CRISIS in the CITIES

Jack Mundey on the Urban Blight
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The year ministerial incomes took a dive in Qld, racism came back into vogue, Bill Hayden exchanged tourist map for top hat, political debate hit new lows in the USA, and Aboriginal people found nothing much changed. ALR surveys the year that was.

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A Year to Forget

For the Aboriginal people, the end of 1988, the much-vaunted “year of reconciliation”, seemed much like the beginning, with an infant mortality rate still three times higher, unemployment four times higher, imprisonment rates up to sixteen times higher, and life expectancy twenty years less, than the national average.

The inspiration of Sydney’s January 26 march raised hopes of a better future. But where the year’s beginning had at least seen some attempt at progress, its close saw the government in hasty retreat behind a

conservative onslaught against Aboriginal self-determination and Aboriginal programs. In NSW, “mainstreaming” (read “assimilation”) became the buzzword. And in Canberra the furore in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs saw the government in abject retreat once more.

But a question mark remained. Were Gerry Hand’s actions a capitulation to the right’s anti-black vendetta, or was the demise of the unloved Charles Perkins and friends a case of the Aboriginal movement choosing the moment to put its own house in order?

Shady Lanes and Dark Alleys

The Fitzgerald Inquiry into Queensland corruption was one of the great pieces of political theatre of 1988. And, like any other good drama, it came to a climax shortly before the year’s curtain-fall.

By the time this gets into print dramatic events may already have resulted from former Senior Minister, Don “Shady” Lane’s confessions to the inquiry in November. As one allegedly reliable National Party source was quoted as saying on ABC local radio: “this could be the straw that breaks the donkey’s back”. This is no way to talk about your own party and government, and why a donkey rather than a camel is not clear. What is clear, however, is that the ambit of the inquiry is now firmly, rather than “allegedly” within the political arena. Don Lane’s confessions that he had rorted both the taxation department and the ministerial expenses system (allegedly along with many of his ministerial colleagues) to the extent of a combined sum of $130,000 may pale into insignificance against the wide implications of his confessions in relation to the amassed evidence that the inquiry already has at its disposal.

Two senior ministers, a Supreme Court Judge (Angelo Vasta), a District Court Judge (Eric Pratt), a Police Commissioner (Sir Terence Lewis), several other senior and some lower-ranking officers, all new either stood down or aside, or confessedly corrupt, is not bad going for just over a year’s work. But these have been only the most public figures and events in the inquiry. What is clear is that Tony Fitzgerald QC has been slowly building up a database of intelligence, occasionally introducing a “key operator” to
Howard Plays the Wild Card

1988 was the year racism came back into fashion. The FitzGerald Report opened up a “debate” over multiculturalism even as a sanitised version was doing service as the official representation of nationhood in the Bicentennial year. And “social cohesion” became the racists’ catchcry.

Not for the first time, John Howard found himself exchanging Menziesite conservatism for the lexicon of the populist right. Meanwhile, the left found itself in a familiar dilemma: how to support the multicultural principle while remaining critical of the practice?

Bushed

The world recently experienced two major American events: the election of George Bush as President, and the twenty-fifth anniversary of President Kennedy’s assassination. While history sees the latter presidency as Camelot; we can predict with certainty that the former falls into the Father Knows Best category.

With a Bush administration we are assured of four more years of extreme conservatism, despite the fact that political commentators, scrambling for a label, suggest he is more “moderate” than Reagan.

Bush will probably wish to continue Reagan’s kudos-winning disarmament initiatives. But he is still a hawk. He supports Star Wars as vigorously as Reagan. And defence expenditure will only be affected by the ability to squeeze other sectors, do deals with Congress, and the pressures of the general economic malaise.

We know Bush supports Reagan’s “freedom fighters”, the Contras: his exact role in the Iran/Contra scandal has yet to be spelled out in court (if it gets that far).

Where Bush does differ from Reagan is in the “charisma” stakes.
Glasnost's Year of Trials

1988 was the Year of Glasnost. Almost daily, the limits of the possible were pushed back by Soviet journalists and intellectuals.

Today, Gorbachev is himself criticised, in particular because of his proposal to take the two top positions in the country into his hands.

And now it is the armed forces who must answer for their huge consumption of the nation's wealth. The restructuring of the armed forces is finally being debated — including among the military themselves. Andrei Nuikin, a commentator known for his outspoken views, recently even asked if the military may not take part in a coup d'état against perestroika and glasnost ...

But if glasnost continues to chalk up new victories, perestroika, particularly in the economic field, is sadly lacking. It is here that the resistance of the bureaucracy at all levels is more obstinate and ferocious. Often it seems almost conscious sabotage.

Ordinary working people see the queues grow longer, prices rise, and the bureaucrats cynically defy their own slogans. Yet the worst is still to come: price reform is essential to get some rationality back into the economy, but will involve inflation, speculation and hardship. In China, after ten years of rising living standards, it is still difficult to “sell” such reform. In the USSR it will be much more difficult.

The hope is that greater democratisation will enable the people themselves to decide such reform is unavoidable, as are the problems it will bring. The tragedy is that the $80 billion the USSR received in hard currency during the oil boom in the 'seventies was squandered by the Brezhnev apparatchiks. That could have softened the pain of reform. Today there is little left.

1988 solved nothing for the Soviet Union, but the hope remains that glasnost and democratisation will allow fundamental change in the economy and society as a whole to begin in 1989. But nothing is certain: a neo-stalinist coup is certainly not excluded, although the resistance would be enormous.

Back to Basics

Former premier Barrie Unsworth had pledged “back to basics”, and back to basics is certainly what NSW electors got. The fall of the twelve-year old Labor government in March was the cause of little mourning, but it did usher in one of Australia’s most dangerous recent experiments in conservatism.

By the end of 1988, the Greiner government had undermined the state school system, threatened to abolish Aboriginal land councils and “mainstream” their funds, moved to privatise a swath of government services, and wielded a hatchet through women’s programs. After years of corruption and complacency Labor received a newer, cleaner face with reluctant leader Bob Carr. Yet it offered little resistance to many of the new government’s assaults.

And while some of education minister Terry Metherell's plans probably have a touch of merit, the overall effect of the Greiner moral agenda was to push the conservative focus nationally from the “hip pocket nerve” to John Howard's new fascination with “conservative values”. Is Greinerism the face of the Liberals' future?
1988: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Paying the Bill

1988 saw the curtain fall on one of the most contradictory careers in Australian politics, that of William George Hayden. A man reputedly loved by the party which ultimately didn’t really seem to want him as leader; a self-professed “democratic socialist” who ended his political days as an acolyte of Paul Keating, and who instigated perhaps the first “Keating budget” back in 1975; Hayden’s career was a maze of ambiguities.

His foreign policy record, too, was fraught with paradox: strong on Indochina but spineless on East Timor; never quite happy with the Americophilic tendency of his government, yet unwilling or unable to buck it. His final flourish produced similar spasms of ambivalence: was it just a “job for Bill”, or was it a genuine way of removing the spectre of 1975?

Probably the most fitting epitaph to his career is the faction formed in his image, the ALP Centre Left: a “conscience” of the party which always seemed to deliver to the right, and an “alternative to the factions” which coincided with the deepest institutionalisation of factions in the ALP’s history. In the crunch, like its mentor, it was squeezed by left and right longevity as himself. In fact, it has taken twenty years for any substance to be found in his terse prophecy that *apres moi le deluge*.

Indeed, the flood of radicalism most feared by the general could have just floated ashore this May in the shape of the avuncular Mitterrand and the apparent consolidation of a left/centre formation in French politics. And this must be what we’re excited about: against the backdrops of Kohl, Thatcher and Bush, Mitterrand does indeed look rather welcoming.

And yet there’s something despondent about all this. Although the political structures being put in place by Mitterrand are an advance on those of de Gaulle, in the exchange there has been a loss of both political perspective and expectations. Whereas, twenty years ago *autogestion* meant a saner world where people had control over their workplaces, the idea of workers’ control has now slipped, via the path of economic rationalism, to the hope of buying a share in a recently privatised national airline.

On reflection, maybe the general was right about the deluge; he just had the direction wrong.

Contributors to 1988: The Year in Review:

David Burchell, Denis Freney, Jane Inglis, Colin Mercer, Peter McNiece.
Profile

Peter Carey

Within days of his triumphant return from London with the 1988 Booker Prize, Peter Carey disappeared into the bush with filmmaker Wim Wenders. Carey is working on the screenplay of Wender's next film Till The End of the World, much of which is set in Central Australia.

Work commitments aside, the desert is probably providing Carey with a welcome respite from the endless interviews, press appearances and public functions which followed the announcement that Oscar and Lucinda had been awarded the world's most prestigious literary prize.

