth century gold rushes. Simple things were forgotten, like the lesson of Icarus. And now some of those who flew too high have crashed to earth. As a consequence, we have to put up with arguments about our 'tall poppy syndrome'. We have some of those who cheered loudest making sickly-sweet confessions about their culpability. Of course, there are also those who, in the manner of Madame Defarge, want to see people's tribunals string up one or two of the fallen.

Amid all this colour and movement, the question is whether anything serious has happened. I think it has. But it is not my argument that we should try to affect events. Rather, it is to say that there are bigger fish to fry.

The serious thing that has happened is that too many people have been seduced by notions of power. And too few have seen their responsibilities. Good, strong people have suffered for their virtues while weak, ignorant people have prospered. The weakness of those people is their illusions of both power and infallibility. Their ignorance, largely, is reflected in their often gross misunderstanding of who is to blame. And their lasting contribution is a serious distortion of values - an ethos of fantasy.

My argument is that it is up to responsible people in the community to define sensible standards and then to be active in enforcing accountability. Now, you will say that this is a motherhood argument. So I'll provide an example.

In the period of frenzy and indiscipline in share markets, West Australia had a party. And one of the principal hosts was the WA government. Now it appears that the state has lost hundreds of millions of dollars. At the same time, citizens of WA had been waiting more than a decade for someone in authority to accept responsibility for the injuries caused by asbestos mining at Wittenoom. The government steadfastly refused to be party to any thought of compensation or support.

To anyone that came in contact with the fact and the ethos of the Burke administration in that time, it appeared very much as though the fundamentals of the public purpose were turned on their head. Ministers and public servants acted and sounded like 'entrepreneurs'. And many of the riskier entrepreneurs made noises like Medicis. Everyone, it seemed, was living out a sort of fantasy. And while St. George's Terrace resembled a hothouse experiment in state corporatism, the view from other parts of the state was far less uplifting.

The very depressing impression left from a conversation with one of those suffering the Wittenoom disease is of an affliction worse than impotence. These people, who died within months of diagnosis and in excruciating pain, found that no one would take responsibility. The company which employed them, the state and its workers' compensation agency, and the courts, all refused to accept evidence of culpability. In the end, many of the victims seem afflicted with the possibility that they might be responsible. That, to me, was the worst of it.

As it happened, other courts found
very definitely that the company and its associates were negligent. Plain evidence also emerged that this was known both to the company and its insurer. As well, the state government could have been ignorant of this only through a deliberate choice.

This, to me, is a clear example of where public standards and accountability went west. For example, it is a fact that the WA State Government Insurance Commission was created originally for the very reason that private insurers would not accept many risks in covering industrial illness and accident. Yet, in the 1980s, the SGIC was active in financing many a bizarre scheme cooked up in Laurie Connell’s Rothwells, Robert Holmes a’Court’s Bell Group and Alan Bond’s Bond Corporation. But the SGIC could not find a priority in the position of citizens whose needs ought to have been its first concern.

Now, the important point is that this sort of activity was not confined to WA, though the West Australians certainly provided some of the extreme examples. Broadly, what appears to have happened is that aggressive, virtually
revolutionary and certainly fundamental patterns of behaviour have been thrown up by the performance cult of the 1980s.

The performance cult was the nonsense that allowed Robert Holmes a Court to challenge BHP. His profits were a hall of mirrors. Very attractive, but not substantial. BHP’s were built to dissolve the commitment of banks against the debt that was used to fund companies. A large part of the reason for all this having happened is that the corporate heroes were largely unquestioned. Popular, even. What is important is the shape of things.

The problem we have is that corporations which employ people, invest for future employment and generally supply goods to Australians have been made subservient to finance markets. It ought to be the other way around. That result has also left the nation’s economic policies burdened with debt costs that will create social and political pressures for some time into the future. The third major result is that the capacity to make progress socially and economically has been limited by the power delivered into a few hands.

!["TV went through the binge too. And now the cuts have begun."

The best example of that third point is the remarkable power handed to Rupert Murdoch. Plenty has already been said and more, no doubt, will be said in the future about the effect of News Corporation’s dominance of media in this country. But, as far as this is an issue about economics, one vital question is about the creativity of that organisation.

One industry that ought to be healthy and diverse is media and information. Opportunities are growing faster in that than in most. And there are no better prospects for Australians than in becoming active in the information services of this region. So what did we do? We allowed the situation where one company has distribution of print media in Australia by the throat. A company that, most likely, could not have a single TV licence. And, for other reasons, the major competitor was at the same time drawn into the swamp of debt. As a result, the prospects for that industry growing into a wider role of economic benefit are rotten.

TV went through the binge too. And now the cuts have begun.

In retailing, mergers were allowed that must limit competition. The effects of that will bear both on consumers and on suppliers. Coles-Myer is now massively dominant in many areas of basic retailing. That must affect the prices people pay. But it also affects the diversity of suppliers for everything from food to textiles, simply because of the power of its buying. The simple fact that Coles-Myer has moved its major buying functions back to Melbourne means necessarily that potential suppliers in other places are disadvantaged.

In transport, TNT has obtained substantial benefit from the fact that Ansett has been allowed to merge with East West. TNT’s competitors, Mayne Nickless and Brambles, cannot match that advantage. And the possibility that Ansett might be given the right to compete with Qantas as a result of the recent fracas is a threat to make TNT unchallenged as the dominant force in transport within and beyond Australia’s borders.

So, broadly, one result of the recent dramas is that important industries are now dominated by a few. Some, such as those I’ve mentioned, seem crucial in a country with the distances and population of Australia. And the argument, basically, is not that they necessarily are a problem in themselves. Rather, that nothing, not a thing, has been done to ensure that they don’t stop others from producing things.

Back to the question of companies becoming subservient to financiers. The point is that debt is a heavy burden on company finances. All the indicators make that clear. What’s important about the changed relationship is that it should be the other way around. But, in many cases, companies are doing things to suit financiers. The end result is that managers see their role as weigh stations for cash: the cash flow comes in, then goes out to keep investors happy. And the trouble with that is that the investment that’s essential to keep real businesses growing and growing has become secondary. Which is not to say that banks like to run other companies. They don’t. Especially if they’re in bankruptcy. This broad trend is one reason that Japanese investors keep dumping on Wall Street. Because these sorts of business practices are the opposite of their ethos.

The other question, about the burden we face in the future, is undefined. People like John Elliott argue that it’s all OK: if a company has borrowed too much, then its bankers will get stiffed. Which sounds fine, except that it’s not true. Debt repayments are a heavy drag on our balance of payments and those
Many entrants would lose their shirts. But there was nothing said or done that would inhibit practices which led to losses of mammoth proportions in Rothschilds, Spedley and Tricontinental.

The reason for all this, I think, is the popularity of the powerful image. But it is also true that governments recently have been inclined to show discomfitting assuredness in the worth of what are largely fringe dwellers in terms of Australia's economic interests. Certainly the trend was apparent overseas as well. But Australia seems more closely attached to the tar baby than most.

The truth is that not much can be done to set back the clock. We have used up a lot of Australia's credit. And the pressures will almost certainly build. But if the community is to accept continuing tightness and lower consumption, then a few things ought first to be got straight. And the first is that the majority did not create this mess. Most people do not sit at home thinking about their next burst of imported consumption.

Some suggestions. First, extend capital gains tax to private housing. Politicians hate the idea because it's hard to sell. But it will reduce the heat caused in domestic housing markets, and that will release real capital for better purposes. (As well as relieving housing costs.) Second, take a good look at the tax, legal, accounting and other means of regulation which allow people who take massive risks to disguise them as genius.

Finally, it would be nice if government imposed some political discipline on itself by imposing much tougher measures of accountability for its policy objectives. In simple terms, we should know more about what they aim to do. Because, in that context, it's no good saying simply that they want "level playing fields" or some such. Sure, they can try. But the truth is that some players are Rod Lavers and others are like rugby packs - and our playing fields have been without a referee. Much less, we have often not even known the rules.

Because the resources used traditionally have been dissipated - we can't afford subsidies and can't make tariffs and so on work any more - the means to go forward is to separate those who create wealth in the wider sense from those who don't. And one way to do that without messin' things up even more is to make people show plainly what they're doing, what the results are, and take the share of resources that their real performances deserve.

Australia is part of a process that reflects a sea change in the structure and patterns of international finance. Deregulation of finance was the inevitable result of the global characteristics that now dominate flows of money. So far, the system has not sort itself out in a way that would see Japanese surpluses go where they should - back into growth rather than speculation. And part of that problem is that governments have not fully accepted the transition. We, for example, commonly accept that finance markets will make the best long run choices. The rhetoric does not allow for the need to make policy signals that show the way. Rather, we retain assumptions about government policy that ignore the random effects of very liquid international capital markets.

So, when the fashion is driven by short-term profits and high cost debt, we allow the underlying structure of corporations to be undermined. Sooner, rather than later, these pillars of sand will be washed away by a wave of losses."

"Sooner, rather than later, these pillars of sand will be washed away by a wave of losses."

MICHAEL GILL was the editor of Business Daily. He's now a reporter on Channel Nine's 'Business Sunday' in Melbourne.
Federal Labor is strident in defence of its social justice record. Yet it’s increasingly reduced to targeting a shrinking cake ever more keenly. The child poverty debate highlights the government’s dilemma. Adam Farrar reports.

When Bob Hawke made his 1987 election promise that, by 1990, no Australian child need live in poverty he threw into relief all the paradoxes of Labor’s social justice agenda over six years of government.

Labor has been struggling between two apparently opposed pressures. On the one hand, it has been increasingly faced with the need to prove that its time in government has produced real progress on Labor’s tradition goal of greater equity. In Social Security Minister Brian Howe’s case this has been a genuine desire to entrench major reforms in the structure of social security. On the other hand, it faces all the constraints of its attempt to restructure Australia’s stagnant industries and economy. The contradiction between these opposing pressures will be the key to social justice debate in the nineties.

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The Family Package which was finalised on July 1 this year was Labor’s new-found concern with social justice. As Labor has struggled to remind supporters and electors of its ‘traditional’ credentials, ‘social justice’ has become an ever more frequently heard phrase on politicians’ lips. But, at the same time, it has taken on a very specific meaning. Rather than understanding fairness to mean that no one should be disadvantaged because of their circumstances (an understanding which entails a high commitment to social responsibility), Labor’s social justice has come to mean no more than that, once as much responsibility as possible has been loaded back onto individuals, then no one should live in poverty because of their circumstances. Hence, the child poverty pledge.

This ‘residual’ notion of a government’s (or society’s) responsibilities is nothing new. But what may be new is its ability to meet even the limited goals of social democracy as we have known it in Australia for most of this century. And this brings us to Labor’s other constraint: the enormous social and economic changes which Australia has undergone in the last couple of decades.

Even if we ignore the furphy of Hawke’s exact wording of the Child Poverty Promise, which has exercised the media recently (in a typical Hawke rhetorical overstatement he actually said, “no child will be living in poverty”, although the notes to his speech made it absolutely clear that he meant they will have no financial need to live in poverty), the objective he set Labor was as grand as any in the social democratic tradition over the past fifty years.

It was as grand as the Curtin/Chifley objective of full employment or the...
Whitlam plan to eliminate aged poverty. But in some crucial ways it is also very different from these other two.

The full employment objective could be met because the patterns of employment participation were still largely limited to single people and male ‘breadwinners’. Safe behind Australia’s high tariff wall, income generated by our primary exports was quite enough to generate domestic employment for this group in local manufacturing industries. Security from poverty was guaranteed (as far as anyone cared to see), by the income of these breadwinners, and by the support provided by women in post-war families.

Whitlam’s attack on aged poverty came at the end of this long period of comfortable security. But even so it was sustained by some of its benefits. The rediscovery of poverty in the early 1970s pointed up one weakness of the post-war solution to poverty and unemployment. This was that, for a large number of people, the end of their working life removed one of the major planks of post-war security. And the safety net of public pensions was far too meagre to make up the gap. Whitlam responded with a massive injection of funds for pensions and the pledge to ensure that the pensions would be 25% of average weekly earnings. With that, Brian Howe is fond of pointing out, the problem of aged poverty again disappeared from public view.

Howe is particularly keen to compare the present Labor government’s attack on child poverty with the Whitlam success; and, indeed, the strategy is almost identical. Like Whitlam, they have dramatically increased income support for children through the Family Allowance Supplement. And, like Whitlam, they have established (and reached) benchmarks for this support - 15% of the married pension for younger children and 20% for older children. But there the similarity ends. It ends because the scaffold which supported both Chifley’s and Whitlam’s grand goals has gone forever.

Its first plank was the structure of the Australian labour market which provided jobs in protected industries on the back of primary exports. Its second was the distribution of income through the family to the more than half the population who did not participate in the paid labour force. And its third was the support - personal services provided by women, and material possessions such as housing - built up within the family. Even Whitlam’s attack on aged poverty built its successes on the housing and other security built up by older people throughout 30 years of post-war employment.

We now face a very different picture. With tariff barriers gone and the economy unable to generate the export income needed to overcome the balance of payments crisis, the Australian labour market has been transformed. Secure, well-paid jobs in manufacturing industries have shrunk, part-time work has boomed, and access to jobs has been restricted to ‘prime age’ workers, locking out both younger and older workers and all those with less access to the new skills required.

At the same time, the patterns of dependence have also changed dramatically. Since 1971, those who received their income through the family have fallen from 47% of the population to around 30%. While the amount of work available per person in Australia has grown by 10% since Labor came to power at the end of the recession, it is still 3% lower than it was 20 years ago. And this has to be spread between more
workers due to the growth of part-time work - up from 5.3% of the population to 9.4% in the last 15 years. As well as more people seeking work, the proportion of the population dependent on social security has grown from one in ten to one in four.

The effect of these changes has been to undermine dramatically the ability of the government to remove poverty by throwing more money at it. First, access to financial security through the labour market has been greatly reduced. Since far less of the life cycle is spent in work, and since the work is not only more thinly, but also less evenly, distributed with some households having two wages and others depending on one or a part-time wage, many people’s ability to build up the personal resources which provide security has been greatly reduced. Perhaps even more important, many more people no longer have access to the unpaid support of a dependent spouse.

For families with children, all this means that poverty has a new dimension. Lack of childcare, affordable housing, support during illness and secure access to the labour market all loom as large as income support. And without them it is a travesty to talk of removing the need to live in poverty.

Because of this the Prime Minister’s promise has provoked a Child Poverty Campaign around Australia by the Councils of Social Service and the Brotherhood of St Laurence to raise public awareness of the real nature of child poverty and to add to the package all those measures lacking at the federal, state, local and community level. But even in terms of the financial assistance provided by the Family Package, it is now possible that child poverty has not been overcome. Some preliminary research seems to indicate that the proportion of children living below the poverty line will only be cut from 20% to 15% - although, without it, by now the proportion would have risen to 22%.

Again this goes to the heart of the government’s understanding of poverty. Drawing on studies around the world, the cost of children has set its benchmarks at 15% of the married pension rate (20% for older children). This has the advantage of ensuring that the benchmarks will increase as the pension is indexed. It has the disadvantage of providing only the same meagre level of support as offered to older people by the pension. And without the extra security of such things as home ownership or lifetime savings, that level is itself below the poverty line.

But, just as important, these benchmarks ignore one of the most important aspects of the Henderson poverty line: that it is set relative to average household disposable income - in other words, that it measures relative equality and inequality, not some absolute minimum for survival. This means that as social inequality increases - as the incomes of those at the top end increase faster than those at the bottom - the proportion of the population in poverty increases. This growing inequality is the reason that, despite achieving the benchmarks, child poverty is far from eliminated. Not surprisingly, this is not a message the government wants to hear and, as a result, ministers such as Senator Peter Walsh have turned their attacks on the poverty line itself.

This is yet another sign of the changed understanding of social justice within the government. Of course, social justice is a vital political concept for those who wish to increase social responsibility and reduce inequality. The welfare sector’s current Child Poverty Campaign can be seen as the claim that the living standards of Australian children must be viewed as a matter of social justice, not poverty narrowly defined. But it also means that a struggle over the understanding of social justice itself is now on the agenda for the “nineties.

Labor sought to build a viable industrial base for the Australian economy (to replace our previous dependence on highly vulnerable primary exports) by wholesale deregulation. Ever since, it has found itself trapped between a growing national debt (fuelled in large part by greater attractiveness of debt and corporate raiding over equity and productive investment), and the fickle perceptions of the international money markets. This has had the twin effect of increasing ‘poverty traps’ (which place prohibitive costs on individuals attempting to enter the workforce) and, in the case of services, it redistributes the cost within particular areas of need (aged, disabled, working parents and so on) rather than sharing it among the community as a whole.

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As well, Labor has much more tightly targeted both income support and subsidised services only to the most needy. Its rhetoric has been an attack on ‘middle class welfare’. Its method has been increased means testing and user pays. This has had the twin effect of increasing ‘poverty traps’ (which place prohibitive costs on individuals attempting to enter the workforce) and, in the case of services, it redistributes the cost within particular areas of need (aged, disabled, working parents and so on) rather than sharing it among the community as a whole.

This is the new Labor version of social justice. Not surprisingly, it has turned our attention away from broader issues of inequality back onto a far narrower concern with poverty. The bitter irony is that, as the attempt to eliminate child poverty has shown, the very pressures which have provoked this approach will make any real attack on poverty less susceptible to such an approach in the ‘nineties than ever before.
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Stemming The Tide

It's official: the union movement is in crisis. By the end of the 1990s it could be reduced to a quarter of the workforce. But it's easier to diagnose the malaise than to suggest cures. The Clothing and Allied Trades Union, and secretary Anna Booth, have become well-known for innovative forms of unionism. ALR asked them for their views on the crisis.

Involved in the discussion were: Anna Booth, federal secretary of CATU; Sonia Laverty, resources officer for the CATU federal office; and Sue McCreadie, national economic research officer for the TCF unions. They were interviewed for ALR by David Burchell.

Can I start by asking you about the recent ACTU Congress. The outstanding feature of that Congress for me was Bill Kelty's gloomy forebodings about the future of the union movement. A lot of things which, if they had been said not very long ago by a magazine like ALR would have been considered rather controversial, now seem to be accepted wisdom in the ACTU. The ACTU-endorsed booklet Can Unions Survive?, puts the case at its bleakest. By the year 2000, it says, on current trends the union movement will cover less than a quarter of the workforce, the centralised wage-fixing system will have collapsed and we'll have enterprise bargaining. But what I found most striking about Can Union Survive? was that, while it identified the problems very accurately, it didn't seem to go any further...

ANNA: Yes, I think that's right. It's got a quite complex analysis of the cause of the union movement's problems. But at the same time it's got a very one-dimensional approach to the solutions. Its main answer seems to be amalgamations, whereas I'd argue that's just one element of a comprehensive range of things which have to be looked at. And we have to recognise that there are different solutions for different areas.

SUE: Some people portray amalgamations as a kind of cure-all to our problems. But many union members feel that in amalgamations they're losing something in their relation to their union. We have to face the fact that unions can actually become more removed from their members through amalgamations.

SONIA: In many cases amalgamation proposals have been dragging on for years, because many union memberships are understandably cautious about the idea. Often they oppose amalgamation for reasons which are very important to them. They want their own union; they have a sense of belonging to it. And they are often worried about being swallowed up by another union and losing their identity.

ANNA: I'm all in favour of amalgamations as a solution to various problems of under-resourcing for unions in particular industries. But it's not always the only solution, especially where the membership feels particularly attached to their own union. In many cases perhaps the same can be achieved by networks of unions sharing resources, rather than by putting all our eggs in the amalgamations basket.

So what are some of the other solutions to the problems of membership decline?

ANNA: To some extent they vary from industry to industry. The biggest
area of employment growth in the economy is the service sector, an area which even before the rapid increases in employment of the last few years was not well-unionised. Thus even if unionisation rates in the service sector held up, the union movement as a whole would still be going backwards. Conversely, the areas with historically high levels of unionisation, such as the manufacturing sector and the public sector, are shrinking. Those are the areas where unions have historically achieved closed shops and strong preference clauses with employers, and where they've had a high profile in the workplace. But they're now unionising a shrinking base. These are trends which would exist even if the union movement had no other problems. But the fact is that the movement is also having difficulty in generating support across a whole range of occupations and industries, and the shifts in the workforce as a whole simply serve to exacerbate that.

