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# BRIEFINGS

**Keating's Precarious Balance**  
The Treasurer's big picture has come unstuck

**Media on Media**  
Nothing's above criticism - except the media itself

**Taxing Women**  
Are women being traded-off in Canberra

**Party Time?**  
Second time lucky for a new party of the left?

**Diana Simmonds: According to the Script**  
Profile: Boris Yeltsin

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# FEATURES

**COMRADES AND CITIZENS**

Can the left be likeable as well as ideologically sound?  
Colin Mercer muses.

**RETURN OF THE KILLING FIELDS?**  
Vietnam is leaving Kampuchea. Not so the Khmer Rouge, says Ben Kiernan.

**AFTER THE REVOLUTION: (MICRO) CHIPS WITH EVERYTHING**  
The workforce of the future is taking shape. Laurie Carmichael imagines.

**CHILD'S PAY**  
There's more to child support than having to make men pay, argues Linell Secomb.

**SATHANIC VERSIONS**  
The Salman Rushdie furor was about more than Islam, according to John Leonard.

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# TIME OUT

**Boom Baby Boom**  
Why are so many feminists having babies?

**Jessie Street: Feminist Extraordinary**  
At last - the News

The USSR's first real newspaper?

**Letters**

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# REVIEWS

**Male Bonding, Hollywood Style**  
A Poetry of Dialogue

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# SERVICES

**Disinformation**

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Six months ago, Paul Keating was savouring his beautiful vision. With the balance of payments seemingly under control, he had a bold plan to have the troublesome economy come right just in time for a 1990 summer election.

At the heart of the plan was an ambitious wage/tax trade-off with the ACTU, to be financed by a prospective $5.5 billion Budget surplus for fiscal year 1988-89. If the unions agreed to forgo a 1989 wage round in return for tax cuts, Keating could break the back of inflation, preserve corporate profits, maintain job growth and bring down interest rates for the election.

The Accord has performed such tricks before. In 1983 it enabled Keating to avoid “catch-up” from the Fraser government’s wage freeze. In 1984, the introduction of Medicare artificially lowered the Consumer Price Index to which wage rises were indexed. In 1985, the unions agreed to discount wage indexation by the inflationary impact of the $A depreciation. And, in 1986 and 1987, the Accord delivered real wage cuts in response to a balance of payments crisis.

The surprising durability and flexibility of Labor’s income policy has made it the foundation of Labor’s economic strategy. Although real wages have fallen, the economy has generated rapid job growth. On this base, Keating has formed a working policy consensus.
between the Federal Treasury on the one hand and ACTU secretary Bill Kelty and left union leaders such as Laurie Carmichael and Tom McDonald on the other. So long as the economy holds together, the weakness of the Opposition political parties means that big business will retain grudging support for Labor.

As with previous Accord deals, Keating's promised wage/tax trade-off contained a sleight-of-hand. Probably more than half of the total tax cuts would represent fiscal drag - higher tax revenues produced as inflation pushed wage earners into higher tax brackets. In effect, Keating wanted the union agreement for wage restraint in return for tax cuts which were due in any case.

So long as the economy behaved, Kelty would play along with this because the deal included a modest social wage pay-off for unions. The problem was that the business cycle refused to co-operate with Keating's election cycle. The August Budget forecast that the economy would grow by a brisk 3.5 percent, that the current account deficit would fall from around $11.5 billion to $9.5 billion and that inflation would drop from around seven percent to 4.5 percent by mid-1970. Instead, the economy began to boom as the non-residential construction, housing, tourism, wool, building products and metal manufacturing sectors all peaked at once.

The surge in domestic demand - particularly the long-awaited business investment recovery - sucked in imports and quickly blew the Budget's current account deficit forecast out of the water. The explosion in Sydney housing prices fed into the CPI which, instead of falling, accelerated to 7.7 percent. With fat corporate profits, worsening labour shortages and falling unemployment, the pent-up industrial relations pressures from four years of real wage cuts began to surface, particularly in the trade union heartlands of metal trades workers, electrical trades workers and building workers.

Kelty told Keating that the ACTU couldn't deliver no general wage rise in 1989, even with tax cuts. At the same time, Keating's scope to deliver large tax cuts was diminishing because of the import pressure that would come from any boost to household spending power.

With the size of Australia's foreign debt, this would risk invoking the financial markets' power of veto on the economy. But Keating has tied his hands against further Budget reduction cuts to finance big tax cuts. Come election time, Keating wants to claim that a Liberal/National government would savage basic government services in order to fund their promised tax cuts.

As Keating's plan has unravelled, policy has been pushed into damage control. As the bureaucrats' confidence in the Accord has been tested, they have successfully pushed for a substantial tightening of monetary policy in order to weaken the unions' firepower and to slow the demand for imports. But, with an election looming, the Reserve Bank has stopped short of lifting interest rates high enough to produce a recession in the second half of 1989.

Keating figures that the unions are not stupid enough to spark off a wage explosion that would ensure a recession. But he knows there is a cost for holding the Accord. First, Kelty will ensure that the industrial relations hot spots - particularly the metal workers, the building workers, Telecom technicians and aviation engineers - will be first in the wages queue. Second, Keating will deliver tax cuts on July 1 in order to ease flow-on pressure to the rest of the workforce. Unless the government switches strategies, Keating will agree to something approaching the ACTU claim for a $20 per week tax cut and award restructuring rises of $30 per week. But this is likely only to forestall a bun-fight over the ACTU's demand that all workers receive something on top of tax cuts in the second half of 1989. Keating will try to drag out the award restructuring round through to the end of 1990, if only to reduce the incidence of "bogus" deals.

As well, the tax cuts will be targeted at wage earners rather than salaried employees or welfare recipients. This will serve the government's battle with the Liberals for the working "family" and working women's vote as well as with the ACTU's desire to deliver gains for the industrially weak and low paid. Keating will postpone plans to cut the top personal income tax rate from 49 cents in the dollar to match the 39 percent corporate tax rate.

Assuming the damage control strategy "works", Labor will still face an uphill battle to win the next election. Whatever the result, the balance of payments is likely to remain precarious, probably forcing a showdown by mid-1990 between a continued negotiated clamp on wage claims or a monetary policy induced recession.

MICHAEL STUTCHBURY is economics editor of the Financial Review

Media on Media

The recent international conference in Sydney (February 8-10) on global media ownership made Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation its case study. Murdoch was in the country at the same time and, through his Sydney executives, he was kept informed of the project.

He is believed to have ordered that News Corporation not co-operate with the organisers but that an executive attend as a paying member of the public to keep an eye on proceedings.

But would the Murdoch papers report the event? This was a pressing question for the organisers because a blackout in the bulk of the press would reduce the effectiveness of one of the chief aims: to improve public understanding and debate about the media ownership problem.

Checks with News Corporation sources neither confirmed nor disproved the rumour. So why not test it?

Since Murdoch bought the Herald and Weekly Times in the frenzied summer of media deals in 1986-7, he has invested substantially in an attempt to revive the Melbourne afternoon daily, The Herald, the paper his father, Sir Keith, made powerful.

Under its former editor Eric Beecher, the Herald has gone "up market" and is, in many ways, greatly improved. The opinion pages have presented a wider variety of commentators.
So it was to the Herald that I offered the article printed below. The proposal was initially well-received by the editor of the feature pages. I sent in the article and, after waiting two days, I rang to ask whether it would be published, and to point out that, to be timely, it would need to appear before the conference, by then only three publishing days away.

The features editor said he had thought about it but felt he had read similar material before. He decided not to publish.

Where in Australia or in foreign publications had he read such an analysis, I asked, for, despite being a keen observer of media, I had missed it and would like to read it myself. He replied that he couldn’t say exactly; it was a feeling he had.

I asked whether he had commissioned any other article about the conference which, after all, was the first of its kind and would deal with an institution - News Corporation - of undoubted significance to Australian public life. Surely this was a newsworthy topic for a serious broadsheet trying to improve its quality.

No, he hadn’t planned any other coverage.

I asked for a ruling from Beecher and was informed, when I rang back a few days later, that he agreed with his staff.

This illuminates a serious problem which, although not new, has been exacerbated by the increased concentration of media control of the past two years. How are journalists employed in the mainstream media to tackle their unease about the effect of publishing on one's employer.

Coverage of the media by media professionals is sporadic, often self-serving and too rarely more than a nigglet at the opposition. Journalists need to recognise that, on the media issue, they must play more than their usual roles of gathering and disclosing facts and opinions from others. They must be sources as well.

It is not as simple as resisting direct orders from Murdoch, or any other proprietor. Directives may not be necessary. Journalists have the same urge for self-preservation as others. Hosting vigorous debate seems attractive until it has the potential to affect adversely your employer's interests. It is not easy to publish critical analyses of the hand that feeds you, especially when there are so few alternative hands.

Other factors intrude. The Herald's decision not to publish could be supported on grounds that it was a legitimate exercise of "editorial judgment". Perhaps, somewhere, the Herald's readers could have found a similar argument to mine. Maybe Murdoch isn't newsworthy. Perhaps my train of thought was unclear or the expression so poor that the piece did not reach publication standard.

Criteria such as these can lead to rejections which have nothing to do with unease about the effect of publishing on one's employer.

But, in relation to media issues, the public will not accept forever claims that "editorial judgment" explains failures by executive journalists to publish unsolicited contributions from outsiders or to deploy staff reporters to delve.

Here is the rejected article:

Next week in Sydney an international conference will examine the influence of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, now the most diverse of the world's giant media conglomerates.

Responses to Murdoch's still-growing creation will depend partly on a recognition that it is different. Regulatory structures designed to balance the public interest with any big media operator's interests may have to be rethought in Australia and overseas.

In some ways, Murdoch has been true to the media baron type.

He is successor to Lord Beaverbrook and Lord Thomson in the sense that he began as the modern colonial (they were Canadians) who made himself big and powerful in the press in Britain. Like Northcliffe and Beaverbrook he is an active, hands-on ruler of the empire. In this, and the yellowish parts of his journalism, he follows (US media owner) Randolph Hearst, too. Like Thomson, Rupert has spread from newspapers into TV. As with most of his predecessors, including in Australia Sir Frank Packer and Sir Warwick Fairfax, he gets involved in politics.

But more striking are the differences between what Murdoch has created and what has gone before. Consider:

1. The sheer geographic spread of News Corp far exceeds the reach of media empires of the past. Even if one accepts that the market is more international now and the globe a village (for communications purposes), his reach is vast.

He has 61.6 percent of Australian daily newspaper circulation (including The Herald) and 36 percent of Britain's; newspapers in Hong Kong, PNG, Fiji and New Zealand; the European satellite TV service Sky channel; and, in the US, major magazines, newspapers, the film studio 20th Century Fox, and the Fox TV network.
2. The "foreign policy" implications of administering such a range of information outlets. It is too often taken for granted that, unlike other famous multinationals, McDonalds, Sony or Coca Cola, the product Rupert sells is food for our thoughts.

3. The skill and complexity of messaging so many different governments to ensure a favourable regulatory climate wherever possible.

4. The differences and the strategically useful similarities of controlling so many different types of media: newspapers, TV, books, news and financial data wire services, movies and computer data services.

5. The range of other businesses with the potential for conflicts of interest for the journalistic operations he also controls, for example, his half share in Ansett Airlines.

Other media organisations, past and present, may have shared some of these characteristics, but not all of them, and not to the same extent. And not in the so-called Information Age, when information is among the greatest sources of wealth and power. Its strongest currency, the English language, is the one News.Corp deals in.

The uniqueness of the Murdoch empire in turn reveals the inadequacy of the traditional methods of attempting to balance the public interest against private media interests of this scale and shape.

It has been suggested that it is not necessarily a bad thing for democratic, capitalist societies if sections of business become very big. The argument goes that they then confront big adversaries on more equal terms and the conflict between the two cancels out the excessive power of both, thus protecting the public. For example: Big Business v Organised Labor, or Monopolies v Antimonopoly law enforcers.

But another school of thought suggests that this idea, if ever worked, has been subverted by a tendency by would-be adversaries to find it easier to work together.

A recent example has been the revelation of collusion among large defence contractors and the Pentagon officials who were supposed to counteract their power. In Australia, changes to the broadcasting law and general inaction by government and regulators aided the concentration of media ownership over the past two years.

In the case if Big Media, this tendency for collusion, not counterbalance, has particularly disturbing possibilities. First, the product - news, ideas, opinion - is so precious that it may be argued that bigness should never be allowed in the first place. If it is, the public needs the adversaries to do their job well.

In the absence of several reasonably well-matched competitors, the main counterbalance is government. But in a democracy, elected rulers know a Murdoch can reward or punish with his media.

The crux is not whether he does, but that he could if he chose.

What counterbalances an information empire such as News Corporation? Is opposition, a prerequisite to brake the excesses of any powerful entity, forever to be restricted by national boundaries and parochial concerns? Are "multinational" responses to a unique multinational phenomenon possible?

A first step to tackling these questions is for many minds to apply themselves to the issue from a basis of accurate information. This is the chief purpose of the conference convened by the Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists.

Instead of debate being restricted to the rather cliched perspectives on Rupert Murdoch which have developed within each country, the IFJ wants to define better the bigger picture. The gathering has not been organised for "Murdoch bashing", nor as a venue for complaints about "tabloid journalism". He owns and represents much more than that.

It is an attempt to analyse an important institution with the same expansive, international outlook that has been applied to such remarkable effect by Murdoch himself.

Like the Herald, other Murdoch papers did not preview the conference, but several did report some of the proceedings. With some exceptions, such as the Melbourne sun (11 February), the coverage was generally fair and accurate. Fairfax papers previewed and reported the conference. Without a set piece "event" such as this it is doubtful that the media ownership issue would have been aired spontaneously, particularly by Murdoch's papers. If it is accepted that only publicity, and then public disquiet, will push cowed politicians into some sort of remedial action, the lesson for activists on the issue seems to be: more events.

PAUL CHADWICK is a Melbourne journalist whose book on media ownership will be published shortly by Macmillan. He was a member of the AJA organising committee for the abovementioned conference. The AJA plans to publish the collected papers.

**Taxing Women**

Low pay, part-time work, domestic responsibilities and children keep women poor, according to background material for the Women's Tax Convention. This is most obvious where women's earning abilities are limited because of family responsibilities or when households depend on women's wages, despite fifteen years plus of official equal pay.

Two hundred women met in Canberra on Saturday, 4 March, at the invitation of the National Women's Consultative Council and Women's Electoral Lobby to discuss the costs of children and women's workforce participation. They came from over forty women's organisations ranging from the right to the left in terms of their male political alliances.

The objectives were twofold: firstly, to pressure the government into recognising that women should be part of economic debates and the second was to give the women at the convention the confidence to enter these debates. We probably succeeded better with the second than the first.

The surprising outcome was that there was a high level of consensus on various issues that were raised. There was almost universal support for the fact that children were a communal responsibility and should be supported, at least partially, from the public purse. This was support for universal payments at a
Participants at the women’s tax conference.

more generous level than the limited support presently available.

The particular situation of women and their responsibility for children suggests that tax cuts targeted to families with children, and low income earners, would be both fair and economically rational. These options were generally supported at the convention.

However, there were some diverse views among the participants. Those supporting traditional roles for men and women want to seek tax changes which will reinforce these. They were, however, the minority and there was substantial majority support for the abolition of the Dependent Spouse Rebate.

The task of the convention was to raise these issues. In the present debate on wage-tax trade-offs the views of women have not yet been heard. The outcomes of the convention were presented to the Prime Minister on March 8, International Women’s Day, but as yet there is no sign that the government is paying any attention.

Early indications are that the government will continue along the track of supporting children via income tested payments, that is, through the Family Allowance Supplement. This is one of the most anti-women measures the government has introduced, but against which there has been little protest.

The supplement makes it very hard for second income earners to enter the workforce because of the withdrawal rate it imposes on extra income. This provides a major workforce disincentive for women. However, its major hidden function is of a public and selective subsidy for those employing low wage workers. Payments of up to $24 (under 13) or $31 (13-15) per child and a rental subsidy, tax free, are more attractive to employers and employees than a wage hike of $30 taxed.

By offering additional payments to low income employed males with dependents, this negates the idea that there should be comparative wage justice, and removes these workers from the industrial arena. It then allows low income workers without children, or from two-earner families, to continue to be underpaid.

Furthermore, the poor families receive additional help in a form which severely penalises extra earnings with effective marginal tax rates well over the maximum rate of income tax.

In a family with two children on Family Allowance Supplement in private rental accommodation with the husband on $350 per week, the wife moving into the workforce at $100 per week would net $31 without counting in fares, clothes or child care costs.

The welfarising of children’s costs was not appreciated by participants who had seen payments for children generally eroded. They also recognised that women bore the brunt of the costs of children through income forgone, or through paying out for child care. The participants objected to measures which discouraged women’s workforce participation such as income testing of benefits and other payments, and the spouse rebate.

It was recognised that such payments create poverty traps and tend to redistribute to the rich by allowing for cutbacks in the size of the public sector through "targetting" payments. The convention rejected the idea that tax cuts should be offered at the expense of government services.

Many of the participant groups prepared background and discussion papers which showed that women still have a backlog of problems to face. Although over 50 percent of women are working they still do not earn the same as men. Fifteen years after equal pay, full year/full-time women workers aged between 34-44 earn only 74 percent of male incomes. Moreover, half of all women taxpayers have incomes below $15,000 and three-quarters of women taxpayers have incomes below $20,000. Over one-quarter of married couple income units have women as their main income earner and these couples are poorer than those with a male "bread-winner".