In many ways, Oscar and Lucinda was an appropriate choice to win the Booker during the Bicentennial year (interestingly, it was overlooked for the major Australian literary awards). The novel is an unusual love story set in Australia in the 1860s. Oscar Hopkins, a young member of the Plymouth Brethren, turns against his father and becomes an Anglican minister. Oscar sends himself into exile to Australia on the fruits of his successful gambling exploits. In Sydney, he finds himself increasingly drawn to Lucinda Leplastrier, a strong-willed independent woman who has bought a glass factory at Darling Harbour, through their mutual obsession with gambling.

And it is a bet which sets up the central incident of the novel — a glass church on a barge floating up the Bellinger River.

The glass church provides Carey with a number of opportunities to raise issues about colonisation of Australia. The church has to be carried in pieces overland from Sydney to the mouth of the river — passing beyond the limits of European settlement through areas where the only religion is the spirituality of the Aboriginal people. The bringing of Christianity to the "heathens" or, indeed, Christianity passing through "heathen" lands has to be marked in some form, and the leader of the expedition organises a massacre of Aboriginal people. Christianity has well and truly arrived.

Carey readily acknowledged the difficulties he faced as a non-Aboriginal attempting to write about the effects of the European invasion upon Aboriginal society. "A number of years ago I was at a playwrights' conference in Canberra, and Gary Foley said, "Just stop fucking around, you whites, because Aboriginal people have enough misinformation to deal with about who we are and what we are. Let us deal with that and you stick to your own stories."

"I thought that this was both absolutely right and absolutely wrong. Right because I understood what he was saying and I recognised that he had every right to say that. But, at the same time, I felt that there might be writers who were capable, even though they were not Aboriginal, of transcending their race and class to a degree by the sheer power of their understanding and sympathy and the power of their writing."

Oscar and Lucinda, then, continues the political trend Carey established with his first collection of short stories, The Fat Man in History, published in 1974. The Fat Man was followed by another collection of short stories, War Crimes (1979), and the novels Bliss (1981) and Illywhacker (1985).

For Carey, all his work is political in one sense or another. But while he may be constantly criticising society and suggesting alternatives, he is also aware of the dangers of overtly political writing. "Talking about politics and writing can be dangerous because it can make you sound like an essayist. I'm not trying to write essays or propaganda. What I am trying to do is create an imaginative work and it just happens that politics plays an important, but hopefully subtle, part in the creation of that work."

In the early days of Carey's career I felt a little uneasy about his work. While admiring his skill and imagination, I found it difficult to reconcile Carey the author with Carey's other profession in advertising. For a long time, in fact, Carey combined the two, supplementing his income from writing with a steady income from the advertising agency. It took Bliss to finally expel doubts I had about Carey and advertising. In Bliss, the main character, Harry Bliss, too works in advertising. After a heart attack Joy looks around at his work, house and family and decides that he has died and is in hell. Nothing, however, has really changed except Joy's perception of his society.

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to question Carey about his background in advertising. Somewhat surprisingly, he referred to advertising as one of the important political influences on his work. "We live in a capitalist society and large corporations are the bodies which really rule our lives. I found it very useful and informative to be in a position where I could see the intimate workings of large corporations and I got to know a lot of people involved in the running of those corporations quite well. I'm sure that none of us would wish to have a literature totally produced by schoolteachers and I feel it has been a valuable experience to have had the nitty gritty political experience of working in advertising."

But whatever you think of Carey's political "education", it's probably vitally important to read Oscar and Lucinda before you accept your next dinner party invitation. It's the sort of book everybody will be discussing for a long time to come.

Mark Roberts.
Quayle Soup
Diana Simmonds

What happens if you cross a chicken with a hawk? You get a US vice-president.

Yet J. Danforth Quayle is not only the Veep, but also a fully paid-up member of the Klutz Klub, the Schlemiel Society, the Goony Bird Brigade and... he is the man who is only a heartbeat away from control of our destiny. Just recall that twinkly old sweety, Secretary of State Schultz — the one who writes Australian foreign policy statements — if you doubt it. And what of his boss? President Bush — a hardy annual if ever there was one — began his reign in what must surely be a heartwarming sign of things to come. The Canberra Times' main headline for the day summed it up perfectly: Bush pledges kindness.

Get used to it, folks, there are lots more meaningless platitudes where that one came from. This is the man, don't forget, who, when boss of the CIA and faced by two pushy subordinates with opposing views, decided (if that is the right word) that the CIA should simply have two views on the subject — which anyone who writes inane and basically cruel justice systems.

Top Adviser: Mr. President, I think we should increase trade with Australia and give them lots of economic incentives and cultural exchanges to ensure tenure of our secret bases.

Other Top Adviser: Jeezuschrist Mr. President. That's crap. Tell those Ossie bastards their ass is grass and they can kiss goodbye to their fannies if they even THINK about our goddam bases.

Mr. President: Yes, yes, I think we can probably accommodate these behaviour modes and proceed accordingly. It would be an act of kindness, don't you think?

In any event, the prospect is one of greatest mediocrity and an administration whose collective hypocrisy will leave a silvery and slimy trail around the world which will accelerate the greenhouse effect by decades.

Why Michael Dukakis didn't mention the words "heroin" and "Noriega" during the campaign will remain a mystery forever. He might not have wanted to go the dirty route — commendable but stupid, given the nature of the race he was engaged in — but it was surely his public duty, and one he at least attempted to undertake as governor of Massachusetts, to protect the public from the murderous expansionism of the narcotics industry.

Why are Americans (the 426 who bothered to vote, that is) unmoved by President Bush's cosiness with an international drug dealer, never mind his other curious associations behind the Contragate? What goes on in their burger-brains is probably something only the CIA knows for sure, which stands President Bush in good stead.

Meanwhile, let's just try to avoid antagonising them: unlike his predecessor, the new boy is a waspish, snappy fellow, much given to making sneering pronouncements in a nasal, sharp-toothed tone of voice. He also shows alarming signs of not only being awake for a considerable part of the working day, but also of taking an active part in running the American empire. In any event, it bodes ill for Osstralia.

Evil Angels bodes deeply ill too. The film of the Azaria Chamberlain tragedy, scripted by Robert Caswell, with obligatory finishing touches from director Fred Schepisi, tells a chilling story. And it isn't necessarily the one known — supposedly — to millions either. It has been simplified considerably for the all-important US market, which is a pity, but it's still one of the most powerful collections of statements about a country and its people to make it to the popular cinema screen in years.

Underlying the main story of a young family who went on holiday and fell headlong into an unimaginable — and endless — nightmare are three strands of hypocrisy will leave a silvery and slimy trail around the world which will accelerate the greenhouse effect by decades. 

Underlying the main story of a young family who went on holiday and fell headlong into an unimaginable — and endless — nightmare are three strands of hypocrisy will leave a silvery and slimy trail around the world which will accelerate the greenhouse effect by decades.
A WORLD of DIFFERENCE

Between the early Seventies and the late Eighties, the culture and priorities of feminism have changed dramatically. The old slogans of 'liberation' and 'equality' have been replaced by the tougher nuts of diversity and difference. The women's movement has indeed come a long way in a short time. So where is it headed into the Nineties? Marilyn Lake has some ideas.

It is fashionable to argue these days that we are in a post-feminist age, or that the women's movement has lost its way. Let me say at the outset that this is but masculinist wishful thinking.

I think the very success of the women's movement is evident in the number of domains in which feminists now work — ranging from equal opportunity offices, to centres against sexual assault, to women's refuges, to women's studies courses, to child care co-operatives, to filmmaking, to trade unionism and more. Women are now a force to be reckoned with: but it has been, paradoxically, our very mobilisation that has engendered a recognition of our diversity, of our divergent experiences, needs and priorities.

The women's movement now has many ways, and multiple identities, which need to be fostered. It was never solely a middle class movement, as our brothers like to charge. But it has been a white Anglo-Saxon movement which too readily assumed that white English-speaking women spoke for all women. One of the major issues for the 1990s is how to reconcile an acceptance of differences among women with the assumptions of oneness and sameness necessary to a feminist politics. And a feminist politics demands an explicit formulation of our feminist values and aims. This, too, is an important future project.

Feminist mobilisations occur historically when women identify as a group, seeing themselves oppressed by, or disadvantaged compared to, men as a group. In the nineteenth century it was clear that women were systematically deprived of a range of legal and civil powers enjoyed by men. They were refused citizenship, custody and property rights. By the 1960s, women had achieved formal equality in most of these areas. How do we account, then, for the resurgence of feminism, for the vociferous and concerted demands for Women's Liberation?