A lot of people refer to unions as having an 'image problem'.

SONIA: A while ago I visited a number of high schools in Sydney's inner west which mostly cater to kids from non-English speaking backgrounds. There was a lot of real anti-union feeling among those kids. Often it was a response to the bad times their parents had experienced when they'd been on strike and there was no money coming in. The strongest impression those kids had of unions was that they expect a lot from you, but they don't do much for you. And of course they cause you hassles - like being without pay for instance. As we know, when unions are out on strike it's often the case that they don't articulate the reasons adequately to the media. Nor, for that matter, do they often articulate the reasons adequately to their members.

Migrant workers in particular often find the experience of being on strike alienating. They don't understand the philosophical position occupied by unions and the left generally: the rationale behind the welfare state - inasmuch as we have one for instance. And we often don't explain to them why we want their union membership. So migrant people in particular often only see the down side, not the up side. They tend to take for granted four week's annual leave, sick leave and so on - indeed, they often think they're given by the government. The biggest problem for unions in this country is that we've lost the ability to recruit, to organise, and to sell ourselves - to explain what we're on about in a realistic kind of way.

ANNA: Some of the solutions to these problems are in essence very simple. They about doing more of what the best of us do, and better. Resources are important. If you are going to communicate better, you should be doing so not only at the time of disputes. Every union organiser visiting workplaces should consciously stress the gains that have been made by that union and the unions generally over the years.

If you've got a branch full of organisers whose job it is to be out on the road every day, with the exception of the odd executive meeting, it requires real effort to ensure that they're regularly brought up to date on some of the quite complex issues we have to deal with in a union like this - on the relative of merits of structural efficiency, broad-banding, minimum rate adjustments and so on, just to cite the example of the recent wage decision - so that these sorts of things can be communicated to the workers. And this means developing the skills to be able to communicate these kinds of issues in ordinary language, as well as the back-up material to illustrate them. In our case, that means providing regular information about these issues in ten to fourteen languages.

Add all that up, and you've got a major resource problem. There just aren't enough organisers, they're not skilled enough in communicating in English and other languages, and they may not have the information that they need.

SONIA: Because the trade union agenda has become much more compli-
cated, it's probably unrealistic to think we're going to get more organisers on the ground. Resources will remain relatively constant, or may even diminish, if the membership continues to fall. This puts much more weight on the old shopfloor network to educate and inform members.

There are other organisational problems, too, which are an even greater obstacle in the service sector. When you work in places like hospitals on a weekend basis, for instance, you never see the union rep, and you don't know who to contact in the union, so you have to take it on in your own time. Even if you make a big leap and do that, it's still very difficult to communicate any of the problems with the union. You always have to do everything yourself: the only sort of back-up you get is over the telephone. This makes me wonder how much are unions facing up to the challenge of organising people who work in different types of jobs from the classical manufacturing model. In the service sector people often work around the clock; they're not organised in large workplaces; they're often outside the major cities. Take the tourism industry, for instance: quite probably all the relevant union offices in Queensland are in Brisbane. Have they thought to put any, for instance, on the Gold Coast? The same queries apply to shiftwork: this raises major problems in servicing the membership which unions will have to face. Again, there are a lot of areas where people mostly work from home - computers, some clerical jobs and so on. As far as I'm aware, we're the only union that's acknowledged we've got home workers. It's a difficult issue which many unions aren't prepared to face up to.

ANNA: It's clear that workplace reps are going to have to play a much larger role in individual worker issues, if organisers are to be freed from constantly fighting bushfires, so they can develop long-range campaigns.

SONIA: But that's still only the start of the problem. Even if you get together a good network of shopfloor delegates, you have to ensure that their experiences of union life are positive ones. We have to deal with the question: how can you run meetings which are interesting and meaningful, where everyone gets a chance to speak, and where everyone's views are represented? For many women, getting onto their union executive is only the first battle. They don't get listened to, they never get to speak, everything's too structured, they don't know the rules and nobody helps them to understand them. Here we are talking about getting young people into unions. But if you actually did get them along to some union meetings, often they'd be out the door in ten minutes...

ANNA: It would seem worse than school!

SUE: A lot of women do find it very alienating. They find that the men are always pulling stunts: using meeting procedure to quash discussion, stacking votes and the like. Now, those women may be as good at pulling those kinds of stunts as the men, but when they look at how those kinds of meetings work, and the kinds of human relations involved, they often ask themselves: is it really worth it? And often they simply walk away.

This discussion raises an issue which I've often heard voiced. A lot of people who fundamentally oppose the whole direction unionism has taken over the 'eighties - often for reasons they're not able to clearly articulate - commonly link that direction to what they see as the unions' reduced presence on the shopfloor. They argue that the fact that the unions have taken on a far greater strategic role, which entails them taking on far more complex issues than they used to, has been the direct cause of this alleged reduced presence on the shopfloor. In other words, they're saying that ultimately strategic unionism and all that goes with it is simply a process of bureaucratisation.

SUE: Opponents of strategic unionism always think of it as a top-heavy thing: to them it's all about the ACTU negotiating with the government somewhere behind closed doors, while the membership's left out in the cold. But to me strategic unionism fundamentally means going beyond the old agenda of wages and conditions - not just at the national level, but also at the shopfloor level. And that's precisely how the unions can regenerate their support at the workplace level: by raising questions such as consultative committees, industrial democracy, unions' and workers' access to companies' investment plans and training plans, and so on. That will immeasurably broaden the range of issues on which unions can make themselves relevant to their members' lives. Obviously organisers can't take all that burden on themselves, because their won't be any extra organisers. So it's all about empowering people on the shopfloor, and getting them involved in those structures.

That raises another conundrum. A lot of the people who've been least well catered for in unions in the past, and who work in areas the ACTU has now identified as those where unions need to lift their game - married migrant women with kids, for instance - are those who have the fewest human resources in their own lives to be easily enabled.

SUE: I think we've tried to address that in this union. A lot of workers get quite frightened by the thought that not only will they have their job, but they may also be on consultative committees, and have to ask their boss to see the company accounts, and do other, often quite terrifying, things. They think to themselves: I haven't got the time; there are the kids to think of; I might lose my job... That's why the question of the legitimisation of unions is so important.

ANNA: But that's only a matter of the way you handle the big issues. I can think of three ways we could have handled the TCF Industries Plan.

First, we could have opted out. Second, we could have simply formulated a position with a few economists; trooped off to Canberra, had meetings with the government and got the best deal we could get; and had this conveyed to the workers through the national media and by bosses on the shopfloor. Or we could do what we actually did. We formulated a simple seven-point strategy and sought the approval of the workers for it.

This showed the government that it wasn't just the creation of a few union bureaucrats, and it also meant that the workers understood and identified with the plan.

Then, when the TCF plan was finally
announced, it didn’t come as a great surprise to them. We also took the women onto the streets in support of our plan, and that showed them that direct action can have positive results. I draw from that a theoretical conclusion: positive direct action leads to more confidence in positive direct action. I’d qualify that immediately, however, by saying that the worst possible thing you can do is to have workers on strike for weeks without pay, and then lose. You’ll never get them out again.

If I may summon up our critic of strategic unionism again, I can see them - probably him - saying at this point something like this: ah, but all of those mechanisms which have been set up in the last six years just undermine the ability of workers to discover their true consciousness as workers, in that very way, through the wage struggle. You hear that sort of thing quite a lot, don’t you?

SONIA: I’ve heard it often. Usually it’s just a good excuse for sitting back and doing nothing. And at the same time that kind of person sits there telling us that the reason for struggle’s gone there are an enormous range of new issues just waiting to be picked up. We mightn’t have to get out there on wages, but instead we’re out there on health and safety, on maternity leave, or any one of a number of things.

Out in the marketplace how should the unions go about getting themselves good publicity? I’m thinking here particularly of the current TV ads for the ACTU Minimum Wage campaign. Now, those ads were done with the best of intentions. And it’s certainly a good thing that the ACTU is trying to reach out like that to the general public. But what struck me was the disparity between the arguments of the ACTU about who they’re not successfully reaching out to at present, and the style and content of the ad.

On the one hand we’re arguing that the unions are seen as trapped in the past, and as not able to service new and different parts of the workforce. But then the ads themselves seemed to summon up all the images of the past, and to say very little about the future.

ANNA: It’s always going to be difficult for something like the ACTU to advertise successfully on TV. To start with, most TV advertising works by repetition, and yet it’s so tremendously expensive. The ‘Do the Right Thing’ campaign, for instance, combined with a heightened environmental consciousness, has in fact stopped a lot of people from throwing scraps of rubbish on the ground. But it’s been on TV every night for ten years. And this ACTU ad campaign ran for three weeks. So there’s not a big chance that those ads are going to alter people’s perceptions of trade unionism. What they might do is push more unions into communicating better to the general public the positive things they’re doing. I think CATU has done a reasonable job on that score. And we’ve in fact got very good treatment from the media. When you communicate with the media in a positive way, even in the haphazard way we do, you get a very good response. Some people are almost a lost cause - A Current Affair, for instance. But the ABC and the industrial news reporters actually look for positive things, and they’ll give you fair treatment if you give them half a chance.

SONIA: I wonder whether in the ACTU and the local labor councils they shouldn’t attempt to be a bit more cosmic in their public comments, to take on issues outside the narrow industrial field. Take Fred Nile’s demonstration in Sydney recently, for instance: a demonstration deliberately targeted against a particular community, actually in that community. It’s something that everyone should be outraged by as citizens, and perhaps the unions should reflect that. The unions could become more of a movement of people who have something to say about principles and morality, about the kind of society we want to have, the priorities we think are important - and fit into that the things that affect people’s lives like their working conditions. It’s not easy to do, but it’s not impossible. You could get a reputation for making comments on a whole range of issues - often controversial ones. And that way young people in particular would start to feel that the unions have something to say on issues that they can understand and have an opinion on.
A Brave New World?

Bill Kelty’s grand vision to reverse the shrinking fortunes of Australian unionism is well-documented. The question now is whether the trade union movement is capable of rejuvenation, or whether, like much of its officialdom, it is reclining in its twilight years.

The survival clock is ticking, with the rate of unionisation down to 42%, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This represents a fall of 17% since 1954, with an accelerated crash of nine percentage points during the life of the Hawke government. The ACTU itself believes the level of unionism is now less than 40%, and the doomsayers have predicted a twenty-five percent rate of unionisation by the year 2000 if the decline is not arrested.

The August ACTU Congress was the forum to relaunch the revival strategy in earnest, after a response to the 1987 *Future Strategies* document which Kelty sarcastically described as ‘a big yawn from the union movement’. An arresting publication, *Can Unions Survive?*, was distributed to Congress this year by the BWIU’s ACT secretary Peter Berry to document the crisis. It charts the collapse of unionism’s traditional manufacturing base, the boom in the service sector, and the woeful performance of unions in all growth sectors of the economy.

But curiously, and despite the statistical omens and the gloomy outlook, the Congress went off with more of a whimper than a bang. Fiery speeches by secretary Kelty and solid support from the ACTU’s left/right leadership group failed to move the masses to more than an orderly response. If there was a shuffling of feet it seemed more in response to the hard seats and the gloomy surroundings of the Sydney Town Hall than a rippling of fear and interest.

With not a word from those, such as John Halfpenny, who had expressed opposition to the strategy outside in the corridors, and only a modicum of debate, the ACTU proposals to reshape unions into industry blocs through membership trading and amalgamations and to dramatically lift services to members, were easily carried. But it was a weary audience, and observers casting an eye over the wall-to-wall sea of ageing and mostly male trade union officials could be forgiven for asking if this were really the team to build the brave new world, to recruit the young, the women, the part-timers and the professionals.

The Congress theme, ‘Taking Trade Unionism into the 1990s’, rests on Kelty’s futuristic and ambitious agenda. The chances of it succeeding seem slim unless there is dramatic change inside the unions themselves within one or two years.

The union movement faces a conundrum. On the one hand the ACTU intends to push and provoke, to wheedle and coax the unions to reform, much as
it has taken them into the Rubik’s Cube of complex wage systems since 1987.

The unions will be confronted with propositions for internal restructuring, to change the way their own officials operate, to increase subscriptions and offer new services to members, and to introduce supportive provisions for female employees with children. Perhaps most importantly, there will be pressure on the trade union seniority system which has given the union movement a top layer of ageing senior officials which could remain in place for at least another half dozen years - perhaps the time span which will make or break the strategy.

But if the ACTU pushes too hard, it will face a backlash. Long terms in senior posts and appointments to the ACTU executive are regarded as sacrosanct at the end of long union careers: the young must bide their time.

If the revitalisation is not underway within a few short years, there is little chance of a turnaround. But there are many middle managers in the union movement who use their positions for personal political power. These will not be the movers and shakers of the new era, and by the time the next generation of unionists is able to cement its control, critical years will have been lost. In that period the growing non-union sentiment among women, the young and the part-time and casual workers in the growth sectors of the economy could be institutionalised and irreversible.

The history of the union movement - or at least of its officials - has been essentially male. But with the entry of women into the workforce in the 'seventies and 'eighties, there is new pressure for representative positions for women in the trade union hierarchy.

At the recent Congress Kelty announced his intention that women should make up half of the ACTU executive by the turn of the century. He nominated the nurses’ Pat Staunton to succeed Martin Ferguson as an ACTU vice-president when Ferguson becomes ACTU president at the next federal election.

However, in what became a hallmark of the difficulties faced by Congress delegates this year, the most senior official in the footwear and textile workers’ union, Bill Hughes, rejected all attempts to persuade him to relinquish his ACTU Executive seat to the clothing trades union’s Anna Booth. Hughes will retire anyway in a year’s time and the seat will then go to Booth.

But the struggle between the old and the young, the male and the female, was a microcosm for many observers of the problems facing the ACTU.

The risk of alienating the elders of the union movement by moving too quickly is balanced by the risks to the very survival of the union movement if change is not immediate.

Already the question of 'how fast' appears to have caused disension between secretary Kelty and his ally for the future, Martin Ferguson. Ferguson is a relative youngster at 36, but nevertheless a unionist in the traditional mould. He has an ear to the Kelty strategy, but also to a sense of trouble brewing in some unions as amalgama-

tions are seen as a threat to personal power. Ferguson is now exercising, as has Simon Crean before him, something of the voice of caution.

In the crash-through strategy, Kelty is partnered by Laurie Carmichael - perhaps the most remarkable character the union movement has spawned, and a man who perceives the need for change even more keenly than Kelty. Other senior unionists backing Kelty - and whose support is central to the credibility and acceptance of his strategy - are the left’s Tom McDonald and Tas Bull and the right’s Jim Maher. In addition, there is the emergent younger, cross-factional leadership group around Kelty which includes Martin Ferguson, Greg Sword from the National Union of Workers, Michael Easson from the NSW Labor Council, Steve Harrison from the Ironworkers and Greg Harrison from the Metalworkers.

The strategy as it has unfolded so far has reflected similar emergency measures in the UK, where the British union movement has sunk deep into decline under a decade of Thatcherism. The prospects for Australian unionism under a future conservative government are mixed. An onslaught against the unions could provoke a sudden reawakening and a return to militancy. But by the same argument, militancy is unlikely to appeal to many of the now ununionised and more conservative sections of the workforce.

In the UK a group of leading unionists has gone so far as to propose a form of 'associate membership' in an attempt to recruit workers outside the normal union organisational structure. This associate membership would enable these workers (professionals, part-timers, casuals) to buy a range of professional services from unions without requiring involvement in the collective activity of the union.

Whether a similar scheme would appeal to Australian unions remains to be seen. Perhaps the real test of local survival instincts will not come unless a conservative Australian government - now a looming possibility in February or March - dishes out the British anti-union medicine first.

Pamela Williams

Pamela Williams is industrial reporter for the Financial Review in Melbourne.
Arguing Over Auntie

In the 'eighties the ABC has been on the back foot. Unloved and underfunded by governments of all persuasions, it's become embroiled in an atmosphere of crisis. Is the solution more financial independence from government? Or is this merely the first step towards privatisation?

The ABC's John Cleary and Glyn Davis, author of 'Breaking Up the ABC?' debate the issues.

Just a Little Bit Pregnant

One consequence of Labor's broadcasting policy over the past four years has been the sight of the Merchant Princes of Australian capitalism desperately seeking to turn themselves into Media Barons.

Under the fashionable dictates of economic rationalism and the 'user pays' principle, elements in Treasury, DOTAC, the Opposition and even cabinet are asking: why is it that public media, and the ABC in particular, consume $470m a year and return nothing but trouble?

If broadcasting is so commercially attractive why isn't the ABC doing more to 'pay its way'?

For the ABC, as for other public radio and television organisations, broadcasting is more than a commercial commodity. The airwaves are a scarce resource capable of multiple uses in culture, entertainment, education, information and analysis, which the commercial sector, necessarily constrained by the profit motive, cannot fulfil. Of these values, Sir Ian Jacob, a former director general of the BBC, said, "they must not be vitiated by political or commercial consideration".

Such a 'commercial consideration' is the recurring debate over sponsorship and advertising of ABC programs.

Commercial radio and TV stations earn their revenue from money received from advertisements. Their program policies are predicated on maximising audiences so as to attract the most lucrative advertising contracts. Program content or quality is relevant only insofar as its capacity to serve this end.

What tends to dominate under commercial formulae is mass appeal, entertainment-oriented programming with special interests not acknowledged or recognised only at the margins.

In 1985 Margaret Thatcher established the Peacock Inquiry to consider future financing of the BBC and whether it should take advertising. It recommended firmly against, saying:

"We are not persuaded by the claim of advertisers that it would never be in their interests to influence program content. There would certainly be a risk that controversial drama, critical consumer programs, current affairs programs and satirical programs which challenge conventional attitudes and prejudice would not be supported by them."

The urgency of these concerns is evident when one looks at the sorry state of those public broadcasters in the USA, Canada and New Zealand, who have travelled the commercial road. Charter commitments have been replaced by dollar obligations.

In Public Broadcasting in Transition Barnett and Docherty point to the increasing dependence of the NZBC on commercial funding (1985 - 71.5% advertising and 16.3% licence fee). "In New Zealand this dependence on advertising has resulted in a narrowing of the range and type of programming."

The New Zealand government has recently announced that it is only prepared to provide continued licence
funding for two of RNZ's networks. It is expected that the government will soon announce which networks are to be privatised and sold off. Most observers say that the commercialised 'pop' network NZ will be one, and much speculation is centred on which others.

Sponsorship is seen by some 'reluctant realists' as a less intrusive form of commercial activity that may provide a middle road for the ABC to supplement its budget. Sponsors pay money to programs or projects which they think will benefit their corporate image. They gain acknowledgment of their contribution in the program credits. Sponsorship is seen as inoffensive to the viewer, image building for the sponsor and a valuable addition to revenue for the broadcaster.

For program makers, however, it poses as great a danger as advertising for, while it may be less visible, sponsorship has a far more insidious effect on individual programs.

In holding the purse strings, sponsors hold the potential to influence editorial judgment on the project selected to benefit from their largesse. They gain the power to influence which programs are made. Those attracting sponsors' dollars and able to fund their production costs, gain a significant advantage in financially stretched organisations. Un-sponsored programs will be left to languish.

Sponsors may also influence program content directly. If an issue is not handled in a way which meets with the sponsors' approval they may withdraw from the project or choose not to participate in future ones. Either case is a powerful incentive for producers to find a compromise.

They can hold sway in determining when programs are scheduled. Sponsors are going to want their material broadcast when most people are going to see their generosity at work. Un-sponsored material will tend to be pushed to the margins.

Speaking in 1985 to the American show business newspaper Variety, one highly placed PBS official said "corporations will now tell us, the stations, what they will sponsor". In the same article Bill Moyers, one of America's most respected journalists and a veteran of 'pub-tv', said "The system leaves no room for an independent journalist or a serious inquiry into our society".

Moyers added that he was grateful to Chevron Oil for sponsoring his latest series but, "I should've been able to air controversial views. I wasn't."

Some have suggested that a way to avoid the worst dangers of both sponsorship and advertising is to 'fence off' areas like news and current affairs as 'core activities' to be funded entirely from within the corporation, protected from the market place. This was the thrust of the 'Evans Papers' in 1987.