Families with children are also losing ground. While 243,000 fewer families receive Family Allowances in 1988 than in 1985, the worth of the Child Endowment/Family Allowance has steadily declined. For a family of two it was worth nearly eight percent of Average Weekly Earnings in 1949-50, 4.4 percent in 1976, and only 2.5 percent in 1987/8.
Party A-Go-Go

Two years to the day after the Charter statement, Towards a New Party of the Left, was distributed to the 1987 Palm Sunday marchers around the country, it was happening again. This time the leaflet had a new name and, despite many familiar faces among the distributors, a new list of sponsors. To be quite accurate, the 1987 Charter had no formal sponsors, while the new Time to Act statement was endorsed by 132 leading left activists from around the country.

For that fact alone, the new leaflet must be marked up as a distinctly new stage in the undeniable difficult path towards a new effective left party in Australia. That process began more than five years ago when the proposal to build a party which could serve a much larger left constituency than any existing at the time was first discussed among groups of activists.

Despite the time which has elapsed, and despite Palm Sunday marchers being asked to consider the option of a new party for the second time in two years, a lot has changed. If anything, the response to this latest call seems to have struck a stronger chord than before. This may well be partly the result of the sheer perseverance of the statement makers which, if nothing else, shows a reassuring level of determination. It may also be a product of the greater awareness on the left of a range of proposals for alternative left organisations which have been circulating in the last two years.

And, finally, both the level of disenchantment with Labor, coupled with some experience of the appalling new face of Liberalism has produced a pretty desperate desire for a viable alternative.

The new statement is new in three important ways. First, it demonstrates that there is support for a new party from a significant number of people whose influence could be decisive in securing any effective presence for a new party. Second, it lays down a basis for the politics of the new party which will serve as the foundation of any future program and policies. And third, it states an intention to launch the new party in 1989.

Particularly in the labour movement the list of sponsors is impressive. It includes two members of the ACTU executive, a number of secretaries or presidents of state and regional labour councils, federal and state secretaries of a number of important unions, as well as a strong list of union organisers. The range of the more than ten unions represented is reassuring too - from metal workers and building workers to journalists and welfare workers. In previous attempts the difficulty of organising support within unions has been a serious barrier.

Although the labour movement dominates the sponsors’ list, there is a leavening of other support. The community welfare sector has a significant place with sponsors ranging from local youth workers, to members of national advocacy groups, from welfare workers union officials to welfare teachers and academics. In fact, academics from a number of disciplines, including prominent political economists such as Ted Wheelwright and Frank Stilwell, have endorsed the statement. Environmentalists, particularly urban environmentalists, such as Jack Mundey, and gay and women’s movement activists are represented. The list also includes two prominent left filmmakers among a number of cultural workers. Perhaps most important, a number of people with strong records as independent members of local government have supported the statement. They range from Don Syme in western Sydney’s Liverpool Council, to Wollongong City Councillor Dave Martin, to last year’s mayor of the Victorian City of Broadmeadows, Lynda Blundell.

Just under half the sponsors are women, active both within the women’s movement and across a range of areas of work. More than half the sponsors are not members of political parties, some are lapsed ALP members, while the rest of sponsors are members of the Communist Party or the Association of Communist Unity.

Impressive as it undoubtedly is, a list of sponsors alone will not make a new party. But organisers hope that with such a solid demonstration of support in key areas, any potential members’ doubts about the viability of the new party might be allayed. According to organisers, the response has already been very strong and the job they now face is to build these expressions of interest into an organisation of members an embryonic party - to take over from the sponsoring group and allow those involved to work in campaigns, even before the party is launched or founded.

A national meeting of sponsors just held in Melbourne identified areas in which commissions could be established to develop policies and platforms to flesh out these basic points. But the most directly important thing about the statement is that it makes an explicit call for the party to be launched this year. Because of a commitment to get the party up and running, the national sponsors’ meeting agreed to a two-stage process. A launching conference of the party will be held in late July. This will then allow time for the necessary policy, program and organisational work to be carried out leading up to a founding congress early in 1990.

Given this time frame, it’s not going to be long before the left can judge whether the auspicious beginning to this latest stage means that the quest for a new party has at last been successful.

Adam Farrar
TIME FOR EXPANSION

Editorial worker for Australian Left Review

This year *Australian Left Review* will become a monthly.

To help in this we need someone to join our editorial staff who has editorial and/or production experience in publishing and who wants to participate in ALR's expansion.

Skills in more than one of the following areas would be an advantage: sub-editing, writing, administration, desk-top publishing, layout and production, promotion and advertising.

The successful applicant will work with ALR's co-ordinator and other members of the Sydney collective.

Examples of work (where suitable) should be provided with application.

The position is available on either a full-time or job share (part-time) basis.

Applications should be forwarded to: ALR, PO Box A247, Sydney South 2000.

Deadline for applications is Friday, May 26, 1989.
Boris Yeltsin

Boris Yeltsin seems an unlikely candidate for a Soviet popular hero. Now aged 58, he has spent the past 20 years in the party machine, working his way up to membership of the Politbureau in 1987. At first appearance, he seems a typical bureaucrat, even down to his hair style and his taste for double-breasted suits and chauffeured limousines. He does not affect a beard and long hair, like many of his admirers among the youth and intelligentsia. Yet what does differentiate him from the usual bureaucrat is his flair for appealing to crowds. He reminds one, in that respect, of Khrushchev.

Yeltsin graduated from the Urals Polytechnic in 1955 and became a foreman in the local building industry, climbing up the ladder to become a director of an integrated house building factory. In 1968, he became a department head of the Sverdlovsk regional party committee and by 1976 was its first secretary. In 1981, he became a member of the party central committee.

He was appointed first secretary of the Moscow City party committee in December 1985 and became an alternate member of the Politbureau in January 1987, but in November 1987 he was dismissed from his Moscow party post and soon after from the Politbureau. Yeltsin was one of the "impatient" who wanted the process of perestroika speeded up. He publicly attacked Igor Ligachev, reputedly the leader of the conservatives. The Moscow party apparatus circu-

Yeltsin says he hopes to form a loose bloc of 400 or so deputies in the 2,500-strong Congress of People's Deputies. But the Congress will meet only a few days a year. It will elect the 422-member Supreme Soviet, which will meet over six months each year and play a much more important supervisory and legislative role. If Yeltsin and other outspoken advocates of radical perestroika are frozen out of the Supreme Soviet, then its credibility - and usefulness - will be severely limited. Perestroika needs its "left" opposition in the Supreme Soviet, even if there is a whiff of demagoguery involved.

- Denis Freney
According to the Script

Diana Simmonds

Since before Christmas - don't ask which Christmas - television has been an almost entirely entertainment-free zone, although Eden's Lost was apparently the most glorious Austro-drama in history. Some, however, would say Eden's Lost was awful, stagey, stilted, badly written, incomprehensibly strung together tosh.

Its gilt-edged cast was left floundering in that popular school of drama whose main tenet is: if in doubt - shout. If still in doubt - shout louder. If you can't get a bearing on your lines or part because the writer actually supplied you with toilet paper and the director can't or won't help: then simply yell your lines or part because the writer whose talents were so miserably squandered in this risible attempt at sitcom?

Meanwhile, be thankful for small mercies - like SBS, whose news service, for one thing, is better than world class. It's almost a sitcom in itself turning from the programs called "news" on the commercial channels to see what SBS delivers under the same title.

Returning to good writing: make the most of thirtysomething. Channel Ten clearly has no idea what to do with its unpigeonholable brilliance and it may well disappear before long. Enjoy LA Law for its consistently high quality scripts and swirling camera-work (why haven't the makers of crappy TV cottoned on to the simple fact that life doesn't happen in static takes?) and, enjoy even more - because it's uncommonly good writing, result of the worst writing in the world.

You'd think that doctoring was played out as a hanger to suspend a sitcom? Why should this be?

Can we really only come up with one Geoffrey Atherton? Is there nobody at all so inspired by Mother and Son that they are even now hunchered over the Amstrad trying to emulate his excellence? Will anyone ever own up to thinking there was the possibility of life in Family Business? Why should we have to suffer with the actors whose talents were so miserably squandered in this risible attempt at sitcom?

Speaking of which, who actually WATCHED the Bob Hawke shock-horror-amazing-scenes-I-have-behaved-like-most-other-men-and-I'm-deeply-ashamed confession? And who can then relate to what has since been reported in our august print media? Let us recollect ... Clive asked Bob what was meant by the description of him as "a womaniser". Bob said it meant he'd been unfaithful to Hazel. Clive asked him how he reckoned Hazel felt about that. Bob found that thought a bit upsetting andcripes! he looked upset.

Politicians are criticised for not being honest, on the one hand, and for not giving straight answers to questions, on the other. Taking these two hands one by one, Bob was honest and he answered the questions absolutely straight. For this he is a gruesome wimp?

It seems the first thought to pop into the minds of the moral giants of the press was that it was an election ploy. How so? Did Bob engineer, in some unexplained Machiavellian way, that Clive would be so predictable as to dust off a hoary old question that was answered years ago?

Would the moral giants have preferred Bob to fudge it? Or to lie? There are few sights yukker than the outraged hypocrite in full bluster. They should remember the words of Confucius, however, who said of such persons: man with hole in pocket all time feel cocky.
COMRADES

AND

CITIZENS

Between Labor's "pragmatism" and the rantings of the fundamentalist left, is there a third way? Can the left be smart and likeable, as well as ideologically sound? Colin Mercer ponders these and other burning issues.

Who do we think we are talking to? This is surely one of the fundamental issues which confronts any consideration of left renewal. Whether we are dealing with a new party of the left or with a more general reorientation of left politics - let's call this a democratic modernisation - the issue of actual and potential political constituency is crucial. So, who we are talking to, how we are addressing them and what we are addressing them about are urgent questions. This is certainly a question of the "style" of politics but not in any superficial sense. What is at issue here is a whole political culture of the left and also, therefore, the key components of its political logic. These are the issues I want to address by drawing on recent contributions from both Australia and the UK.

A central question must be: what are the conditions which would enable the left to produce what John Mathews calls a Culture of Power in his recent booklet of the same name. The ability to think achievable and sustainable political goals and avoid the pitfalls of both a tradition of vanguardism and minoritarian politics and the top-down managerialism of social democracy is good advice but enormously difficult to achieve. How, in fact, is it possible to combine the minimum requirements of expertise in techniques of government, policy formation and administration and, at the same time, sufficient levels of popular acceptability. How, in other words, to be expert and popular, smart and likeable and to do this strategically and not just by an opportunistic modification of tactics?

This is not a facile question: it is at the very heart of current moves towards new political formations and agendas in Australia and elsewhere. It is a question which, if not answered by the left will certainly be answered by the New Right which demands a new political logic. This logic will have to thread its way between a competent but "statist" social democracy with a dwindling traditional social base and a right-populist championing of the market and the interests of "ordinary people". At the same time it will need to recognise that, given significant changes in class composition and the nature of the national and international economies, there is no easy or necessarily effective resort to tried and trusted formulae of a "socialism of the grand plan", whether that be Soviet, Swedish or Chinese in inspiration.

The general problem might be characterised as one of, on the one hand, a Labor government which has "expertise" but which is in severe danger of losing its popular acceptability and, on the other hand, a left which is able to mobilise, say, 100,000 people in the streets for a peace demonstration and yet have minimal input into, say, the Dibb Report.

More central, on a day-to-day basis, and as a key factor in swinging political fortunes, is the area of economic management. How is it possible to develop expertise in areas such as economic management and, at the same time, maintain a certain level of popular interest and participation in the notoriously grey areas of the "dismal science". One way of dealing with this is to realise that, in their day-to-day existence, most people do not confront the abstraction of the economy but the much more tangible and readily recognisable form of the market. Economists will need to forgive me here for inappropriate comparisons but it seems to me that this is a politically powerful image that the New Right recognised a
good while ago: that it is much easier to talk about the market - for goods, for labour, for services, health and welfare - in terms of can afford and can't afford - than it is to talk about the more abstract laws and tendencies of the economy.

This is why Margaret Thatcher has been able to exploit so successfully the metaphors of the "housewife's purse" or the "family budget" in her rationalisations of economic strategy in the UK. Housewives' purses do not usually have to account for such things as invisible earnings, trade balances or foreign debts run up by people who are not members of the household. This, however, is what economies and their managers have to do. This is also why talk about the market flows more easily, in the political sphere, from the right than it does from the left. The economy, that is, is condensed into the image of the market and, as the logic flows, the market sets in motion the key features of choice, competition and efficiency. These are features which are then automatically associated with political conservatism while the left is pitched against the market and its meanings. Perhaps it is time to divert this strategy: for the Left to pay heed to the concept and the reality of the market in its own political logic and culture?

Jeffrey Minson touched on this in *ALR* 107 ("The New Romantics") where he remarks the over-emphasis in Mathews' work on "production culture" at the expense of due attention to "economic consumption and its culture" with its associated features of lifestyle, popular culture and the uses of leisure. What people consume, how they consume it, how such forms of consumption determine their lifestyles and array of cultural identities are matters which are no longer - if they ever were - peripheral to the politics of strategic economic calculation. There is, in other words, a particular solidity to "consumer capitalism" which, as the blurb says of Marilyn French's novel *The Women's Room*, "changes lives". The next question to pose, then, is: what are the mechanisms which would enable the left to address effectively issues of consumption and choice not only in the private sector but also, crucially, within the public sector as the recipients of health and welfare services etc.?

A long time ago Gramsci noted how the new production processes of Fordism and Taylorism had established a fundamentally new relationship between work and lifestyle supported by high wages, psychoanalysis, rotary clubs and new sexual and social codes: "the new methods of work are inseparable from a specific mode of living and of thinking and feeling life". These issues have been addressed in the pages of *ALR* and elsewhere, but they are still largely determined by a logic which categorises them as "cultural" and therefore to be dealt with under Any Other Business.

What I would want to argue for here is some serious rethinking of this inherited notion of the cultural. What I mean by "the cultural" here is the capacity to recognise the "lifestyle" aspects of political constituencies in order to respond efficiently to the sorts of political issues they put on the agenda. Culture in this sense is about the entire range of dispositions, tastes, habits and preferences of people. This concept of culture is concerned with areas of consumption, choice and identity and how these are affected by our relationship to the market. It is about how people actually use the resources at their disposal in order to elaborate a lifestyle. In turn, lifestyle itself needs much more attention from any political agenda since it is the framework in which, as individuals, members of families or communities, people actually choose to live their lives within, of course, economic constraints.

Lifestyle, choice, taste: these may be terms which we would more readily associate with the political appeals of the New Right or with a general ethos of yuppieism, but we need to ask if there is a necessary reason for this. Should we not recognise that, as Stuart Hall has pointed out, consumer capitalism did refashion and reshape social relations and cultural attitudes quite widely and irrevocably", and that it did this as more than an "icing on the cake" of raw economic relations. The transformation of western economies from the "Fordism" of the post-war era has been experienced as a fundamental reorganisation of our relationship to the market and is manifested in massively changed patterns of consumption. In this context it has become possible to manipulate the purchase of goods and services much more in order to fashion an identity and lifestyle for the majority of people.

This is not a defence of "consumer capitalism" as such, nor is it written in ignorance of the still severe discrepancies in access to the market which exist: it is simply to underscore the basic reality of the market as the first thing in the economy that most people actually meet and its importance therefore as the starting point for elaborating a strategy which addresses "economic" and "cultural" issues simultaneously which would have a chance of being listened to and understood.

In a British Fabian Society pamphlet, *The Politics of Prosperity*, Charlie Leadbeater argues for the mobilisation of a concept of social citizenship in order to meet the realities of Thatcherite transformations of the political and economic domains and, as he says, to enable some clear strategic thinking on the part of the left "... on the role of the private sector, the market, competition and individual initiative, as well as the state, collective finance and public provision in contributing to equity, security, efficiency and choice". The different components of this strategy must fit together, he insists, and must be "... built up from the foundations of the cultural identities and lifestyles it sanctions ...". Above all, this means moving away from that logic so successfully installed by Thatcherism: that the private sector is the domain of choice and efficiency and the public sector the domain of planning, lack of choice, alienated service provision and "grey collectivities". Social citizenship, he argues, provides a way of refuting this logic by enlarging the traditional category of citizenship (possessing a minimum set of rights) to enable it to encompass "rights to the resources which are needed to play a full role in the normal life of a community". These resources, he adds, "should clearly include income, health, education, housing, transport, but also possibly consumer durables, a capital stake and holidays. But whatever the bundle of goods or resources, social citizenship should also include the right to choice over how these rights are delivered. While the argument relates most urgently to Britain and to the Thatcherist colonisation of the prerogatives of
choice and the market and to the overwhelmingly conservative image of the yuppie consumer, the sort of political logic that the argument entails is certainly also applicable to current debates and conditions in Australia. As Minson points out in his article, there is also a case - recognising not only the rights of citizens but also their responsibilities - for establishing a category such as a "corporate citizen" implementing responsibilities in the areas of environmental protection and race and gender issues in the workforce. Equally, such a concept of social citizenship could be fruitfully applied to social policy and the social wage which would not restrict these prerogatives to the agencies of government and the trade unions and hence to a top-down social-democratic managerialism which, for all its good intentions, nobody may get to hear about outside of those agencies. It would therefore help to address the central problem of the popular acceptability and understanding of an arrangement like the Accord and, for that matter, other social advances in the areas of human rights, equal opportunities, multiculturalism and so on.