We can identify certain preconditions. First, there was the post-war expansion of the economy and the heavy demand for female labour by the early 1960s. The number of women (especially married women) in the workforce grew steadily, as did women's outrage at the discrimination against them in pay, conditions and opportunities. Second, there was the expansion of the tertiary education system in the 1960s. The new availability of higher education fuelled expectations of social mobility. Young women were encouraged to think about their lives in terms of individual, personal, fulfilment. Third, Australia's participation in the Vietnam war and the policy of conscription politicised this generation of students, and it was an experience which, for women, pointed up very sharply the limits of men's radicalism. Men, it was recognised, could be, like other ruling groups, "chauvinist"; women, like other (Third World) oppressed groups, needed "liberation".

Again, the "sexual revolution", in its bid to separate (the joys of) sex from (the burdens of) reproduction, a goal facilitated and symbolised by the Pill, promised women new sexual freedom. But this new freedom was offered on masculine terms and all too often experienced by many women as a new confinement, a further means of exploitation. There was a felt contradiction between the intensification of women's constitution as sex objects and the promise of "individual fulfilment" through education, politics, a career or sex. Women's Liberation can be seen as both a product of, and reaction against, "sexual liberation".

Finally, the publication and
circulation of certain feminist texts offered women new perspectives, meanings and language in which to make sense of their experiences of trivialisation, denigration, powerlessness.

In its formulation of demands, the Women's Liberation movement expressed its basic driving force: women's bid to escape, their urge to flee, the confinements of domesticity. Women wished to jettison wifehood and motherhood as vocations; women wanted the freedoms that men seemed to enjoy. The main demands were:

Equal pay and equal education and job opportunities; rights to free contraception and abortion — the refusal of compulsory motherhood, access to community child care (an early slogan was “Free 24-hour Child Care”); an end to sexism in advertising, children's books, charity fund-raising and so on; the affirmation of lesbianism, not just as a sexual option, but as a political position.

The Melbourne Women's Action Committee, for example, listed its objectives as: Economic Equality, Social Equality, Equal Education and Abortion Law Reform. The meaning is clear. Women demanded to be let into men's domain of privilege, power, self-determination and economic independence. The goal of “equality” seemed unproblematic.

Women's methods of organisation were creative and various, depending on the issues to be addressed. Thus, to combat women's construction as sexual objects, as objects of the male gaze, demonstrations were organised, for example, against the Miss Teenage Quest in Melbourne in 1970 and the Miss Fresher Quest in Adelaide in the same year. To achieve equal pay, women campaigned and demonstrated in novel and effective ways. There was Zelda d'Aprano's courageous self-chaining to the Commonwealth Building and Arbitration Court in 1969; the tram ride in 1970 when women insisted on paying only 75 percent of the fare; and the painstaking research necessary for the submission to the Arbitration Commission's equal pay hearings. Edna Ryan recalled, for example, of the minimum wage hearing in 1974, that she had obtained information from the Commonwealth Statistician revealing there were 131,700 fatherless families in Australia:

This proved beyond doubt that the family component in wage-fixing should be applied to women. There was a flutter of sensation in the courtroom when we produced that letter as part of our evidence.
It has been claimed that no one was hurt by the Petrov affair. This book tells another story.

This account of Bernice Morris's life illuminates the impact on everyday life of some of the major political events of our time in Australia and internationally. Using recollections, letters as well as ASIO documents from the Australian Archives, Bernice vividly recreates her childhood in the bush, war-time Melbourne, the devastating interventions of security services, and life as a foreign comrade in China and the Soviet Union during the 1960s.

'Bernice Morris's account of her life is told with good humour, honesty and a remarkable lack of bitterness.' Julie Copeland

RRP $18.50

In Taking the Revolution Home Joyce Stevens has provided us with a much needed study of this communist tradition... It is a courageous and informative study which raises important theoretical questions about the relations between socialism and feminism' Marilyn Lake, Australian Left Review.

'Taking the Revolution Home gives an acute insight into masculine culture. It serves also as a memorial to great-hearted women' Stuart Macintyre, the Age.

RRP $15.95

For prices, orders and further information contact Di Langley, Administrative Officer, Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, Griffith University, Nathan, Qld 4111. Tel: (07) 275 7772.
To achieve political intervention on behalf of women, the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) conducted its famous survey in the 1972 federal election, an election which returned a Labor government to power for the first time in 23 years. Gough Whitlam scored the highest possible score, Billy Snedden the lowest. To achieve entry to the administrative level of the Victorian Public Service, women with ambiguous given names applied to sit the exam, up till that time closed to women. To promote cultural and sexual independence from men, women's conferences, consciousness-raising groups and dances were organised right across Australia.

In its meetings, Women's Liberation was characterised in general by an adamant refusal of "male" power structures, male hierarchies and the paraphernalia of leadership. Deeply suspicious of elites, Women's Liberation insisted on collectives rather than organisations with presidents, treasurers, and secretaries. Differences in approach to organisation partly explained the pronounced antagonism many in WL felt towards WEL. Anne Summers recalled attending the first national WEL conference:

Its differences from a Women's Liberation Conference were apparent as soon as I walked into the opening session and saw the row of "leaders" facing the hall full of women...

Summers concluded: "we are determined to avoid having leaders — we want to move on from competitive masculine power politics involving aggression and backstabbing to true egalitarianism".

This preoccupation with egalitarianism pointed to the importance of enabling women to find their voices. Women had been silenced by patriarchal culture, by the dominant organisational structure and discourses and in particular by the political leaders of the "new left". Consciousness-raising groups enabled women to speak their pain, to understand their experiences in social terms, to generate new ways of naming their experiences. A new language gained currency. As the history of the Diamond Valley group testifies: the concepts of "conditioning" and "sexism" were totally new and offered an entirely different perspective of their lives.

The determination to eschew hierarchies was both a reaction against the practice of the new left/libertarian/anarchist male comrades and an endorsement of their ideology. Feminism is always caught and constrained by the terms of the masculinist discourses which constitute its context. What is most striking when looking back on feminist debates of the 1970s is the continual agonising over whether certain actions were truly "revolutionary" or merely "reformist", a dichotomy borrowed straight from Marxist analysis. Thus, while stating the need to "reject all male-defined concepts and goals", we were urged, ironically, to concentrate on "constant revolutionary action".

Just as Simone de Beauvoir invoked the existentialist opposition between "transcendance" and "immanence", and Betty Friedan called on women to seek Maslow-type growth, fulfilment and maturity, so feminists in the 1970s classified political actions and agendas into the despised "reformist" and the admirable "revolutionary" kinds. It has since been suggested that the ejaculatory metaphor of revolution might not be appropriate to feminist methods and visions. Rather than ask whether certain policies were "reformist" or "revolutionary", perhaps we should have been asking whether they would empower women, and which women in particular. "Smash the family" was a "revolutionary" slogan, but for Koorie women, whose families had been systematically broken up throughout the century, it must have had little appeal. Similarly, abortion on demand made little sense to a people whose very survival was in jeopardy.

Though caught within the terms, concepts and frameworks of prevailing masculine discourses, the Australian women's movement has nevertheless also been characterised by a pronounced separatist impulse — a healthy determination to achieve a degree of autonomy and independence from men's movements. This is evident, for example, in the strength and dynamics of the refuge movement, referral and sexual assault services and the expansion of women's studies courses. But as feminist activity proliferates and disperses, and as theoretical analysis proceeds at different rates and in different directions, it is becoming increasingly evident that we need to reconnect, to re-establish links in order to reformulate our goals. By the 1980s, the simple goal of "equality" seems to be thoroughly inadequate. As the 1980s slogan says: "Equality with men is a limited ambition". Many women are disillusioned with the effort to compete on men's terms: those terms continue to mean more work by women for less pay. At the same time, it is becoming clear that men's ways, men's organisation of the world, has brought us to the brink of destruction.

Women are freeing themselves from the male point of view and consciously exploring alternative ways of seeing, knowing, working and loving. But what would a feminist world look like? What are feminist economic policies? To what extent do "equal opportunity" policies subvert masculine power and practices, to what extent do they, consolidate them? How do we bring about men's equal participation in the work of caring for people? How do we enable men to look after the sick, the old, the young, the dependent, on a regular, daily basis? And how do we address the differences between women and men without obliterating the differences among women themselves? The real challenge for feminism in the 1990s is to come to terms with female diversity, to build on difference, regarding it a source of strength rather than a source of weakness in need of repression.

Marilyn Lake teaches in Women's Studies at La Trobe University.
Australians take for granted providing comfy studios in Paris for our writers, and generous funds for our opera and ballet. But rock music has never been viewed as ‘worthy’ of public support. Would subsidised pop lose its cutting edge? Or could public support for the local product break the overseas stranglehold on our airwaves? Graeme Turner charts a course through these and other dilemmas.