Such guarantees as 'fencing off' news and current affairs ignore the fact that many of the ABC's best and most politically sensitive programs are made by production departments outside the fence. Two of the ABC's most contentious and challenging programs of recent times 'Nobody's Children' and 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind' were made by the documentaries department.

This view may also underestimate the power of the dollar to jump the fence. If, for example, Elders IXL were a major sponsor of ABC sport or the arts, what attitude would be taken by Elders if *Four Corners* launched a damaging investigation into IXL? Would they be tempted to withdraw their general sponsorship? What subtle internal pressures would be placed on the producer to 'get it right'?

The overall impact is to distort program schedules towards the populist, the inoffensive and the bland. And it may be worse.

Even the best PBS stations are engaged in a constant struggle to remain viable. On a visit to Boston I arrived to find that WGBH, one of the nation's leading public stations, had stripped down two of its broadcast/production studios and filled them with telephones. These phones were staffed by station employees and volunteers in a constant round of calls begging the public for money to keep the station afloat. This is nothing unusual, public stations in the US are regularly engaged in all sorts of cup rattling, from televised auctions to fund-raising galas.

In these circumstances it is not surprising that as long ago as 1982 there were plans by WNET in New York to organise fund-raising along more familiar lines. WNET president John Jay Islen referred to 'enhanced corporate under-writing credits'. Few dared to speak the word 'commercials'.

Either by circumstance or by design, it appears that once the market imper-ative enters public broadcasting its progress to dominant value is just a matter of time.

Unfortunately, editorial concerns are not high on the list of those seeking to push Aunty towards sponsorship. The immediate purpose is to reduce the drain on government revenue. This view is predicated on the belief that the ABC is expensive and somehow less efficient than the corporate sector and that it would require a 'quantum leap' in funding to fix.

As to efficiency, Radio National, the ABC's equivalent of a major daily newspaper, delivers its service to an audience of approximately one million Australians for about 10 cents per day. The cost of a major daily newspaper to the reader is 50 cents. It would be closer to $2 if advertisers didn't provide a significant proportion of the revenue.

Studies have shown that, in TV, the cost per unit of audience reached is no greater than that of commercial stations. On present indications, 'Peoplemeter' surveys will improve these figures considerably.

*At what cost?* In 1974/75 the Australian workforce worked for three hours 45 minutes to fund the ABC. In 1987/88 this time had fallen by 30% to two hours 35 minutes.

ABC funding has been falling as a proportion of Commonwealth budget outlays since 1975 and, except for the first two Hawke budgets, the erosion continues. From 1985 to 1989 staffing levels fell by 10%. A current review of resources predicated upon government guarantees of indexed funding anticipates a similar fall over the next five years.
The federal government failed to honour its 1987 commitment to index funding for three years in each of the first two years of its operation. The total shortfall is now around $32m.

The most optimistic projections about the financial returns from corporate sponsorship are around $20m per annum. To risk the permanent damage outlined above for a figure equal to 4% of one year's appropriation seems a poor bargain.

For the ABC, sponsorship is a double penalty. Forced to devote much of its already stretched resources to chasing commercial dollars and forced into the editorial compromises necessary to achieve them, it must then accept the government's withholding the equivalent of that hard-won amount from its budget.

For the government, however, it has the additional bonus of providing a handy means of disclaiming responsibility.

As appropriations are wound back, the ABC is 'free' to seek more in the marketplace, increasing pressures for ratings-based programming and the adoption of a fully commercial operational model. All without pain for the government. What, then, will remain of public purpose?

As the inexorable dictates of the market begin to work their way through the commercial broadcasting sector, forcing stations ever more 'down-market' in the search for profitable ratings, history and experience may be on the side of the ABC. Unfortunately, those charged with policy-making in this area may require lessons in both.

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And Now a Word
From Our Sponsor ...

Nobody wants advertising on the ABC or SBS. Well, hardly anyone. Some advertisers perhaps. Some retailers with products to sell. Some ministers with budget cuts to find. And some staff and directors who, however opposed in principle to advertising on public networks, must look longingly at the dollars dangled before them. SBS is about to catch some of that loot with ministerial approval to accept sponsorship funding for the 1990 World Cup Soccer series and SBS test pattern transmissions. The ABC may not be far behind.

At present both national broadcasters rely primarily on government funding, supplemented by their own commercial activities. The risks of such dependence are well known. Occasionally a broadcaster may be favoured with largesse, such as SBS has gained from a pre-election rediscovery of multicultural policy. More often, though, dependence has meant sudden cuts, or a lengthy decline in support. Gareth Evans' promise of triennial funding was supposed to take away the uncertainty of an annual budget round, and so bolster independence. This year's claim by the ABC to be underfunded by $28 million, though rejected by the Hawke government, suggests that even guarantees are open to dispute. Blank screens and angry press conferences follow, but do not disguise the essential powerlessness of national broadcasters reliant on one paymaster.

SBS has prospered since its supporters demonstrated the strength of their commitment by fighting amalgamation during 1986 and 1987. Sponsorship deals promise even greater income next year. The ABC, in contrast, feels it has done badly. Despite a $473.6m appropriation in 1989, the corporation points to a declining share of total government outlays, and argues that it can no longer fulfil its full range of responsibilities. Such claims are worthy but dangerous. By publicising a funding crisis the ABC may promote the case for some sponsorship. How better, the government could argue, to make up any perceived shortfall?

The ABC fears that, in accepting some advertising, eventually it must accept all, to the detriment of the objectives of its Charter. Yet if the corporation really cannot make do on nearly half a billion dollars, and if the political reality is restricted funding for the indefinite future, who gains by being pure? Certainly not the ABC which, after all, has no qualms advertising its own merchandise. Nor the audience, unless it likes interruptions with irritating messages. Other public systems, such as Italy's RAI and West Germany's ARD, prefer a burst of advertising between programs. All rely on a mix of advertising income and government subsidy, either direct or through licence fees. There is little evidence these networks are any less independent or valued than the ABC - even if they are not as pleasant to watch.

In America, public broadcasting relies on a slightly different form of advertising - corporate sponsorship of specific programs of the kind accepted by the SBS and sometimes advocated for the ABC. The distinction between spot advertisements and endorsements at the start and conclusion of a program may seem immaterial, but it sets up a subtly different relationship between advertiser and broadcaster. Corporate sponsorship is relatively ineffective for promoting consumer items, but enables companies to project themselves as caring corporate citizens. To demonstrate their enlightened interest in culture and public affairs, companies tend therefore to sponsor worthy
programs rather than popular ones. Documentaries, seasons of opera or plays, and serious science attract corporate dollars. Sponsorship is about companies wrapping themselves in respectability by appropriating images and symbols from a world outside business.

America's Public Broadcasting System (PBS) has received a bad press in Australia - partly because it plays to different tastes, partly because of easy accusations that corporate sponsorship means corporate domination. Yet if the test of independent public broadcasting is the quality and quantity of political content transmitted, then PBS, at least on television, offers a substantial range and depth of coverage. Its main news program, for example, deliberately avoids the breezy format and sixty-second stories found on both commercial stations and the national broadcaster in Australia. Instead, the McNeil-Lehrer NewsHour employs expert interviewers and specialised reporters to cover four or five items thoroughly. During election campaigns it broadcasts long extracts from political speeches including, in 1988, those of socialist and libertarian presidential candidates.

Though the excellent ABC Radio National does tackle similar subjects, ABC television - despite brief experiments with programs compered by Huw Evans and Robyn Williams - has rarely matched the time and resources made available to McNeil-Lehrer NewsHour, for example.

More startling for Australians used to the stifling balance of a Couchman are the numerous PBS television political discussion programs. In Washington Week in Review a roundtable of 'liberal' journalists quietly discuss current affairs, while in The McLaughlin Group moderate to extreme conservatives ('an ideological Neanderthal' the presenter described one guest who smiled with pleasure at the praise) heatedly debate why George Bush is too soft on almost everything. Similar programs on local PBS stations cover state, and even city, politics.

The content is less interesting than the form, which is partisan and argumentative. Here is television which transcends both politeness and the endless pairing of opposites, in which voices cancel each other out. PBS offers public affairs with enthusiasm, not just as duty. Corporate sponsorship of other programs frees money to underwrite this wealth of news and community services. Whatever the threatened evils of corporate sponsoring, by most criteria the apparently compromised American system delivers better political coverage and discussion than still virtuous Australian public broadcasting.

Of course it is not difficult to find things wrong with American public broadcasting. Those who work in the system are acutely aware of their relatively modest budget and audiences. Sponsors generally do prefer uncontroversial programs. But, unlike our ABC or, indeed, the BBC under Thatcher, the PBS has been able to resist government displeasure. PBS survived Nixon's assaults, and weathered cutbacks under Reagan, by diversifying its income. Around 16% of its dollars now come from business, with the rest drawn from federal and state governments, individual subscribers, philanthropic foundations, universities and fundraising activity. Diversity can mean in-

To describe the American experience is not to advocate corporate sponsorship. Ideally, those many Australians who value the ABC wish it to remain fully funded by government, free of both advertising and corporate endorsement. But such government support has not - and is unlikely to be - forthcoming. For the ABC no longer plays a central role in Australian public life. Satellites and competition mean few communities depend exclusively on the corporation. The ALP seems more comfortable with private media owners than the public sector. Diversification of government support for the arts has contributed to a relative decline of once flagship companies such as the ABC and Australian Opera. The corporation may still rely on government, but government no longer needs the ABC as of old to reach the entire electorate.

European and Canadian experience tell us that, however undesirable, advertising is hardly fatal to national broadcasting. And the American PBS suggests that corporate sponsorship, by removing dependence on just one patron, provides some benefits - albeit through an odd convergence of public broadcasting needs and the interests of corporate image. Whether Australian companies would support similar programs remains unknown; certainly the pool of potential sponsors is small. But the SBS clearly perceives opportunities and the ABC, by its own account strapped for cash, may soon have little choice but to follow. If the effect is to make the corporation a little less timid in its televised politics, then we may anticipate a season of ironies.

GLYN DAVIS' Breaking Up The ABC was published by Allen and Unwin last year. He teaches in Commerce and Administration at Griffith University.
Heroes Of The Epidemic

Australia's AIDS stand has been generally good. But it's threatened by the 'roll back permissiveness' tide. Ken Davis looks ahead into the new decade, and sees the gay community still at the forefront.

One week's worth of Australian AIDS news (early October):

▼ 1000 fringe pentecostals march on Sydney's Oxford Street carrying "gay = AIDS" signs, and are 'welcomed' by 8,000 angry and witty lesbians and gay men.

▼ The next day The Bulletin opinion polls show majority support for homosexual law reform in Tasmania, Queensland and WA.

▼ The AIDS Council of NSW denounces Burroughs Wellcome for selling AZT capsules for $1.75, when they cost 15 cents to produce.

▼ An HIV antibody negative Canberra man complains that because he is gay hospital staff leave him unwashed, display biohazard signs, glove-up to take his pulse, and write his sexual history on the clipboard at the foot of his bed.

▼ Cleo finds that 69% of women have changed their sexual practices because of AIDS.

▼ A Sydney gay paper announces the death of a 26 year old gay tradesperson, who jumped off a cliff the day he was diagnosed as HIV positive.

Unlike North America, where militant civil disobedience groups such as ACT-UP are centre stage, confrontational AIDS activism in Australia has been somewhat ephemeral. The federal government, led on this issue by Dr Blewett, has a record that looks good in comparison to other Western countries. Yet, according to the people with AIDS demonstrating at its launch in Sydney on August 30, the gaps in the National HIV/AIDS Strategy White Paper are deadly.

In its favour, Australian government policy opts for general preventive education, calls for review of laws against prostitution, drug use and homosexuality that hinder AIDS responses, and promotes and funds a co-operative relationship with gay community organisations. These positive elements of policy, however, are not necessarily taken to heart by state administrations.

The $60 million budgeted by the Commonwealth for 1989/90 is not paltry, but nor is it adequate: 50% is for treatment, and with price gouging by the companies that sell the two most used drugs (AZT and pentamidine) a very large segment is simply profits. And as AIDS activists have pointed out, while last year $40 million was spent on fighting an epidemic that has already killed several hundred Australian residents, six times that amount was spent in as many days on the joint US/Australian military exercise, Operation Kangaroo.

Of course, the problem with AIDS is that it is an expanding epidemic, which requires ever greater finances to maintain levels of care, but also ever greater investment in preventive education. Where do the resources come from?

Clearly the greatest danger is that AIDS funding will be played off against cuts to other health services. The viability of AIDS services cannot be removed from the context of overall community health programs funding, cuts to home care budgets, or the sale of Sydney's Prince Henry Hospital, with
its purpose-built AIDS unit. Nor, on the other hand, can many health or community services be immune from the impact of AIDS. How does the hard pressured childcare, women's health, or disability workers factor in new AIDS specific education and service tasks?

At every level, from individual counselling through education brochures to government legislation, there is a major choice to be made. What is the primary strategy for containing the spread of the virus? The frontrunner as far as AIDS community organisations are concerned, is to promote the minimum personal behaviour changes to prevent new infection. Often counterposed to this promotion of safe sex and safe needle use are two other primary strategy options: mass testing and abstinence campaigns. Both are more popular in general with governments and the medical establishment. And indeed more popular in public opinion.

Because the antibody test cannot reliably identify those infected quite recently, and because HIV is not easily transmissible, screening models from previous epidemics, such as tuberculosis, are not appropriate.

HIV antibody testing is increasingly valuable as an individual diagnostic process, now leading to early treatment options. Yet the legal and social situation of those who have tested positive is anything deteriorating. The recent detention of a woman prostitute in NSW, and the failure of a gay man's discrimination complaint against doctors who refused him surgery on learning of his homosexuality, are powerful negative examples.

The defence of democratic rights in this instance becomes an essential part of public health. It is not bleeding heart civil libertarians that stand in the way of mass testing, but notification and quarantine laws, media beat ups, gross breaches of confidentiality, travel restrictions, insurance screening, inadequate discrimination laws, and so on. Indeed, the laws against homosexuality, prostitution and injectable drugs are major obstacles to individuals coming forward to be tested. In many cases the personal cost looms too great.

A major thrust of US and British government campaigns on AIDS has been to promote abstinence, especially among young people. "Just say no" to sex and drugs, the US campaign advises. This is an extension of existing campaigns aimed at lowering the birthrate of young, poor (often black) urban communities. These campaigns use community development and self-empowerment language, but aim at delaying sexual experience rather than explaining contraception and safe sex. They diagnose drug use as an individual failing, rather than addressing the economics of oppression that allow injectable drugs to spell genocide in many cities.

Abstinence campaigns, along the lines of 'sexual freedom and drug use were always wrong, now they are deadly', and relying on fear and guilt, do not result in long term behavioural change. But they do make it harder for people to see themselves as in control of their sexual lives or drug use.

The champions of the 'roll back permissiveness' line, in both pulpit and parliament, stand in the way of effective AIDS response. Section 28 in Britain, and a series of US Congressional votes initiated by the ultra-conservative Jesse Helms, restrict safe sex promotion for lesbians and gay men.

HIV transmission is not stopped by love or monogamy, by certificates of HIV negative status, by choosing partners wisely, by 'healthy and positive outlooks', or by periods of abstinence that break down from time to time. It is how people have sex that counts, and whether condoms are used properly in vaginal and anal sex.

Educators, and specifically sexual health educators, people in the women's and gay movement, and activists on the left in general, have a role to play in defending sex, sex for pleasure, sexuality, homosexuality and explicit public discussion of sexual issues against this repressive climate. Only messages that affirm sexual freedom and maximise personal decision-making can effect the behaviour changes necessary to limit the epidemic.

With media messages consistently confusing safe sex with fidelity, the 'new celibacy' or lifestyle conservatism in the late 'eighties, it is no wonder that people want to rebel against this apparent government incursion into social control of bedroom conduct.

This rebellion against anti-sex propaganda takes the form of a rejection of the fact that AIDS is truly a community-wide concern and a denial that vaginal sex can transmit HIV - at least to 'normal blokes'. "Normal people make up only 1.5% of known AIDS victims and only seven have died, compared to fags who make up 88.4% of the victims ... It's your right to know the truth about AIDS, not just your government's interpretation of it. Hell! It's scaring the piss out of every straight bloke with a hard-on. So we ask you:
How many of you tax-paying Australians want your money spent in a bid to save a pack of fags who're dying because they've done a bit of bum poking? How many of you are really concerned whether these fags live or die anyway?" declaims a recent edition of an Australian biker magazine.

While vaginal and anal sex and needle sharing are all capable of transmitting HIV, there has been no explosion of AIDS through the entire population, nor is everybody equally at risk.

It's whether people engage in unsafe activities that determines risk, not social identity, and this is where the problem lies for AIDS preventive education. Most men who have sex with men do not identify as gay. Most people practising unprotected anal sex are not gay men. Most people sharing needles are not heroin addicts. Most people who say they are monogamous have not been in mutually sexually exclusive relationships for the last ten years. One in four adult men in Queensland have been to prostitutes, according to surveys reported in the press earlier this year. By that token alone an enormous proportion of the adult population should think carefully about signing the AIDS risk declaration when donating blood at the Red Cross.

This concept of the 'general community', defined as being not the gay community, muddles thinking on public campaigns and media coverage on AIDS prevention. People don't see themselves at risk because they do not see themselves as 'junkies, fags or sluts', nor are their friends. Nor can they see who is HIV infected, only those who are already ill. Therefore they don't adopt safe sex or safe needle use behaviours. As has been pointed out by Susan Sontag and others, all epidemics are ascribed to someone else.

In Australia, with its so far quite gay-specific epidemic, the worst burdens, not only of sickness and grief, but also of blame-the-victim prejudice have been landed on fairly localised communities. The dominant image is of gay men who have learned at great expense the error of allowing their burst of 'seventies gay liberation to turn to Dionysian excesses.

Homosexuality itself was freed officially from its definition as pathology only in 1973, the end of an era, at least in Sydney, of brain surgery and aversion therapy. With AIDS, homosexuality again is inextricably linked with disease. The new president of the Private Doctors' Association, Dr Jodhi Menon, has been campaigning in the pages of Australian Doctor Weekly to return to active treatment "or adequate control" of homosexuality per se as an illness, as with "schizophrenia, kleptomania or similar departures from the more usual patterns of human behaviour".

This backsliding on homosexuality as disease is reflected within the North American gay movement itself, with writers regretting the previous years of 'fast lane' lifestyles, their works infected with guilt, self hate and anti-sex sentiments. Nowadays, with twelve-step recovery programs (abstinence groups modelled on Alcoholics Anonymous) all the vogue, Sexual Compulsives groups have ads in gay newspapers.

But the virus has no meaning. It's a simple physical entity that does no thinking. It's not a CIA plot, not nature's revenge, not a symbol of pollution, either moral or environmental, not God's punishment, not part of some eternal cycle, nor the crystallisation of poor self-esteem among homosexuals.

A more realistic perception of the state of the gay communities' response to the epidemic, while not minimising its terrible impact, must recognise at least in Australia, the creation of cultures of resistance. Enormous mobilisations of efforts in care, in political defence and in preventive education have transformed the gay scene. Pride is stronger now than ever before. The non-AIDS gay and lesbian organisations are larger and more effective than ever before.

While military metaphors are common in discussion of AIDS - and have dangerous side effects, as Susan Sontag points out - they remain popular with gay men as well as doctors. Those working in AIDS see gay men, commercial sex workers and needle users as frontline fighters, whose leadership in community education is the major defence the population as a whole has against the further extension of infection.

In the words of one epidemiologist, they are "the heroes of this epidemic, the shock troops who bore the brunt of the first wave thrown against us with galantry and with unsung courage".

KEN DAVIS is active in Gay Solidarity and works as a health educator with the AIDS Council of NSW.
The Australian Women's Education Coalition (AWEC) was formed in 1975 as a loose alliance of women’s groups concerned with the education of women and girls. The Coalition holds national conferences which are presented by a different group each year. The 1989 AWEC Conference, titled Women and the Politics of Education, was held in Sydney in October.

**Australian Women's Education Coalition**

The aims of AWEC include:

- to promote equality for women and girls by any appropriate means at the state and national level
- to work to eliminate sexism in all levels of education
- to lobby governments and educational institutions to ensure that funding in specific areas of education is equitably allocated, and that the needs of girls and women are taken into account.