To return to the point about who we think we are speaking to, what our constituency is and what their concerns are, it is clear that a concept of citizenship has a potential to which traditional appeals to collectivities of class, race and gender cannot lay claim. It may enable us to formulate ways of thinking about the "new social forces" as integral to the political process rather than as somehow ancillary to the mainstream movement. This is because it provides a way of thinking about diverse social, ethnic and cultural identities and lifestyles as necessary components of social citizenship and which would therefore be enabled to lay claim to full rights of social participation rather than as something to be "added and stirred" either to society as a whole or to the labour movement.

It is worth registering that a country like Australia with a dominant Anglo-Celtic culture, an indigenous population and a wide range of other ethnic identities is, for all the problems generated by these relationships, uniquely situated to formulate a more "disposed" concept of citizenship than the one we have inherited from the more "unified" model of the European nation state. In areas of multiculturalism, language policy, immigration policy, the legal and institutional recognition of such diversity requires a new and democratic concept of citizenship.

In the area of political strategy it is worth considering what forms of appeal and identity would be involved in elaborating an effective program around issues as diverse as Aboriginal deaths in custody, economic management, human and civil rights, legal reform, child care and the environment. It would certainly be much easier to elaborate a unified and coherent strategy around these issues via an expanded concept of citizenship than it would through trying to hold together the already politically saturated identities of class, race, gender, parenthood and "greenness". This is because there is a fair chance that many people, not just those on the left, already share bits and pieces of each of these identities without necessarily staking their claim...
to one in particular.

One objection to this, of course, is that political struggles in these areas are best treated independently as "single issues" and by movements rather than parties and that coherent overall strategies are not necessary anyway. In some areas there have been outstanding successes based on precisely this logic but the problem is that these remain precisely isolated political successes and their implications for government and the polity as a whole do not usually or, more frequently, are not allowed to flow on.

Now, access to the structures of the state is, surely, what it is all about, unless you subscribe to a "permanent ginger group" mentality.

Jeff Minson pointed out in his article that it is precisely because the women's movement and the environmental movement have well-organised feet in the door of government that their campaigns have had significant successes in combination with other extra-parliamentary forms of activity. This brings us again to the issue of forming a new political logic which involves emphasising a particular aspect of "identity" which is crucial to modern forms of government. These movements have recognised that they have a role to play as individual or collective citizens "within the state" and not from a position somewhere outside of it. We are all, as citizens, somehow inside the state whether we acknowledge it or not. As tax and rate payers, pension recipients, students receiving grants or other benefits, families receiving child allowance, as holders of government bonds (i.e. most people who have insurance policies) as registered unemployed, receivers of medical benefits or whatever, our relationship to the state is indelible.

The older political logic, whether leninist, trotskyist, anarchist or just plain oppositional, which always positioned its troops somewhere outside the walls of the state, all the better prepared to storm it one day, and which gave the labour movement its initial program and logic for revolution is now definitively dead in western politics (and probably has been since about the 1850s). Increasingly, since the 1920s, we have been positioned as citizens rather than subjects and therefore in a new sort of contractual relationship to the structure of government. Taking this reality seriously is a key component of political logic rather than a hymn of praise to the state and to statism.

In his last political statement before his death, the Greek marxist Nicos Poulantzas defined the state as a "material condensation of a relation of forces". By this he meant that the state is neither a neutral apparatus (as social democracy frequently believes) nor the "executive committee of the ruling class" as classical marxism would have it. It is, rather, a set of institutions, procedures and techniques of government which are a nationally specific result of historical struggles and negotiations between government and political and economic agencies which have laid their claim and achieved representation within the state. The Australian state has, as part of its fabric, an arbitration system which no other state has. The British state has (but may not retain) a fully comprehensive National Health Service, free at the point of delivery. The Swedish state has agencies and mechanisms for the productive direction of investment in which unions have a major role. These forms did not arrive by accident: they did not drop from heaven and they are not simply a result of spontaneous pressure from below. The political effects and value of such institutions are, in other words, the "condensed" result of a series of struggles. This is what Poulantzas means. The state is a rather uneven patchwork of institutions whose shape is determined by a specific relationship between government and people. What are the implications of this and how do they connect with the issue of citizenship?

First, this conception of the state defines it as a legitimate and necessary domain of political struggle and intervention. Not being a monolithic entity but one subject to pressures, contradictions and "movement" means that it is possible to establish a position there.

Second, it enables us to define citizenship not in the rather old-fashioned terms of a sort of civic state-worship, but as an integrally political status and identity. Citizenship, insofar as it is defined as a relationship to the state means that it is not an abstract identity but a citizen of this state with access and rights to whatever the relation of forces has produced. That is, in the Australian example, with rights of access to a Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, an Office for the Status of Women, an Office of Multicultural Affairs, an Arbitration Commission and so on. Potential rights that is, because the chances are that most of us will not have exercised our rights to participate in or call on the services of these agencies in any direct way.

This is why the New Right has been so successful in depicting nationalised industries, government departments and welfare agencies as inefficient and alienating bureaucracies. Sometimes, perhaps frequently, they are. The response to this is not to dismantle them but to make sure that they are able to respond efficiently to the input, however organised, of citizens as consumers in both the public and private sectors. There is the possibility here, then, of laying claim to a political principle which is able to address and provide policy principles for both the private and public sector. Since the two sectors are increasingly intermingling anyway, this may be no bad thing.

Yet another dimension of the citizenship argument is, of course, that it demands a certain level of expertise both from individual citizens and from political organisations representing citizens. This returns us to the point about being both popular and expert, likeable and smart. If a condition of success of a political party is an ability to appeal not just to sectoral and class interests but to a wide range of social and cultural identities, to what used to be called "the people"; and if the concept of citizen is a useful one for thinking how to frame such appeals and to move into a new political logic, then the other side of the coin is how to negotiate a relationship between "mass politics" and "expertise". John Mathews touches

it is clear that a concept of citizenship has a potential to which traditional appeals to collectivities of class, race and gender cannot lay claim
On this problem when he argues for a confident move from a "culture of protest" to a "culture of power"; from a mere "alternativism" to a situation where it is possible to come to grips with the nitty gritty of government and bureaucracy and management especially at the level of policy input and formulation. In itself this shift would entail a quite radical reconceptualisation of left politics if the answer is not simply "become a member of the Labor party and get involved in its committees, etc."

On the whole, there have been two characteristic ways of responding to the disequilibrium between "mass politics" and "expertise". On the one hand, there is the persistent distrust of leadership as a corrupting position, of bureaucracies as inert and corrupting agencies and a fundamental division between a good rank and file and a bad leadership. On the other hand, there is the top-down managerialism of social democracy which is content to hand down decisions, policies and initiatives to the rank and file. It is a curious irony that these two modes of the old political logic can coexist quite easily. Let the rank and file look after the workplace and we'll look after the polity, the "two wings" of the labour movement and so on. One of the crucial issues is how to break out of this inexorable logic, the "scissors" of social democratic statism and rank-and-file leftism which disable large sections of the population from any political investment and leaves open a fertile ground for the New Right to instal any one of the many variants of the "silent majority" as its mythical correspondent among people.

Given that it would be possible to open out our mode of address and our potential constituencies it would become feasible to establish something like policy communities which are not necessarily constituted along traditional political lines but combine forms of expertise with political input on particular issues. The British marxist Bob Jessop raised "policy community" as an issue when he was in Australia in 1987. The example he offered at that time was the AIDS crisis to which there was possible to precisely demarcate the latter is more likely to be slotted into the rubric of class politics and, more importantly, to be represented in the key agencies of political and economic negotiations.

Even if there was a time - before share-ownership, superannuation schemes, insurance policies, arbitration systems and the welfare state - when it was possible to precisely demarcate the Titans of class politics, then it is very clear that because of all these developments, the associated formation of new political and cultural identities, the emergency of new patterns of consumption and a relationship to the economy fundamentally mediated by the mass market, that logic can no longer apply and actually mean anything to those people we think are talking to. It would be a pity if we missed a golden opportunity initiated in the current debate to redefine some aims, objectives and methods in a climate which remains, for the time being, relatively genial.

**COLIN MERCER** teaches in Humanities at Griffith University in Brisbane.
From Left: Shirley Childress Johnson (please note will not be coming to Australia), Evelyn Harris, Aisha Kahlil, Nitanju Bolade, Ysaye Maria Barnwell, Bernice Johnson Reagan.

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*ONE CONCERT ONLY IN EACH CITY*
RETURN
OF THE
KILLING FIELDS?

While the Vietnamese withdrawal from Kampuchea poses a new stability in the region, the threat of the Khmer Rouge remains. Ben Kiernan assesses.

The cause of Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea in 1979 was Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea regime's attacks on Vietnam. From early 1977, after more than a year of peace, Khmer Rouge forces staged fierce raids into undisputed Vietnamese territory, massacring thousands of Vietnamese civilians and causing hundreds of thousands to flee from their homes. Vietnam's complaints to this effect were corroborated at the time by both US intelligence reports and the testimony of Vietnamese refugees fleeing abroad from the war zone, and they have since been extensively documented from both sides of the border.1

Before Vietnam had responded to these attacks, China informed both sides that it supported Democratic Kampuchea. In early 1978, Vietnam offered to negotiate a ceasefire and a settlement under international supervision. Democratic Kampuchea refused, and the war continued. China openly backed Kampuchea, and later invaded Vietnam itself. For these reasons, it is not correct under international law to describe Hanoi's 1979 invasion as aggression or "unprovoked attack". The aggressor states were Democratic Kampuchea and the People's Republic of China.

Whatever its longterm goals, Vietnam's immediate reason for intervention in Kampuchea was self-defence, the repulsion of armed attacks already launched against its own territory.

To counter this argument, it is not adequate to point out that Kampuchea was militarily incapable of overthrowing the Hanoi government. Its ally China is. And Kampuchea's small size is not a licence to commit armed aggression against any part of another's territory. So long as the Khmer Rouge maintain an effective military capacity in Kampuchea and an alliance with China, Vietnam will continue to regard them as a security threat. Nevertheless, in 1985 Hanoi pledged to withdraw all its troops from Kampuchea by 1990, and so far is keeping to that promise.

Vietnamese Troop Strength in Kampuchea, 1979-88 (US Sources)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>1979</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
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<td>1989</td>
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(Vietnamese Projections)

The Elder Brothers

Since its overthrow of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, however, part of Hanoi's policy and practice in Kampuchea has been to patronise the Khmer people. Kampuchea has often been treated not as an equal, but as a subordinate. This lop-sided, patron-client relationship has made Kampuchea vulnerable to Vietnamese political domination, best illustrated by the long confinement in Hanoi and Phnom Penh of the PRK's first Prime Minister, Pen Sovan.

At times, the People's Republic of Kampuchea has even reflected patronising Vietnamese attitudes in its own propaganda, for instance in this broadcast on Radio Phnom Penh in 1984:

By nature Kampucheans are loyal, gentle, kind and polite. They have already done well in preserving the Kampuchea-Vietnam bonds of solidarity ... while defending and building their own country ... As for the Vietnamese people, who are champions of independence and freedom ... [they] have proved their traditional heroic abilities in helping free the Kampuchean people from the danger of genocide ...

One might fruitfully compare this statement with one made by Francois Ponchaud in 1863:

And so in 1863 Cambodia became a French Protectorate. For ninety years, the Khmer people and their monarchs were able to doze out of the way of the great worldwide changes, an island of happiness isolated in another century.
Vietnamese advisers in Kampuchean ministerial offices and local administration have varied in quality, from excellent, responsible and appreciated, to corrupt, supercilious and arrogant. (The Vietnamese troops have generally conducted themselves well.) However, since 1980 the advisers have gradually been withdrawn as Kampuchean cadres have become more experienced. In 1988 the Vietnamese ambassador in Phnom Penh predicted that the remaining two to three hundred civilian and military advisers would return to Vietnam by January 1989, a year prior to the planned total troop withdrawal. This has since been carried out, and it is a welcome development.

As in Laos, Hanoi has attempted to create a junior ally in the People's Republic of Kampuchea. As one commentator has argued, this does not mean a colonial relationship, but a satellite relationship in which the junior partners are subordinate. Thus, Laos and Kampuchea have military provisions in their respective treaties with Vietnam, but not in their treaties with each other. So far, all military roads lead to Hanoi. There is extensive six-way co-operation in modern Indochina, and it covers nearly all fields; the exception is that there are currently Vietnamese troops in both Laos and Kampuchea, but no Lao or Kampuchean troops garrisoned in Vietnam. Hanoi has recently pledged to withdraw all its troops from Kampuchea by September this year, or if there is no political settlement, in 1990. And it withdrew most of its forces from Laos in 1988.

Hanoi has painted its intervention in Kampuchea as an exercise in international solidarity. In the outside world it would have been wiser to adhere to its case of self-defence under international law. But inside Kampuchea it has preferred to stress that the three countries of Indochina will "either die together, or live together". Heng Samrin has himself asserted that "separation from Laos and Vietnam means death, while unity with Vietnam and Laos means victory".5

This is partly a reflection on Vietnamese dominance, and partly gratitude for real Vietnamese assistance to Kampuchea. Vietnam sheltered over 300,000 refugees from the Pol Pot regime. And during the threatened famine of 1979-80, Vietnam provided Kampuchans with "tens of thousands of tonnes" of rice, and about 50,000 tonnes thereafter, according to William Shawcross.6 Other unpaid, non-military assistance has been in the fields of agriculture, health, transport and communications, technical training, administration and education. In some of these fields, Vietnam has found opportunities to increase its influence over Kampuchean affairs, in others it has not. In all of them, Vietnamese assistance has helped re-establish a Kampuchean state from the wreckage left behind by the Pol Pot regime. Even if it is a dependent one, the existence of such a state is a precondition for Kampuchea's long-term independence.

The Khmer reaction

In its last years at least, the Pol Pot regime was on a genocidal track. It is not surprising that most Kampuchans were glad to see it overturned. Nor, despite historic animosities, is it surprising that many Kampuchans were grateful to the Vietnamese, whom they saw risking their lives against the Khmer Rouge. Kampuchans I interviewed in France, who had quickly decided to make their way abroad, nevertheless expressed the view that the Vietnamese invasion had been a genuine liberation.
Tae Hui Lang, an ethnic Chinese woman recalled in August 1979 how a few months before the Khmer Rouge had tried to round up villagers and drive them into the forest. "The rural population would gather together and then run behind the Vietnamese lines", Lang said. She told how Vietnamese soldiers had provided protection, transport, food and medicine for herself, her baby, and a pregnant Khmer woman. "I don't know what their politics was about, but from what I saw they did good things... Their leaders were nice," Lang added. She said that Kampuchean were grateful to the Vietnamese for "letting us have freedom to do what we wanted... The people like the Vietnamese much more than the Khmer rouge... The Vietnamese have more heart than the Khmer Rouge."

The Vietnamese also impressed Kampuchean with their discipline, and their lack of racial prejudices. Whereas in Lang's account many local Khmers held China and the ethnic Chinese responsible for their sufferings under Pol Pot, the Vietnamese attempted to discourage racialist sentiments.

When Khmer civilians prepared to stage an anti-Chinese demonstration in Battambang city, a Vietnamese leader addressed the crowd, pointing out that the ethnic Chinese had suffered under Pol Pot as well, and he asked people to calm down. He said that those who wished to fight the Chinese could go and help defend Vietnam from Chinese attack. Ang Ngeck Teang, an ethnic Chinese girl from Phnom Penh, was fourteen years old when the Vietnamese invaded in 1979. All ten of her family members had perished from starvation and disease under Khmer Rouge rule in 1977-78. Safe with relatives in France soon afterwards, she recalled:

When the Vietnamese came, the Khmer rouge ran away... The Vietnamese were good... very honest... If we asked them for food, they gave it. If we were sick, they gave us medicine. My hand was infected, they cured it. I asked them for a lift to Phnom Penh, where my elder brother found me... My house had been destroyed by the Khmer Rouge... 8

Tae Hui Lang noted that in the first months of 1979 there were 100 Vietnamese soldiers for every 10 Khmer PRK troops. Khmer officials were flanked by Vietnamese from whom "they had to ask permission to get things done". Lang thought this might have been because the Vietnamese "wanted to take over our land but at the same time give the false impression that the Khmer have power". Or alternatively it might have been the lack of education and experienced Khmer administrators, of whom "out of a hundred, only two or three had survived the Pol Pot years. Like Lang, many Khmers harboured suspicions of Vietnam's ultimate intentions, best expressed by the one who asked journalist Martin Woollacott in Phnom Penh in 1980: "Yes, the Vietnamese have saved us, but what have they saved us for?"

Some Khmers in the PRK government service have regarded their superiors, including even cabinet ministers, as merely the "letter-box" for Vietnamese advisers wielding the real power behind the scenes. The real grounds for these suspicions have lessened with the withdrawal of the advisers over the years, although many of the same Khmer dissidents probably object just as much to an independent Kampuchean socialism as to Vietnamese domination. When Pen Sovan was proclaimed prime minister of the PRK in 1979, he was considered by some as a Vietnamese stooge, and Heng Samrin was considered a "Khmer nationalist" who had been confined to a figurehead role. But when Samrin ousted Sovan in 1981, little changed, and gossip now had their positions reversed. Over the decade since 1979, Khmers have become more accustomed to the PRK leadership, while new faces and names have appeared gradually as part of a normalised political process, and public opinion is much better informed. By early 1987, there seemed relatively few Khmers in Phnom Penh who doubted that the Vietnamese troops would eventually withdraw from the country, although suspicions lingered about the advisers.