As a post-colonial, Second World nation, Australia has a long history of protecting selected national cultural sites from foreign domination, narrow bases of local control, or an alignment with exclusively sectional interests. That history may be reaching its end in the rash of deals and deregulation since the Hawke government took office. Nevertheless, it does not much surprise Australians that the Australian Opera is subsidised to the tune of hundreds of thousands, the Australian ballet to the tune of millions, or the Australian film industry in tens of millions.

Since books published by Australian writers have a hard time competing in the market place against international titles dumped on our booksellers’ shelves for the price of waste paper, the Australian Literary Board subsidises publishers of local works of literary merit, underwriting their admittedly modest print runs against loss. Studio-flats are maintained at taxpayers’ expense in Paris and Venice where writers can work untroubled for periods of up to twelve months. The Australian Film Commission regularly hosts programs of Australian films overseas and maintains marketing offices in key cities as well as at Cannes during the festival. Australian films, Australian literature, Australian dance, are seen as cultural flagships, operating as quasi-official representatives of an egalitarian but cultured, distinctive but parochial, modestly world-class Australia.

Rock music has had very little of this kind of protection. There are Australian content regulations covering music broadcast on radio, and some concessions regarding the use of local support during tours by overseas bands (often more notable in the breach than in the observance), but nothing in the way of a program of political interventions or set of institutions produced by the operation of a cultural policy. Last year, one brave government member of a committee on arts funding suggested that the rock industry deserved a government-funded office overseas and maintained writing studio in London: this may have borne fruit in Pete Steedman’s newly incorporated quango, the Australian Contemporary Music Development Company, but it is still too early to tell what it might actually do, and little sense of what kind of cultural policy might drive it. The fact that it was launched in WA might indicate something about its marginality.

This situation may seem entirely natural to most Australians. Indeed, the conventional establishment contempt for the popular in all its forms — music, fashion, popular fiction, soap opera — may seem a full and adequate justification for such a state of affairs. Rock music is certainly not the only category of popular culture without string institutional or political support.

Writers of Australian popular fiction once found it hard to get arrested until Peter Corris managed to force the door open for detective fiction (an achievement not unrelated to Corris’ long stint as reviews editor for The National Times). Equations between the popular and meretricious are deployed as alibis for the neglect of such cultural formations. Rock music, in particular, occupies a significant place within the demonology of mass culture, threatening mainstream, democratic, moral society by its “jungle rhythms” and thirst for excess.

Of course, it would be wrong to suggest that rock music has always regretted its cultural positioning, or that the industry has persistently fought to revise it. Rock music has exploited, and is in some senses defined by, its marginality. Elsewhere I have argued that rock’s musical form sets up “a central (if often bogus or putative) opposition between the popular and elsewhere...” have argued that rock’s musical form sets up “a central (if often bogus or putative) opposition between its values and those of the rest of straight society揭开。Rock’s musical and verbal discourses regularly flirt with connotations of the demonic, the primitive, and even the satanic — Kiss, Alice Cooper and so on. Rock Music invites, and luxuriates in its ability to generate fear and loathing — both as an index of its significance as a genuine threat, and as a surrogate for any more explicitly political challenge.

Successive generations of rock musicians customarily dismiss the previous generation, and even some...
its most venerable elder statesmen (The Rolling Stones, The Who) as boring old farts who have failed to maintain an authentically oppositional posture. In discussing pub rock elsewhere I have argued that the music's roots as a form and as a social practice are in the group, and one of its functions is the ritualised demonstration and celebration of the difference between the group and those outside it. So rock music necessarily takes on subcultural meanings and proposes them to mainstream culture as challenges, exceptions or propositions for renovation.

Yet rock music is also a large commercial industry, whose most successful performers often end up "crossing over" into the mainstream entertainment industry, becoming regulars on talk shows and voicing ambitions about becoming serious actors or all-round entertainers. Neither the subcultural roots nor their subversive forms and styles inhibit the regular achievement of commercial success — even for unlikely contenders like Boy George, Lou Reed or Alice Cooper. Rather, and probably definitively, rock music's industrial and ideological history is one of a "continual dialectical process of the articulation of opposition to, and incorporation within, the dominant structures of society". I found, when I looked at the perceived "Australianess" of rock and roll in the pubs, that, despite the regular moral panics excited by the "delinquent" or criminalised behaviour of the audiences in these pubs, it was remarkable how entirely this subcultural form was enclosed within dominant constructions of an Australian character — invoking radical egalitarianism, lack of pretentiousness and so on. While the Australian formation of rock and roll I was examining took some pains to represent itself as an oppositional one, the values it opposed were not those of Australian society — it expressed those — but those of the big, capitalist American, hype-riddled music industry.

This bicentennial year has given us another example of the way in which rock music, and rock musicians, are incorporated — not merely into the industry, but also into the nation. John Farnham's installation as Australian of the Year, while not a first for an entertainer (Paul Hogan got it in 1986), is a first for a rock or pop musician.

This is more complex than it might appear. For a start, Farnham is no Michael Hutchence. He has actually gone from being an all-round entertainer first, and is not the most marginal, the most rock 'n' roll, he has ever been. And yet he is not a rock star like Michael Hutchence, Jimmy Barnes, or James Reyne. His "Australianess" is more pronounced than any of these; his wholesome, country-boy parochial-
ism is unlike these quintessentially metropolitan stars. To watch a Farnham concert is an ambiguous experience. What we hear is a stylish, technically flawless rendition of international blue-eyed soul pop stripped of its subcultural core but still exciting; what we see is a blond, gregarious, Fortyish lad with a permanent suntan, and total lack of satanic cool or predatory sexuality, who prowls the stage about as menacingly as Kylie Minogue. His relation with his audience is folksie, the well-loved entertainer still trying hard to established the hipper, more abrasive rock credentials. The result is curiously disjunctive on stage, although there is little of this contradiction on record.

John Farnham is one image of the way in which rock music can negotiate its relation to the discourses of the nation. Molly Meldrum is another. Molly has long acted as a gatekeeper in the industry, championing the cause of local product while also helping to determine exactly which local product gets their chance in the first place. Molly's role is ambiguous, too, however. On the one hand he acts as the messenger from abroad, bringing home all the news of what is happening in the capitals of rock — elsewhere — and on the other he trumpets whatever successes are achieved by Australian bands in those same distant centres. This attempt to mediate, and its inadvertent restatement of, our marginality in the global rock music industry is what used to be called the cultural cringe.

The duplicity of the affiliations Molly signifies is admirably encapsulated in the symbolism of his hat, an icon of "Mollyness" so powerful a copy was presented to Bob Hawke in a gesture of reciprocal appropriation when the PM appeared on Countdown to flog Priority One. At the simplest level, Molly's hat can be understood as a stylised Australian bush hat and is thus naively un gormlessly nationalist; or it could be understood as a reference to rock'n'roll's love affair with American cowboy headgear and its invocation of the outlaw. It is possible to have both understandings at once, leaving Molly stranded in mid-Pacific pushing the commodities from both nation-states. The hat, and Molly's national function, is also complicated by its material necessity of hiding his bald head, and thus his disappearing credentials as representative of Australian youth and culture. Finally, Molly's nationalism is also complicated by his notorious bumbling, his fabled inarticularcy, and his effective representation of someone who has somehow or other managed to overcome his hopeless provincialism by becoming an institution. From such a perspective, Molly becomes harmless, powerless, and this is misleading. He is not, nor are the industrial institutions for whom he speaks.

Molly's hat, an icon of Mollyness so powerful a copy was presented to Bob Hawke when he appeared on Countdown.

The point I am circling here is what does happen to rock music, rock musicians, rock culture, as it is appropriated, incorporated, institutionalised — as it would be under a cultural policy. How did you feel when Redgum signed with Warners, Midnight Oil with CBS, when the Dingoes rerecorded their best Australian album for the American market and ruined it, when Boy George became the darling of the talk shows, when Elvis joined the army, when Christina Amphlett stopped parodying male sexual fantasies and became their object? Should rock music resist incorporation into public policy, asserting its essentially subcultural form, despite the similarities between the rock industry and, say, the television industry? Cultural policy formation does appropriate, selectively and with motivation — the film industry has demonstrated that; but it does not only do that. Recent history suggests that, particularly in popular culture, which offers often quite unofficial pleasures, the official regime can be subverted. So, the Australian film industry starts out making Picnic at Hanging Rock but ends up making Mad Max, Scales of Justice, Vietnam, Going Down, and so on. If there is a risk in rock music becoming another ideological apparatus for the state, this needs to be weighed against the risk of it being entirely silenced by commercial imperatives.