AWEC meets to discuss strategies around a range of issues including defending public education and improving girls' participation in schooling, increasing women's influence in educational decision-making, working in solidarity with Aborigines to improve educational institutions' responsiveness to the needs of Aborigines, improving educational access for disadvantaged women by expanding child care provisions, opposing moves for taxes, fees and charges imposed on students, expanding women's understanding of the implications for training of award restructuring in the workforce, broadening women's participation in the full range of educational offerings, ensuring resources in education are equitably distributed, and so on.

**AWEC/Women in Education Membership, 1989-90**

Please use this form if you would like to join Women in Education, the NSW Branch of AWEC. Make cheques payable to Women in Education; send this form with your cheque to:

Women in Education
c/- Inner City Education Centre
37 Cavendish St
Stanmore NSW 2048

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A Sporting Chance

The sporting arena is a complex battle between the sexes. Jan Wright explores the ideology of 'difference' in sport.

Years flowed like spring rain as the elfin Australian realised that she had become the country's first track and field medallist for 16 years ... There were women athletes at the Olympics who were distinguished by moustaches and physiques that would alarm Dean Lukin, and it is enough to say that Glynis Nunn was not one of them. She was an athlete of undiminished femininity who smiled warmly and spoke softly, who ran lightly and through with grace, who triumphed with modesty and who accepted her hour of happiness in the time-honoured woman's way, she cried. That is why the world applauded. (Melbourne Herald, Oct 2, 1984.)

This description of Glynis Nunn is representative of the way in which media coverage of women's and men's sport continues to reproduce traditional expectations of masculine and feminine behaviour. Men are described in terms of their achievements, their toughness, both mental and physical, under trying conditions, including playing while seriously injured and in pain (the back pages of any popular newspaper provide evidence of this). Women, on the other hand, are described in terms of their physical attributes, their non-performance behaviour and their relationships.

Sport, of all social institutions, is particularly influential as a demonstration of gender differences. As a form of public display, it is ideally placed to reinforce the dominant ideology of male superiority. It is accessible to all for observation and comment. The results need no interpretation from experts. They are the currency of popular conversation - it is obvious who runs further, who jumps higher, who throws further and therein lies its power for legitimating commonly held beliefs.

Even the arguments from social biologists such as Ken Dyer that women are catching up to men, buys into this ideology of difference. The standard is still male performance and still expressed in terms of winning and losing or beating an external standard such as a record.

For many female participants the pleasure that they derive from sport has very little to do with besting an opponent and very rarely is it about being better (or worse) than men. It has much more to do with feeling powerful and in control of their bodies, as they achieve in ways that they have never experienced before. What is culturally valued about sport, however, is who is better than whom - how do performances differ rather than what do they mean to individual participants. These differences in performance in turn help to confirm or legitimate the dominant version of gender relations. Women are not as strong/powerful/exciting/fast/aggressive as men therefore they are weaker/inferior not only in biological terms but in social terms as well. Sport is thus ideally placed, in Luce Irigaray's terms, to "construct the male body as virile, full, unified and the female body as passive, castrated or lacking as the necessary precondition of patriarchal social relations, 'naturalising' and rationalising the historical domination of women by men." 2

While the conditions for valuing sport rest on the comparison with a standard which means a male standard, women will always lose out. The popular belief continues to be that women will never be as good as men (read as exciting/powerful/aggressive/tough) in the areas that really matter. Few people seriously entertain the idea of women playing with men on the football fields of Australia's capital cities and that's a very safe and comforting position for women because, in the long term, that's the forum in which it really counts. The media confirms these beliefs by both explicitly and implicitly representing women as either less than men or as different in ways that constitute women as emotional, dependent, nurturant, etc.

The comparison of women to a male standard (to their disadvantage) comes through clearly in commentary such as that demonstrated in The Bulletin (August 18, 1987) article "Impossible Dreams in Athletes' Sights". For most of the full-page article the author describes the achievements of a number of men in breaking what, at one time, appeared to be impossible records. In
the last paragraph the author draws attention to the achievements of a woman, Evelyn Ashford, but he does this by comparing her achievement with that of men, and particularly with men of a decade ago.

"Nor is record breaking a purely male domain. The women's 100 metre sprint provides possibly the most stark portrayal that no barrier is beyond the imagination. American Evelyn Ashford's 10.76 seconds world record is equivalent to a hand-timed run of 10.5. A decade ago, Ashford would have made the Olympic men's final on that effort. And barely 10 men in Australia could go that fast now." (Emphasis added.)

Read another way, Ashford would only have made the final, and that was ten years ago; men's times have improved since then, and today at least ten men in Australia alone, could beat her. Nor is there any mention of a comparison with other women; the comparison is only with the male standard. There is nothing for men to be concerned about here. Is this too cynical a conclusion? I think not. I am not arguing that this is the author's consciously intended meaning, but when an article like this is read in the context of the prevailing ideology of gender relations, this interpretation is not unreasonable.

A patriarchal society has a vested interest in the continued privileging of traditional male sports. As women threaten male dominance in other public spheres of life, sport has become the last frontier (along with war) where men can publicly demonstrate their differences. When we have female bankers, politicians, union organisers and managers, it is becoming increasingly difficult to make a rational argument that women have inferior abilities in any other sphere of activity.

Sport remains the one arena where men can display the culturally valued attributes of physical toughness and strength. If women take on men in sport, if sport becomes 'feminised', what avenue is there left to demonstrate male superiority? An example from Bryson wonderfully illustrates this point:

In 1978, A Texan woman was one of only three people from the United States to qualify for the finals of the famous Cliff Diving Championships in Acapulco. However, her attempt at the championship was aborted when the Mexican competitors threatened to withdraw if she did not. She was then disqualified. As one competitor explained: "This is a death-defying activity - the men are taking a great gamble to prove their courage. What would be the point if everyone saw that a woman could do the same?"

Television helps to highlight the differences between male and female performance and bring the observable to a mass audience. Women's sport rarely makes it to the TV screen but when it does it is often trivialised. Women's sport is often reported for its humour or the unusual rather than for action of the game or the achievements of the women involved. The concern seems to be to keep the male sports world clearly differentiated and the media takes on a major role in doing this in a number of ways, some obvious and intended, some more subtle and possibly unconscious.

The most obvious difference is the general invisibility of women athletes. You might well be forgiven for believing that only men played sport if you were going on the amount of women's sport in newspapers, television, and magazines such as The Bulletin and Time. In a survey in 1980, 2% of all available sports space in capital city newspapers was given to women's sport. There were four times as many men's as women's sports featured in the results section and twelve times as many graphics. A further survey in 1984 indicated that rather than improving, the situation had deteriorated with 1.3% of newspaper space devoted to women's sport and five times as many men's as women's sports covered in the results section.

When women do feature, their coverage is different from that of male participants in a number of significant ways. The emphasis is less on the action of the game or achievement of the athlete than on her femaleness, her physical appearance, her dress and her relationships - that is, her femininity or lack of it. This can be demonstrated by looking at most newspaper and television coverage though some writers are more subtle than others and their ideological bias is not immediately obvious.

The television coverage of women's and men's Olympic gymnastics stands out as one example of the production of difference through the media. Although both women's and men's activities require strength, agility and flexibility,
the commentators are selective in the attributes they associate with each sex. Attention is drawn to the strength and power, to the muscle development of the young male competitors while the female competitors or 'girls', as they are more likely to be called, are described as "petite". Reference is usually made to their age and they are praised for their graceful and expressive execution of routines.

In the print media, two Bulletin articles on Julie McDonald and the retired Tracey Wickham provide a further example of the ways in which the media deals with successful female athletes. Like the gymnasts described above, female swimmers compete at elite levels while very young. In these articles swimmers are described as 'tiny', 'pathetically thin' and even 'aneurxic'. Tracey Wickham is described as having been the baby of the team when, at thirteen, she represented Australia at the Montreal Olympics - "I cried all the time; I just wanted to go home to Mummy, I missed my dog ..." It is almost as though they are temporary visitors to the male sports world. They are tolerated and even regarded with some affection as pseudo-males who will eventually grow up to be real women. Coach Laurie Lawrence is quoted as saying "... the way to make girl swimmers faster is make them the shape of boys." Like adult female athletes they are also described in terms of their physical appearance - Julie McDonald for instance we learn has "Nordic good looks, pale green eyes, cropped blond hair and perfect, very white teeth." The Wickham article reassuringly describes Tracey, now retired, with her "retroinne nose and brown button eyes ... now topped by almost an Afro of brown curls", as married, into cooking and teaching herself to sew. So it seems that, after all the hard years of training and being accepted, as it were, as androgynous, it is not too late to flower as an attractive and marriagable woman.

A further example from The Good Weekend (SMH, April 11, 1987) demonstrates the ways in which an article that is intended to be supportive of women's sport reveals, on closer analysis, unintended meanings that reflect cultural attitudes to women and women's behaviour. The article, 'How to Sell a Sportswoman' is ostensibly about the difficulties women's sport has in attracting substantial sponsorship and, in particular, is about the ways in which the entrepreneur, Robert McMurtrie, intends to attract sponsorship for women's netball. The main protagonist of the article and of the photo that accompanies it, is not women netballers but McMurtrie. He is associated with potent imagery that positions him as a very active participant in the text. "He means business", he will boycott those who ignore his sales pitch, he will no longer tolerate the rationale of "the breweries, the advertising agencies, the television networks, media sports departments" in ignoring women's netball. He is described as "the Mean Machine of Marketing" (an allusion to successful male athletes); he "is like quicksilver in his office, moving from busy phone to photocopying machine". His marketing strategies are "conducted with all the precision of a military campaign" Robert McMurtrie is active, successful and capable of bringing about change through aggressive marketing. Unable to act on their own behalf, the netballers have to seek legitimation through male representation in the real world of business to which they have no access as equals; at the same time, they are the commodities to be exchanged. Either way, women are disempowered in the male worlds of business.

Individual women such as Anne Seargent, then captain of the Australian netball team, and Ann Mitchell, manager of the world champion 'cricket in culottes team', are described not in terms of their achievements but in terms of the emotions they have experienced in relation to their involvement in their respective sports. Anne Sergeant "sighs": "Sometimes the workload is so heavy. You don't know whether to scream or cry. But if I didn't have it, I'd crave it." Ann Mitchell is described as being "siegied"; "her crusade has almost engulfed its champion"; she "suffers terrible migraines" and sometimes feels like giving up. The women are represented as barely coping, operating on an emotional level and confessing to weaknesses and the need to be supported.

So that even in an article that is apparently supportive of women's sport the traditional gender relations are reproduced in subtler ways in the language and in the structure of the argument. It is not only in the traditional male sports that reproduce gender relations but in the representation of women in their own sports, that the mass media helps to define what is normal, appropriate and desirable behaviour for female sports participants.

For all of the above reasons, women's participation in sport presents a dilemma to the feminist writer, at least to this feminist writer. On one hand it is apparent that many women derive a great deal of pleasure from their participation and this should not be ignored or dismissed. On the other hand, organised sport is so blatantly instrumental in maintaining and reproducing social relations that support a patriarchal order, that its practice must be transformed in radical ways both to match more closely with women's experience and desires and also to subvert attempts to colonise it for patriarchal ends. For many women the choice has been to opt out of sport altogether, not because they did not want to be physically active but because they were resistant to and often alienated by the restrictive structure of sport and the competitive ethos. Other women, like the netballers described above, and most women's sports organisations, take men's sports as their model for the future. As such they will remain on the fringes of the male sports world colluding in their own oppression.

JAN WRIGHT teaches in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong.
You'll never forget the feeling of safe sex

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The extraordinary events in Poland and Hungary in the last twelve months have raised widespread hopes that a fundamental transformation in the politics of Eastern Europe is at hand. With the installation of a non-communist prime minister in Poland in August, and free elections in Hungary scheduled for December, such hopes have been raised to expectations. But expectations of what, exactly?

Commentators have proclaimed the end of communist hegemony in what, for over forty years, have been mere satellite states of the Soviet Union. However, they have so far been understandably reluctant to speculate on the nature of the societies and political systems which might replace the current regimes in the next few decades. The vague assumption seems to be that the Western and Central European countries, starting with Hungary and Poland, with East Germany or Czechoslovakia possibly next, will gradually (or even suddenly) transform themselves into amenable, unthreatening, Western-style, market-oriented liberal democracies.

There has already been speculation (including by the Hungarians) over the possibility of Hungary applying to join the European Community in the not-too-distant future. Timothy Garton Ash, for example, writing in the first issue of the Independent Monthly claimed that: "What we have in those two countries (ie, Poland and Hungary) is nothing less than the attempt to transform communist systems back into some version of Western European liberal democracies, with market economies, constitutional government, the rule of law, and the pluralism of a developed civil society". The crucial word here is 'back'. It signals an unspoken but powerful revision of the history of Eastern Europe - namely, that before the communist takeover after World War Two, these countries were very much like their Western counterparts in political culture and tradition, and that their 'liberation' by the Soviet Union in 1945 imposed totalitarian rule on previously flourishing democracies.

Such an assumption, which informs much Western comment on the dramas now unfolding throughout the communist world, is simply nonsense. It is born of an arrogance which assumes that Western political and economic systems are the ideal for every country in the world, which all would choose if they were not prevented from doing so by communist or other authoritarian regimes. Its corollary is the acceptance (particularly in American foreign policy) of any ideology which proclaims itself to be 'anti-communist', no matter what excesses it might commit against human rights or democracy. This attitude ignores the historical reality which is that, for most of the countries in question, Soviet domination has been not an interruption, but a continuation of centuries of authoritarian and profoundly undemocratic rule.

The only exception to this rule is Czechoslovakia which was, indeed, a liberal democracy between the wars and again until 1948 (when the communists won 40% of the vote in the last free elections). Its relative economic well-
being and this, albeit brief, experience of genuine and stable democracy suggest that Czechoslovakia might indeed follow a "Western" path if its people were able to overcome the hard-line Czechoslovakian communist leadership and seize the same political advances as their Polish, Hungarian and Soviet counterparts have. Poland and Hungary are very different.

After World War One, Poland was at last free of the three great powers which had carved it up between them for the last hundred years and more. The collapse of the Prussian and Austro-Hungarian empires, and the fall of the Tsar in Russia, allowed the Poles to rule themselves again. Until 1926, it staggered along under a chaotic democracy of sorts, although the dominant figure of Marshal Josef Pilsudski largely succeeded in imposing his will on parliament. The inter-war years were characterised by extremist movements of both left and right, and particularly by increasing waves of anti-semitism and intolerance of the many minorities, Ukrainians in particular, which were then within Poland's borders.

Pilsudski's virtual coup in 1926 and the depression of the early 1930s heralded more and more repressive measures, including censorship, purges and rigged elections (half the electorate refused to vote in 1935 in protest). Poland even had its own concentration camp, used for both left and rightwing opponents of the regime, and for Ukrainian nationalists. Parliament was rendered virtually impotent by the 1935 constitution which installed a presidency with almost dictatorial powers.

Following Pilsudski's death in 1935, racialism and intolerance were rampant, both among supporters of the regime and openly fascist groups opposed to it. In 1938, when Hitler occupied the Sudetenland area of Czechoslovakia, the Polish reaction was not to throw its hands up in horror at such an outrage, but to seize a small piece of 'Polish' territory in Czechoslovakia for itself. Hardly the behaviour of a model liberal state afflicted by the bullying ways of dictatorship.

Hungary, too, collaborated with Nazi Germany to redress its own grievances over territory ceded to its neighbours after World War One. Throughout the inter-war period, a succession of governments under the regent, Admiral Horthy, enacted steadily more authoritarian measures. The first stable government after 1918, with Bethlen as prime minister, repealed the secret ballot for rural areas, and the universal franchise. The new 1922 franchise allowed him to remain in power throughout the 1920s.

As in Poland, anti-semitism simmered for two decades, and boiled over under the prime ministership of the fanatical racist, Gyula Gombos, of the Right Radical Party in the 1930s, despite the more 'traditional' and relatively moderate conservative leanings of Horthy himself. By 1939, laws had been introduced limiting Jewish participation in certain occupations to 6%, Imrey, the near fascist prime minister who enacted the policy, was himself forced to resign in 1930 after being accused of having Jewish ancestry.

In the elections of 1939, the fascist Arrow Cross was the second largest party (in a genuine secret ballot). Although Horthy succeeded in protecting the Jewish population in the earlier years of the war, by 1944 the desperation of the Nazi regime impelled them to exert more direct control over their Hungarian 'allies'. Horthy appointed a collaborationist government under General Szotay, as a result of which hundreds of thousands of Jews and others were deported to the death-camps, and the anti-Nazi parties still in existence were obliterated.

It is against this background that talk of a 'return' to democracy in Eastern Europe should be seen. "Constitutional government, the rule of law and the pluralism of a developed civil society" have yet to be established today, in the sense that we understand them, in either Poland or Hungary, though Hungary is very rapidly heading that way. This is even less so in stubbornly dictatorial Bulgaria or Romania. Having said that, it is all too easy to draw simplistic 'lessons' even from an accurate reading of history. The fact that Poland and Hungary sustained profoundly undemocratic and authoritarian regimes fifty years ago is, in itself, no reason to suppose that they will do so again if and when communist rule is thrown off. No country in Europe was free from the pressures of economic catastrophe, instability and extremist agitation in the pre-war years and, of course, several which succumbed to totalitarianism, such as Italy, Spain and (West) Germany are now pillars of Western European liberal democracy. In addition, the international pressures on Eastern Europe, particularly from the Soviet Union and unreformed East Germany and Czechoslovakia are certain to remain immense for the foreseeable future.

Nevertheless, it would be an even worse mistake to disregard history altogether, or to distort it for contemporary motives. The fact is that Poland and Hungary are not fallen democratic angels whose future political structures will develop along predictable or, necessarily, desirable lines. The West, obsessed as always with 'anti-communism', has so far failed to probe too closely the possible ideological directions which the current opposition parties might take in the future. The fact that they may soon be exercising a considerable degree of power makes this a particularly foolish position.

It would be an exaggeration to suggest that dictatorial rightwing governments are about to seize power. The point is to identify the historical and cultural forces which will come into play if and when communist rule is indefinitely relaxed, and which may shape at least some of the ideology of future non-communist governments.

There would seem to be few grounds for concern in Hungary at present. The Hungarians have inaugurated western-style democracy by proclaiming an independent republic on the 33rd anniversary of the 1956 uprising. It will be an 'independent, democratic and legal state in which the values of bourgeois democracy and democratic socialism are expressed equally'. Hungary, of course, has not presided over the same scale of economic shambles and political repression that the Poles have suffered, nor was its opposition so firmly linked with the Catholic Church and its reactionary political stance in most parts of the world.

Nevertheless, among the many political groups recently established has been the reconstituted Smallholders Party, a relic from pre-war days which played a large part in the authoritarian rule of the 1920s. Then there is the dispute over the fate of ethnic Hungarians in Romania. Although, in this instance, the barbaric policy of Ceaucescu's gangsters is clearly to blame, a powerful resurgence
of Hungarian nationalism over any issue could have disturbing implications for both its internal and external affairs.

Nationalism is the genie which the break-up of the Soviet empire will release from the bottle. Although it would be foolish to push the analogy too far, the present situation in Eastern Europe does have certain parallels with that of 1918 in this respect. Then, the disintegration of powerful blocs released the pent-up and utterly unpredictable forces of smaller nations at a time of economic disaster and enormous political uncertainty. Although the process this time may be more gradual, and worldwide economic interdependence is much greater, the same potential for totally unforeseen consequences is there. Nowhere is this more true than in Poland.

The forces which will shape the new governments of Poland are many, and their potency after forty years of repression is, as yet, incalculable. What, for example, are the implications of Solidarity’s umbilical links with the Catholic Church - the same church which was the mainstay of the anti-semitic National Democrat Party in the 1920s and 1930s? As Solidarity is forced to come to terms with the realities of political power, it will be fascinating to untangle its ideological roots.

The conservatism of the church and the inevitable reaction to so many years of communist rule will be factors pushing the party to the right. It remains to be seen whether the militancy of the union in its urban strongholds will be an effective counter-weight on the left; or, indeed, whether Solidarity will survive as a single entity at all.