Two issues worth canvassing in this context are the teaching of the Vietnamese language and of Kampuchean history in schools. The Vietnamese language has been slow to appear in the PRK school curriculum. By 1988 it was taught only in the three final years of high school, for two hours per week. Students at this level took either Vietnamese or Russian. In the PRK, it is the Khmer language which has occupied a more central place in the Kampuchean school curriculum than ever before. The 1,000 trainee teachers at the Phnom Penh Higher Pedagogical School are offered Vietnamese language courses, but they are trained to teach only the Khmer language when they take up posts in schools.

Until 1988, no Kampuchean history was yet taught in PRK schools. History was discussed in classes on "Political Morality" and in a series of books of "Folk Tales" published by the PRK, but history classes were not part of the school curriculum. The "explanation" given by some PRK officials was that the country's history had yet to be written! The near-total destruction of books and libraries in the Democratic Kampuchea prior to 1975 is no excuse for such a view: even a detailed, 584-page, Khmer-language history of Kampuchea published in the Soviet Union was banned in the PRK for two years because it allegedly contained errors. One suspected that Kampuchean history would not be officially "approved" until first defined in terms of Vietnamese history.

But in 1988 two new developments occurred. Firstly, a school history textbook printed in 1986 came into use in the fifth grade of PRK schools, as did new textbooks for the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. The subjects studied at each level are Kampuchean History, and World History.

The fifth-grade text, at least, does not avoid discussing previous Vietnamese interventions in Kampuchea, notably that of the 1830s. It states that, in response to Thai domination, "our Khmer kings ran to rely on the feudalists in the east, that is, the Vietnamese kingdom", then based at Hue.

The intervention of the Hue court became steadily more active, especially beginning in the reign of King Ang Chan II (1794—1834). This king firmly believed that he could strengthen his throne by relying on the forces of both the Hue court and the Bangkok court. Ang received a gold seal from the Hue court. The Thai king, unhappy with such an attitude, used force to pressure King Ang Chan II and to encourage him to accept absolute Thai sovereignty. Worried by such pressure, King Ang
Chan II requested help from the Hue court. Immediately the Hue court sent troops into Kampuchea as a matter of urgency.

Then a war began. The Vietnamese troops defeated the Thai troops...

King Ang Chan II died in 1834 leaving no heir. The Hue court at this time had very great influence over the Khmer royal family and it began to use manoeuvres to enthrone Princess Ang Mey, who was a daughter of King Ang Chan II, as ruler of the kingdom. In order to strengthen its own influence and eliminate Thai influence, the Hue court intervened in the internal affairs of the Oudong court with increasing power. Thus it happened that the city of Bangkok pressured Kampuchea more powerfully and, along with this, the court and the people of Kampuchea were not happy either.10

Then in March 1988, Phnom Penh University reopened after thirteen years. It began teaching over 2,000 students. Its History Faculty consists of three lecturers, some of whom had helped write the texts now used in the schools. The medium of instruction is Khmer.

Could the Khmer Rouge Come Back?

There was little Khmer Rouge activity in Prey Veng province, on the east bank of the Mekong River, from 1979 to 1985. The province governor was wounded when his car hit a mine in July 1981, but he recovered.

Then, in early January 1986, Khmer Rouge (KR) snipers assassinated a sub-district official in Sithor Kandal district in the north of Prey Veng near Kompong Cham, and then made their escape. Later, on the night of 20 January, 90-100 Khmer Rouge massed and attacked the district town of Sithor Kandal. The province governor and other officials were conducting a meeting there. The governor escaped but four Vietnamese troops, nine civilians and two Khmer soldiers were killed. The district chief escaped only in his underpants. The KR burned down “everything”, including the district office, the district medical clinic and the district school. They suffered three dead in the fighting. They beheaded their dead comrades and took the severed heads with them as they retreated, so that they could not be recognised. (One of the Khmer Rouge later defected in Kompong Thom province; he asked to return not to his home district of Sithor Kandal but to another district in the same province. He was, however, sent home under supervision, to see if he was a genuine defector.)

These Khmer Rouge were led by Khan Soeun, commander of the DK’s 920th "Brigade". Soeun’s parents, who were natives of the area, were taken in for questioning by PRK officials. They said he had joined the Khmer Rouge in 1970, and disappeared until 1975, when he came home for three days after the war ended. His no-doubt circumspect parents claimed that they had never seen him again until 1986. He is variously said to have been a regimental commander in the district from 1975 to 1979, or even Vice-Minister of Defence under Pol Pot’s Deputy Prime Minister, Son Sen. Soeun had obviously retreated to the west with the DK forces in the face of the Vietnamese onslaught of 1979.

Khan Soeun returned to visit his parents early in 1986. Locals quickly reported his unit’s arrival to the PRK authorities, but troops sent out to capture them were unable to locate them, and the Vietnamese forces in the area were disinclined to believe the story. It appears that the KR were mostly locals who had returned from the Thai border, and were able to count on their relatives to supply them with food. One such relative was the district chief who turned out to be Khan Soeun’s cousin. After his bare escape, he was demoted to member of the district committee.

On 8 January 1987, Khan Soeun’s forces returned to the fray in Prey Veng and attacked a district/provincial armed forces base at Khum Kompong Prang in Peareang district. They were well armed. (A section of 10 KR is reported to have 7 AK-47s and 3 B-40 rocket launchers.) It is not known whether they inflicted any casualties in this attack, but that night I overheard a PRK officer say that if there were any, it would be kept quiet “to prevent the people getting confused”. “The situation is not good,” he said. "Wow, they even dared to attack an army position," a militia guard said after
By 1988, the last Vietnamese advisers withdrew from Sithor Kandal district, and they were followed by the remaining Vietnamese troops. But in December 1987-January 1988, Soeun’s band came back to his village there on five occasions, looking for food. The local authorities did not discover this until the group had crossed the Mekong and returned to Kompong Thom province, where they hide out during the rainy season. But before then they struck again. On 4 January 1988, twenty of Soeun’s guerrillas disguised themselves as civilians to attend a video screening in a village near Chite in neighbouring Kompong Cham province. After the screening was over, the infiltrators opened fire from the crowd, killing the sub-district police chief and one militia member, and wounding two others.

Three days later, while the country was celebrating the ninth anniversary of the defeat of the Pol Pot regime, a force of ninety of Soeun’s troops was seen on the road between Prek Pou and Koh Sautin. Soon afterwards they returned to Kompong Thom, and there were no more incidents in the area in 1988. But fighting broke out again in Sithor Kandal in January 1989, following the usual pattern of the previous three years.

Across the Mekong in Kompong Cham, a village forty kilometres north of Phnom Penh was attacked by Khmer Rouge forces in early 1985. The terrified villagers were unarmed and unable to prevent the attackers burning down a government office and destroying a rice mill. PRK regular forces came and drove the Khmer Rouge away, but the losses suffered by the villagers totalled 40,000 riels.

Then, on 24 January 1986, the same village was treated to a massive display of force. Eight hundred Khmer Rouge marched through the village in broad daylight. They were very well armed, each carrying two B-40 rocket launchers, according to a witness. They didn’t harm anyone, but villagers feared and distrusted them because of their murderous record. According to the witness, the situation had improved by 1987, with the Vietnamese and Heng Samrin government forces in a “much stronger” position than in early 1986. There were still, however, some Khmer Rouge supporters living in the village. “There is no problem now,” the villager said, but others there were not so sure. By 1989, the same villager expressed much greater confidence in the local 33rd Regiment of the PRK army which “protects the area” from the Khmer Rouge troops who were now confined to a distant forested area.

These incidents in Prey Veng and Kompong Cham may be a good illustration of the war in Kampuchea. The KR are able to strike in many parts of the country, even those far from the Thai border, they are well armed, and they benefit from limited local support; but they also have many enemies who will report their movements to the PRK, and their ability to damage the PRK is limited even in a province like Prey Veng where there are few, if any, Vietnamese troops. The PRK has to pour out much of its budget on defence, but six incidents in three years have not disturbed its control of the province. The PRK militia in Prey Veng consists of 17,000 armed villagers, and there are at least ten battalions of PRK district forces, plus a provincial regiment. These face about a hundred Khmer Rouge, but have been unable to defeat them so far.

According to one observer, the mid-year rainy season in 1986 passed without a general Khmer Rouge offensive, the first failure of their rainy season campaigns since 1980. In 1987, according to military analysts, the Vietnamese had their enemies “on the run” for most of the year. And 1988 saw little rebel military activity at all.

The insurgency in Kampuchea seems to have peaked in 1986, but it had still reached a much higher level than in the early 1980s. In April 1984, Khmer rouge forces attacked right into the town of Kompong Speu; in 1985 they penetrated Siemreap city on five occasions (but not since). In early 1986 they overran Sithor Kandal in Prey Veng. In August and September 1986 Khmer Rouge raiders slaughtered twenty peasants and burnt down a number of houses in two attacks on a single village in Kandal province, not far from Phnom Penh itself. (These murders may have been the work of Khan Soeun’s forces, who are believed to be able to move through the forest from Prey Veng right up to Arey Khsat across the Mekong from the capital. Such brutality outside of their own area may prefigure events should the Khmer Rouge ever regain state power.) In October 1986, a Khmer Rouge unit penetrated the city of Kompot...

It would be unwise to write off the Khmer Rouge after the Vietnamese withdrawal is completed.

NOTES

BEN KIERNAN teaches in History at Wollongong University.
Media interpretation of Laurie Carmichael’s definitive interview in ALR was varied, to say the least... After all, Carmichael is a controversial figure.

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Ten years ago, the ACTU assistant secretary, Laurie Carmichael, was the communist leader of the metal workers wages and hours campaign in defiance of the then ACTU president, Bob Hawke. Today he becomes the Hawke Government’s first component of the union movement’s strategy.

A wage free-for-all would mean even higher interest rates, a recession and the end of the Hawke Government. And, while a Howard government’s bite would be less savage on the unions than its bark might suggest, a change of Government in these circumstances would greatly threaten the ACTU plan for labour market reform.

“The agenda for micro-economic reform is set,” Carmichael says in a strong defence of the Hawke Government and the Accord carried in the latest Australian Left Review. “It wasn’t set by the unions. It’s set by the technology, it’s set by the market. It’s set by what is needed in order to meet modern requirements. It will be a Western European-style interventionist manner.”

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AFTER THE REVOLUTION; (MICRO) CHIPS WITH EVERYTHING

Fordism, the era of the assembly line and the process-worker, is coming to an end. The shape of the future, however, is still unclear. Laurie Carmichael argues that it's up to the left to make the running.
It is now commonplace to say that the world is proceeding through a technological revolution. The big question for us is whether we share its benefits in Australia while effectively guarding against the dangers it can bring.

Technological change is always occurring but there are some comparatively brief periods where the pace of change is much more rapid than in the comparatively long periods in between. Modern industrial development has witnessed four such periods of very rapid change. The first was the origin of "commodity production and manufacture" - the breakdown of the "peasant" economy and the guilds in Europe between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. This created a narrower division of labor with still narrower forms of work being carried out in "putting out" systems or in "work houses".

Development of this technology was stimulated by the demand of increased levels of intra- and international trade, along with the sophisticated navigation and canal systems that made this greater trade possible.

The social relations created by these economic changes were crude and brutal: forced enclosure of the land, mass committals into the work houses, the convict system, enforced slavery from Africa, piracy, colonialism, population expropriation, and even genocide, were part and parcel of this stage of human history. Yet, in terms of wealth creation and cultural development, it was a major historical step forward, with achievements including the flowering of culture, painting, the arts and liberal philosophy.

The second and most recognised of all "industrial revolutions" came at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century with the advent of steam power and an outbreak of a variety of mechanical inventions for production and transport. It led to a massive leap in productivity, trade and wealth accumulation on the one hand, and the "Dark Satanic Mills" on the other.

The division of labour at the base levels was intensified and its role in production studied by many, including Adam Smith and, most notably, Charles Babbage who, with a phenomenal degree of understanding, first saw as early as the 1830s the relationship between the division of labour in production and the emergence of digital computerisation. He did some very remarkable experiments with both, more than one hundred years before the first "workable" digital computer was created.

In a sense it is possible to say historically that the processes which intensified the division of labour in fact created the seeds of their own eventual reversal by also creating the precondition of computerisation and therefore replacement at the most finite level.

Yet a further more cruel and more technically thoroughgoing stage had to be traversed before that reversal could occur. This stage emerged with the internal combustion engine and electrical revolution at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, along with the so-called "scientific management" theories and practices of Frederick Winslow Taylor.

Taylorist modes of management will die hard

Taylor's preoccupation was to create both a management system and a work process over which management could, so far as was humanly possible, exercise absolute control and, in doing so, created the basis upon which all production engineering was developed and engineers were educated and trained. This required the creation both of the division of labour and stratification of labour associated with authoritarian supervision in its modern production-line forms.

Harry Braverman described the process developed by Taylor and those who later took his "system" on board as the "degradation of labour in the twentieth century". At the most depraved "process worker" level, the objective was to divide labour to its absolute degree: that is, to reduce human beings to no more than what we would today call "pick and place" or "single function" robotics.

Training requirements were therefore minimal: the employees only performed as they were told, and they had no say in the function performed which was determined by management in the planning department. Productivity depended upon "time and motion" studies, with the use of a stopwatch over every individual function.

Inevitably, such a system based on authoritarian means and alienation generated powerful antagonistic and adversarial relationships. The "managers" and "engineers" who applied the system blamed and condemned the unions and workers' representatives for non-compliance with this most inhuman dimension of industry.

Nevertheless, the enormous supply of labour coming into industrial centres from the countryside, and by way of migration, maintained more than sufficient pressure to ensure acquiescence in the process.

The most notable application of Taylorism in his own time was in Henry Ford's automobile plants where Ford had his "Social Department" constantly survey every employee in their own home, and his "Security Department", based on thugs, ensure that trade unionism didn't gain any foothold to "interfere" with control of production.

Where resistance to further division of labour could not be overcome, the Taylorist system called for its stratification - so that each level became boxed in by impediments and "status symbols". For anyone at the lowest levels of industry to pursue any career objectives required titanic efforts and sacrifice.

It is little wonder that the nature of their work put its stamp upon the industrial organisations that employees created to defend themselves from the worst excesses of this exploitation. Divisions of labour and alienation from managerial prerogative in decision-making became part and parcel of trade union movement culture and philosophy, with positions of power and influence within the movement based only upon the ability to mitigate its worst manifestations. This led to defensive and reactive styles of trade unionism, fettered also by their "craft" origins.

In a number of instances, trade unions succeeded in reducing the worst characteristics of Taylorist practices such as "line speed up", use of the stopwatch, and even the "time and motion study" itself. But the very basis of the system of the infinite division and stratification of labour was unaffected except marginally until recent times.
Despite its callousness, Taylorism and the electrical revolution created another huge leap in productivity and wealth creation in human history. It was what colleagues from Sweden call the transition from a peasant "high competence low productive society" to "a low competence high productive society". And it represented a "stage" of development that all industrial societies adopted to varying degrees to maximise productivity and wealth creation, irrespective of social systems.

The computer revolution

By the mid-1960s, a number of new factors were emerging that predicated another major technological revolution in our time. The jet aeroplane, ship containerisation, heavy dieselisation, television and a wide range of other developments rapidly piled one upon the other. Digital computerisation emerged, flourished and rapidly became the heart of this new technology. There is hardly an area of industry now that has not been affected by it in one way or another.

From its creation in 1944, through the first "built-in" memory in 1949, and the first commercial product in 1954, it developed in a headlong rush that has overwhelmed almost everything.

This has been especially true since the advent of the first micro processor chip in 1972. In swift time it moved from a fairly crude "bit" chip to a very useful and sophisticated "8 bit" chip capable of being directly adapted to robotics as well as to wide-ranging functions in commerce, administration and science.

By now it has already moved through the "16 bit" stage to "32" and every effort is being exerted to create the "64 bit" micro processor. These, along with other ancillary developments in memory chips, interfaces, printers and the like threaten to create a situation where the power available to humanity from its technology substantially exceeds our capacity to utilise it fully.

From technology to social change

Software in particular has not kept pace, and I would argue that this substantially results from Taylorist hangovers which debar "mass involvement" in software development, especially harnessing the entire intellectual resources available from the experience and potential of the whole workforce.

From its origins in "setting by hand", software has so far advanced to three levels - the built in operating system, the programming languages, and applications systems for the most used requirements - each becoming more and more powerful by the day. In time, other technological developments such as print scanners and voice recognition will lay the foundations for anyone and everyone to readily "feed in" their thoughts, ideas and experience.

Even at this stage of development there is the capacity for vast numbers of people to be able to handle a computer keyboard as though it were the same as using a pen or pencil. The invasion by computerisation of machinery, process control and other industrial functions puts "residual" intelligence required for repetition, monitoring, communications and the like into the equipment itself, thus arresting and even reversing the "need" to turn people into robots.

Of course, while the reversal of this
"need" is immediate, the effect will only take place over time and with considerable difficulty - especially where the level of investment and work culture is not yet ready for it.

The new technology makes possible a different kind of workforce, comprising fewer and fewer human robots, with multi-skilling replacing the infinite division of labour in order to handle efficiently and service real robots and highly automated multi-staged machines, processes and administration. A more highly skilled workforce is required, with a greater sophistication and inter-activeness of functions and work processes.

While new technology makes all of this possible, the old Taylorist modes of management will die hard. Every attempt will be made to fit the new technology into the old "mould". The separation by management of functions into "design" and "planning" and other "departments" is a process which will hang on like grim death.