There are three main points I want to use to suggest the kinds of objectives a cultural policy for the Australian rock music industry might pursue. The first point is a product of the recognition that rock music, like other forms of communication and culture in Australia, is dominated by non-Australian interests. Irrespective of whether these interests may or may not now be benign, it must be accepted that a nation state culturally colonised by another is not just in danger of boring radio, but in severe political danger too. The problem of the explosion of the communication industries from America and Europe into the Second and Third worlds has been widely canvassed. The Australian Broadcasting Tribunal's (ABT) own 1986 report on Australian music and broadcasting put it this way:

At an international level, there has been growing recognition of the importance of individual nations being able to express and maintain their cultures. This recognition has been heightened by the proliferation of communications technologies which, now more than at any time in the past, carry the potential for some cultures to exert a significant influence on others ...

There is, then, a strategic, geopolitical crisis recognised by UNESCO in its attempt to create a new order in the dissemination and control of information and the export of culture, of meanings and ideologies. Australia needs such a "new order" in many of its culture industries, not only rock music.

The second point involves asking how we go about justifying the protection of rock music as part of our national culture. The ABT has accepted the importance of "popular forms of creative expression —
for example, poster art, video clips, or rock music”, which merit inclusion under the general heading of “culture”. While this may not kill off elitist resistance to the form, it is significant that the ABT should see rock music as having a cultural value, “as a way of reflecting the concerns, interests, and aspirations of Australian society, as well as celebrating the creativity of that society”.

A further strategy of justification has sidestepped the prejudice against the popular in order to demonstrate the intrinsic cultural importance of indigenous rock music through the proposition of an “Australian sound”, an identifiable cultural accent in our music that is unique and therefore demands protection. This can be something of a blind alley, and one we don't really need to go down.

For a start, there is no denying that rock music is a global industry. Whatever we produce here takes place in an industrial and musical context which is in no way confined to Australia. Rock music is not an indigenous musical form; the performance of Australian rock music can be produced from an experience of records heard in Australia but not performed by Australians. However, it is not necessary to define the characteristics of a unique indigenous sound in order to argue that our culture must produce its own specific inflections, its own accents, in rock music as it has in spoken English, in film, or many other language-like activities. So without getting into arguments about national identity, about what constitutes or signifies it, one can accept that rock music is subject to the regime of pleasures and meaning we call “our” culture. Exactly how it is subject to that regime, and how clearly its accent can be heard, is just the kind of issue the formation of some kind of cultural policy should address — and local content regulations are addressing.

My third point, and a key objective, flows from this. A cultural policy for the rock industry must aim at being able to guarantee that Australians are able to gain access to the industries producing, broadcasting, and disseminating music for the culture; and to maintain minority interests in a commercial market-driven industry in order to recognise, if not serve, the interests of all members of the culture — whatever their class, gender or subcultural group.

It is important to remember, despite all this discussion of culture and nation, that rock music is not only a set of musical texts; it is also a set of industrial and institutional structures and work practices which affect people's daily working lives, not just their occasional pleasures. The industrial interests of Australian rock musicians have very few champions. In a business context which argues that non-viable or non-commercial industries should be allowed to go to the wall, Australian record producers have a hard time defending their existence against the obvious supremacy of the multinationals. Musicians themselves have to fight for equity and access at every point of the industrial structure: they have to combat videos and tape players in order to perform live; they have to accept that the scale of the Australian market may necessitate the attempt to break into one of the larger markets and ultimately America, and this may usher in the “love the singer, but fire the band” syndrome.

Once records are made, bands have to tour to promote them, but often their tour takings underwrite the cost of promoting the album for the company rather than produce returns for themselves; and at all points their interests are situated so as to be in opposition to those of, at varying junctures, the Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters, and
the Industries Assistance Commission. Against this we have the Musicians Union, Actors Equity and ARIA but, it should be said, these do not always constitute a unified force. Without mediation of some kind, commercial logic would have wiped out even these divided forces by now, but the intervention of cultural policy — and in particular, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal — has done enough to, at least, sustain the conflict. So, albeit precarious and embattled, there is an industry out there producing Australian music in competition with music from elsewhere, and often convincing the Australian public to buy it in preference to foreign music. But if the industry is to continue, it will require more political support.

Before I finish, I would like to cash these general points in by outlining some of the areas where such support might usefully occur. A shopping list of problems with the industry and its effects might include the following:

- The domination of radio music programming by two major FM networks — Austereo and Hoyts Media — should be causing the kind of concern customarily if ineffectually expressed about Murdoch's pre-eminence in the press and television. As the FM airwaves are now going to be sold off to AM stations, there is a golden chance for an effective cultural policy to regulate this. The likely result if this does not occur is for the two FM networks to spread even further (and/or to be joined by others) and for the entire radio spectrum to be locked up.

- Music broadcasting formats have narrowed and become more conservative in recent years. The golden oldies, 'seventies revival, lists have exercised an increasingly rigid control over what new records make it to air. Radio stations in many markets are now reversing the dominant trend of the post-television years in aiming at mass markets, rather than segmenting, localising and targeting specialised markets and thus offering a wide range of alternatives for radio listeners.

- In the recording industry, the major companies are American-owned and hold crucial advantages over local and independent producers. Independents are locked out of pressing plants, promotion and distribution networks, informal networks of obligation to the radio stations enforced by the supply of chart-topping American product, and so on. The cost of promoting a record has been increased by the institutionalisation of the promotion video. Videos have also threatened to function as substitutes for live performers, "increasing the dependency of rock consumers on privatised domestic technology".

- For video clip makers, conversely, there is little recognition, and their work is rendered invisible to radio and TV audiences by the formats used and their case needs to be put, too.

- Non-commercial music, rock music aimed at subcultures which fill pubs and clubs every weekend in every city in the country, cannot survive the cost of recording without assistance. Subsidies for such productions should be analogous to those given to experimental film-makers or poets, and it is hoped that this will be a major activity for the new Contemporary Music Development Company.

- The verbal contracts between musicians and venue owners should be formalised in order to protect the musician. Despite the union, musicians are frequently short-changed at the end of the gig and made to bear all the commercial risk of their own performances while only minimally participating in the profits.

- Specialised marketing assistance, like that offered by the Australian Film Commission, should be available to bands and companies wanting to export their products.

- The institutionalisation of discriminatory work practices which make rock music one of the strongest bastions of sexism won't change simply as a result of commercial pressures. Robert Palmer's latest clip for his song 'Addicted to Love' suggests that they will only get worse.

Cultural policy can be used as a means of preserving differences; at one level that means the difference between Australian national culture and other national cultures, and at another level it means the differences between subcultures, groups, or interests within the national culture. Capitalist culture both produces and smoothes over these differences, so there needs to be some political intervention in cultural and economic processes if the common culture and its internal divisions are to be recognised and understood.

Further, since Australia is a culture which is generally dominated by economic and political interests based outside its shores, whose specific objectives may well now and later be against the very survival of this culture, there are good arguments against leaving the production of national culture entirely to market forces. Cultural policy must be explicitly interventionist. In short, the point of having a cultural policy on rock music would not be to work within normal market forces, but to circumvent and subvert them. The result could be that Australia continues to produce, not only consume, its own culture.

NOTES:
FROM GREY
to GREEN

The Eighties have seen the rise of a swathe of urban movements, all focussing on oppression and alienation in the late twentieth century metropolis. Yet the environment movement, despite its many successes, remains wedded to the wilderness. Jack Mundey argues that urban issues and the alliances they promise provide a road out of the left's current morass.

Historically, the environmental movement in all the industrialised countries has been essentially the preserve of the more enlightened and articulate of the upper and middle classes. Other strata of the population simply haven't been sufficiently involved.

The movement's main concern has been nature conservation and the protection of wildlife. The Australian experience is a good example. The most successful environmental campaigns here — South West Tasmania, the Barrier Reef, Fraser Island, saving the dwindling rainforest — all fall into this category.

I don't wish to denigrate in any way these fine actions. They certainly raised ecological consciousness and placed environmental issues on the political agenda. However, Australia is the most urbanised country in the world, and ninety percent of its population lives in eight cities. The myriad urban problems are increasing yearly and it is only in recent years that there has been some attention given by environmentalists to these problems. In some ways “pure” green issues are more clear-cut, whereas the urban ones are often thornier and many-faceted.

Urbanisation globally has grown at an accelerating pace. In 1950, 28 percent of the world's population lived in cities. By the year 2000, it will have increased to 55 percent.

When one realises that, by the year 2000, the world's population will be nearly six billion it can be appreciated that the problems will be truly enormous. Mexico City and environs, for example, will have over 30 million people.
The rise of green politics

There can be little doubt that the environmental movement has gained a large degree of public appeal. A major Australian Bureau of Statistics survey in 1986 found that 47% of Australians were very concerned about the condition of the country's environment. The survey estimated that nearly 800,000 Australians visited World Heritage areas in 1986, and that more than four million visited World Heritage areas in 1986, and that more than four million visited at least one national park in the same period.