For the moment, the important fact to grasp is the nature of Poland’s enduring political culture. Anti-semitism is alive and well, as the comments of a former Polish journalist in the *Sydney Morning Herald* recently made clear: "any doubts I may have had about the persistence of anti-semitism in Poland were dispelled by the insulting responses to my reports (on demonstrations at Auschwitz) from more than 100 readers". Although the present-day Jewish population of Poland is minimal, this underlying current should at least make us wary of the potential nature of Polish nationalism. And this nationalism, as with the inter-war governments, is the force which still binds together the opposition in Poland.

Perhaps the direct historical warning to the West about the future of Poland is its utter impotence at all the crucial moments in Polish history to influence events there. Hitler’s invasion, the communist takeover in 1945, martial law in the 1980s, all have been played out with the Western democracies as, to all intents and purposes, mere onlookers.

Even in the nineteenth century, Poles were aware of the failure of Britain and France to come to their aid. As Neal Ascherson noted, "At the Western end were liberal nations who sympathised with the Polish struggle, but provided only Notes, tears and charity for Polish refugees".

External events (the rise of Gorbatchev, Western economic sanctions) have again helped to unleash forces for change in Polish politics.

But if the West believes that it can impose its will on them, or that Poles will meekly follow a pre-ordained path to liberal democracy, then it will be failing utterly to learn the lessons of history. For a country so obsessed by its past, that would be unforgiveable.

MICHAEL TICHER is a freelance journalist based in Sydney.
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The Rise and Rise of Oz Lit

The irresistible rise of the Aussie novel has been a feature of the 80s. Jim Endersby spoke to three prominent members of the Australian literary community - critic, Helen Daniel; publisher, Louise Adler; and author, Peter Carey - to get their views of where the Australian novel has come in the 80s and where its likely to go in the 'nineties.

The contemporary Australian novel was one of the things that brought me to Australia. Reading Carey, Hasluck, Jolley, Grenville and others gave me an image of Australia; a huge dangerous place with white people in cities clinging to its edges, while black people roamed the dangerous, empty centre. The books gave me a desire to see the country for myself.

I doubt that I'm the only one. The Australian novel has achieved an enormous international prominence in the last ten years; Peter Carey's novel *Oscar and Lucinda*, winning Britain's prestigious Booker prize, is only the most recent example.

Louise Adler, publisher of Heinemann's Australian list, thinks that "part of the heightened sense of being Australian, as a worthwhile thing, has been a rise in the Australian novel, and the Australian publishing scene has blossomed over the last twenty years".

Helen Daniel, critic and editor of the recent books *Expressway* and *The Good Reading Guide* (see p64), agrees that the rise of the Australian novel has been closely linked to a rise in the notion of Australianness. "In the work of Peter Carey, for example, or Nicholas Hasluck, they are essentially Australian novels. And what is of great interest is the way the Australian content is being explored in ways that are international. But because of the Australian content they have a directness and an urgency for Australian readers."

Many readers notice the affinity between Australian and, for example, Latin American novelists. Much Australian work doesn't seem out of place alongside that of 'magic realists' like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, or Isabel Allende. That, according to Daniel, is no coincidence. "I think all over the world there are writers searching for new forms that can accommodate the kinds of upheavals all of us find towards the end of not only the 20th Century but of this millenium. But for people to be searching out those sorts of new modes and using Australian material is of particular urgency for Australian readers."

This growth in Australian nationalism has a darker side too, according to Adler. "The Australian in the swimming pool at the Olympics, with his hand in a sort of shove up into the sky, fist clenched. It looks like a moment of fascism - 'I've done it' - and I think those kinds of images are now seen in some kinds of Australian writing. So that when we see Carey win the Booker we say 'bugger you, we did it, didn't we? we're as good as you are'."

Carey certainly finds reactions to his London triumph are complex. "After the Booker people were asking me all these things to do with *Oscar and Lucinda* and Australia, and how I felt about being Australian. And I knew, on the one hand, that Australians would be very pleased and proud, but on the other hand I had to say things that I couldn't help saying, which were in fact intensely critical of Australia. When I got back I saw someone I know, who said something like 'did you have to go all that way to shit on your country?' ."

Carey's ambivalence towards Australia is uncharacteristic of the prevailing nationalistic mood, which reached a peak during 1988's Bicentennial celebrations. It seems to fit more with the 'cultural cringe' era of the 50s and 60s. "I left Australia in 1968. I felt alien here; the Vietnam War was on, lots of my younger friends were being drafted, or finding ways to avoid the draft. If you had long hair, you would feel continually threatened just because of how you looked.

"We all of us had rather low opinions of ourselves, and you still find that we have in many respects - we as a culture. I think you can look at that 'making a bee-line for London' in two ways. One as a sign of inferiority - that you have to go where the real culture is. But the other thing, which is easy to forget, is that in many ways Australia was a bloody terrible place to be. To arrive in London, in 1968, was such a good feeling. One felt loose and light, and home, and never wanted to leave."

The relationship with Britain continues to mark Australian literature, not just in its content and style but the practical problems of publishing Australian books. Adler still finds her position, as the Australian publisher of a British-based multinational like Heinemann, ambiguous.
"I don't think it’s possible any longer to argue that people like me are holding positions that are likely to go at any moment; because British companies are not really interested in Australian publishing at all, nor in Australian writing. "They’re simply interested in the profit margin and if the profit margin is bumped up by a publicity stunt - like an Australian list - then they’ll do that. The idea of being a branch office of an English publishing company is a self-aggrandising notion of local, and often provincial, publishers. It’s now absolutely essential to be seen to have an Australian identity as a publishing company."

Yet it’s still more common for a company like Heinemann to take titles from their British parent company, than for the parent to take theirs. A sign perhaps that Australian writers still have a lower status in British eyes? "Yes. And everyone would argue that’s the proof of the pudding and we’re still in this colonial relationship.

"I’d argue that what we’re publishing, most of the time in Australia, is actually not interesting to anyone other than Australians. You can either call it the birth of an Australian cultural identity and a writing culture that’s authentic to Australia, or you can say its parochial - it can be either.

"I don’t see any reason why the consumer in England is going to be interested in short stories by a person who lives in Melbourne, about Melbourne life. Why on earth should they be? I’m not particularly interested in a book from Golder’s Green unless the book says something to me beyond that."

Daniel, too, has a sense that the link with Britain is diminishing in its importance. But her response is more to do with Australian literature’s content, than with the problems of publishers. "In the last decade there is an increasing sense of an Australian consciousness that is without any hint of cultural cringe, and it is not any longer as a kind of offshoot of the European consciousness."

New ways of exploring Australia’s, and that of Australian literature’s, place in the world seems to be becoming more important for Australian writers. According to Daniel, a novel like Oscar and Lucinda, or Rodney Hall’s Captivity Captive, or those of "the new, younger writers, is re-exploring the 19th Century. It’s a very interesting development in Australian writing, that it is addressing itself to the past in order, I think, to turn into addressing the future.

"The kind of things we can see in Oscar and Lucinda, aren’t confined to Carey. There is a range of writers who are trying to explore where we have been and the kinds of collective concerns that we all have - partly in order to identify the nature of the future but also there is a kind of shift of geography going on in fiction writing.

"Christopher Koch (author of The Year of Living Dangerously and The Doubleman) once talked about ‘the strain of the lost hemisphere’ in our writing, the harking back to European mythic frameworks for our thinking and our writing."

"There is a shift away from the northern hemisphere now and a sense of moving into a new geographical area. On one level this emerges in a number of novels that are set in the Asian and Pacific area, and there’s also a lot of interest in South American writing. South America too has this sense of being like ‘another Europe’, with strong ties back to the northern hemisphere but an increasing quest for an identity within one’s own geographical zone.

"It is partly a matter of place, a sense of place and space. Out of that many Australian writers are opening-up new ways of looking at the familiar world. Of course if you read an American, South American or an English novel there are often all sorts of resonances and affinities that you recognise, but there isn’t that
primal sense of space that has the capacity to reach an Australian reader."

Carey agrees that the historical theme of Australia's place is something he's addressing. Oscar and Lucinda, for example, starts in 19th Century England and then follows Oscar to Australia. Carey's comment on why he tackled the historical theme is interesting. "You have to, if you're going to deal with the country at all. It wasn't something I sought out because it was a theme that interested me, but suddenly I had this idea to do with glass and this church, which involved being written at a certain period. And the minute you start to think about the period then you've really got to look at that connection."

"I felt particularly with Illywhacker, but also with Oscar and Lucinda, that the culture's so incredibly thin that the country hasn't yet been invented. I grew up, in a literary sense, writing these short stories - The Fat Man in History and War Crimes - and I did want to invent fictional worlds, but I always wanted to write about Australia in the same way that I'd written about those more imaginary societies. And in a way, with Australia being what it is, you can do it here. It would be much more difficult to think of doing in the UK."

The optimism of Australia, the 'lucky country' image, is reflected in the literature boom, says Carey. "Going to the Adelaide Festival a couple of years ago I spent a lot of time with friends from out of the country. I tended to be a bit jaded but they were really impressed - by the vitality, enthusiasm, energy, and optimism; and the number of people who are writing. Yet I always feel compelled to argue against that sense of Australia, the one that I've just put forward, because it's what people see when they arrive. Looked at that way it looks like a country that could do anything."

"Yet when you look at all the other evidence around you, our balance of payments for instance, or manufacturing industry or our record in foreign affairs, you see what's hidden under this great excitement and enthusiasm and optimism; a country with a very fragile economy, that's sold out its independence to other powers - historically it's been keen to act like a child to parents. I always feel so mean even mentioning this with visitors who're excited about it. They're coming from Europe and the problems of Europe, we seem like these happy dancing fools with nothing to worry about."

The complexities of Australia's relationship with the USA seem in some ways to have displaced those of the relationship with Britain. They're certainly a theme in Carey's work. In his first novel Bliss, for example, several of the characters are itching to get away to New York. "I'm with them," admits Carey, "I'm off to New York to teach in January, I love New York."

But Australia's relationship with the US is a more complex matter, he says. "That's a different thing, that's talking about politics and governments, what I respond to in New York is the great, raw, ugly, cruel machine - it's a very exciting place."

In his short story 'American Dreams' (from the collection The Fat Man in History), for example, the kids in a small Australian country town are really in love with America. Yet when American tourists arrive, the town's inhabitants become parodies of themselves as they try to entertain the Americans and get their dollars.

"But the story originally had a last paragraph," says Carey, "which my editor at the time suggested I cut off because the story had too many endings. At the moment the story ends with one of them posing for the tourists, saying 'I feel I've let them down by growing older and sadder'. The paragraph that was cut out said 'but we're saving the dollars they're giving us and we're going to America'.

"I think my editor was right about the story but I still mourn the more complicated truth."

Carey says he has no real feeling of the direction in which Australian fiction in general is going. He's busy working on a new novel and two movies at present. "I'm a self-centred writer," he says, apologetically, "basically obsessed with my own work and perhaps not in a very good position to give any sort of overview."

Adler, however, feels confident that the boom in Australian publishing will continue with Australian publishers continuing to develop their independence and continuing to win a wider acceptance in the world. It's an optimism Daniel shares, "In terms of the writing I find that incontestable. There can only be a continuing surge because of the number of younger writers as well as the established writers."

But her confidence is tempered by a few doubts about her fellow critics, "I think the terms of debate, dialogue and discussion are still very limited. The fiction is ahead of us. I hope that in the nineties there'll be much more adventure and risk-taking. I think it's very important that there be all sorts of exploration of the tensions and the differences, the diversity, the contradictions within our writing. And I hope there'll be more and more critical books and more and more critical debate about what is happening because at the moment I don't think we're keeping up with what our writers have been doing for nearly twenty years."

JIM ENDERSBY is a British journalist, currently working for the Tribune newspaper in Sydney.
I grew up with *Dolly*. The first issue came out in November 1970 when I was in Year Eight. It was a heady time. My pocket money was going up and up. The Whitlam government was about to be elected, ‘things’ were happening out there in universities and city streets 25 miles east of where we lived in a semi-suburban, semi-rural town optimistically expected, like everything else, to boom. (In 1987-88 *Dolly*’s circulation was 228,000. It enjoys the highest readership saturation for a particular age group of any women’s magazine: 58.6% of 14-17 year old girls read the magazine.)

Leafing through old issues I am incredulous to discover that I remember, almost word for word, an article on how to kiss boys. And did I really read *Are You the Dolly Girl He Really Wants?, So How Do You Get To Him?, How to Write a Love Letter, and Keep Every Bit of You For Him?*?

For me, then, the tone of the magazine was frank, friendly and informative. I do not wish to succumb to the all-too easy benefit of hindsight, forgetting conveniently that then (as now in other ways) we were anxious to learn the convenient that then (as now in other ways) we were anxious to learn the codes of behaviour and style that would run the ‘how to talk to guys’ genre of story and give a fashion twist to its story on political protest movements (‘How to Change the World - a Protester’s Guide to Radical Chic’) the magazine clearly understands that times have changed.

Yet, while we have, for a decade, been debating the theoretical means of making sense of *Dolly*, and its absurdly anachronistic title persists, the very object of our anxieties has arguably changed. A survey of the magazine for 1989 suggests that *Dolly* has begun to reflect, even if palely, some of the issues feminists have put onto the agenda: ‘Jobs that Don’t Pay’; ‘Child Abuse: What Can You Do?’; ‘Did He Rape You?’; ‘Is this Our Future? A Look at Australia’s Environment Hot Spots’; ‘It’s OK to be Gay’. And if *Dolly* still runs the ‘how to talk to guys’ genre of story and gives a fashion twist to its story on political protest movements (‘How to Change the World - a Protester’s Guide to Radical Chic’) the magazine clearly understands that times have changed.

Looking at a new magazine like *The Edge* provides one way out of the bother of how to comment on a magazine like *Dolly* while retaining a sort of wry awareness of fashions in interpretive strategies that exist at any historical period. *The Edge* was first published in March 1989 and was intended, in the description of assistant editor Clinton Walker, to fill a potentially large gap in the male market that the success of *Dolly* magazine implied.

This kind of ‘gap marketing’ strategy did not occur to me when *Dolly* made its debut, but when *The Edge* hit the streets, I was media-literate enough to roll my eyes heavenwards at the inevitability of a magazine that proclaimed itself as “lifestyle for young men - sport, humour, music, current issues”. This description is offered in Margaret Gee’s Media Guide, and we can only speculate about “fashion, beauty and lifestyle for teenage girls” while *The Edge* opted for the “Lifestyle” category. Neither did *The Edge* nominate the age group of its intended readership, although it was originally targeted at 18 year olds.

I was also relieved to be afforded a reprieve from endlessly examining as *Dolly*, in the ‘eighties we run the risk, already hinted at here, of reading the mass media to detect negotiation, appropriation, even subversion of its codes of femininity. This is consistent with the need to argue that the oppressed constituency is implicated in the making of those codes and therefore empowered to resist or change them.

Fantasy is still the major attraction of teen magazines. May Lam looks at what’s changed over the past two decades.

Getting the Edge on *Dolly*
what was wrong (or right) about mass media for women. A study of The Edge would make a fascinating complement to the plethora of research and writing on women and mass media - an abundance that inclines one to agree with Andreas Huyssen: that women, the mass and mass culture are conflated in an opposition to the real, authentic culture of modernity. I was not, then, predisposed to read The Edge in the same way that I had read Dolly.

The first editorial exceeded my wildest dreams:

"Welcome to THE EDGE. It's the one magazine that won't waste time on wimps and bullshit. THE EDGE brings you the latest in designer drugs and look at X-head antics. Ever wondered what a girl wanted from sex? You could always ask one. We got all the answers from a girl who's not afraid to talk exactly what she wants. Or maybe you wanna hear..."

To say that The Edge formula is based on sex and drugs and rock and roll might suggest a somewhat flat, tired set of options. Far from it. Feature stories have focussed on a series of 'lifestyle' consumer activities such as getting a tattoo, how to buy a used car, 'hard' and 'designer' drugs, sex aids, night clubs, sex shows, comics, up-market prostitution (now why not down-market prostitution, I wonder?) and lingerie ("...So why not give her a surprise? Show her you've got style"). There are stories on murderers, torture, boxing, planes, cars and a regular sprinkling of stories on music and bands.

Fashion, beauty and fitness tips are conspicuously absent, but there are style pointers aplenty: how to be hip, how to give a party, what kind of cigarette lighters and hip flasks to buy. The magazine does not so much eschew fashion as concentrate on style as a total concept: where to go, how to behave, and what to talk about being at least as important, in this ethos, as what to wear.

The Edge has a specific reason for avoiding fashion features. In a 'don't quote me on that' interview I gathered that fashion features might call into question the masculinity of the magazine, or its readers, or both. In any case, and this is something assistant editor Clinton Walker is proud to discuss, The Edge does not want to display expensive fashionwear only available from selected stockists. The key to the magazine, he explained to me, is accessibility. That is why the magazine has run all those stories on heroin, and getting a tattoo, and presumably, prostitution. Readers want to be informed about these things, he says, without "the bullshit".

Defining "the bullshit" is an extremely interesting proposition, given the flavour of potentially controversial stories run by the magazine. Treatment of such topics as sex aids, prostitution and hard drugs can be characterised as adopting a line that goes: this is what it's like, this is what it will cost you, you're a bit of a dork if you really want to get into this. The story on sex aids in the September issue, for example, includes a picture of a chocolate brown blow-up life-size doll but accompanies it with the following text:

"A blow-up girl, yes. But this one really blows up. Nitro-glycerine nipple inlay gives Cynthia that little extra charge today's busy executive is looking for. Made of genuine Walrus hide, the white model comes complete with horse hair wig that washes clean in hot turps. The black lady is fashioned from high quality suede with tasteful steel wool afterthoughts. For the man who has everything but doesn't want to talk to it. Just $29.95."

Smart. Very smart and very neat. They buy it, we only read about it. It's sick, but it's also funny. Humour is conscripted into the service of what could pass as enlightened politics, depending on which way you look at it. And you might well look at it both ways at once. Either way, it sells magazines.

This sort of play on sex and sexual politics may therefore not need to be readjusted in the light of The Edge's informal surveys which suggest that girls, bigger spenders on magazines than boys, are increasingly reading The Edge. This is a not insignificant development given that the office closed down when unpromising circulation figures were released after the change of format, but reopened when new information came to hand. In view of this readership trend, Walker informed me that The Edge has recently been losing its male focus. He also estimated a more diverse readership than was originally planned for, describing the magazine's potential readers as spanning the 14-35 age group. It's not an age-group category with many precedents but, heck, they can be flexible.

These elasticities of readership categorisation present an interesting phenomenon to the sociologist of popular culture. Boys read Dolly when it's lying around, they just don't buy it. Girls read and buy The Edge. Julie Ogden, editor of The Edge, is ex-editor of Dolly. Women write for The Edge. Men write for Dolly, but not as much. Is there a difference? What is it, and does it matter?

I think it does. For a start, Dolly is read by over half the female population aged 14-17, most of whom go to school, yet its world is located firmly in the boudoir. Despite its forays into social issues, Dolly is still primarily concerned with fashion and beauty. Dolly editor's scoop interview with Bob Hawke, for example, is headlined as novelty, written as farce.

The Dolly girl's boudoir milieu is complete with the inevitable mirror that confirms her status as a spectacle. Whether she looks gorgeous or a fright is up to her. But one thing is for sure - she will be looking at herself, and others will be looking at her.

The Edge reader, on the other hand, is out there on the streets; cruising around, looking for action but staying out of trouble. The Edge is a consumer guide to the spectacle - forget about stockists, we're talking Lifestyle here.

The currency is wit, worldly non-chalance, style. And if this is a fantasy, as Dolly's 'Are YOU the Face of the Eighties?' is a fantasy, that's magazine land for you.

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Not So New

How new is New Woman? Not too much, according to Jennifer Craik.

New Woman Storms Stands ran the headline in the trade journal, B & T, heralding the success of Australia's newest women's magazine. The voracious appetite for women's magazines is attested by the success of two recently launched additions to the market place: New Woman and Ita. New Woman alone sold 275,000 copies of its inaugural July 1989 issue, reportedly the largest selling first issue of any Australian women's magazine.

Its publishers, Murdoch magazines, printed 350,000 copies of the August issue, a staggering increase on the initial target of 75,000. Sales are expected to stabilise between 150,000 and 200,000, which would make it a significant rival to Cleo and Cosmopolitan; or perhaps a companion, for Australian women tend to buy several magazines on a regular basis.