These management characteristics are at least as detrimental to modern industry as were the old "demarcations" and "work practices" in the workforce, implanted there in the first place by Taylorist management and then carried by the workforce into their trade unions.

The technology also makes it possible to be more flexible, adapt more readily to market and other changing conditions and to provide custom-built product and service. Over time the reflex from new market demand to market delivery will shorten quite dramatically. A further concomitant of the technology is its ability to deliver greater consistency, uniqueness of design, durability and warranty.

In short, quality and service have now been placed by history alongside of price as a principal market determinant. Smarter working rather than harder working, efficiency and quality are the order of the day in the world of advanced technology. Whereas, in the past, workforce alienation was "built into" production and was dealt with by authoritarian means, today's requirements are for an ever-increasing level of participation.

It will not be sufficient for management to denounce, complain and demand compliance. Today, to be competitive, genuine commitment has to be achieved by industry and this postulates as big a crisis for management as it does for the workforce.

New managerial theories have emerged calling for flatter management and the devolution of functions to a more highly skilled, competent and committed workforce. It is not for nothing that an OECD group of experts reporting this year to all member countries has recommended:

In enterprises and other productive organisations the effective implementation of technological change requires a strong commitment by management to deepen the involvement of those affected by new products, processes and systems. Broadly speaking this means in many instances a shift from "Tayloristic" patterns of organisation, with their fragmentation of work tasks and layers of supervising management, towards multi-skilling and the devolution of responsibility. Such change will require the retraining both of managers and of workers. It also means a trend towards the "horizontal" integration of departmental functions within the enterprise, and the interchange of information throughout the enterprise, from the earliest stages.

Work organisation

In a nutshell, it is the organisation of work that must change. This is what is meant by the OECD group saying that "their starting point was that technological change is a social process". Even the technology itself becomes adapted to work organisation and design. The character, form and ergonomics of the technology will reflect its social content, varying upon whether it was designed.
by a Taylorist management for a Taylorist workforce, or whether it was designed with or even by a participative workforce from its very beginning. But to achieve this level of commitment and participation, the skilling of the workforce has to be broadened in a number of principal dimensions.

There will have to be a "skilling synthesis" to work organisation as well as a functional synthesis. Or if you prefer - process operators will have a great deal to give in software development and in product and process innovation alike derived from their work experience, community experience and through the expansion of their skills individually and within a group context.

This "skilling synthesis" therefore means that the assessment of skill contributed cannot be a mere mechanical accumulation of "fixed" skills or a string of "like" skills.

Particular skills or horizontal strings of skills can only be assessed at appropriate levels of education and training where the convergence of general education and vocational education becomes the normal practice.

Vocational training will more and more have the characteristic of having been learnt as a "process", and will reflect a capacity for innovative application within a group decision making operation rather than separate specific "fixed skills".

In practice, participation in decision-making is mainly performed minute by minute in course of exercising skills in the workplace. The narrower the skill, the more limited the decision-making, the more limited the work satisfaction and the more limited is the commitment.

Henceforth, the aim of industry must be to enhance competitiveness by smarter working and not by being "directed". The pressures on enterprises today to win and hold onto a modern skilled and committed workforce are greater than at any time in industrial history.

Some countries have already gone part of the way down this road. In every case, though, this has been limited to some degree by management "prerogatives" that suddenly inhibit the degree of commitment that has been achieved (such as plant closure decisions arising from company takeovers or a multina-

tional company's board decisions in relation to its global operations.)

It must also be expected that a growing convergence will (and even should) occur between the work environment and the community environment, more broadly, an environment of which the workplace is itself a part and where workers experience other "identities" as consumers and citizens.

In a nutshell, it is the organisation of work that must change.

Industry itself will gain from an inter-relationship where income, work satisfaction, enterprise product and process and the community environment are changed by those directly involved exercising increased decision-making rights and responsibilities.

In this process, the dissemination of information by management concerning company objectives and strategies, and greater levels of consultation and involvement are vitally important components.

However, none of the positive potential of the new "post-Fordist" era can be taken for granted. There is no automatic cause and effect about these developments. The underlying objective pressures require positive and determined affirmative action to reinforce their effects and to realise their full potential.

Both the technology and the market will be inhibited to the extent that the social dimensions of the process are limited.

The Pacific Rim strategy or: Taylorism in the international division of labour.

Yet, hitherto, Australia has managed to insulate itself from these new developments in technology and in the world economy. The story of how it managed to do so is a sorry one.

The colonial and mendicant cringe that has affected much of Australia's history was only partially offset in the period following the Second World War when, as a reaction to being virtually "left for dead" by Britain during the war, we gave our industry the stimulus of a wall of protection in order to develop an independent manufacturing base.

However, by the late 1960s and the "American alliance" commitment, following the Japanese economic "miracle", the development of multinational corporations, and other related ingredients, the so-called "Pacific Rim Strategy" became increasingly adopted as the basis of the world economy.

In this scheme of things, Australia, Chile, Peru, Canada and others were to supply raw materials, Asia masses of cheap labour, and the US and Japan the capital and technology - creating, if you like, Taylorism in the international division of labour.

That the strategy was ill-conceived historically and was doomed to failure, did not deter the powerful forces that drove it to acceptance and implementation. For some it was immediately lucrative, and that was enough.

Yet at the very moment that the new technological revolution germinated in the world economy, the major political forces in Australia failed to see its social significance.

Australia's manufacturing industry went into decline. Almost all available investment was poured into two unprecedented resource booms, and Australia became committed to trade which, in terms of value, was the slowest growing area and the most price volatile.

World trade in high value-added manufacturing and service industries, especially high technology industries, was increasing at two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half times the rate of resource trade. We were importing high value-added high cost products and exporting the reverse.

It was this policy which virtually assured that a balance of payments crisis was inevitable. Indeed, at the time the new technological revolution was unfolding in the world, Australia, because of its industrial decay, was largely locked out of it other than for importing and using equipment for resource development. Even in this, despite a substantial favourable local market base, we deprived ourselves of the opportunities presented. The resource developers and the big companies wanted the cheapest possible equipment, and our resource
need micro-economic reform to effect structural adjustment in the macro work organisation - or, if you like, we industry is still far from world class both modem efficient quality output in not corporate expansion. Less than world class terms. Vive as an economic entity, we require selective scapegoat are rationales of the ready shown the way, by: Australia's industrial development dimensions has to be brought into tion with its associated sociological "new guard" global, multinational cor­ way out of the that we can (or even should) "trade" our factor. Neither do I support the argument been, and remains, the biggest single negative "in­ come payments" side of the ledger has been, and remains, the biggest single factor. Neither do I support the argument that we can (or even should) "trade" our way out of the whole problem. Both arguments of "trading our way out" and "making public sector debt a selective scapegoat" are rationales of the "new guard" global, multinational corpo­ rate expansion. Nevertheless, our industry and trade position is such that in order to sur­ vive as an economic entity, we require modern efficient quality output in not less than world class terms. Unfortunately, much of Australia's industry is still far from world class both in its technology, its management and work organisation - or, if you like, we need micro-economic reform to effect structural adjustment in the macro economy. The modern technological revolu­ tion with its associated sociological dimensions has to be brought into Australia's industrial development. But, in doing so, we have the opportu­ nity to do it in a more fully developed fashion than other countries that have already shown the way, by: Increasing the share of trade devoted to high value-added manu­ facturing and service industries - especially in high technology industries; #associating this with maximum possible advantage to be gained through the most advanced forms of manage­ ment, work organisation and skills formation; #generating the highest possible level of natural networking between our research and development, universities, TAFE institutions, with industry management and the trade unions; Domestic markets are nowadays more like local segments of the world market. #developing a pro-active industrial relations system with an effective national framework and guidelines that promotes intense enterprise initiative around innovation in product and process, quality in all forms and reliability of delivery and service all in­ fused with high skills and high value-added content. Changing attitudes Many of those who have experienced the very worst effects of Taylorism have understandable difficulty in facing the changes its dissolution now offers. They are expressing no more than the deprivation of education, narrowness of skills and alienation that was instilled into them. For those at the rockface who car­ ried the brunt of trade exposed competi­ tion it was a hateful system, despite the industrial growth and wealth it created (the great bulk of which was distributed elsewhere). Yet the fear of unemploy­ ment, learning new skills, making decisions and taking responsibility creates deep uncertainty about the future in the minds of ordinary working people. Bringing these people into the new reality requires care and concern as well as urgency in Australian conditions. Equally, the problems of middle management also need to be understood, without retreating from the fact that change is essential and urgent. Debate, pressure, incentive, explanation and retraining are all in­ gredients in effecting the change. We cannot concede to those who want to try to stop or delay it. Neither general historical nor specific Australian circumstances will allow it. It is a case of either managing the chal­ lenge effectively or having it frag­ mented by inadequate results. Associated with the technological revolution and as an extension of it, the "world market" has become dominant. Domestic markets are nowadays more like local segments of the world market. In this new world order each country is entitled to its portion of the world market, but there is no apportion­ ing body or apparatus to deliver it. Each country, even the US, is impelled to draft up its balance of payments with the world market - and especially the finance sector of the market. Competitiveness drives each country to achieve its slice of the world market action while exercising limited and unequal influence in that world market - a legacy of our time with dilem­ mas for the people of all countries. Certainly, it is not possible to win an appropriate slice without a mix of trade that has sufficient high technologi­ cal value-added content in products or services. Nobody can pretend even if fully carried through that the modern computerised technological revolution will produce a utopia. But the achievement of basic social adjustments will be a turning point in history equal (as I have suggested more than once) to the ending of serfdom in Europe in the fifteenth century following the great crisis of the Middle Ages in the fourteenth century. Certainly, it is a step that is quite tangible and achievable in our time and one which can create the basis of much wider social change - as did the Rena­ issance that followed from the changes in the fifteenth century. We have to seize this opportunity while we can, not simply because the changes it will bring are desirable, but far more importantly because history it­ self places it on our agenda right now.

Laurie Carmichael is an assistant secretary of the ACTU.
CHILD'S PAY

One of the Hawke government's most ambitious promises has been that it will abolish child poverty by 1990. However, despite the dazzling rhetoric of "child support" and "family support", there's little prospect that children's economic situations will improve significantly. Linnell Secomb argues against a renewed emphasis on traditional notions of the family in the Child Support Scheme and proposes some alternatives.

The maintenance system which operated in Australia until mid-1988 was clearly unworkable and inadequate. As a result, custodial parents, nearly all of whom are mothers, have had to bear an inequitable share of the financial responsibility for their children.

While maintenance payments have remained low, the number of sole parents has increased over the past decade. The number of sole parents reliant on state income support has also increased so that currently there are nearly 250,000 sole parent pensioners in Australia; consequently government outlays have increased by over two hundred percent during the last decade. The federal government's response to this situation has been to introduce the Child Support Scheme which will increase maintenance levels and enforce their payment. The government has stated that the major objectives of the scheme are to decrease the high levels of poverty experienced by children in sole parent families and to reduce government outlays.

The Child Support Scheme is being implemented in two stages. Stage One, which took effect on 1 June 1988, establishes the framework for setting maintenance levels, for enforcing payment, and for reducing government support as it is replaced by maintenance payments.

The government will enforce maintenance payments through wage withdrawals administered by the Australian Taxation Office. Maintenance payments will be transferred to children via the Department of Social Security. Pension and benefit recipients will be required to claim child maintenance and also spouse maintenance where this is applicable. If the Department of Social Security considers that reasonable steps have not been taken to secure adequate maintenance, pensions
and benefits will be cancelled or not granted. These provisions are not new but the previous statutory obligation was not enforced except for a brief period at the end of the Fraser government. It appears that exemptions to this requirement will be granted in some instances and specifically, for example, where there is genuine fear of violence. However, it remains unclear what constitutes a genuine fear of violence and what will be required by way of proof.

The receipt of maintenance income will reduce the level of pension received by families on supporting parent’s pensions by $1 for every $2, once the level of maintenance income exceeds a very low income-test-free area. In effect, the application of the maintenance income-test creates an effective tax of fifty percent on maintenance income and it is from this effective tax that the government will achieve its saving. This high effective tax rate is higher than that imposed on the highest income earners and will represent a significant reduction in the benefits accruing to children through the Child Support Scheme. In addition, the income-test-free area for maintenance income has been reduced from its previous level of $40 per week plus $12 per child to $15 per week plus $5 for each child after the first. This will mean that much more of the pensioner families’ maintenance income will be subject to the fifty percent effective tax than was previously the case.

The new social security arrangements will also ensure that all forms of maintenance will be subject to this effective tax rate. Not only will periodic cash payments be "taxed" but so also will maintenance-in-kind and the portion of property transfers and lump sum payments which will replace, wholly or partly, weekly maintenance payments. These forms of maintenance will be imputed to income over time so as to establish their value as an equivalent to regular maintenance payments and will then reduce pension income through the operation of the effective tax. This "broadening" of the base which is subject to the effective tax means that the actual level of maintenance received by children will be further eroded.

Stage Two of the Child Support Scheme will come into effect in July 1989 and will apply to pension and benefits recipients who separate, or have a child, after that date. It will introduce a formula to determine how much child support should be paid. Under the formula the non-custodial parents will have their maintenance payments level fixed as a percentage of income above an exemption level. The exemption is made for self-support costs to a set level before the formula is applied and will also make allowance for the costs of natural or adopted children living with the non-custodial parent. Step-children or children of a spouse or de facto who are living with the non-custodial parent are not considered to be dependents of the non-custodial parent.

The percentage of income payable for maintenance will vary from eighteen percent for one child to thirty-six percent for five or more children. The formula will not be applied to income above two and a half times average weekly earnings. Clearly, this will decrease the maintenance burden on the highest income earners. Non-cash maintenance, such as transferring the family home, will be imputed to income over time and will therefore reduce the level of periodic cash maintenance that non-custodial parents will be required to pay.

The changes introduced by the Child Support Scheme will increase the amount of maintenance paid, and will also increase the number of fathers paying maintenance. But not all children will benefit and the level of assistance will vary depending on the father’s income.

There is no attempt in the Child Support Scheme to place children on an equal footing. While some children's maintenance payments will increase, as many as a third will receive no maintenance payments as their fathers may be either unknown, have died, be unemployed, be too poor to pay, or continue to evade. Furthermore, many children will receive an inadequate level of maintenance as the formula which prescribes levels of payment is well below the percentages of income intact families normally spend on their dependent children.

The Australian Labor government has responded to the "fiscal crisis of the state" by instituting a restrictionist economic regime which has, in part, involved reducing welfare provisions in the hope of reining in the government’s debt and thus allowing increased private investment.

The Child Support Scheme is, however, only one of a number of cost saving measures including the abolition of the Class B widow’s pension and unemployment benefits for 16 and 17 year olds, the extension of the waiting period for unemployment benefits to thirteen weeks, income testing of family allowances, the restriction of allowances for dependent children over eighteen who continue their education, the minimal take-up of the job search allowance and the family supplement allowance, and attempts to limit entitlement to old-age pensions.

While the Child Support Scheme forms part of the government's strategy to restructure the economy, it also functions to reconstruct the family in a way which will maintain patriarchal relations.

It is not surprising that, in an era of reduced family formation resulting from decreased marriage rates and increased divorce rates, the state has established a cost-saving measure which simultaneously enforces traditional notions of family ties and obligations.

Under the scheme, women on sole parents pensions are obliged to seek
children's biological father is not just a consideration to be avoided in the formulation of the Support Scheme and not to formulate a coherent policy for child maintenance. It is contentious it is difficult to avoid the consequences of reinforcing maintenance, by improving men's work and well-being. Within the current social, non-patriarchal family structure, women's reproductive function is not considered a dependent of the father. The scheme affirms biological ties over social relations - women are forced to seek maintenance for their children's biological father even if the children no longer have, or never had, contact with them. At the same time, step-children or children of the father's current spouse or de facto are not considered dependents of the father even though he may relate to them as such. The scheme functions to re-establish outmoded notions of the "natural" family based on blood relations over contemporary forms of social, non-biological, family. In this model, women's reproductive function is central and her dependence on her children's biological father is not just assumed, but enforced.

Carol Smart, in her recent book on marriage and the reproduction of patriarchal relations, has suggested that there is no "feminist answer" to the "so-called maintenance debate". The issue of child maintenance raises the question of whether individual fathers should support their children after separation. Both positive and negative responses to this question are contentious from a feminist perspective.

Feminists have argued that women's financial independence is a prerequisite for their economic security and well-being. Within the current economic structures, however, abolishing maintenance payments would exacerbate the poverty of women and children in sole parent families and increase their reliance on inadequate state income support. As women earn considerably less than men, and as marriage increases women's labour market disadvantage while improving men's work options, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that men should compensate women for this through child support. However, reinforcing maintenance reconstructs repressive family structures and relocates the problem of poverty experienced by children and women within the private sphere, avoiding public responsibility for alleviating poverty.

While a feminist position in regard to child maintenance is contentious it is inadequate to criticise the current Child Support Scheme and not to formulate some alternative proposals.

A feminist response to the Child Support Scheme must incorporate a concern for both the child's welfare and for women's security and independence. I will outline three reforms of the Child Support Scheme: they are neither comprehensive nor fixed and final propositions but, rather, are intended to promote discussion of alternatives to the current scheme.

First, a guaranteed maintenance allowance should be available to all children. This would achieve equality of treatment between children and would overcome the failure of the current scheme to assist close to a third of children in sole parent families. Further, it would overcome the significant disparities in maintenance levels received by children as a result of variations in their father's incomes.