Since the Franklin Dam controversy, the ALP has paid greater attention to Green issues. In August 1987, Graham Richardson, Minister for the Environment, said, "The Australian Conservation Foundation and the Wilderness Society are organisations with grass roots going out everywhere, which is why for a time I feared the formation of a green party". Certainly, Richardson believed if a party were formed, and had the backing of the ACF and the Wilderness Society, it could have been of great electoral damage to the ALP. "They could have taken a significant number of votes off us. They would be votes coming off the ALP's natural constituency. It is a concern felt right across the factions."

At present, the environment movement is so fragmented and ideologically diverse it is difficult to envisage the formation of a Green party in Australia's contemporary conditions and with our electoral laws as they are today. For the time being the environment movement should continue to impact all political parties.

Even the National Party has entered the Green debate. In an article in the National Leader, the National Party's Senator David Brownhill wrote a special article on the importance of the environment. "It would be unfortunate if the National Party, due to misapprehensions about its environmental concern, were to lose electoral appeal simply due to the lack of will to make decisions that are politically rational."

It is of some interest that Senator Brownhill cited the Green Ban actions of the early 'seventies as the first real politicisation of the environment movement in Australia. He particularly noted the controversial nature of the Green Ban philosophy and the central theme of that philosophy "that all work performed should be of a socially useful and of an ecologically benign nature". He went on to say, "While in Europe the Green Movement appears to be restricted to middle-class professionals, environmental issues in Australia attract people from a wide and diverse spectrum".

While I believe the movement in Australia is still mainly middle class, the Green Ban experience is living proof that the working class and the middle class can forge successful alliances.

Robyn Williams, in a recent address to a national conference of the ACF, told of the tremendous interest internationally that the green bans generated. Paul Ehrlich of the USA and Petra Kelly of the German Greens believe the green ban actions gave the environmental movement a new and wider dimension and opened up the possibility of involving a much broader strata of the population in ecological actions.

It is also true that the Wran government in NSW in the last 'seventies, in introducing the best environmental legislation in this country, was heavily influenced by the popularity of the green bans successes of the Askin years, and the need for genuine public participation in the environment and planning processes. Wran set up the Land and Environment Court with his then good friend Jim McClelland as Chief Judge and, for a period, the new processes flourished.

Unfortunately, with the passage of a few years, things changed dramatically. Large developments and sensitive projects were taken out of public scrutiny, and control was vested in single ministers who did secret deals with developers and entrepreneurs. Darling Harbour, giant construction towers, the monorail, harbour tunnel and countless developments up and down the NSW coast were approved. Public participation ceased. In 1987 the Unsworth government, to its everlasting discredit, sacked the Sydney City Council precisely because the Community Independent council members were, to a certain extent, environmentally effective in thwarting developers.

The picture is similar around the country — with WA and Queensland the real frontier states. The pattern of urban development and redevelop-
Conservative governments have the worst record, but Labor governments have a tendency to start better environmentally but to adapt quickly to the pace and directions of the developers. This often goes hand in hand with a stress on the job creation function of development, a stress designed to quell environmental opposition. It is necessary to combat this "jobs versus the environment" argument by an insistence that such jobs should be of a socially useful character. Social responsibility should be the cornerstone of all urban environmental decision making.

Resident action groups and other citizens' organisations exist in one form or another in every state. During 1988, two state organisation of urban environmental activists were established. In NSW, under the auspices of the ACF, two conferences were held and a NSW Urban Environment Planning Coalition was established. Well over 150 urban groups were involved in the conferences. A coalition committee was elected. In Queensland, an Urban Coalition was established in Brisbane. A main feature of these coalitions is the great diversity and differing interests of the various groups. At the one time it shows their strengths, yet their concerns can be so different it can also be a weakness unless there is an overall co-ordination. There is a significant potential in these burgeoning urban coalitions.

Left neglect

The old and new Left alike need to question their poor records on the urban environment. Potentially, urban issues and their solutions could be a fertile ground for the Left, particularly since its position has never been weaker. A degree of attention to urban issues from the New Left Party movement and the Rainbow Alliance is promising, and the experience of Green Labor will be keenly followed.

Likewise, trade union involvement in urban environmental issues could not only give them a much-needed political presence, but could enhance their public profile as well. The ACTU is considering hiring advertising agencies, at great cost, to improve its image. Campaigning against homelessness, and for the diversion of superannuation funds to socially useful production would be a far more lasting benefit and would enhance the ACTU's reputation.

Public transport unions should be campaigning aggressively for the needs of urban public transport and vigorously opposing the car and oil lobbies, Main Roads Department, and so on in their destruction of more homes for roads and freeways. The BWIU, for example, could have enhanced the trade unions' reputation and expressed social responsibility if it had refused to demolish the Regent Theatre in Sydney. It is worthwhile remembering that it was a BLF green ban which saved the Regent Theatre in 1972 when the billionaire owner, Leon Fink, wanted the theatre demolished.

The conservative political climate of the 'eighties is reflected in the unimpressive performance of the Left of the union movement and its total lack of creativity around social issues. It could break out of its lethargy if it entered the debate on urban issues such as the problem of increasing homelessness, rapidly worsening pollution, rising noise problems, the need for a vastly improved public transport service (trains, light rail, ferries and electric buses), the need to move away from the wasteful single standing dwelling to forms of medium density housing, to improve and extend open spaces and maintaining these spaces in a better condition, to create employment by caring for and servicing our city and its environment — in other words, going beyond the traditional "on the job only" considerations which have shackled unions for far too long. What is the use of improving only wages and working conditions if we live in cities devoid of sufficient parks, trees, sunshine? We can win shorter working hours but we still must live 168 hours each week.

Expressions of thought such as a real quality of living must replace the more narrow, economist-oriented "standard of living" which conjures up a quantitative rather than a qualitative mentality and state of mind. I remember during spirited debates in the green ban days, some of the dogmatists of the Left claiming that the BLF was the "darling of the middle class trendies", and that environmental considerations were not working class issues. The green ban proponents argued that any social, economic, political or ecological issue was of concern. After all, who lives in the least leafy suburbs? Who is subjected to increasing road noise, who has the poorest quality housing, who has least open space? Everything that impinges on working people as citizens should be the right and, indeed, the responsibility of trade unions and their members.

Crisis — East and West

At one time when environmentalists raised the huge problems of the future they were often considered by trade union leaders to be extreme pessimists or Jeremiahs, or distracting workers from the class struggle. Environmentalism didn't cause a sense of urgency or immediacy. No longer is it some dim and distant problem. This generation and, more particularly, their
children, are going to be directly affected by the effects of 200 years of industrialisation and the greenhouse effect. A more ecologically oriented society is required.

Both capitalist and socialist countries have been guilty of great ecological crimes, and both have had a similar arrogant notion of conquering and using nature for "man's" benefit. Both systems have an economic growth fix without seriously weighing up the decisive ecological factors. It will require something of an ethical revolution to bring about the needed change to harmonise with nature.

Capitalism, by its very nature, is acquisitive and predatory and even the more sophisticated countries never even speak of a sustainable society. Nor, for that matter, do any of the socialist models. For example, in the Soviet Union, it is only very recently that any criticism of the USSR's pitiful environmental record has been raised. Fyodor Morgun of the Soviet's Environment Protest Centre has described the USSR's record as disgraceful.

The left of the union movement shows a total lack of creativity around social issues.

Petra Kelly of the German Greens, on a recent visit to Australia, told of a burgeoning green awareness within some of the Eastern European countries. The Chernobyl disaster also made an impact. Gorbachev, in an address to an International Women's Conference this year listed the threat of nuclear war, poverty and ecology as three great problems. He spoke of "ecological disasters confronting every continent on the planet". Years of ecological neglect has affected both capitalist and socialist countries alike. The apparent new environment awareness in some of the socialist countries is to be welcomed. But ecology must be a central feature of socialism, not just tacked on the end of a program.

Whereas the very nature of capitalist is acquisitive, socialism's nature should be conducive to being able to harmonise better with nature, providing a model of socialism with an ecological heart, a human face and an egalitarian body.

Environment versus employment?

Environmentalists have never effectively combatted the myth that environmental protection exacerbates unemployment. Many corporations, because of their wealth, power and vested interests, succeed in persuading many in the general public about "the selfish self-interest of the environmentalists".

Environmentalists must link up with the more progressive segments of the union movement and draw up their own program of socially-useful employment requirements. There must be a long-term strategy.

Together with trade unions, consumer organisations of other concerned bodies, we should debate the requirements of an ecologically sustainable economy and society. The total concerns of socially useful production and consumption should be addressed. It is a tall order, but there isn't any alternative.

The enormously wasteful use of non-renewable (and renewable) resources cannot continue unless at our very peril. There must be much more attention given to socially responsible job creation schemes. There could be an inventory of such schemes drawn up. Here is where trade unions could be creative. There should not just be the demagogic politicians' cry at election time of jobs, jobs, jobs, but careful decisions on which socially useful job creation schemes should be pursued. So much damage has been done to the planet that just to repair the damage will require millions of workers.