Ita Buttrose has said that New Woman complements her glossier, up-market Ita which was launched in February. Both magazines are aimed at women over 30, women who New Woman declares are "into gym and tonics". Editor Julia Zetta (pictured cuddling the cover model's baby during the photographic session), characterised it thus:

"It is to share what we experience today as women; the vast number of choices we have at our disposal - marriage, working, kids, all of these, some of these or none of these. Travel, study, big business or small businesses of our own. Entwined in all this, keeping one's personal life balanced, beautiful and full with all the sensitivity and magic that requires (sic). Then, of course, there is your own self...we hope to keep you fit, healthy and glowing, realising that this is not without its price of effort either."

According to Matt Handbury, managing director of Murdoch Magazines, New Woman was launched because women "want a magazine that deals with them as women". Research has been commissioned to establish "exactly who these women are", and what they like and dislike about the magazine. Meanwhile, Ita has been fine-tuning Ita, refining the punchy pitch to "women who weren't born yesterday" (a format and slogan borrowed from an American magazine).

Of the two, Ita (published by Capricorn) looks rather more professional - it uses thick and glossy paper; has a more sophisticated layout; has more content which is more stimulating; and carries two-thirds less advertising. At $5, in contrast to New Woman's $2.95, Ita is aimed at a better heeled, better educated and more adventurous readership. This is reflected in the diverse opinions expressed in the letters page which are refreshingly cogent and positive about dealing with life's rich tapestry.

But this may well be the death knell for Ita since, as Nova found in Britain in the seventies, a magazine which pitches itself above the common denominator and gains a loyal readership for so doing cannot defy the logic of publishers obsessed with mass markets.

New Woman is a somewhat scruffy object by comparison. The curious choice of thin, transparent paper cannot do justice to glamorous advertisements or typeface. A good many of its articles rely disconcertingly on reprints of material from elsewhere, presumably bound by Murdoch copyright. This gives the appearance of a casual market gambit - a budget production using recycled material to test the market place. On the basis of its initial high sales, New Woman will raise its advertising rates of $2,850 (full page) in September; one can only hope that production values will rise accordingly.

So what will the new woman find in its pages? Articles in the first issue include: are you indispensable?; self defence for women; is marriage making you fat?; more sex please; the difficulties of step-mothering; setting up house with another woman; men who won't commit themselves; how to cope with ageing (faces); how to turn stress into success; and how to divorce your mother.

These topics are clearly pertinent to the new woman, but the articles themselves give off a slightly desperate, defeatist air, suggesting that women cannot quite cope and would prefer a simpler life. Undoubtedly the recognition of stress, multiple demands and invisibility will appeal to readers accustomed to the suburban norms of the Women's Weekly and the superwomen of Cleo, but New Woman still relies on the formulaic journalism of these magazines that falls short of adequately addressing new issues and endorsing contemporary lifestyles.

Moreover, there is a constant contradiction between articles constructing and promoting the new woman, and articles and advertisements with a very different message; for example, the article "Is marriage making you fat?" appears opposite an advertisement for YSL perfumes featuring a very slim glamorous model. This kind of schizoid presentation can only confuse and further undermine neophyte new women. Surprisingly, men's opinions feature prominently in New Woman; apparently the new woman still cherishes his views. Indeed, a male writer leads the issue with "Who is this new woman?" He concludes:

"But new woman or not, she likes kittens, flowers on her birthday, Sunday breakfast in bed, little kids unwrapping Christmas presents, boiled eggs and 'soldiers', Maltesers at the pictures, and me. Her favourite things are, like me, paradoxical."

It would seem that this new woman is very like the old. An article on balancing work and home argues for balance between "love and work", to be like Francesca, a 38-year old film editor:

"My work is stimulating and challenging. I love it and the people I work with. I also love my time away from work, whether I'm with my husband and our
son or with close friends or alone with myself, away from everything. My life is really a rich tapestry, and all the threads contribute to the beauty of the design."

The contradictions between the ideals and realities of the new woman are reinforced by the selection of advertising, most of which plays on the fear of losing youthful looks and bodies. The Elle Bache Neck Creme advertisement epitomises this theme by depicting three cackling chooks in bonnets and bows over the caption "Unprotected necks end up looking foul". Elle Bache can, of course, "restore your neck and give it a more alive skin".

It is an effective advertisement and carefully targeted, though it is a disturbing reflection of how little conventions about femininity and beauty have changed. Women consumers are still hypnotised by the magical, transformative powers of potions and products.

In all, over a third of the advertisements promote cosmetics (perfume, skin care and 'personal' products) appealing to a middle range and concerned with preserving one's looks. Fashion (designers, hosiery and shoes) and food (healthy) each account for about 13%, followed by a smattering of other products and services: travel (Greece, Philippines, Victoria, Terrigal); kitchen equipment (upmarket); cars (Pulsar, Rover and Galant); and financial advice. Looking somewhat out of place is an advertisement for a pewter hip flask; a better tonic for some perhaps than the gym!

This array of advertising reflects the equivocal appeal of New Woman, at once acknowledging new lifestyles and new habits, but still emphasising old values. The focus on youth, health, slimness and 'looking good' relies on the old formula. Even though New Woman features some (slightly) older models, for example in a fashion spread on 'Home-Work', featuring a couple and a child in tableaux of domestic and working life, (very) young models are still the norm.

More disconcerting is the convention employed to photograph subjects of the 'Face to Face' interviews; women who weren't born yesterday receive the soft focus treatment to soften the ravages of time.

Faces interviewed are John Mangos (newsreader), Litsa Moessis (florist) and Wendy Harmer (comedian). Wendy's mother advised her: "Don't put your personal life on the stage, dear. It makes you very vulnerable", advice which many new women will have heard! More realistically, Wendy observes: "Women can't reasonably expect to have a career during the day and still be treated like a delicate sex object at night." New Woman, however, would appear to be adding to the confusion rather than clarifying women's roles.

The magazine has the familiar variety of arts reviews, beauty advice, fashion, fiction and horoscopes. It also gives financial advice and features an article on day care. Its recipe section is limited to two recipes, Le Cassoulet and Souffle Omelette, giving two staples a cosmopolitan makeover; the dishes are photographed in Vermeer-like earthy tones of a rustic kitchen (strictly European).

A reader's cultural identity is further confounded by Anna Dell'Oso's column which, as usual, is written beautifully; she revisits her pet topic, namely the difficulties of growing up in the 'fifties as a New Australian. But now, as a new mother, she seems to be rediscovering her roots, her mother and the values of the 'fifties. Dell'Oso sees new mothers "looking at our mums with new eyes, as allies rather than ideological or lifestyle enemies"; for her, new women need "to be nurtured into standing on our own female ground".

The future of the new woman is clearly contested; it is hard to know how much New Woman is a serious attempt to address the issues and how much a disingenuous construction of a new target market. Either way, if the range of issues and opinions in the inaugural issue is any guide to the challenge facing all new women, the task is formidable. And I doubt that New Woman is the answer.

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Making the World Go Round

World Music: trick or treat? Paul Chapman offers an answer.

World Music is a useful if slightly misleading label. Michael Jackson, Kylie Minogue, the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd and Sting make what is really World Music. Their music is as ubiquitous and inescapable as pollution. They are global by virtue of the commercial-technical power of the West.

Live Aid, Sport Aid, Sting’s Aid, Mandela’s Aid, global telecasts all serve to reinforce the domination of Western rock-pop. The new category World Music was not created to describe this music. Paradoxically, the term describes local musics! Therein lies its challenge to the dominant discourse.

World Music was invented by a group of UK distribution companies as a marketing device to facilitate the sale of mostly African music in retail stores. African music, or Salsa for example, would disappear in the record shops into jazz, reggae or folk sections when it was none of these things. The retailers are happier to stock the material now they know where to put it. There is, and has been, a market for this material for some time. The device has worked: everyone now knows about the existence of the category even if they don’t know what it is. A subtly subversive piece of marketing.

World Music has become a catch-all description to cover non-Western popular music. It could be described as the rest of the world’s response to the global domination of Western music. Reactions to this phenomenon cover a broad range. One sort of reaction is to ignore completely Western music or ban it (USSR, China, Guinea). Another is complete internalisation of Western music and the rejection of indigenous local traditions. A third is incorporation of Western music into traditional local music creating a new syncretic or hybrid music. The latter is the most interesting and creative response to the commercial monopolising of Anglo-American music corporations.

This syncretic music subverts our traditional definitions of rock, pop, jazz, ambient and so on - the very reason retailers were reluctant to stock the material in the first place. Syncretic music also quietly undermines any notions, still strong in the community, of equating technical mastery with cultural superiority. Not the least of its qualities is that these forms of music can remind us that there are viable cultures other than our own. These political acts of resistance are all there in the music itself without the need for sloganeering. Their basis is local economies, individual communities or language groups and local entrepreneurs. These may be very fragile but it is these alternative sources of power which enable the musician to maintain competing musical-cultural and political discourses.

Recent popular music history has shown that the forms of music which simply proclaim their rebelliousness are among the most easily absorbed by the multinational corporations. As the cultural critic Adorno once observed: "music represents the immediate manifestation of impulse and the locus of its taming". Punk rapidly became high fashion, an empty sign or simulacrum of rebellion. Hip hop, for all its taboo violations, ends up confirming the rules it breaks. Its bricolage techniques remain enclosed within a self-referential rock-pop mythology. Their occasional successes feed the commercial culture they often complain oppresses them. Internationally they only add weight to the steamroller of American culture that squeezes other music culture into insolvency.

Syncretic musics of resistance have existed and flourished in the non-western world for more than twenty or thirty years. These musics have been infrequently heard in the West because it was not in the interests of the ‘majors’ (the big five - CBS, WEA and RCA in America, EMI in the UK, and Polygram in the Netherlands) to sell the material outside their local communities. From the early days of recording, the companies divided up the world into dis-
crete ‘territories’. This was part of the process of creating a controlled market. Other companies would adopt a ‘hands-off’ attitude. It was important to prevent the market from being flooded with material and actually keep other music out. These artificial barriers have been breached to a certain extent, due to recent developments. Among these are the setting in place of global distribution networks for rock-pop, disco music, greater ease of communication and increased mobility. Tourism can enable people to hear and see different musics. Jumbo Van Rennan, UK head of Mango records (a subsidiary of Island), considers that ‘access’ is the basic reason for the upsurge in interest.

The ‘majors’ do not have complete control over World Music: that is its great advantage musically and politically. What is happening is that the ‘majors’ are signing more and more ‘licensing deals’. The local originators of the music sell the reproduction rights of their material outside their home territory. It is, of course, an area wide open for abuse and exploitation. The protection these World musicians have is that they don’t need the West and its ‘majors’.

It is in the nature of music that it is a transient reflection of culture, politics and society. The moment of World Music may last longer than many other musical phenomena because there is still such a great diversity of musics, cultures and societies in the world. The creativity displayed in these musics must make us question the sterility of our own culture outside the technical and scientific fields. The Michael Jacksonisation of the globe continues apace. The president of international operations for ‘Toys R Us’ recently said “There are fifty million kids in Europe and they have converging lifestyles in music, designer labels and Big Macs. The international market is a reality and consumers are becoming more similar globally.” World Music is a herald of these developments and points the way to creative strategies to meet the challenge.

PAUL CHAPMAN presents ‘Globestyle’, the African and World Music program for Sydney Community Radio Station 2SER-FM.

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A DATE TO REMEMBER

Dear Subscribers,

From February 1990, ALR will be going monthly. The issue you’re holding in your hand is our bumper summer issue, covering the months November to January. From February, therefore, existing subscribers will unfortunately find their six-issue subscriptions expiring twice as quickly. But as a small token of thanks to our loyal subscribers we’ll add two months free of charge when their current bi-monthly subscriptions expire.

You’ll also be pleased to know that the new monthly subscription rates, published elsewhere in the magazine, are actually relatively cheaper than the bi-monthly rates they replace. They’re also cheaper than those of any comparable monthly magazine in Australia. We’re sure you’ll find the new monthly ALR more stimulating, topical, surprising and possibly exasperating than ever.

Yours sincerely,

David Burchell & Jane Inglis.
An Era Closes

The collapse of 'actually existing socialism', and the winding-down of much of Western communism, marks the end of an era. For many veteran socialists, it seems a final chapter of defeat. Eric Aarons argues on the contrary that the lives of two generations have been far from wasted...

Most of my colleagues, I think, share Adam Farrar's considered optimism for the success of a new left party (ALR 112). But there are others among us oldies who feel the emergence of new political forms and the fading of old ones mean that their life of devotion to the cause has been wasted and that the principles for which they have stood through thick and thin are in danger of being cast aside.

I can readily envisage that there are similar comrades in China, the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Hungary and other countries; indeed, I know some personally. And I know some other lifelong socialists, in the Labor Party for example, who feel somewhat the same way.

Having 55 years' membership in the Communist Party I can understand and sympathise with their feelings, but I do not share them.

People like myself have made the sober assessment that there is no great likelihood that the fortunes of the old organisations of the left will radically revive. This assessment is based on our own strenuous efforts over many years to achieve just that, on our long experience of both success and failure, and on our analysis of present conditions in Australia and elsewhere, including in countries where communist parties have ruled for a long time.

And I do not regard my life as having been wasted, though I could not say as Edith Piaf does in her song that "I regret nothing". I believe I became a better human being through being in the CPA than would have been likely had my life taken a different course.

Nor do I fear that the values and principles for which I have stood side by side with others, or the traditions in which we have developed, are in danger of being ditched.

The old shoes may be comfortable and familiar and have travelled many memorable miles; but thesoles no longer keep out the stones or the water, and no amount of polish can halt the disintegration of the uppers.

The challenge facing socialists everywhere is precisely to find the ways in which what we have stood for, suitably developed and modified, can best be fought for.

The first responsibility of a revolutionary, to my mind, is to their ideals, not to a particular association. The second responsibility is to find the best vehicle through which to pursue those ideas in the conditions in which they have to live and struggle. One recalls, for example, that Marx three years later left the Communist Party for which he had written the Manifesto because that organisation could no longer adequately further its principles.

Members of ruling parties in socialist countries, including those who have held power for decades, are having to face similar issues and the prospect that, without change and reorientation, they could well face extinction, despite great past achievements.

What specific forms of organisation will emerge is still unclear and will no doubt differ from country to country. But it should now be obvious that the changes will have to be radical and will take a long time, during which the inspiration formerly provided to the cause of socialism elsewhere is not likely to be matched, to say the least.

As we receive increasingly loud messages that we are in a new political epoch it may be useful to review some of the features of the previous one in which my generation of socialists, and the generation just before mine, grew up. (I was born in 1919.)

World War One and the Russian Revolution formed the general background, changing everything. I experienced as a child, directly and by observation, the grinding poverty, unprecedented unemployment and indignities inflicted on people during the Great Depression. I was informed (through one parental side) of opposite conditions in the Soviet Union. I felt the dangers from the rise of fascism, was revolted by colonial wars such as those of Italy against Ethiopia (Abyssinia) and of Japan against China, and was intimately involved with the Spanish Civil War in which my father fought. I felt in my guts the ominous forebodings of world war.

Then came the war itself with its success of heavy reverses in which the Soviet Union, with incredible heroism, played the key role. There was the war against Japan with the (as we then thought) possibility of an invasion against which communists and others would have fought whatever the odds, while sections of the ruling class would have collaborated.

We supported and celebrated the post-war national liberation victories, especially that of China in 1949.

These great events and issues embodied the values and principles for which we stood: for equality, against exploitation and injustice, for the social good against pursuit of private profit, a concern for people and their dignity, against the rich, their economic and social control and their opposing values; against war and colonialism and for the equality of races, nations and the sexes.

These values and principles were con-
Our view and practice of democracy left a lot to be desired as we responded to the 'requirements of the class struggle' based on extreme conditions and accepted Soviet pronouncements as to the necessity of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' characterised by a monopoly of state and ideological power by the communist parties.

Sirensorous efforts over the past twenty-five years to review attitudes and practices have proved insufficient to overcome public perceptions reinforced by the focus of the media and the gathering problems of socialism as practised by the CPs in power.

All this, together with new world conditions, new concerns, and changed attitudes to politics, parties and forms of political organising require that a fresh start be made, to which we aim to bring what is good in our traditions and experience, and an attitude of learning from others.

But, some ask, will the principles for which we have stood (developed and modified over the last 25 years) be adequately embraced in a new movement? And, anyway, can we count on their wide acceptance?

The New Left Party's political manifesto, A Time to Act, describes its principles as: social justice, equality of rights and opportunities and equitable distribution of wealth for all Australians; the expansion and transformation of Australian democracy in all areas of economic social and cultural life; an environmentally sustainable society; Aboriginal self-determination; a foreign policy for independence and peace; women's rights; an economy which serves social and ecological ob-

jectives rather than the profits or power of a few or the pursuit of economic growth for its own sake; for a broad vision of the tasks of socialism and the development of workable strategies towards these goals.

That will do me for a start.

If statements like this do not formulate these principles in the same language as we might have used in the past, that is a plus.

If they acknowledge that there are as yet unanswered questions about socialism in practice, that is also a plus.

If they do not claim possession of superior theoretical knowledge or rights to leadership, that is also a plus.

And if they recognise that, in pursuit of fundamental social change in Australia today, there is no alternative to long-term work within existing society and that strategies must be developed on that basis, it is only stating what anyone with even half a realistic eye already knows.

And the chances of success?

Acceptance of one or more of the above principles are today the basis for mobilisation of large and growing movements which extend far beyond the presently organised left.

And while it is a difficulty that many participants in these movements (and in the labour movement) do not count themselves as being part of the left, shared values and principles provide a solid basis for broad actions and alliances which can make a real impact in the course of which perspectives can broaden.

As to political practice, organisations which claim to be or act as though they think they should be the 'general staff' or 'vanguard' of today's movements will get short shrift, as they deserve to.

New political skills have to be developed, and are being, in the very process of forming new political groupings, as Adam Farrar pointed out.

Guarantees cannot be given, either for the success of the new or a revival of the old.

But I am certain in my own mind as to which is the more worthwhile direction of effort and the more likely to renew the fortunes of the left.

ERIC AARONS was joint national secretary of the Communist Party in the mid-1970s. He now writes and sculpts.
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:

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AHEAD OF THE PACK

Two years ago, when we asked whether the unions had their 'backs to the wall', some people weren't impressed. Now the ACTU itself is asking 'Can Unions Survive?' The moral: ALR doesn't just address the issues of the day, it gets in first.

In fact, ALR is just the sort of lively but serious read your thoughtful and intelligent friends would like as a gift. And with Xmas fast approaching, what better time to introduce them?

Give an ALR subscription as a gift this Xmas, and we'll add four months to your own subscription, free of charge. Give two gifts and get eight months free, and so on. And provided we get your order before Friday December 10, we'll also send the beneficiaries of your gifts a Xmas card advising them of their good fortune. Just fill in the form below:

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My Favourite Read of the 80s

Though most lefties lay claim to serious reading (at least in public), some can actually relax and read for pleasure. ALR asked a handful of busy activists, academics, and journalists to tell us about their favourite read of the 'eighties. Here's a sampling:

Just a bit over the top

Over the past ten years I've read a number of magnificent books from Peter Carey through Isabel Allende to Bruce Chatwin but, without a doubt, the best book I've read during the decade has just got to be Pants Off by those two sporting sages, H.G. Nelson and Roy Slaven.

Okay, on the surface, it's just a book about sport. But dig a little deeper and you find these two geniuses, while sharing a knowledge of all types of sport unrivalled anywhere in the world for its profundity and sheer scope (how many umpires did the ancient Mayans use in pelota? Roy and H.G. can tell you: which side of his head did Neville Sellwood part his hair? Or, for that matter, Russell Mockridge? (The boys can tell you.) It's not just sport they're talking about.

What the boys do is use sport as a metaphor for just about anything else you can think of - politics, literature, philosophy, showbusiness, sex, philately - you name it and the boys know about it. What they've done is unlock the wisdom of the universe and dress it up as sport, sport and more sport.

There's nothing these two estimable gentlemen don't know about every type of sporting endeavour right around the globe, but that's only the beginning of it. They are, quite simply, entrepreneurs of knowledge, educators skilled in the Socratic and Platonic traditions right through to the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Allan Border.