Secondly, the base for the maintenance tax should be broadened beyond non-custodial parents to encompass all taxpayers. The advantages of this proposal are that increased child support could be collected which would enable more adequate payments to children. Moreover, the level of the maintenance tax could be decreased significantly from the currently high rates facing non-custodial parents and this would minimise avoidance which will continue to be a significant problem with the Child Support Scheme. It will also mean that the second families of non-custodial parents will not suffer as a consequence of the current high maintenance tax structure. A further advantage of this proposal is that the maintenance tax will not reinforce familial ties which the woman and husband have chosen to sever and therefore conforms with the "clean break" principle on which divorce judgments are increasingly based. Lastly, this proposal establishes the role of community support for children.

Thirdly, maintenance payments to families on pensions should not be subject to the effective tax of fifty percent that currently applies. This tax reduces support provided to the poorest group of children in order to achieve economically insignificant government savings. Moreover, this effective tax rate is higher than that paid by the richest taxpayers. This is clearly inequitable and diminishes the redistributive effects that the tax/transfer system aims to achieve.

These reforms would enable the Child Support Scheme to more adequately support children in sole parent families. They would also offset the emphasis on parental responsibility for children which has contributed to the maintenance of patriarchal family structures in which women are subordinate. The reforms would, instead, promote community responsibility for children. Thus, they would reflect the fact that benefits accrue to the whole community from the care and nurturer and development of children.

LINNELL SECOMB is involved in Women In Support of a better Deal for Mothers (WISDM), a group active on the child support issue.
Salman Rushdie has played fast and loose with history and popular culture as much as religion, with Thatcher's England and life in post-colonial Bombay as much as any middle-Eastern state. John Leonard reads The Satanic Verses.

Headlines kept getting in the way of this article. In Pakistan, reactionary nuts are using Salman Rushdie and the dead bodies of some true believers to destabilise Benazir Bhutto's government. In Iran, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, with Rocks in his Dome, has put out a $5.2 million contract on the novelist.

In South Africa and Saudi Arabia, The Satanic Verses is banned. For a couple of minutes, let's try to see the book through the bonfires of its burning.

As much as Islam, Salman Rushdie blasphemes Thatcherism. He's unkind, too, to V.S. Naipaul. "Pitting levity against gravity," altogether impious. The Satanic Verses is one of those go-for-broke "metafictions" - a grand narrative and a Monty Python send-up of history, religion and popular culture; Hindu cyclic and Moslem dualistic; post-colonial identity crisis and modernist pastiche; Bombay bombast and stiff-upper-lip suction; babu baby-talk and ad agency neologism; cinema gossip, elephant masks, pop jingles, lousy puns, kinky sex and Schadenfreude; a sort of Sammy and Rosie Get Laid in Doris Lessing's The Fair-Gated City - from which the sly-boots Author-God tip-and-twinkle toes away with a cannibal grin. "Who am I?" he asks us. Let's put it this way: who has the best tunes?

As we shall see, he's disingenuous. And already, like the Mojabais and Mukherjees, I've made the novel sound as daunting as the kipper that the poor displaced protagonist Chamcha has to face, so many miles from home, at his first appalling public-schoolboy breakfast: "England was a peculiar-tasting smoked fish full of spikes and bones, and nobody would ever tell him how to eat it." How, indeed?

Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta were both born in Bombay; they are equally inauthentic. Chamcha leaves the "vulgarity" of Bombay for the "poise and moderation" of England, where he eats kippers, marries the blond and well-bred Pamela, co-hosts a popular children's TV program called The Aliens Show and turns himself into the Man of a Thousand Voice-Overs: "If you wanted to know how your ketchup bottle should talk in its television commercial, if you were unsure as to the ideal voice for your packet of garlic-flavoured crisps, he was your very man. He made carpets speak in warehouse advertisements, he did celebrity impersonations, baked beans, frozen peas. On the radio he could convince an audience that he was Russian, Chinese, Sicilian, the President of the United States.

He made carpets speak in warehouse advertisements, he did celebrity impersonations, baked beans, frozen peas. On the radio he could convince an audience that he was Russian, Chinese, Sicilian, the President of the United States. From Pamela he wants a child, but can't have one. He is a mimic man.

Gibreel stays home to star on the big Indian screen, and in various Bombay bedrooms. When he isn't pretending to be Hanuman the monkey king "in a sequence of adventure movies that owed more to a certain cheap television series emanating from Hong Kong than it did to the Ramayana," he incarnates "with absolute conviction, the countless deities of the subcontinent in the popular genre move is known as 'theologicals'. Blueskinned as Krishna he danced, flute in hand, among the beauteous gopis and their udder-heavy cows; with upturned palms, serene, he meditated upon humanity's suffering beneath a studio-rickety bodhi-tree." Recovering from a mysterious Christ-like haemorrhage, he will fall in love with the Everest-climbing ice queen Alleluia Cone, and lose his faith.

Instead of kippers, Gibreel eats "the gammon steaks of his unbelief and the pig's trotters of secularism." He is an impostor.

Now, then: Chamcha and Gibreel, the mimic man and the impostor, are on their way from Bombay to "Mahagonny, Babylon, Alphaville" - better known as Proper London, capital of Vilayet - when their jumbo jet, the Bostan, is skyjacked by Sikh terrorists and blown up in mid-air, at 29,002 feet. This unlikely pair of pretenders, in a parable of the migration of peoples and souls, drop from a "Himalayan height" down "the hole that went to Wonderland", through "a succession of cloudforms, ceaselessly metamorphosing, gods into bulls, women into spiders, men into wolves. Hybrid cloud-creatures pressed in upon..."
The Rushdie Affair

EDWARD SOREL

CAN YOU RELIEVE THIS AYATOLLAH?

THE MAN'S A BARBARIAN!

IMAGINE REAGAN PUBLICLY OFFERING A REWARD TO ANYONE WHO'D BUMP OFF GADDAFI

PREPOSTEROUS

OR KISSINGER ANNOUNCING TO THE WORLD THAT WE WERE GOING TO ASSASSINATE ALLENDE IN CHILE

YOU DON'T ADVERTISE THAT SORT OF THING.

OR KENNEDY BROADCASTING THAT THE MAFIA HAD A CONTRACT TO LIQUIDATE CASTRO.

NEVER

WHY CAN'T THESE IDIOTIC MOSLEMS UNDERSTAND THAT IF YOU WANT TO ELIMINATE SOMEONE...

...YOU GO THROUGH PROPER GOVERNMENT CHANNELS!

AND THEN DENY EVERYTHING.

The Nation. March 13, 1989
them, gigantic flowers with human breasts dangling from fleshy stalks, winged cats, centaurs, and Chamcha in his semi-consciousness was seized by the notion that he, too, had acquired the quality of cloudiness, becoming metamorphic, hybrid.

Are they "just two brown men, falling hard, nothing so new about that, you may think; climbed too high, got above themselves"? Or are they fallen angels "halfway between Allahgod and homosap ... daring to ask forbidden things: antiquestions"?

Chamcha and Gibreel land in a swamp in Sussex presided over by a crazy woman. And Chamcha has turned into a goat. He may also be the devil, Shaitan. But what he looks like to white England - with his horns, hooves and tail - is Everywog. As a manticose explains to him on the night of his escape from the detention centre for illegal immigrants, to which Gibreel has betrayed him, "They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct." Undergound in Vilayet, Chamcha will see his new image become an icon of the underclass. Asians and West Indians, with a lot of help from the police, will riot about race. Although, after some funny business with waxworks in a nightclub, Chamcha will metamorphose once more, by rage, into Shakespeare's Iago, he won't really learn anything interesting about himself until he returns to Bombay for the death of his father and the bed of an old girlfriend, the opinionated Zeeny Vakil.

This is overmuch symbolic baggage for any one character to carry around, but it's nothing compared to the burdens of Gibreel. Gibreel acquires a halo. He may be the Archangel Gabriel, through whom God posted messages to the Prophet. On the other hand, he behaves more like Azrael, the exterminating "agent of God's wrath", come to burn down Proper London. On the third hand, having played so many gods in the low-budget "theologicals", maybe he's just crazy. He has terrible dreams: "The universe of his nightmares had begun to leak into his waking life, and if he was not careful he would never manage to begin again, to be reborn with her, through her, Al-leluia, who had seen the roof of the world. " These bad dreams are what got Rushdie into deep Shiite:

1. In the ancient sand-city of Jahlia, a Mohammed-like businessman/prophet named Mahound seems to be making up his messages from God or Gabriel, or Shaitan - to suit his political convenience in a hairshirt-pulling fight with the local matriarchal deities Uzza, Manat and Al-Lat. Even these "satanic verses" are fiddled with, whimsically, by his scribe. Meanwhile, in the local brothel, the girls take the names of Mahound's many wives, to spice up their profane business.

2. In the semi-modern Titlipur, in the shade of a banyan tree so immense that "the growth of tree into village and village into tree had become so intricate that it was impossible to differentiate between the two", the beautiful, orphaned and epileptic Ayesha also hears voices and, wearing nothing but a cloud of butterflies, leads the credulous villagers on a pilgrimage to Mecca that ends in death by drowning.

3. In a modern imperial city, an Imam plots the overthrow of a Middle Eastern state run by a Westernised and secular-minded empress, whom he accuses of "sexual relations with lizards" and whom he confuses with a mother-goddess: "History is the blood-wine that must no longer be drunk. History the intoxicant, the creation and possession of the Devil, of the great Shaitan, the greatest of the lies - progress, science, rights - against which the Imam has set his face. History is a deviation from the Path, knowledge is a delusion, because the sum of knowledge was complete on the day Al-Lah finished his revelation to Mahound." And: "Burn the books and trust the Book; shred the papers and hear the Word." And, after the revolution: "Now every clock in the capital city of Desh begins to chime, and goes on unceasingly, beyond twelve, beyond twentyfour, beyond one thousand and one, announcing the end of Time, the hour that is beyond measuring, the hour of the exile's return, of the victory of water over wine, of the commencement of the Untime of the Imam."

Well, "Mahound" was a term of contempt used by the Crusaders and is always a satanic figure. The Jahilia brothel, a "tent of Black Stone called The Curtain", sounds a lot like Ka'aba, regarded by the faithful as the only consecrated spot on earth. And the scribe who fiddles in the desert with the text of the Koran is "a bum from Persia" whose name - surprise, surprise! - is Salman. And while the story of Ayesha, her butterflies and her lemming-like Exodus to Jonestown may derive from the Sufis and their moths, Ayesha was also the historical Mohammed's favourite wife. And she turns up yet again in the Imam dream, as the name of the despised Empress. The Imam, of course, is Khomeini, never notorious for his sense of humour.

Rushdie may say now whatever he wants to about "the fictional dream(s) of a fictional character, an Indian movie star, and one who is losing his mind at that". He can say that his book "isn't actually Islam"; it's about, instead, "migration, metamorphosis, divided selves, love, death". To Madhu Jain in the India Today of September 15: "Actually, one of my major themes is religion and fanaticism. I have talked about (Islam, which) I know the most about." To Shrabani Basu in the September 18 edition of Sunday. "It is a serious attempt to write about religion and revelation from the point of view of a secular person ... Besides, Mohammed is a very interesting figure. He's the only prophet who exists even remotely inside history."

I'm not saying that for this impudence Rushdie deserves Khomeini's eleventh-century sort of criticism by assassination. I am saying he has played fast and loose. ("Writers and whores", observes his own Mahound: "I see no difference here."). Having said that, let me add I'm sorry that so much attention's been paid to less than a third of the novel and so little to the rest of it, which has brilliant things to say about the hatred of women in history; the triumph of the machinery of images - in movies, television and advertising - over ancient myth, classical literature and political science; the displacement and deracination of the modern in intelligence in a world of permanent migration and mindless hybridising; the loss of self and death of love in a time without decency or roots; wog-bashing in the racist theocracy of the Mad...
Thatcher.

Talk about your Imams. Listen to this, from one of the New Men, an ad exec:

Maggie the Bitch ... She's radical all right. What she wants - what she actually thinks she can fucking achieve - is literally to invent a whole goddam new middle class in this country. Get rid of the old woolly incompetent buggers from fucking Surrey and Hampshire, and bring in the new. People without background, without history. Hungry people. People who really want and who know that, with her, they can bloody well get. Nobody's ever tried to replace a whole fucking class before, and the amazing thing is she might just do it if they don't get her first. The old class. The dead men ... And it's not just the businessmen. The intellectuals, too. Out with the whole faggoty crew. In with the hungry guys with the wrong education. New professors, new painters, the lot. It's a bloody revolution. Newness coming into this country that's stuffed full of fucking old corpses. It's going to be something to see.

Who's left out of this revolution? Certainly Chamcha. He may have married Pamela because of her voice, "composed of tweeds, headscarves, summer pudding, hockey-sticks, thatched houses, saddle-soap, house parties, nuns, family pews, large dogs and philistinism"; because, as she says, "I was bloody Britannia. Warm beer, mince pies, commonsense and me." But, having fallen from the sky and found his brown face, Chamcha's welcome only in Asian ghettos like Brickhall High Street, in cafes like the Shaandaar, among the pista barfi and jalebis, the chaloo chai and vegetable samosas. "What's a pachy?" asks Alleluia Cone, herself the daughter of death-camp survivors. A news vendor tells her: "A brown Jew".

Also left out will be Mimi Mamoulian, Chamcha's partner in mimicry and impersonation: "I have read Finnegans Wake and am conversant with post-modernist critiques of the West, e.g. that we have here a society capable only of pastiche: a 'flattened' world. When I become the voice of a bottle of bubble bath, I am entering Flatland knowingly, understanding what I'm doing and why." Owing to "upheavals of Armenian-Jewish
Dickens and Naipaul, William Blake and Omar Khayyam, Henry James and Frantz Fanon, Ubu Roi and The Wizard of Oz, Dr. Strangelove and Jerry della Femina - we end up, all of us, hungry for meaning, demanding to be made new, condemned instead, like Chamcha, to The Aliens Show.

We've come all this way in as much of a mess as The Satanic Verses itself, and I haven't told you anything about Pamela and Alleluia and Chamcha's father and Gibreel's producer, not to mention Dr. Rushdie lost control of his novel

Uhuru Simba and Jumpy Joshi and the Granny Ripper and the race riot and the Othello sub-plot and the female Sikh terrorist and the satirical poet Baal. Nor do I intend to. Somewhere along the line, maybe in "the secret chamber of the clavicords", Rushdie lost control of his novel the way I've lost control of this article. The Satanic Verses lacks the ravening power, the great gulp of Midnight's Children and Shame. It bites off the heads of its characters instead of digesting their essences. It has far too much on its troubled mind to make a symphonic noise out of so many discords. Nevertheless, of course, in its huge, dishevelment, its Leaves of Grass lurchings and scourgings, whirls and vapours, belly laughs and belly-flops, it is infinitely more interesting than those hundreds of neat little novels we have to read between Rushdies.

Is there a way out of his cycles that devolve into lesser selves, meaner societies and deathward-spinning metaphysical systems? One suggestion, though I'm not sure how seriously it's intended, shows up in a book by Zeeny Vakil, Chamcha's Bombay art critic (and the most interesting and intended, shows up in a book by Zeeny Vakil, Chamcha's Bombay art critic and Omar Khayyam, Henry James and Frantz Fanon, Ubu Roi and The Wizard of Oz, Dr. Strangelove and Jerry della Femina - we end up, all of us, hungry for meaning, demanding to be made new, condemned instead, like Chamcha, to The Aliens Show.

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Is there a way out of his cycles that devolve into lesser selves, meaner societies and deathward-spinning metaphysical systems? One suggestion, though I'm not sure how seriously it's intended, shows up in a book by Zeeny Vakil, Chamcha's Bombay art critic (and the most interesting and least-developed character in the novel): The Only Good Indian lambastes"the confusing myth of authenticity, that folkloristic straitjacket which she sought to replace by an ethic of historically validated eclecticism, for was not the entire national culture based on the principle of borrowing whatever clothes seemed to fit, Aryan, Mughal, British, take-the-best-and-leave-the-rest?" It's Zeeny who tells Chamcha to get real: "We're right in front of you. You should try and make an adult acquaintance with this place, this time. Try and embrace this city, as it is, not some childhood memory that makes you both nostalgic and sick."

But this seems far too straightforward for metafiction. I'm not positive but I think Rushdie is proposing something more botanical. When, in Gibreel's dream of Mecca and drowning, the Tipitipir villagers leave their mothering banyan tree, they perish. Then there is, for Chamcha, "the tree of his own life", the walnut tree his father planted "with his own hands on the day of the coming of the son". Chamcha explains this tree to Zeeny: "Your birth-tree is a financial investment of a sort. When a child comes of age, the grown walnut is comparable to a mature insurance policy; it's a valuable tree, it can be sold, to pay for weddings, or a start in life. The adult chops down his childhood to help his grown-up self. The unsentimentality is appealing, don't you think?" As usual, Chamcha's missed the point. For his father, that tree was where his son 'soul lived while the boy himself was far away, pursuing his unrequited love affair with England. Many pages later, Chamcha will watch a television program on gardening, and witness what's called a "chimeran graft", in which two trees - mulberry? laburnum? broom? - are bred into one:

a chimera with roots, firmly planted in and growing vigorously out of a piece of English earth: a tree, he thought, capable of taking the metaphoric place of the one his father had chopped down in a distant garden in another, incompatible world. If such a tree were possible, then so was he: he, too, could cohere, send down roots, survive. Amid all the televisial images of hybrid tragedies - the uselessness of mermen, the failures of plastic surgery, the esperanto-like vacuity of much modern art, the Coca-Colonisation of the planet - he was given this one gift: esperanto-like vacuity of much modern art, the Coca-Colonisation of the planet - he was given this one gift.