Socialism's lost century

The evils of stalinism so distorted the perception of socialism that, in many ways, the twentieth century has been the "lost century". Socialism was often considered a dirty word. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, socialists had a vision of a human society in which genuine egalitarian values would prevail, and capitalism and poverty would be abolished. Working people were to be decisive in helping to fashion such a new socialist society.

Such visions and dreams never came to fruition, and the stalinist nightmare set socialism back for almost all of the 20th century.

Now we are at last emerging from that nightmare. If the left learns the lessons of this last century, socialism can still have a future provided that a heightened ecological presence becomes an integral part of its theory and practice. Ecology has become a new, vital ingredient in the left's quest for renewal.

JACK MUNDEY is an environmental activist, and was secretary of the NSW BLF between 1971 and 1974.
Labor's Five Years

COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE

An Interview with Laurie Carmichael

As the left linchpin in the ALP/ACTU alliance which has held up the Hawke government, Laurie Carmichael has been one of the left's toughest internal critics. And his support for the record of the government flies against most conventional left wisdom. Here he defends both his personal vision of the future and the record of the last five years to ALR.

Laurie Carmichael is an assistant secretary of the ACTU, and widely recognised as one of the most influential strategists in the union movement. Originally a fitter at the Williamstown dockyard, he became an activist in the Amalgamated Engineering Union and ultimately assistant national secretary of the AMWU, Australia's largest blue-collar union. He was widely regarded as one of the architects of the ALP/ACTU Accord signed in 1983, which has been instrumental in the election of three Labor governments. He was one of the pioneers of an interventionist strategy for the trade union movement. Nowadays, he is closely identified with government policy in the areas of skills development and education and training. Here he is interviewed by Brian Aarons and Peter Murphy for ALR.

How do you assess the current position of the labour movement in Australia today? Where does the interventionist strategy stand in the current economic situation?

I still see the basis for the interventionist strategy as the Accord. But within that basis I'd stress four component parts. The first component is Labor maintaining government. The second is the Accord processes operating in such a way that the trade unions use their wages influence on the economy and their ability to have an effect on microeconomic reform as their principal negotiating weapons. The third is an independent trade union input into that process which takes responsibility for the items that they have on the agenda each year, and the outcomes that they propose in relation to those agenda items — not only wages and microeconomic reforms but also social wage issues, economic matters and so on. And then, fourthly, building this process over time.

I would categorise the current situation as an attempt to stabilise the balance of payments of problem while laying the foundation for real growth in living standards. I think the opportunities are there for the labour movement on the wage and tax cuts front. And in this context I think it's vital that the trade union movement continues to keep in front of the microeconomic reform agenda by attacking award restructuring through the skills formation issue. There is further opportunity for living standards growth arising out of productivity growth. It's vital, too, to maintain the thrust on bringing unemployment down, which has been quite successful — especially in the light of population growth and participation rate growth. We can see how successful if we consider this; if the participation rate today was the same as it was when the government came to office, the unemployment would be below five percent, down around 4.6 percent. That gives some idea of the job growth that's taken place.

How many of those jobs are full-time as against part-time?

The big swing in the past 18 months has been away from part-time to full-time. All the current figures indicate that. That's an important thing which the labour movement must take note of as an achievement of the recent period.
In Reagan’s America there’s also been a big job increase. That’s one of the boasts of the Bush campaign. A point that’s been made by commentators is that most of the jobs there have been in the lower paid service sector. Have you got any analysis of the position here?

I don’t have precise figures but the general trend of technology is away from the unskilled areas. In fact, the growth areas must be non-process working areas because of the degree of automation that is being built into the machinery equipment. One only need to look at the changes of employment structure in the automobile industry to realise the extent to which that applies. Employment at General Motors is down from its peak of 23,000 to 11,000.

To what can we attribute the job growth? Some commentators, including Hawke, say it’s because of wage restraint. Is that a factor, and is it the only factor?

It is a factor, but not the only factor. We could have gone the way that Britain did in going after wages more rapidly for those that were employed. That would have had the effect of inhibiting the job growth, particularly in Australian circumstances where we were afflicted with such a massive balance of payments problems. We opted not to do that. We opted precisely to ensure that whatever growth opportunities were taking place expressed themselves in industry growth and not simply in income growth.

What are the current gains of the strategy as you see them?

The first big gain is the protection of, and even the extension of, the living standards of the lowest paid. That’s not immediately evident, and if you listen to some of our loudest critics you would think that it had not occurred. But if you take the position of people who enjoy the family allowances that were achieved as a result of Accord processes, somebody on $16,000 or $17,000 p.a., with three kids, can claim upwards of $107 per week — which is the equivalent of a wage increase allowing for taxes of more than $140 per week. That ought not be derided in the labour movement. It ought to be held up as an achievement.

How many of the target group have actually taken that up?

It wasn’t high at first, but the government went into a major advertising campaign. Instead of trying to keep it quiet, they went out in a major campaign to ensure that everybody who was entitled to get it, got it. Another significant thing: the education budget this year is up by some $642 million. That represents a growth rate in real terms for the current year of about double the rate of inflation. It is a major achievement and it came out of the Accord negotiation processes. It’s directed towards ensuring that the education base and the skills base of the country is better geared for the future than it has been. And certainly it’s oriented towards a closer relationship between education and industry — something I support.

If you take child care places, they’re due to rise by 30,000 over the next three to four year period, which is significant in any terms, and is a major contributing factor to the high participation rate in employment, particularly for women.

In the area of age incomes an allowance for more earning capacity has been introduced on top of pensions. Of course, that’s not much solace to those who don’t have earning capacity above their pension, but it is a major factor in moving a significant number of pensioners out of what was called the poverty trap and that’s important. I think much more can and will be done about that. Finally, the government’s action in proscribing something like sixty banking tax havens around the world should be applauded by the labour movement as a whole. It is one of the most remarkable things that’s been done and is unique in the world.

And for which the left and the labour movement was campaigning for some time...

In fact, it was negotiated in the Accord before the government ever came to office, back in 1982. We argued that it was a great danger at the time of the deregulation of the finance system, and the arguments of the left in that regard have been proven right. But not only have they been proven right, what’s more significant is that they’ve been accepted and implemented, and I think that’s an important matter. Pressure has been exerted for institutional finance to be brought back to Australia for investment so that taxation on that investment can be paid in full, and that again is an important development. These are the gains which need to be noted and weighed against those parts of the government’s record which the left considers inadequate.

What about the corporate tax issue, more broadly?

Another important feature of the labour movement and which certainly should be for the left was that when this government came to office about nine percent of companies with a turnover of $100 million or more were investigated in relation to tax. As a result of the Accord processes and not the least by the efforts of the ACOA, now accepted by Keating, it is now of the order of thirty-three or four percent of companies with $100 million turnover or more that are thoroughly investigated as to their taxation.

Are or will be?

Are.

But notwithstanding those real gains, we still have companies such as Bond announcing $340 million profit and paying one percent tax. What are the loopholes which are allowing him to get away with that? And can something be done about it?

I don’t think it’s as simple as people try to make out. I must say now after some years of experience I’m somewhat circumspect about people with simple answers. I don’t mean, however, that that shouldn’t lead the government to doing more.

There’s a limit to what I can say on this. I can only say that I think that the labour movement should maintain as much pressure as possible to ensure that all of the
escape routes are cut off. I don't think that any company should be able to use all of the escape routes that have been discovered.

Can we deal with these escape routes...?

They're not just escape routes. Some of the biggest write-offs are quite legitimate within the terms of the current law. If you go out and borrow and force up your debt to equity ratio in a company, you can write off those interest payments on that debt. So it depends on where your company is domiciled, where the negative income is deposited, and how much you can get away with. It's part and parcel of the whole ideology that the public sector debt is the only debt to be taken into account, when Moody's, in a statement a fortnight ago, made it abundantly clear that it's the total national debt that has to be taken into account, including the private sector debt.

What issues hasn't the government addressed which you feel should be addressed?

In the immediate future, we've got the issue of the wages and tax trade-off for next year. We have to find a correct balance in relation to the mix. We have to ensure that it's significantly positive in terms of actual living standard gains — not merely stabilisation, which we went through this year, but real gains. I think we need to encourage people to save as far as practicable, having in mind that we ought to discourage imports as much as we can because that's still a problem for the national economy.

What about the problems of pollution and ecological destruction, which are affecting everyone, capitalists and socialists, around the world? What can the labour movement do to put these on the agenda?

It's essential that we get the mainstream labour movement onto the subject in a balanced way. We need to devolve more responsibilities and rights to the workforce, including developing workers' education and skills, and health and
safety on the job — but we also need to take account of the environment as an act of responsibility in managing industry.

