LOOSE CANNON is ALR's new column of gossip, comment, and humour.

IT'S BEEN a long time between drinks, but it seems that the Clerks Union is 'lost' to the right. At least that's the expression which NSW Labor Council secretary Michael Easson uses in private. Federal FCU chief John Maynes is a 'goner' according to Easson. The Right itself, says the ambitious but unprepossessing Easson, is in danger of becoming a 'ghetto minority'. Lindsay Tanner, Victorian FCU secretary, now finds previously closed doors opening - such as that of ACTU secretary Bill Kelty. As ALR goes to press, the Reform Group has won ballots in four FCU branches, representing 60 percent of the membership. A ballot is expected for national officials after a win in the Federal Court in May.

Easson, meanwhile, is continuing his attempted takeover bid for the Right in the unions, wresting power from the geriatric hands of the aforesaid Maynes.

ARE AUSTRALIA'S newspapers, radio and TV stations mere handmaidens to their owners - The Bonds, Packers, Murdoch's et al? Conventional Left views are liberally spiced with a demonology which misses the subtleties of media power. An object lesson, then, is Sixty Minutes seen on Sunday nights on Bond's Nine network. The June 4 program saw Jeff McMullen interview Bond himself, not least on the sensitive topic of Ms Diana Gwenyth Queenan's article on June 9. For all the jibes thrown at Sixty Minutes, Cassandra thinks it takes a bit of guts for a program in the private sector with ratings hiccups publically to distance itself from its station owner.

CONSERVATIVE US business magazine Forbes has discovered the unacceptable face of capitalism: the Vancouver stock exchange. Here's what Forbes writer Joe Queenan said of the Canadian Bourse, through which one-third of Canada's trading volume passes: 'A lot of that volume, one suspects, is wash sales and money laundered through shells that were mining outfits on Tuesday but by Thursday were in the three-dimensional pangalactic anti-AIDS cybernetics business.'

Though the sleazeball entrepreneurs who launch these cruddy companies may come and go, the infrastructure of chicanery remains... "And: Asked how many companies listed were real companies with real employees, products, profits and futures, one dealer said, 'I don't know of any, You go into a stock because you know the promoter can run it up to 12 bucks and then you try to get out before the bottom falls.'

"Every so often, beleaguered British Columbia regulators muster the resources to jail some hapless thug. The VSE then trumpets the imprisonment of the criminals behind an International Tixel as an example of how it is cleaning up.

"But it is never clear what one particular lowlife did that made him the object of prosecutorial vigilance, while scores of other lowlifes beat the rap.

"The fact is, being thrown off the VSE for being crooked is like being thrown out of the Khmer Rouge for being too bloodthirsty."


ALEX MITCHELL is not in good odour with parts of the Left in Sydney after his expose-shock-horror of the naive property dealings of the Sydney branch of the WWF in the Sun-Herald.

However, from Mitchell's Notebook (SH, 21 May) comes the following item: The latest book by Britain's Lord Chalfont is not selling well in Sydney - despite his much-publicised visit last month. This is hardly surprising. The book is called By God's Will: A Portrait of the Sultan of Brunei, the world's richest man and one of the most appalling despots of the 20th century.

Chalfont, an army officer and former defence correspondent of The Times, concludes the sultan is "the source of justice and the impartial overseer of good administration for his people" and a man with "a friendly and easy manner, a sense of humour and an obvious affection for his people". Why, then is the sultan guarded 24 hours a day by a crack unit of the British SAS? A clue to Chalfont's sycophancy may be the sultan's decision in 1987 to hire international public relations company Shandwick Pty Ltd to clean up his image.

One of the directors of Shandwick is none other than Alun Chalfont, Baron of Llanternam.

A WALK along the promenade at Bondi or St Kilda reveals a new fashion: Soviet chic. Sweatshirts emblazoned with Cyrillic letters, hammers and sickles, Gorby badges - even old Vladimir Ilyich himself. But more is on the way. The latest craze is a Soviet watch whose numbers spell perestroika in Cyrillic and whose hands are miniature workers' spanners. To counter Monopoly, the board game spawned by British imperialism, the Russkis now produce Glasnost (Nevsky Prospect instead of the Old Kent Rd?). A US-based Zylos menswear now features a line called The Working Class, with dark jackets and caps modelled on 1920s workers' garb. A Sydney dance club, Metroplus, now has a Tuesday night Glasnost club, and features motifs from the golden age of Soviet design - before Uncle Joe got his hands on the drawing board, that is. Meanwhile, ALR's own Gorbymania T-shirt has been sent off to some unlikely places: one buyer asked for a plain brown wrappered number to be delivered to his suite at the Sydney Stock Exchange.

And Australia's Pravda correspondent disproved worries about the Russian sense of humour by purchasing one, fittingly the XL size.