And the special features! How many runs did Patrick White score against Dodemaide?

Did you know White and Donald Horne enjoyed a fighting partnership of three before Alderman sent Horne's stumps crashing ten metres the other side of slips with yet another of those incomparable inswingers which then cut the other way (he had to do that to get a batsperson of Horne's quality out).

And the steamy stuff of Roy Slaven's early life poolside and behind the bikeshed which goes some small way to explaining the man behind the mike today.

Pants Off is simply the best book I've ever read. And if that seems to err on the side of reservation, if it sounds like I'm hedging my bets, afraid to come out and really say what I think about the tome, don't take my word for it. Go out and buy it from your local ABC shop or, as they say in the ads, any quality bookshop.

- PAUL MURPHY; compere of ABC radio's PM and journalist on SBS TV's Tonight program.

Rules for revenge

My favourite book this year has been Fay Weldon's The Life and Loves of a She-Devil. It is the perfect revenge-fantasy.

The only thing wrong with it is that it is the book I would like to have written and she got to it first. It is the story of a wronged woman who deviously plots her revenge over many years. Weldon has a very bleak view of the world. All her men are weak, self-centred and manipulative, and most of her women are trampled upon and hurt.

The story-line is as old as the hills and she uses coincidence as a literary form so often that, in comparison, Charles Dickens looks like the master of believable plots.

However, her style is gripping and her wit hilarious, so it is real 'can't put down' stuff. You have to find out if rule number 6 for a she-devil, "to be loved and not love in return" can eventually be achieved.

- MEREDITH BURGMANN; feminist, academic and academic union representative.
Old friends & a knock-out

Reading for pleasure can seem a vice when consuming books becomes a profession. Calling them texts for classes, titles for review - the very terms we use tend to separate works of literature from the processes of creation or delight.

But there are cupboard readers even in the worlds of teaching and reviewing; and now and then there appears the space and energy simply to relate to a book.

My steady favourite, old friend for re-reading, remains Jaroslav Hasek's The Good Soldier Schweik (Penguin); still funny, bitter, deeply satirical, riotously rude.

And I really admired, and read twice (that's true praise from a book reviewer), Amanda Lohrey's The Reading Group (Picador) - even liked it more second time around.

But the book I remember being most knocked out by, the book I have pressed onto most people and bought several copies of (that's true praise with distinction from a book reviewer) was Barbara Vine's A Dark Adapted Eye (Viking/Penguin).

Vine is a name under which Ruth Rendell is now sometimes writing. I've always respected her Inspector Wexford mystery novels and have pursued eagerly her more wide-ranging, detective-free psychothrillers, usually set in North London.

But now, with a new name and publisher, she seems to have reached a wholly new level of structural and stylistic power, creating a compelling and fully mysterious story where horror, credibility and insight interweave in a way that suggests that Rendell, writing as Vine, may be just about the most powerful novelist working in England today, and with few challengers elsewhere.

STEPHEN KNIGHT: Professor of English at the University of Melbourne.

By dint of necessity ...

Epigraph 1. Chelov'ek yest' to, chio on yest: - A human being is what it eats. (Old Russian saying.)

Epigraph 2. A Soviet citizen shopping for food walks into a store with empty shelves. "Hmmm ... I see you have no meat," he comments. "You are wrong, comrade. We sell fish here. We have no fish," corrects the clerk. "The store that has no meat is down the block." (New Soviet joke of the 'eighties.)

I have been living alone for about two months because my wife, a great talent in cooking, is herding our schoolboy in Moscow. So I have, at least once a week, to wash and cook for myself. My best achievement in cooking is fried eggs with bacon. But it is impossible to eat this meal for more than two days in a row. You will acquire repulsion, for sure! To go for take-away food? Spare me this necessity of going for food every day, thank you! Sometimes I use to work ...

... Having searched each drawer in the kitchen I have found a remarkable book that I had bought myself 17 years ago in Moscow. I recalled we had been married for three years to that time ... But I did not remember if my wife had used it whenever.

The book I found is titled Guten Appetit. It was written by two German authors - Gunter Linde and Heinz Knobloch (the last means 'garlic'). It appeared first in GDR and then was translated into Russian: Moscow, 1972. The authors have collected the most typical and most popular cooking recipes all over the world. There are even some descriptions of Australian meals. The best meal in Australia, it says, is a piece of meat. I really did not understand what they meant - steak, lamb or pork, and was amazed why they did not recall such a famous Pavlova cake recipe...

By the way, plenty of cookbooks are published in the Soviet Union. I don't know why. Maybe to compensate for a lack of food itself? For instance, the book titled One Hundred Meals of Eggs and Milk is very popular now. And it's clear why. Because it's a task beyond the capabilities of an ordinary Soviet citizen to buy meat in a butchery (viz epigraph 2). The author of this useful manual is trying to convince us that it's madness to eat meat, because it's highly harmful for our health. I think the fellow simply filled a so-called social order ... I hope that there will come a new page in the history of 'Mother Russia' when there is plenty of food and a lack of cookbooks or plenty, it's better, it's normal! of the first and the second.

Back to the German cookbook, the main result of reading it was a disappointing one. Again, I have come to think that I was able just to fry eggs. Stagnation, alas ... - ALEXEI IVKIN, Pravda (Moscow) correspondent here in Australia.
I’ve missed several ALR deadlines trying to decide on my favourite book of the ‘eighties. How to choose from the hundreds I’ve devoured over a decade?

Nothing in non-fiction stands out. All the seminal (Oh, the need for a new language!) feminist works which transformed my life belong to the ‘seventies. And I haven’t read any good Marx or Marxist tomes for ages. (Where are you when we need you, Harry Braverperson?)

Some of the biographies and autobiographies of the ‘eighties have been outstanding - Vivian Gornick’s Fierce Attachments and Kim Cherin’s In My Mother’s House, both of which deal with the problematic relationships between American communist mothers and their feminist daughters. But none of these have carved out a place as favourite.

A novel perhaps? After a hard day’s class struggle, nothing gives me greater pleasure than to curl up with a good novel, often until the wee hours of the morning. Well, almost nothing...

Maxine Hong Kingston’s American Chinese classics, The Woman Warrior and China Men; Janine Burke’s novel about Australian radicalism in the ‘seventies, Speaking; Marion Zimmer Bradley’s blockbuster historical romance, The Mists of Avalon; Jane Lazarre’s The Power of Charlotte, another book about the communist mother/feminist daughter relationship; and Margaret Atwood’s terrifying vision of women’s future, The Handmaiden’s Tale.

Isabelle Allende’s The House of the Spirits is a gem. Sally Morgan’s My Place is also a revelation, though her often pedestrian style diminishes what is otherwise a forceful account of Koori oppression in Australia. Brian Matthews (even though he is a boy) deserves an accolade for Louisa, his biography cum novel about Louisa Lawson, pioneering feminist and also Henry’s mum.

But, I guess my favourite book of the ‘eighties is Keri Hulme’s The Bone People. It is a wondrous story about a Maori Scottish artist and fisherwoman, much like Hulme herself. It transcends the limitations of the narrative style with strong elements of fantasy and myth, though it doesn’t quite fall into the category of magical realism. It’s about the creative and chaotic impulses of artistic life and of the often conflicting desires for independence and interconnectedness. It’s also about the fierce Maori attachment to place.

Altogether, The Bone People is a whirlwind which blows you to parts you’ve never known. And it’s, sadly, one of the few books which deserved the Booker Prize.

- CARMEL SHUTE: works in the Public Sector Union (PSU), ABC sub-branch and is an Insomniac.

If I were to choose a couple of books from the latter end of the decade which really engage with some of the conundrums in left political thought, they would be Stuart Hall’s collection of essays covering the decade from 1978 to 1988, The Hard Road to Renewal and Barry Hindess’ Freedom, Equality and the Market.

While quite different animals, the strength of both of these books is that they take the market seriously - not just as an economic category but as a central component of political and ideological calculation.

Both insist that the Left recognise the importance of the market and resist either demonising or lionising it; and both effectively argue, though in quite different ways, that a complete rethink of the dichotomy of market vs public sector is well overdue. Hindess, for example, argues that those positions - liberal, socialist and in-between - that "treat market provision and public control as if they represented distinct and incompatible principles of social organisation ... don’t get us very far". Ranging through the classic debates on citizenship and welfare provision, Hindess brings a refreshing - and tactical - realism to debates on social policy.

One of the interests of Stuart Hall’s essays is the way in which this theme starts with a murmur in the late seventies and then expands through the ‘eighties in dealing with choice, consumerism, the politics of social identities and his critique of the forms of social democratic statism. In his conclusion, Hall underscores Thatcherism’s achievements in unfolding a "positive conception of the ‘enterprise culture’" and puts in an urgent plea for both a reconstruction of the idea of choice as a key element of democratic pluralism; for serious thinking on what a left ‘appropriation’ of the market might mean outside of the old formulas of caretaker statism and for detailed consideration of the "institutional forms of a responsive (rather than a prescriptive) state".

Even if you’re not too keen on these two authors, these issues would seem to be pretty important. Think of developments in Eastern Europe. Think of the decline elsewhere of traditional labour movement values, ideologies and organisations and the restructuring of the labour market. "Onwards", as Gorbachev says, "to full-cost accounting!".

- COLIN MERCER: teaches in cultural studies at Griffith University.
The A - Z of good reading


Who wrote it? What is it? Will I like it? Those are the three questions that The Good Reading Guide asks, and it makes a good job of answering them.

According to its editor, Helen Daniel, The Good Reading Guide is designed to meet a need that I’ve long felt was there. I find the present system by which new fiction reaches the reading community is limited.

"New novels are reviewed and for a few weeks or months they’re shimmering there on the horizon and then they disappear. It seems to me that we need to extend the life expectancy of new novels. We have some splendid writing from the ‘seventies that was helping to pave the way for the fertility of the ‘eighties, and I think it’s very difficult for readers to keep up with such an extraordinary range of fiction."

The book comprises entries from a hundred reviewers from all over the country, each of whom was asked to choose 50 interesting Australian novels from the last 20 years. All the contributors set-out to write for the casual reader, for someone who is not familiar with an author’s history and perhaps won’t have read their work before.

The Guide is set out in an A-Z format so that you can look-up individual authors, and when you do, you find a ‘critics choice’ - the book most liked by most contributors - and a couple of mini-reviews of the author’s books.

The result, says Daniel, is "a menu of what’s available in Australian writing. It seems to me to be a splendid mix of critical voices, there’s no one view of Australian writing being presented. Many of the contributors would disagree with many of the other contributors, but it seems to me like a menu where readers can learn what is offering in Australian writing."

The mini reviews are the kinds of thing a friend tells you when they recommend a book, just a few details that will either make you want to read it, or will put you off it for life. Luckily most of the books mentioned have at least two reviews, so you get a balance of opinions.

Whether you’ve read a lot of Aussie fiction, and want to know more, or you’re an absolute beginner, wanting to know where to start, The Good Reading Guide is going to be invaluable.
Do-Gooders and Blow-Ins

As the Royal Commission into Black Deaths reminds us, white 'do-gooders' play a significant part in the Aboriginal people's struggle for justice. Yet just how do we stand 'outside' the systematic racism we deplore? Tim Rowse muses on this and other contradictions of white anti-racism.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody has again focussed attention on the relationships between Aborigines and police. Whether police kill Aboriginal prisoners or those prisoners make police cells the setting of suicide, it would seem that the occasions when police 'deal with' Aborigines distil all that is ugliest in Australian race relations: bullying, hatred and despair, laced with booze and what, in Australia, passes for machismo.

Gillian Cowlishaw's recent book on institutionalised racism in our countryside does not canvass these issues directly; in fact, the Royal Commission doesn't get a mention. But in what she says about Brindleton, her fictional name for a real town in north west New South Wales, there is much to inform the hopes one might have for the historic sequence of reforms of which the Royal Commission is but one moment. Her perspective is pessimistic: ultimately she doubts not the efficacy but the direction of what she calls (with plenty of irony) 'enlightened' policies.

The Royal Commission is generating its own literature on the social relationships of towns such as Brindleton, writing flooded with the light of the most searching judicial scrutiny that European authority can set in motion. What the commissioners produce will be unique, not only in the circumstances of its production, but in its genres: a series of case studies, biographies which one might call 'tragic' except that the meaning of that all too easily uttered word might have to be redefined. Is it the epic drama of tormented and flawed individuals, or is it the working out, in the instance of the individual life, of an institutionalised racism which is petty, banal, cruel, well-meaning - and, I believe, difficult to blame on any one clearly malign social interest?

And who are we, the readers of such writings? Is there a constituency of 'enlightened' people to whom the meaning of these terrible individual denouements is already clear, because we come to them with an 'analysis' which separates us both from the past and those redneck contemporaries who (we imagine) will never be our peers? I do not mean to question the anti-racist intentions of any reader when I pose the question which clearly increasingly discomfits Cowlishaw: from what position does one observe racism in a racist society? Is there an Archimedean point from which an enlightened perspective is possible and from which anti-racist social planning and political policies can be formulated with confidence?

As a close-quarters observer of racism in an Australian country town, Cowlishaw found that although she had gone there knowing where she stood, the longer she stayed the less confident she became that such a position existed. So her book is not just about racism, but about how the 'enlightened' think about their relationship to it.

As a site from which to think about racism, the Royal Commission has the advantage of being the product of Aboriginal agitation which has continued to demand answers and results. It may therefore generate the kinds of analyses which can be translated into recommendations. Cowlishaw's book makes three critical points which need to be considered by anyone taking part in that reflection.

First, racism, she says, must be understood as the local idiom of what is really a class oppression. It follows that it is futile to conceive racism as an "outlook" which can be detected in some individuals so that those individuals can be screened out. The structures generating racist responses will be left untouched by such reforms.

Second, though police are the most visible instance of white power, that power is fundamentally secured by "an unholy alliance" of graziers and those whom she (and the white and black townsfolk she studied) call 'blow-ins'. 'Blow-ins' are employees and their families posted to bush towns by such central bureaucracies as education and welfare; they live in Brindleton only a few years, if that. From their ranks emerge most 'do-gooders' and even 'stirrers', those disturbed by local racism who seek to put into practice the 'enlightenment' philosophies of government welfare initiatives.

However, both do-gooders and stirrers remain socially distant from most of the Aboriginal community; their activism not only often embarrasses residents of all colours but also, in its own way, reaffirms dominant white values and institutions. Unable to penetrate and dismantle the most refractory forms of Aboriginal culture, do-gooding (an ironic term for an ironic position, says Cowlishaw) marginalises those Aborigines who do not cleave to 'enlightened' programs.

Third, the most autonomous and dignified Aboriginal culture in the region is that milieu impenetrable to do-gooders and looked down on by local whites. Cowlishaw evokes an Aboriginal "culture of opposition" in which alcohol 'abuse', outlandish public behaviour, a humour both anti-white and self-mocking, and disrespect for property are prominent.

Much of this culture consists of the very practices which solicit the continuous attention of the police who, in turn, are urged on by the many white townsfolk who are worried by what they
see as the leniency of contemporary law enforcement.

In other words, Cowlishaw's book is an assault on the optimism of those who hope that the Royal Commission can achieve something. Though she does not explicitly examine the politics and ideology of that commission and the social movement behind it, it seems implicit in her book that commission-inspired innovations in policing practice and welfare endowment will bear great risk of repeating the failures of 'enlightenment' which she depicts. White townsfolk will fear any weakening of the agencies of law enforcement and will seek to socialise incoming police into the well-practised procedures of town surveillance and control. Programs to assist Aborigines to live with hope in their future will only renew many whites' outrage at Aborigines' privileges, while confirming, in other do-gooding whites, a sense that Aborigines' self-destructive values and practices can and must be changed by sympathetic intervention. The latter view will animate fresh waves of blow-ins and the few unrepresentative allies that such programs co-opt from the disunited ranks of Aborigines.

I stress that this is not necessarily my prognosis of the effects of the commission's likely recommendations, nor is it an explicit forecast of Cowlishaw. But I think that this sad scenario faithfully extrapolates from her description of Brindleton politics in the late 'seventies and early 'eighties. *Black, White or Brindle: race in rural Australia* is therefore a provocative and topical study. Provocative of what? Disbelief? Put the book aside as 'too academic' and too pessimistic?

Most of Cowlishaw's description of contemporary Brindleton is concerned with the whites, rather than the Blacks. To 'study up' (inspecting the powerful) rather than to anatomise the poor and powerless yet again is so unusual in Australian anthropology that we must warmly thank Cowlishaw for this emphasis. It was no doubt prompted partly by a radical curiosity about the world.
ings of dominant ideas and institutions, and partly by the great difficulty, nowadays, of studying Aborigines who are politically sophisticated and who understandably resent a blow-in's detached scrutiny of their intimate affairs. When she comes to the climax of her book, the description of Brindleton Aborigines' "oppositional culture", Cowlishaw admits she does not know that end of town as well as she knows its more 'respectable' side. Her account of their oppositional culture therefore comes from personal familiarity with a few individuals, with one family and from observation at public events. It would have required at least a doubling of the length of my field work to become a participant observer with this oppositional culture, to overcome the discomfort of being initially treated as a welfare officer, and to get past the politically active people whose views are not representative.

I do not doubt for a moment that it would have been difficult to be such a "participant observer", particularly for a middle class white woman. What is debatable is her describing as "not representative" those "politically active" Aborigines whose lives, it would seem, were ordered more like Cowlishaw's and other whites', and were therefore easier to observe. Cowlishaw calls these Aborigines "interstitial" - an accurate word for their place in her analysis for they stand between the dominant and the oppositional cultures and come into focus only in passing. So: who are they?

The interstitial group tends to drink moderately at a pub where behaviour is observable: they stand between the dominant and active people whose views are not respectable. Indeed, in Cowlishaw's account, schooling emerges as the most powerful and controversial apparatus of the 'enlightenment'. Blow-in, do-gooding teachers ally with a stratum of Aborigines to espouse the strategy of advancement through learning.

The purveyors of the new enlightenment theories are struggling in the pool of their own middle-class mores. The modern notions of equality of opportunity, individuality of aspiration and even a limited cultural relativism, are asserted against those, both black and white, for whom such notions are foreign or socialistic.

Cowlishaw doubts that there are the jobs to absorb educated Aborigines, apart from the few in public sector welfare and education agencies. Employment in unskilled trades could be expanded to absorb Aborigines without them having to qualify in an institution which many of them find racist.

Because it is in the advance-guard of 'enlightenment', schooling arouses another kind of critique from the more overtly racist whites. The help that Aborigines get with their schooling, particularly the grants to secondary students, is one of the measures most resented by many whites as government favourites towards those who will not help themselves.

The Aboriginal beneficiaries of 'enlightenment' are therefore truly 'interstitial': subordinate to those who really control 'enlightened' programs, resented by hard-line racists for their 'privileges', and accused by less respectable kin of seeking their own advancement by identifying with whites' values.

But do we need to go to the next step and agree that such people are 'not representative'? Unless we read this phrase only in the rather trivial sense of statistically 'atypical', then answering this question requires that we first answer another: What general Aboriginal interest might the interstitial ones be failing adequately to represent? After reading Cowlishaw's description of what she takes to be the essentially oppositional Aboriginal culture of Brindleton, and noting that she hardly mentions the issue of land rights (apparently rendered a non-issue by enlightenment's emphasis on self-improvement), I am still unsure of the nature of Brindleton Aborigines' interests.

Cowlishaw's conception of their interests is elaborated by putting forward a dynamic conception of Aboriginal culture. She draws on anthropological writing about NSW Aborigines in the 1940s and 1950s by Beckett, Bell, Kelly, Reay and Stilington to show a continuing tradition of Aboriginal reaction to the way whites have mistreated them. That tradition - the "rebellious display of disreputable behaviour" - is alive as contemporary Aboriginal culture, not so much a remnant of precolonial culture, rather a complex formed in response to colonialism itself. She argues that the value of this culture is that it allows Aborigines a dignity in one another's eyes which they cannot have in the eyes of whites. It is "their defiant reaction to rejection, and their haven from the indignities meted out to them".

Some of this culture is humorous: a street that is covered with broken glass is jokingly called "crystal city". There is amusement also at frightening whites and outraging their notions of respectable public behaviour, particularly with public drunkenness. Parents show tolerance of children's misdemeanours when urged by teachers to rein them in. Figures in authority are targets of abuse. Being called a "white cunt" and having one's car scratched has sometimes reconciled some do-gooders (particularly teachers) with Brindleton attitudes which they first thought racist.