For this, they want to kill him.

This article reproduced courtesy of The Nation.
Dear Patient,

My name is Dr. Mary Hartman. I run a chain of highly lucrative private (of course) clinics for people just like you: people who suffer from profound psycho-sexual malfunction.

It may interest you to know that a recent survey has shown that readers of the Australian Left Review are made up of a statistical majority of psycho-sexual cripples.

And so it was with particular pleasure that I agreed to take this opportunity to tell you about a new threat to your psycho-sexual health.

Patient, a plague is sweeping this nation.

A plague that is changing the very fabric of daily life.

You look all around you and what do you see? Babies!!

Every second person seems to be having one.

And everyone else is thinking about having one.

Or helping someone else to have one.

Or regretting not having had one already.

Or even, God help them, planning a second.

Everywhere you look, it’s babies, babies, babies. And you don’t know what to do.

And she was waving to her man as he drove off to work. She picked up the morning paper, turned and walked into the house.

Suddenly she realised that she was utterly alone with a tiny person whose entire conversational range consisted of “Goo goo” and “Gar gar”.

In terror she tried to make the baby discuss the front page story in the Financial Review.

The child farted and fell asleep.

My feminist patient looked in the mirror and screamed.

She had entered the Twilight Zone of BABY BOOM PSYCHOSIS!

Patient, I know what some of you are thinking. I don’t want to sound like a white-coated professional know-it-all. But I do. You’re reading this and, in a deep, dark corner of your mind, you’re wondering “do I want a baby?”

You know the family is a reactionary organ of the state: but do you want a baby? You think to yourself: “But I’ve got so many other things to do. My job is fulfilling. My union activity is important. I enjoy my friends and my social life.”

But this voice inside your head keeps saying, quietly, insistently: “Do I want a baby?”

And in the distance you can hear a ticking, ticking, ticking sound. One morning you look in the mirror and you see your first grey hairs. And still you hear this ticking, ticking, ticking.

WHAT IS THAT SOUND?

And suddenly you realise - it’s the relentless ticking of your biological clock.

If you don’t have a baby soon, will it be TOO LATE? And so, before too long, you present at my clinic with the tell-tale swelling of the belly.

Patient, this is just one example. As you know, people of all ages are having children these days.

All ages and all sexual preferences. Animal, vegetable, and mineral.

Lesbian separatist women who haven’t even let a man inside their house for years are suddenly running around with an empty vegemite jar in one hand, and a turkey baster in the other.

And they spend their weekends listening to “wimmin’s” programs on public radio, and poking tiny tadpoles into their innermost regions in a desperate bid to conceive.

THIS IS A BABY BOOM INDEED!

And we all know a couple who are “trying” to have a baby.

And they insist on telling you about it.

You get a picture in your mind of two people constantly in coitus - 24 hours day.

A classic symptom of the “trying couple” is the obsessive urge to keep the sperm in the love pocket for as long as possible. I had one young patient who insisted on standing on her head for an hour after intercourse so that not a single drop of the precious seminal fluid could slip down her leg into barren oblivion.

Another lassie rigged up an elaborate system of ropes and pulleys so that she could continue her household duties, like vacuuming and washing up, all the time remaining upside down - secure in the knowledge that her love pouch was full.

Clearly, the question must be...
asked: why do these patients want a baby so much?

From my clinical experience you can divide the would-be parents into two main groups: the Sensualists and the Pedagogues.

The Sensualists want a child so they can love a little person unconditionally.

They imagine picking up the child from pre-school.

A little child in tiny shoes with an itty-bitty school bag. As you approach the school you see your child playing in a crowd of kids.

Your child spots you.
Her face lights up.
Her little body quivers with pleasure just because it’s you.
She throws open her little arms and runs towards you.
You can’t help yourself, you start running too.
And as you rush into each other’s arms, New Age Music starts playing from beneath the pavement.
This is the Sensualists.

And the Pedagogues - they always imagine their potential child as being permanently four years old and always asking questions. Questions they long to try to answer.

Like: where do clouds come from? Who makes the wind? Why is the sky blue? You can become a guru with just one little follower. Your child will be a blank sheet of paper, and the pen is in your hand. You can create your dream.

Of course, both groups of potential parents are in for a dreadful shock once the baby actually arrives.

Even a Spielberg movie can’t prepare you for the full horror of what’s inside that bucket of Napisan, left untouched for eight days.

And who but a parent can comprehend the terrible nagging tiredness of disrupted sleep, disrupted sleep for months. Your head rolls forward, your eyes roll back. And half the people at work think you’ve become a heroin addict on the nod.

But it’s the question of discipline that really sends most of my patients into full-blown psychosis.

I had a mother come to me recently, who’d been driven so mad by the nightly bedtime battle, that she’d retreated into a full combat fantasy.

Late each afternoon, as the child played innocently in the backyard outside, mother was in her bedroom changing into jungle greens.

At exactly 1700 hours mother blackened her face, pulled on her combat boots and armed herself with a set of the child’s pyjamas. Then she crawled on her belly down the hall of her house, out the back door and across the lawn towards the unsuspecting child.

She had become RAMBO MOTHER.

IT’S BEDTIME.
AND THERE’S NO TURNING BACK!!!

Patient, if you have identified with any of these symptoms, I look forward to seeing you at one of my clinics.

Yours sincerely,
Dr. Mary Hartman.

JULIE McCROSSIN is a freelance journalist and comedy performer.
This year marks the centenary of Jessie Street's birth. Winifred Mitchell remembers

The celebration in April 1989 of the centenary of the birth of Jessie Street is a belated recognition of her role in a number of areas. She was known as Australia's leading feminist, a champion of equality for women in the workplace, the home and the community; when there were no women in federal parliament, she stood as a Labor Party candidate in the Liberal stronghold of the Wentworth electorate, almost defeating the sitting member; she was the only woman in Australia's delegation to the conference in San Francisco in 1945 which founded the United Nations Organisation; she was a staunch supporter of Australian-Russian friendship during World War II and in the cold war that followed; she was a fighter for peace, a supporter of justice for minorities, a leader of campaigns for the ending of discrimination against Australian Aborigines.

From 1929, when she was a co-founder of the United Associations of Women, whose watchword was "Freedom, Equality of Status and Opportunity", what she said, wrote and did were reported in the press. She was a controversial figure because she worked vigorously for causes unpopular with influential sections of the community: wages for wives and mothers, equal pay for equal work in peace and wartime, equal opportunity and status in all areas where women were barred because they were women. Her support for the Australian-Russian friendship movement was tolerated during the war, as was her welcoming of communist women into the United Associations of Women. From 1946 she was the subject of attacks from conservative individuals and organisations; in 1948 she left the Labor Party rather than turn her back on the Australia-Russia Society.

What made Jessie Street the more controversial was that, by birth, economic circumstances, education and marriage, she belonged in the upper echelons of Australian society. Her radical views set her apart from the class to which, in other ways, she belonged, though there were many other women like her, articulate, university trained, with the financial independence and leisure that enabled them to work with her in their commitment to feminism. But their social standing and their educational abilities also set them apart from the labour movement, including trade unionists. Anti-intellectualism, particularly where women were concerned, was welded with the distrust of middle class feminism.

There were other reasons for trade union suspicion of middle class feminists, particularly in the decade before World War II. The United As-
sociations was brought into being on the eve of the Great Depression. However much it campaigned in aid of unemployed girls and women, or married women teachers faced with dismissal, or improved wages and conditions for nurses, or national insurance schemes, its activities were reported in the press as part of a social scene which had little relevance for a desperate working class. The members were well dressed with no apparent economic troubles; their leisure was not the one enforced by unemployment.

As long as Jessie Street and her colleagues confined themselves to "women's affairs" they could be, and were, ignored by trade unions. When they began publicising their views in the early 'thirties about using the basic wage system to provide a wage for dependent wives and mothers, they went on to outline a scheme for equal pay for women workers, again based on the basic wage structure, the trade unions reacted angrily.

Jessie Street wanted economic equality for women, whether as marriage partners or in the workplace, while fully recognising the needs of a family with children. She pointed out that less than half the adult male population had dependent children and since the basic wage was based on the assumption that the adult male was the breadwinner with a dependent wife and between two and three children, the system should be made fairer. Single men and women should be paid the same minimum wage; the extra amount for adult male breadwinners embodied in the basic wage should be used as an endowment fund on which those couples with a child or children could draw.

The basic wage was, in a sense, a by-product of the arbitration system, arising from the humanitarian Justice Higgins' theories and practices as president of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration. Higgins believed that conciliation and arbitration would bring about "A New Province of Law and Order". He also believed that an adult male worker should receive a wage which enabled him to marry, have two to three children and, with the aid of his thrifty dependent wife, live in a state of frugal comfort. Many labourers had large families and the concept of the minimum wage, on which the whole structure was based, meant increasing poverty for those on lower wages.

The concept also envisaged the "average" or "normal" woman as destined for marriage, child bearing and dependency on a male breadwinner. The average women workers were therefore young and single and should be paid as juniors, at half the adult male rate. But many women did not marry, or were widowed or divorced; working women often had dependent parents or children or younger brothers and sisters to support. They were victims of the basic wage concept in the same way as the lower-paid male breadwinners, but doubly so because they were women.

The "average" rule of thumb also divided categories of employment into "men's" and "women's" work! At first, Justice Higgins conceded that if a woman worked in an occupation normally seen as men's work, and was equally productive, she should receive the same pay. But, by the time Jessie Street was taking up the cudgels on behalf of women's wage justice, male and female work categories had been defined more sharply. In general, women received half the male rate, though while there was no basic wage for women, the practice in wage-setting was to recognise a female minimum wage of not less than half, if there was equal productivity.

While there were some attempts by trade unions with women members to procure an equal wage for adult women doing the same work as their male colleagues, they accepted defeat philosophically. Nor did unions covering higher paid skilled male workers worry overmuch about their lower paid brothers on the basic wage. Their main concern was in protecting their own members' higher margins and their relation to the base rate. Few male unionists could see anything wrong with a male-based wage structure. The level of technology in industry strengthened the idea that work was primarily a concern for the strength of men, that the normal role of a woman was that of a worker in the house as wife and mother. The level of domestic technology confirmed her status as an unskilled labourer and unpaid auxiliary.

In the depression the male section of the workforce was worse affected by unemployment than the female section, though the ten percent reduction in wages, applied universally, fell more heavily on the lower paid. Men recognised the threat of women working for lower wages but saw the solution as preference for men in employment. The support of trade unions for equality in the workplace had to be won mainly on the negative basis of defence against this threat to their own job security, not on the basis of justice for fellow trade unionists who were different only because of their sex. It took the experiences of the second world war, then the years of prosperity, technological advance and full employment to bring about full trade union support for equal pay. And to these factors for change must be added the continued work by the women's movement inside and outside the trade union movement, as well as the increased numbers of women workers both married and single.

A clear illustration of the difficulties faced by Jessie Street and the so-called "middle class" feminists can be seen in the differences that developed with another champion of equal pay, Muriel Heagney. Both women had the same sense of mission, the origins of their interest in the plight of women much the same. Educated at Richmond Convent, Muriel Heagney trained as a primary school teacher. She joined the Labour Party in 1906 as a member of its Richmond branch of which her father had been a foundation member. In 1915, when she was thirty, she became a clerk in the Defence Department. At that time, women clerks received the same rate of pay as their male colleagues. After the war, as secretary of the Relief Fund for Stricken Europe, she visited Geneva and Russia, later working with the Industrial Labor Organisation. Well known for her trade union work, particularly with clerks, she became a member of the central executive of the ALP in Victoria and, in 1933, stood as a candidate for Labor in a by-election, ten years before Jessie Street's experience, also unsuccessfully.

In 1930, both women were involved in campaigns to aid unemployed women. The scheme in Victoria involved the establishing of sewing and jam-making centres; in Sydney, the UA arranged farm training for girls on the land. The paths of the two women...
crossed in membership of different branches of the same organisations and attendance at overseas conferences. They both published their ideas about equal pay and campaigned for wage justice for women.

In 1935 Muriel Heagney came to Sydney while working for the Clerks' Union. She joined the United Associations and was soon a colleague of Jessie on the council of that organisation and on its Like Conditions of Work Committee. In 1937 Muriel established the Council of Action for Equal Pay at the behest of the Clerks' Union. At the conference which founded this body there were representatives of 53 trade union with women members, and women's organisations, the UA included. By this time the differences of approach to methods of achieving equal pay must have been clear to both women.

Jessie Street believed that, as industry's capacity to pay had been an important factor in the reduction of wages during the depression, the precedent necessitated a gradual approach: an increase to 60 percent, then quarterly increments over five years to achieve 100 percent of the male rate. Muriel Heagney thought the correct strategy was the demand for equality immediately, that the gradual approach showed opposition, not support, for the principle of equality. It seems rather strange that the two women could not solve their differences or agree to differ. At the annual conference of the Council of Action for Equal Pay in September 1939, the Heagney line was adopted. After being denounced for "bowing to the dictates of their bourgeois husbands", the United Associations withdrew.

The United Associations then took advantage of a federal inquiry into the basic wage to plan an appearance before the Commonwealth Arbitration Court to give evidence about the need for increases in women's wages. They gained the support of twenty women's organisations from all states, seven from New South Wales, to brief Nerida Cohen, the UA's legal adviser, to appear for them.

Muriel Heagney, resentful no doubt because of lack of consultation and intrusion into trade union affairs, gained the support of John Hughes of the Clerks' Union, president of the NSW Labor Council and, later, of the State Labor Party group which amalgamated with the Communist Party in 1943. They made a joint approach to C. Crofts, the ACTU's advocate in the court, to oppose the intervention of the feminists. But, since none of the 70 unions seeking an increase in the basic wage made any reference to women's wages in their applications, the women's plan was frustrated.

Street and Cohen then approached the Melbourne Trades Hall for aid in calling a conference of unions with women members. Thirty-three unions were represented and, after Jessie had spoken, a resolution was carried unanimously, calling on the ACTU to make an application to the Commonwealth Court, in conjunction with unions with women members, for equal pay.

Despite, maybe because of, this ruthless determination to pursue their own line of dedicated action, the disagreement between the two champions helped provide stimulation to the ACTU and the trade union movement in Victoria and New South Wales. Crofts wrote to the New South Wales Labour Council warning against organisations of women claiming to represent the interests of female unionists. A decision to call a conference of federal unions with women members in 1941 was made. The ACTU's own triennial congress a few months later adopted all the recommendations of the equal pay conference and Muriel Heagney was selected as a member of the committee appointed to act on the decisions. At last the trade union movement was paying heed to the women's call for equality in wage rates.

Another spur was the need for releasing male workers for the armed services. The federal government's plan was viewed with alarm by those trade unionists who saw it as "a means of providing cheap labour at the expense of male employment". The Minister for Munitions in the Labor wartime government listened to delegations from the trade union movement. He also explained the proposed Women's Employment Board's provisions to a delegation led by Jessie Street. The United Associations congratulated itself and the federal government on the proposals to start women in munitions and other essential industries at 60 percent and then, depending on proved productivity, increase the rate to 100 percent of the male wage.

By 1949 there was joint action by five feminist organisations with a com-
mon policy regarding equal pay, one of which gave evidence before the Commonwealth Court in support of the ACTU’s case for retention of the Women’s Employment Board’s wartime wage rates. Seventy-five percent only was awarded. In 1959 the state government in New south Wales decided to give equal wages to women in the state teaching service since the NSW teachers’ Federation had proved that women’s work was equal to that performed by male teachers.

One of the women teachers who had been in the forefront of the equal pay campaign was Lucy Woodcock, another colleague of Jessie Street. A founding member of the NSW teachers’ Federation, the first woman member of its executive, she was the principal of a school in Erskineville where, during the depression, she organised meals for the children of the unemployed. She also campaigned against the dismissal of married women teachers during the depression, thereby coming into contact with Jessie Street and the United Associations of Women. On her retirement she became president of that association, representing both it and the Teachers’ Federation at the victory dinner celebrating equal pay for teachers in 1963. It should be noted that women teachers gained equality in the gradualist way, their union supporting the government’s yearly instalment proposals 1959-1963. Lucy Woodcock had been a member of the UA’s Like Conditions of Work Committee as well as the Council of Action for Equal Pay. Well educated, well paid, articulate and clear thinking, Lucy Woodcock was able to relate equally well with Jessie Street and Muriel Heagney. In Education, the journal of the Teachers’ Federation, in 1968, the obituary spoke with respect of her work in a number of trade union campaigns particularly those for equal pay. It stressed, however, that her approach had always been that of a trade unionist and not a middle class feminist.

Jessie Street included servicewomen in her campaign for wage justice, as did the Council of Action for Equal Pay. She also made representations on behalf of the Australian women who married American servicemen, enlisting the aid of Eleanor Roosevelt to ensure they received main-

tenance. But she had many other programs during the war years. A member of the Labor Party from 1939, she gained pre-selection in 1943 for the seat of Wentworth. Her personal appeal to the electors combined with an extremely efficient campaign organised by the United Associations members and their friends gave her a majority of first preferences. She was defeated by Eric Harrison, Liberal, on the fourth count.

In the same year, Jessie Street led the UA committee which organised a national conference for women, the first "Charter" conference. Delegates from over 90 women’s organisations came from all states in Australia. They included women of all shades of political and religious views, trade unions and feminist bodies. This conference’s resolutions became the Charter, a manifesto of women’s opportunities and needs in the home, the workplace and the community, in war and in peace. It was unique in that it provided a post-war reconstruction program for women.