Cowlishaw does not turn her eyes from the destructive effects of alcohol in this culture, particularly violence. It seems that Aborigines bash each other rather than whites, and much of this assault is inflicted by men on their female companions. Consequently, one of the most important breaches of community solidarity against white authority is women's willingness to call the police and seek court orders to offset the physical threat which some of their menfolk pose.

Acknowledging the element of "social pathology" in this culture, Cowlishaw nonetheless concludes that in a hostile environment it is the shameless affirmation of values which are an affront to
white propriety that are the positive face of Aboriginality.

If that conclusion seems to some readers to accept rather a lot of misery as part of the logic of cultural opposition, and to judge, as testament of that culture’s strength, the persistent intensity of police surveillance, then such readers are in good Aboriginal company. For those (including, of course, Cowlishaw herself) who would attempt to make the definition of Aboriginal include aspects of the culture that are in opposition to the dominant world of whites, and to define these differences in a positive way, are in conflict with those who do not want to be oppositional.

In other words, in defining the “positive face of Aboriginal culture” as she has and in characterising as “not representative” those who make the effort to be more respectable, Cowlishaw is taking sides in a major cultural dispute among Brindleton’s Aborigines. Nothing wrong with taking sides (I’m not pleading for social science neutrality), but one does not have to agree with Cowlishaw, especially when her sympathy for the oppositional culture leads her to overstate greatly both its autonomy and its oppositional force.

Cowlishaw’s exaggeration of the force of the culture of opposition stems from her understanding of the term ‘hegemony’.

Given this oppositional culture’s rejection of pride in property (they had none), refusal of respect for the wealthy and powerful (the oppressors), and the repudiation of the judgments made by white society (which held them to be inferior), Aborigines naturally presented a threat to white hegemony.

This threat to hegemony persists, she argues. I don’t find this convincing.

If ‘hegemony’ refers to one group’s control of resources secured by its political and ideological leadership, then it is hard to see how Brindleton Aborigines are, or have ever been, a threat. Has white proprietorship of land ever been in doubt in this region? Have political structures ever allowed Aborigines to articulate interests which might undermine the collective interests of whites? No. Then where is the threat to ‘hegemony’?

It seems that all that Cowlishaw means by ‘hegemony’ is value consensus. That is, many Brindleton Aborigines conspicuously maintain a value system which is different from what most whites and some Aborigines think proper. No doubt this is so. But to be a pitied and despised public embarrassment because one violates value consensus is only in a very weak sense to be a threat. One could argue to the contrary, that such ‘opposition’ maintains a cultural separateness which arises from and reinforces one. The oppositional culture is meant to bestow some dignity on its participants, yet some young Aboriginal men seem now to be falling into suicidal despair.

Perhaps, then, the oppositional culture of Brindleton is a culture without interests, eschewing the political process to celebrate an Otherness without future, sustained economically by welfare cheques without end.

This harsh conclusion leaves me feeling very uncomfortable. At least Cowlishaw can see something positive, some spirit of defiance, pride, humour, solidarity (maintained partly by marginalising “coconuts” - “not representative”) - in short a kind of Survival, to use the word Aborigines voiced so joyously and angrily throughout 1988. What do I see, in reaction to her vision - pathology and powerlessness? And is not my account even bleaker than hers, given that I am persuaded by much of what she has to say about the political weakness of Aborigines who have attached their fortunes to the new institutions of ‘enlightenment’?

Rather than invite the reader to choose between what two white academics have to say, as if one of us must be right, I would argue that the difference between us is indecisive and is an example of the difficulty of continuing to write with some pretension to authority about what we refer to as ‘Aboriginal culture’.

Cowlishaw’s book shows that ‘culture’ is rather a heterogeneous series of responses to a colonialism which gives certain real but limited kinds of recognition and encouragement to a people dispossessed of a useful and dignified relationship to their land. How does one place oneself, as a sympathetic white observer, in relationship to that variety of Aboriginal responses? If we think we are on Aborigines’ side against institutionalised white racism, what remedial or revolutionary actions do we support? In particular, which Aboriginal responses are we to be guided by?

Judging from her remark about the difficulties of her fieldwork, Cowlishaw has to have felt very sharply the difficulty of answering these questions. The most ‘positive’ face of Aboriginality is that which is least likely to be turned, in sympathetic co-operation, towards her. Her sympathy for them, however, has much to do with her wish to distance herself from two features of her own culture: Anthropology and ‘enlightenment’.

In a number of recent essays Cowlishaw has criticised Australian anthropology’s persistent severance of Aboriginal culture from history. In particular she accuses anthropology of ignoring the Aboriginal culture that developed in response to European colonialism, and of prejudging those changes as mere degradations of the ‘essential’ precolonial culture which it was anthropology’s task to reconstruct.

But Cowlishaw’s praiseworthy commitment to putting history into accounts of Aboriginality seems to me to be marred by its own essentialism. The theme of Aboriginal adaptation, she has argued, is ‘resistance’. Therefore the distinguishing features of contemporary Aboriginality are its oppositional, stubbornly autonomous, practices.

My worry is that, while this argument certainly historicises Aboriginal culture, it does not free the concept ‘culture’ of essentialism. Cowlishaw’s is a political essentialism: Aboriginality equals resistance, and other strategies and styles of life (such as those of the intersititonal group) are aberrations from Aboriginality’s basic historical trajectory. Though Cowlishaw often shows us the dispersed and heterogeneous quality of contemporary Aboriginal responses to colonialism, like the anthropologists she criticises, she has her own conception of what is truly authentically Aboriginal.

Cowlishaw is sceptical of the over-analysing definitions of Aboriginality which are now common in public utterance and accepted in public policy for such notions have a tendency to repress those features of Aboriginal life which are repugnant and embarrassing to the enlightened Europeans who support the policies of the last decade at a half. Cowlishaw accordingly wishes...
to dissociate her perspective from that of local do-gooders who are necessarily committed to that sanitised vision of Aboriginality. Such people naively suppose they know what Aborigines need (and need to leave behind); they cultivate and promote Aboriginal people who agree. Her distance from do-gooders allows her to see how they fit into Brindleton's tensions and solidarities, and how they support what she calls hegemony in the 'unholy alliance' mentioned above. But is there a political alternative to do-goodism? Or is the alternative merely to do nothing but observe that the flourishing of some Aborigines is part of 'enlightenment's' wider failures?

In fact, Cowlishaw does not find it so easy to differentiate her views from 'enlightened', stirring and do-gooding blow-ins.

One of the qualities of Brindleton Aborigines which whites find most abhorrent is their perceived aggression and violence (directed, as she points out, at each other). One of the difficult things about being even a little 'pro-Aboriginal', according to Cowlishaw, is that other whites force one to defend or to explain away such qualities.

Thus do-gooders will explain at somewhat tedious length that the bad behaviour is caused by certain bad experiences: that drinking and petty crime are the result of boredom and depression; that the Aborigines should be helped to overcome feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem and that the grant (for secondary pupils) is one element in the solution.

Yet this is precisely what Cowlishaw does: "the inspiration and the justification for both drinking and domestic violence came originally from the white man, and have been sustained in conditions of dependency." And:

"This violence is in turn a response to the violence which has been endemic in the controlling of Aborigines since the first settlement. It began with killings, and continued with the violence of the Aboriginal Protection Board, reserve management and police intrusion. The fact that police must now be called frequently to stop blacks hurting each other is a final ironic tragedy."

Indeed, and even more ironic that recommended changes in police procedures might also reduce the rate of Blacks' suicide.

Cowlishaw, for all her irony about do-gooders, privately admits that, unavoidably, she is one. What makes her book valuable is her (intended or otherwise) demolition of the illusion that there is a secure vantage point from which to judge others' representations of Aborigines' interests.

Perhaps if there is a fine line separating Cowlishaw from do-gooders/stirrers is that the latter do not yet have (or perhaps cannot, as activists, afford to acquire) her sense of the irony and the tragedy of both the oppositional culture and its 'respectable' but politically circumscribed alternative.

But, for me, to celebrate this irony would be to find solace in what is really only the uneasy expression of an impossible detachment. There is a tough-minded wisdom in Cowlishaw's book, but it is not an enabling knowledge.

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**ANSWERS TO QUIZ ON P72**

**Question 1:** What is the main theme of this section of the text?

*Answer:* The text discusses the impact of do-gooders and their influence on Aboriginal communities, highlighting the complexities and contradictions of their actions.

**Question 2:** What is the inspiration and justification for both drinking and domestic violence according to Cowlishaw?

*Answer:* The inspiration and justification for both drinking and domestic violence came originally from the white man, and have been sustained in conditions of dependency.

**Question 3:** What does Cowlishaw mean by the statement "This violence is in turn a response to the violence which has been endemic in the controlling of Aborigines since the first settlement."

*Answer:* This violence is in turn a response to the violence which has been endemic in the controlling of Aborigines since the first settlement. It began with killings, and continued with the violence of the Aboriginal Protection Board, reserve management and police intrusion. The fact that police must now be called frequently to stop blacks hurting each other is a final ironic tragedy.

**Question 4:** What is the main critique of do-gooders according to Cowlishaw?

*Answer:* The main critique of do-gooders according to Cowlishaw is their inability to differentiate their views from the 'enlightened', stirring and do-gooding blow-ins. They tend to explain at somewhat tedious length that the bad behaviour is caused by certain bad experiences: that drinking and petty crime are the result of boredom and depression; that the Aborigines should be helped to overcome feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem and that the grant (for secondary pupils) is one element in the solution.
A Popular Panorama

One of the historical events of the decade was the four-volume People's History of Australia, published last year. Eric Fry looks on all four volumes with hindsight.

Who are 'the people', and do they have a history distinct from that of the nation or society?

The people about and for whom Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee assembled the volumes under the collective title A People's History of Australia (1) "are predominantly of the working class but not exclusively so. They are the vast majority of Australians who, on balance, have had the pattern of social relations weighed against them". The editors want to recapture and review the experiences of those neglected in conventional histories - Aborigines, women, ethnic or racial minorities, and the working class in general.

In the four volumes, the editors bring together eighty contributors to pursue a common purpose in different ways. The pattern is revealed in the arrangement and contents.

The first book, A Most Valuable Acquisition, based on the nineteenth century but often reaching to the present, begins with the white conquest of Australia, the dispossession of the Aborigines, their struggles to defend and regain their land. It shows how the country was carved up by its new owners exploiting the labour of convicts and migrants in a capitalist economy, part of the British empire economically, racist in the White Australia policy, militarist in Britain's wars. The essentials of white Australia's historical development are laid out clearly in authoritative chapters stripping the disguises from the orthodox stories.

Making a Life focusses on work at home and in earning a living, the daily tasks ignored in most histories, especially when performed by women.

It presents interesting accounts of the kitchen and family diet, of clothing and fashion for ordinary folk, of health care and of the cold charity of government welfare. Despite the changing pattern of family life over a century, the subordination of women in their double work load remains. We look with fresh eyes at childhood in our unequal society and see how the landmark depressions of the 1890s and 1930s stamped the lives of the poor and passed by the rich.

That takes us to the paid workplace with studies of technology, the factory floor, the computer desk and the legal framework regulating employment. As workers organise, the development of trade unions follows, as does an arbitration system which enmeshes workers with the state and abets inequalities of status and gender. These are displayed in practice in pictures of work life on wharves, in steel mills and in offices.

Taking culture broadly to be activities which are part of everyday life, Constructing a Culture shows these are shaped by capitalist society and regulated by the State, not abstract creations of mind. Human made, they can be unravelled and rebuilt.

Birth, marriage and death over two centuries lead to a clear-sighted evaluation of schooling and its purposes, reflections on how crime is defined and mentally disordered disposed of; an illuminating study of prostitution as work and a moral question; lively pieces on gambling and drink, sport cementing social bonds, the ownership and policies of the media in which a version of daily life is depicted. Australian humour, religion, writing and music are observed; popular culture is defended against highbrow detractors.

The first part of Staining the Wattle exposes the ways in which the people have been kept in place, the second the unceasing movements for change.

In Australia, repression began in convict days; self-government was used to defend property; 'community' was constantly invoked to disguise class divisions. In times of crisis the rulers did not hesitate to call on the armed forces of the state and prepare their private armies. These hard facts are no reason for despair; on the other side is the resistance they called forth. This volume includes fine studies of the women's and peace movements, of the working class and labour in action, of radicals and socialists over a century. We hear the voices of Aborigines, homosexuals, young protesters, environmentalists. The rulers are always challenged and changes grow out of the conflict.

This wide range of subjects in four volumes goes beyond usual histories, as the editors intended. They succeed in their aim to view the world from the kitchen as well as the best room and to illuminate everyday life. Their actors are ordinary people, not the 'great men' of politics, business and warfare who dominate the standard texts of a previous generation.

Women receive special attention, as we would expect. More fundamentally, the aim of dealing with the private sphere as fully as the public domain and recognising the essential role of unpaid family labour in production and reproduction requires that familiar subjects are analysed afresh. A People's History makes as much progress as is present possible in redressing the neglect of women, a continuous process of recasting history which these volumes carry forward.

I have not named authors because they form a co-operative and are too numerous for individual mention. They include notable scholars and activists who have won respect over decades, others whose names are well known and many new voices from whom we will hear more. One in three is a woman. Most are professionally trained, usually working or having worked precariously in higher education. In their background and employment they are representative of the Left intelligentsia in the social sciences, in their numbers a heartening roll call of radical historians.

The limitations of these volumes result from the task they attempt. The chapters are uneven in quality and in substance, ranging from mature studies to preliminary sketches. The wide ground could not be covered in any other way. Often, the information is scanty or selective - history from below is hardest to write because ordinary people are the silent majority whose lives have not been recorded. 'New social history' taking the whole of life...
its province can easily become diffuse, lacking boundaries. The editors for all their labour can do no more than arrange their contributions in a loose structure of State power and political economy, material life, culture and conflict, providing some coherence without imposing uniformity.

They would not wish to do so. Disclaiming any intention of producing a complete or definitive history, the editors need not be concerned about overlaps, inconsistencies and different views. These four volumes bear the marks of their composition and invite their own revision. The description on the dust jacket is modest: "A People's History opens new windows on the story of Australia since 1788".

Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee tell elsewhere how, in 1981, they decided with Peter Love to attempt a people's history as an alternative to the official Bicentennial publications which the seniors of the university History establishment were preparing, supported by public and private funds. It was a bold step which would call on all their courage and humour.

Their point of departure was that the Bicentennial history by 'slicing' Australia's past at fifty year intervals would preclude examination of how any state of affairs originated or changed over time or might be altered in the future. They expected, too, that officially sponsored history would become celebratory and self-satisfied. Setting out on their venture for reasons of principle they appealed to all who would help them on ideological grounds. The popular style and critical tone of the book and a guide to action. There is something in it for everyone who wants to understand the past and change the world.

Eric Fry is a labour historian.

A People's History is a hard-won advance, its limitations the mark of its time and circumstances, inviting successors which will see further because they stand on its shoulders. Consolidating the radical scholarship of decades which will see further because they stand on its shoulders. Consolidating the radical scholarship of decades which will see further because they stand on its shoulders. Consolidating the radical scholarship of decades which will see further because they stand on its shoulders. Consolidating the radical scholarship of decades which will see further because they stand on its shoulders. Consolidating the radical scholarship of decades which will see further because they stand on its shoulders.

Leaving aside such speculations we can recognise the practical foundations for a people's history by the 1980s - the ground gained by labour, women's, Aboriginal and minority history and theory over two decades. These new waves challenged notions of what history should be, making historical writing one of the liveliest arenas of ideological contest. A People's History brings together these critical studies and many of their authors, marking a new stage in the ways we can see our past.

The Sixties Revival Quiz

1. Who invented desert boots? (a) the British Army (b) Algerian Freedom Fighters (c) American jazz musicians (d) Left-bank intellectuals.

2. In the late ‘sixties, the names of the Minister for Labor and the Minister for National Service provided Australian anti-war demonstrators with the perfect chant. What was it?

3. Kate Millett’s pioneering book, Sexual Politics, was published in 1968. One of its targets was an English writer whose novels were much filmed in the 60s. Who was he?

4. The recent film, A World Apart, is based on the life story of which South African communist, imprisoned in the 60s?

5. In 1966 the Gurindji tribe at Wattie Creek made history by raising the question of land rights. Which company was recognised by Australian law as the land holder?

6. By the mid-60s it had become obvious that if you were going to sell records to young people, you had to be socially concerned. Even Elvis Presley could feel which way the wind was blowing. Which top 40s hit was his response to the race riots then happening across the US?

7. Who said: “Existing methods of management and the orientation of the national economy have become outdated and urgently require changes, that is, an economic system of management that would be able to enforce a change towards intensive growth.” (a) Mikhail Gorbachev; (b) Bob Hawke; (c) Deng Xiaoping; (d) Alexander Dubcek.

8. Which revolutionary leader was expelled from France in May ’68, inspiring the slogan “We are all German Jews”?

9. Who said: “The Twist was a guided missile, launched from the ghetto into the heart of urban America”?

10. To which world leader was Nikita Kruschev referring when he said: “His chauvinism and arrogance sent a shiver up my spine”?

11. In Dr Strangelove: Or How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the Bomb, Stanley Kubrick’s 1964 film, Peter Sellers played three roles. One was Dr Strangelove. Another was the ineffectual British wing commander, Marmaduke. What was the third?

12. Which Australian mining town virtually shut down for 8 months in 1964-65 following the sacking of Pat Mackie?

13. Which Melbourne fashion designer shocked Government House in 1967 when, told that she could not meet the Governor in her slack suit, took off the bottom half and appeared in her mini-length jacket?

14. What was sometimes described as “the finest ship in Ho Chi Minh’s navy”?

15. In the 60s the CIA plotted to get rid of Fidel Castro in at least two unusual ways. What were they?

16. Country Joe McDonald sang one of the anthems of the 60s protest movement - ‘I Feel Like I’m Fixing To Die’. Who was Country Jo named after?

17. Who did the Yippies nominate for Presidential candidate at the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention?

18. In which countries were these slogans coined? (a) Power grows out of the barrel of a gun; (b) Don’t trust anyone over 30; (c) If you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem; (d) Be realistic - demand the impossible.

19. Who wrote: “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked”?

20. Which black singer, recently discovered internationally, was hounded out of the USA in the 60s because of her support for the Black Power Movement?

21. Where was Mao Zedong’s most prominent facial wart?

22. Who was the Irish civil rights activist, elected to the British parliament in 1969 at the age of 21?

23. Which Australian Aborigine led the 1965 Freedom Ride which attempted to end racial segregation in NSW country towns?

24. Where did Australian troops first serve overseas in the 60s?

25. Which Gerry & the Pacemakers hit of the 60s was revived this year to commemorate the Hillsborough Stadium soccer tragedy?

26. What did Yves St Laurent say would be his basic colour for 1968, in protest against the Vietnam War?

27. Who said: “The Twist was a guided missile, launched from the ghetto into the heart of urban America”?

28. The famous US spy plan of the 60s, one of which crashed in the USSR in 1961, was finally withdrawn from service this year. What was its name?

29. Which names match the acronyms? (a) WITCH; (b) NOW; (c) SCUM; (d) SOS.

30. Which document, before 1967, contained the words: “Aboriginal natives shall not be counted.”?

31. Which 35-year-old with 15 arrests on his record became the youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964?

32. Which supply line ran from North Vietnam into Laos and then into Vietnam?

33. At the Mexico ’68 Olympics an Australian finished second in the 200m sprint. He joined the two other place getters, both Americans, in a black power salute. Who was he?

34. Andy Warhol’s art factory created many 15 minute sensations. By accident it also produced one of America’s most enduring rock’n’roll performers. Who was he?

35. The Yippies created chaos at the New York Stock Exchange in 1968 by throwing something at the traders on the floor. Who did they throw?

36. Who sang: “People try to put us down Just because we get around/ Things they look awful cold/Hope I die before I get old”?

37. Who said: “The radicalism of the 60s become the common sense of the 70s?” (a) Richard Neville; (b) Tom Hayden; (c) G. maine Greer; (d) Gough Whitlam.
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