The second conference in 1946 was also successful, featuring the first all-women art exhibition, a procession for peace, and a service at the Cenotaph conducted by the Salvation Army Brigadier Barbara Auton. But it was smaller: there were 68 organisations represented and it was attacked from a number of areas: the presidents of the National Council of Women and six of its constituted bodies, the Catholic Weekly, and the labor party Women’s Proposals Committee. It was not the Charter that was criticised: it was the United Associations of Women, particularly its president, Jessie Street. For some conservative women, Jessie Street’s candidature as a member of the Labor Party in the 1943 federal elections had seemed radical. Worse was her open admiration, publicly expressed after she returned from a visit to Russia in 1938, for the socialist system, particularly in relation to the status of women. She had become a leading figure in the Society for Cultural Relations with Russia, helped initiate Russian Medical Aid, then Sheepskins for Russia in the war years. When the various committees were combined into the Australia-Russia Society in 1945, she became first its vice-president, then president. Jessie Street had been appointed by the Australian government in 1945 as a member of the delegation to San Francisco for the inauguration of the United Nations Organisation.

The end of the war brought the resumption of pre-war antagonisms, fear of communism, suspicion of those like Jessie who expressed the desire for friendship with Russia and associated with known communists. When the Labor Party proscribed the Australia-Russia Society in 1948, Jessie Street remained firm in her principles. She resigned from the Labor Party rather than obey the direction to resign from the Australia-Russia Society.

She spent much of the 1950s overseas. Using London as a base she attended many conferences as a speaker on peace, international understanding, the status of women and the rights of minorities. On her return to Australia she was a leader in the campaign for justice for Aborigines. Working with the Aboriginal Australian Fellowship she drafted the petition for the referendum to remove the discriminatory legislation from the Australian Constitution and lived to see that referendum passed in 1967.

She died in 1970 after several years of ill health; though she had managed to publish her autobiography Truth or Repose in 1968 she could not participate in the new surge of feminism rising at the end of the 1960s. Nor could she realise that much of the Charter of the 1940s would, in essence, become the reforms in the status of women made in he 1970 and 1980s.

As educational opportunities for women, including mature age women, widened, distinctions between kinds of feminists have become blurred. Laws against discrimination based on a person’s sex are beginning to take effect. There is far more protection of women as wives and mothers, and a long list of other improvements that Jessie Street and her colleagues campaigned for. While some have yet to be gained it can be said that she and they would have been pleased with the developments. It should also be recognised that women like Jessie Street were an essential part of the history of feminism, that the label “middle class” is an irrelevance.

WINIFRED MITCHELL is a retired academic and feminist, and author of the history of the United Association of Women.
At Last the News

Read all about it in Moscow News, suggests Denis Freney

In the Soviet Union, the first and most difficult task is to buy a copy of Moscow News. Only 25,000 copies are printed in the Russian language and most go to those privileged or lucky enough to have a subscription.

The weekly is allocated a certain amount of newsprint, and their quota was set when no one read Moscow News. But that was before Yegor Yakovlev took over as editor-in-chief a few years ago, as glasnost picked up steam.

Fortunately, anyone in Australia willing to part with $14.50 can get a year's airmail subscription.

You soon find problems. Unless you read it from cover to cover, you are likely to miss the most interesting articles. Headlines give no help.

Second, you must read through the usually verbose or "philosophical" opening paragraphs, to get to what the author is really on about.

Third, you must be able to read between the lines. Old habits die hard, and decades of censorship have turned obtuse allusions into an in-built part of the Soviet journalist's stock-in-trade.

However, that said, Moscow News can always surprise. It was able to claim another "first" recently, when it published an interview with Trotsky's grandson and a photo of him beside Trotsky's grave on the outskirts of Mexico City.

"I could not dispute the grandson's opinion about his grandfather. Not out of delicacy... Simply I don't have, nor can I have, my own opinion about Trotsky...I haven't read Trotsky's works...and am not aware of his views on socialism or marxism..."

We are told, too, that an increasing number of Soviet citizens are paying their respects at Trotsky's graveside... Forbidden fruit...

Over the past two years, Moscow News has also provided something of a barometer of the progress of perestroika - and of the icy winds that occasionally blow from the corridors of bureaucratic power. Late 1987 and early 1988 was one such hard period, and the columns of Moscow News became much more subdued.

There was a sense of euphoria in mid-1988, in the lead-up to and during the special CPSU conference. Soon, however, the hard realities, particularly in the economy, reasserted themselves.

Today, there is sense of foreboding, as the forces of darkness once more emerge, and perestroika hits more and more rocks. The big battles, you can read between the lines, are yet to come...

Reading Moscow News becomes addictive. Forget the TV, turn on some good music and set aside a night to read it when it is delivered...and after that there's New Times, and, most extraordinary of all, 20th Century and Peace, the monthly bulletin of the Soviet Peace Committee that's now a voice for the "unofficial" opposition.

Become your own private Sovietologist...

Denis Freney

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challenge to conservative left

may i take this opportunity to congratulate all the alr staff for the wonderful work they do in getting out this journal. i find it great reading and also very helpful in bringing out in-depth articles on the many issues confronting people today.

in particular the dec/jan issue with the articles "changing the subject" by stuart hall; the interview with laurie Carmichael "counsel for the defence"; from grey to green", jack mundey; welcome to the new times", an interview with martin jacques, i found particularly interesting, especially in regard to the increasing circulation of marxism today.

i think our alr has a great potential for increasing sales if it constantly seeks out diversity of ideas not only from among the left but also from people representing various broad movements who don't regard themselves as part of the left and would switch their allegiances during election times to the party which promises the best deal. sections of the environmentalist and pensioner movements could perhaps fit into this category.

the most exciting thing to come out of some of the dec/jan issue of alr are the articles which challenge 'conservative' left thinking. i think that alr is doing this with its publication of articles especially from the uk.

stella nord.

mt. victoria, nsw.

a book for every woman

taking time is a fascinating collection of dates and information about organisations, people, legislation and incidents shaping the lives of women in australia, focussing on victoria. the entries are brief and to the point with plenty of references, and a useful appendix. it covers events from 1861 to 1987 in the areas of equal pay decisions, equal opportunity and affirmative action legislation, the right to vote and stand for parliament, international agreements (un & ilo) and the koories of victoria.

compiled and edited by yvonne smith, with attractive cover and cartoons by mary leunig, it is published by the union of australian women and available from them at 280 collins street, melbourne or from the international bookshop, 28 flinders st, melbourne. $10 plus $2 postage and packaging. enquiries: (03) 654.7409.

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bob rowthorn, university of cambridge

saturday 29 april
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Male bonding  Hollywood style

Rain Man, directed by Barry Levinson. Showing at Hoyts nationally. Reviewed by Adam Farrar.

The movie Rainman has won four Academy Awards - which says both that it is an example of the best of Hollywood, and also that it is quintessentially Hollywood. This doesn't mean that it's not very enjoyable and, as I will go on to describe, can set us on important tracks that lead well beyond this particular film. But before setting off down these tracks, let's consider the film itself for a moment or two.

There's no doubt that the characters created by its lead actors, Tom Cruise and Dustin Hoffman, are out of the top drawer. In their very different ways, they produce strong immediate emotional responses from their audiences - on one side almost unbearable aversion and on the other sympathy and, perhaps more immediately, breathless admiration for Dustin Hoffman's virtuoso performance. The movie's theme is imaginative and adventurous. It takes on the incredibly difficult subject of intellectual disability almost without a stumble. And it is another of the new run of Hollywood films damning the values of America's new breed of yuppie go-getters. But, despite this, it is essentially a Hollywood formula film.

Where else but the US film industry would a director have been unselfconscious enough to team up the worst case of "greed is good" young American entrepreneur with the paradigm of helplessness, autism, in a "long-lost brothers discover each other and themselves on the road in the USA" film? To make the film work for its market the contrasts are extreme and the more interesting and progressive themes are warmly wrapped in messages about the need for - no, the right of American boys to bonding between father and son or brother and brother.

There's even a hint that with loving father-son relationships American capitalists would be a whole lot nicer people. And really, while we can't help cheering on the film while it shows that ruthless, selfish capitalists come unstuck, it's much less easy to get worked up about the corollary that once you learn to care your business ventures will come good too. Then there's the none too subtle message that it's fine to play the "casino" by any rules you like, as long as you take down the heavies who run it and not your friends or those who are defenceless.

All of this is the schmaltzy, dubious padding of Hollywood-with-a-conscience. I'm not really knocking it. It is precisely these formulas which send you out of the cinema with a warm feeling and a hell of a lot more respect for people with intellectual disabilities. But there are a couple of other things going on too.

One of these is an investigation of independence and dependence. This theme is very densely woven throughout the film. Tom Cruise's's manipulative, exploitative, self-obsessed character is rooted in his father's refusal to acknowledge his capacity or independence. Instead of independence based on family support he is driven to a fierce independence based on theft, abandonment and exploitation of friends and lovers. At the same time, he is exposed as utterly dependent on juggling the deals and financing of his shonky end of the market. The symbol of this web of dependence is the American classic roadster which his father would not let him drive. It is also the only thing left to him on his father's death, and in which he is forced into a cross-America journey after kidnapping his autistic brother from the institution he has lived in most of his life.

This is a brilliant device for throwing into silhouette the nature of inter-dependence by confronting a Tom Cruise who can be completely blind to the needs of his lover, with a character...
The Poetry of Dialogue


Denis Altman's A Politics of Poetry - Reconstructing Social Democracy is full of good ideas of which the left should take note.

A small but growing section of the left, both inside the ALP and outside it, would agree with Altman that "for the left to regain the initiative in Australian public life it needs to recognise that traditional divisions along class lines and the traditional solutions of greater government intervention in economic affairs are no longer sufficient".

Altman also argues that the cynical view that only the hip pocket nerve matters was probably never true and is certainly not so today. It is, after all, what the Liberals' new Future Directions policy is all about. He then takes issue with left figures such as John Mathews whose blind spots, he says, are a disinterest in small business and a neglect of the growing importance of the non-work sphere of people's lives: as consumers, citizens, partners in relationships and so on.

While I find myself most at odds with Denis Altman's self-imposed confinement to the Labor Party - hence the debate takes place with Senator Bob McMullan rather than with radical non...
Labor individuals - I do agree with Altman that "there is still room for a refurbished social democratic vision". Because Altman sees the Labor Party as the prime political focus, however, social movements (and presumably trade unionism which he hardly mentions) are relegated to an important but secondary focus.

This is conveyed in his discussion of a new political formation proposed by Jim Falk and Joe Camilleri: "there is a powerful argument for seeing these social movements as the most powerful when they act precisely as single issue movements, and thus avoiding the compromises over priorities and practicalities that is a necessary part of democratic politics".

This argument could have been applied to the trade unions in the 1890s who formed the ALP, but it would have been wrong then, too. A close association between social movements and a political party doesn't necessarily mean the "corruption" of the social movement, nor does it mean that those who favour a new left party or a green party see it as "replacing" the ALP. Altman's own addition to the political dictionary is his notion of an "orange left" - a combination of red and green politics (though he admits, rather amusingly, that this actually makes the rather non-descript colour brown).

What way forward? This is the weak part of Altman's essay - though to be fair, no one else has yet produced a credible and renewed socialist philosophy and set of politics. The problem is "understanding why the old validities no longer work and also putting forth our own values and goals in ways that fit the lived realities of a changing society". Although he talks about "certain values in Australian society to which the left might profitably appeal" and about the left taking seriously the words of Advance Australia Fair (with a new meaning given to "fair"), he fails to flesh out these values in any way.

His basic analysis is that Australia's "radical" political culture is moving towards a "liberal" phase. He draws the terms from an American theorist who contrasts the historic roots of US society which emphasises individual freedom (and hence market liberalism) to Australia's radicalism which stresses collective or social solutions through strong trade unionism, social services and protection for manufacturing.

Altman rightly points out the complex and changing class structure of advanced capitalist societies but the changes go deeper than that - the part work itself plays in our lives.

The Labor Party derives much of its structure from industries and from the very nature of work in the twentieth century, yet work, as such, now plays a smaller role in people's lives than it ever did. It is less likely to be physical and the condition of employment less onerous than in the days when unionism was founded. Along with this is the growing importance of culture - families and personal relationships, popular culture such as TV, sport and leisure. Class consciousness will never be the same as it was in the 1930s or '40s because personal identity is being increasingly fashioned from these fields.

If Altman's analysis does not go far enough into uncharted waters, it is a triumph compared with the shallow piece of navigation offered by Senator Bob McMullan, former ALP federal secretary.

After brief patronising praise of the Altman article, he then picks up several of Altman's themes but gives them a conservative twist. "One very dangerous characteristic of the Left", McMullan opines, "is a tendency to refuse to believe the evidence of change or community attitudes which do not fit preconceived conclusions"....

Most ALR readers would be familiar with the traditional leftwing suspicion of opinion polls. While polls are often designed to produce a specific result, too often the left simply doesn't want to believe that its ideas are not widely shared. I've seen this phenomenon many times on the left, but now it is apparent that the left is grappling with a new reality - of which Altman's views are a part.

What is not apparent is any commitment from Labor leaders - right, left or centre - to try boldly to change the conservative beliefs and values often disclosed by opinion polls. All we hear are platitudes, such as that mouthed by McMullan: "It is of course true that it is an abrogation of political obligations to allow the professional assessment of current mood to determine political attitudes. We need to be prepared to lead rather than merely follow".

But the apparatchiks of Labor have done nothing but follow - either that or constantly yielded to the interests of powerful business lobbies. They followed the cultural and political revolution of the 'sixties and 'seventies and now they are following the drift to conservatism.

Labor had an enthusiastic and popular mandate in 1983 which it chose to squander so that less than two years later it found a large protest vote.

McMullan's most useful contribution comes when he discusses the desiccated round of number crunching exercises which pass for internal ALP political life. He supports the actual discussion of ideas and policies within the party and the reconstitution of branches as interest groups. But, while worthy, such moves are organisational solutions for a party whose horizon on issues of social change has narrowed to an unprecedented degree.

It would be more profitable for Denis Altman to conduct a dialogue with the emerging left which avoids the pitfalls of sterile sectarianism as well as uninspiring pragmatism.

DAVID McKNIGHT is a journalist on the Sydney Morning Herald.
Friday night at the Harold Park Hotel has long been a spot where patrons could engage in some fairly serious discussion, seek out the solace of a strong drink or merely reflect with friends on life's more whimsical moments. Until recently however, the mood of each drinker has largely been determined by the success or failure of various horses across the road at the trots. While it's still possible to find punters wondering why favorites always fail in their last stride or less frequently beaming with pride at having picked the long-shot winner of the last, it's more likely these days that the elbows resting on the bar or the voices from the back room will have more to do with politics than punting. Indeed over the past couple of years most of the "serious" talk at the Harold Park has been inspired by the range of topics and speakers making up the Politics in the Pub series. This autumn the series will focus on: Homes and Homelessness with speakers Chris Sidoti and Peter Botsman on April 28; Child Care - Missing Resources and Growing Need with Eva Cox on May 5; Black Deaths - A Personal View with Bobby Sykes on May 12; and Whither the ABC - Cutting Edge or Just More Pap with Liz Fell on May 19.

Speakers start around 6pm and informal discussion follows: more often than not it flows on around the bar and out into the pub's bistro. The opportunity for a bit of political philosophising and the chance of bumping into a few friends gives Politics in the Pub a cultural mix which is unfortunately all too rare at present. It's a near ideal way of finishing off the working week. Politics in the Pub: Harold Park Hotel, 115 Wigram Rd, Glebe.

Peter McNeice

The Friends of the Earth at 222 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, is an important resource in Melbourne. It houses the Organic Fruit and Vegetable Co-op, the Food Co-op (wholefood and soya/dairy products), the FOE Bookshop (environment, peace, women's, lesbian/gay and political books), and a number of environment and peace groups. If you're a lover of organic and whole foods, you can join the two co-ops for around $10 per year per household. If you put some voluntary time into the co-ops, you get extra discounts on your food. The Bookshop is always looking for collective members to take on rosters and participate in its running. If you're interested in any of the groups housed at FOE, or want more information about the co-ops, ring them on (03) 419 8700 during business hours.

Sherill Berkovitch

If it's cheap acupuncture you're after then try the student clinic on Mondays, Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings at Acupuncture Colleges (Australia) in Harris St, Ultimo. Don't be put off by the idea of students because this is definitely not cheap and nasty acupuncture. These students are in their fourth and final year of a demanding course, the only acupuncture course issuing a government accredited diploma in Australia. The clinic is also supervised by practitioners recognised by AESO (Acupuncture Ethics and Standards Association). It costs $10 or $5 for pensioners. There is also a Private Practitioner Clinic operating at the college from Monday to Thursday, at which students can observe but treatments are given by accredited practitioners.

The Randle St Wholistic Medical Centre in Surry Hills is also worth keeping in mind. It houses acupuncturists, MD's, counsellors, masseurs, and more, all under the one clinic roof. And if you are a member of HCF, NIB, or any other health fund that covers acupuncture treatments, you can get regular treatments for about $11-$18. The same applies to the Private Practitioner Clinic at the Harris St college. Of course, MD's who also practice acupuncture, can bulk bill if you're unemployed or on a pension.

PS. Nearly all acupuncturists use disposable needles these days: almost certainly on request. The clinic number at Acupuncture Colleges (Australia) is (02) 212 5250; Randle St Wholistic Medical Centre can be reached on (02) 211 3811.

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