And while I'm aware others in the labour movement don't necessarily hold the same strength of view that I hold about this, I think the restructuring of awards is one of the most crucial items in front of the Australian working class today if they're to have a future. It's not easy but nonetheless it's a crucial issue. It can deliver a considerable growth in productivity. We would envisage quite significant wage increases associated with the restructuring as it took place. It would not be equal in its application; which is why attention to the national wage is crucial, because that's got to deliver an advantage to everybody. But there would be substantial gains for a great number of people out of award restructuring.

Is there a danger that sections of the workforce would either gain nothing or, in fact, go backwards through the award restructuring process?

There are dangers, but those dangers are there at any bloody time. Employers can lodge claims on workers in the same way in which workers can lodge claims on employers. The fact that we're going into award restructuring neither heightens nor lessens that. On the other hand, the program of the trade union movement is to keep the issues focussed on skill formation. So employers can't go for the quick fix and a further subdivision of labour in an attempt to hang on to the past. Of course, if there are weak unions, or unions who are prone to do deals, then there can be dangers — but that's not new either. Award restructuring doesn't enhance their ability to do those deals. They've been doing them for years. It's no good using award restructuring as the whipping boy of things that would be there at any time.

The agenda for micro economic reform is set. 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 done either in a Thatcherite deregulated manner, or it will be done in a Western European-style interventionist manner. But there's no way of stopping it happening because the circumstances in industry determine that it shall happen. There is a misunderstanding in some people's minds that if the unions weren't in it, then it wouldn't be there. And that is quite crazy.

The amalgamation issue is clearly pretty important in getting the award restructuring agreements.

What we're trying to do through the award restructuring is to lay the foundations in industry, in the very work process itself, that will lead to changes in union organisation and to assist in union amalgamation. But the whole thing's been set back by the way the Democrats conducted themselves in the Senate, where they lined up with the Liberals on that issue.

This raises the point that, in line with the amalgamations, the left needs to stress its traditional commitment to the greatest possible rank-and-file democracy. The danger will be if the new bigger unions become more divorced from the members. That's when the New Right appeals to workers directly, over the heads of their unions...

I can only concur with that. I would enjoy getting out there with 10,000 workers at Lidcombe Oval and battling it out — including with those who are on the left who've got the misguided view that somehow or another, you don't have to be in the process: that you can avoid being in it, or that you can stop it.

It also raises, perhaps, an issue that goes to the heart of some of the unease within the left about the strategy. One example is child care. You've mentioned the gain of 30,000 places. What many argue, though, is that, as a social priority among other social priorities, it's given too little weight, particularly by people like Senator Walsh. It's true that 30,000 places as a proportionate increase on the existing number is good. On the other hand, it's only a tiny proportion of what is needed to free up parents, particularly women, to go into the workforce. Like a number of other issues, it's a question of you've got so much money and where do you put it.

Well, I think that's the point. It's a question of measuring just what you've got available in order to do things. In the past, the idea was you could run up a healthy deficit budget and just spend it and then borrow to make up the difference — which meant that it was inflationary unless you had sufficient growth to offset the inflationary component. But if your borrowings are so heavy nationally that the amount of growth can't make up the servicing of the total debt, then it is inflationary. It's as simple as that.

The bigger problem is the extent to which the public sector is made to be the scapegoat of the debt generated by the private sector. Just in the same way as trying to export your way out of the entire balance of payments problems makes the export of products the scapegoat of the same thing as it's expressed in negative income through developing the debt in the private sector. And they're two sides of the one coin.

However, I do not join those who believe that the answer to that is simply to make bigger and better demands. I don't think there's an answer in that. My view is that you have to have a very positive position in relation to the economy and seek to gain what you can. And if you can make the economic performance better, then to that extent you are able to translate it into social gains. However, those who just simply demand social gains without having a responsible attitude to the economy can, in fact, end up shooting themselves in the foot. They might make a gain on a single issue and end up losing all over the place: by inflation, by unemployment, by whatever the other factor.

The point I was raising is that it is a question of the balance of priorities. And what this means is that the
whole labour movement and the progressive movements need a more sophisticated approach where, in a sense, they actually sit down and look at the apportionment of budget revenue, and I'm saying to you that there well could be an argument about priorities. That priority got too much, this priority got too little.

But that's precisely the point. And that is exactly where the left's lack of responsibility has left it terribly isolated. I won't be part of this business of simply adding up the biggest number of shopping list items that you want to put together and going along to government and then condemn government because they don't meet it. I live in a real world and, at the ACTU, I accept the responsibility of saying what our priorities are. I'm not going to have a shopping list approach to the political process.

But it seems that the ACTU may have its set of priorities, and the left may have its set of priorities, but the big wheels in business seem to succeed in getting theirs.

No, I don't think they fully succeed.

Well, a group of people have got very ostentatiously wealthy in the country while other people are facing great difficulties in many areas of their lives.

Ostentatious wealth has been with us now for something like 6,000 years; the Egyptian pharoahs right down. It is an historical process question for a marxist and the existence of unequal, preferential power is a condition of life and until that is changed you are required to work in practical terms on what is achievable.

Now I don't mean by that that you've got to love it. I loathe it as much as anybody. But I can't find an excuse to go along with a lack of priorities and a long shopping list simply on the grounds that Bond runs wild bloody parties over in Perth.

That's not what I was suggesting. But being specific, this does bring us back to the area of taxation and the importance of wealth redistribution through corporate taxation and taxation of the wealthy.

I agree with you on that. The ACTU and I and anybody else who thinks about it doesn't support the reduction of the corporate tax level from 49 percent to 39 percent which automatically puts the pressure onto personal income.

But not only is there not enough done to argue against it, but the way in which the argument is being waged is not real. For example, you have all manner of people out there with their individual demands, but many of their demands require that people pay more taxes. Each of the demands isn't real unless you are prepared to pay the taxes for it. Well, you don't have it unless all those taxes are paid. Take the issue of pensions. You don't get them unless taxes are paid — likewise with child care.

But is not this an example of how Keating, when he wants to, cuts through all the stuff about the Accord and the wishes of the labour movement and the ACTU with one pre-emptive step. That's what he did, surely, by lowering the corporate tax rate to 39 percent and now publicly supporting the same cut in the top PAYE rate. And now he has locked you into a sort of conundrum.

Well, it is a trap. I don't want to get into personalities. You've got to work with people and, in the finish, you've got to bloody keep them there, whether you like it or not. That's the reality.

But that's not the issue I'm raising.

It's the issue that should be focussed on and focussed in a way that is still aimed to carry out the Accord process. This is the biggest problem for the left: finding a realistic balance in real life politicking. On the one hand people accept the fact that the balance of power distributed in society is preferential and totally unequal, but then when you come to deal with practical matters they want to ignore it. Now you can only come to two alternative conclusions out of that. One is that you don't want to live in a real world; the other is that, in essence, what you really want to do when you deal with the practical issue is to try to solve the problem of the distribution of power. Those are the choices and, frankly, I made up my mind a long time ago, way back in the early '70s, what I thought about that.

But within the framework, it is clearly important that the left in the labour movement has a position which it can realistically and sensibly go into bat for.

I agree. I believe that's my own position. I think that, even now, we could find ways of reducing or cushioning that corporate tax cut by saying that they have to allocate some for the training and education of the workforce. That it is an investment. It's a 20 percent tax cut. I brought this up at a conference recently to the employer representatives: Is that all you want to do, pocket the cut and then turn around and say that, somehow or another, the reduced receipts are going to pay for all your training requirements? Where do you lot stop?

But it's hard in practice to get a consensus left position that people will actually go out and campaign for. On the tax question, say, we need a campaign on the corporate tax rorts and for an equitable tax system that has regard for the social wage as well?

I have to say that going for a total tax review now wouldn't be practicable. I believe that we ought to target three or four priorities.

Name them.

One of the priorities ought to be a higher rate of tax at $100,000. Also, the other issue I've raised about the corporate tax cut. We ought only to give them the full tax cut if they invest in skills, training and education. Otherwise, they should get penalised for three percent points — six percent of the tax. I think there is a range of things we could target and go after. But because it won't be the totality it is not going to make a lot of the people out there on the left happy anyway because it doesn't solve everything right away.
In the European left the talk is of ‘New Times’ — after industrialism, mass production and the mass market. Consumption and lifestyle, not production and work, have been the catchcries of the decade. Stuart Hall argues that it represents a revolution of the subjective dimension against the iron-clad certainties of the old left.

There is a good deal of talk these days about “new times”. This discussion is of great political significance, for two reasons. “New times” are associated with the ascendency of the Right in Britain, the US and many parts of Europe. But “new times” will also provide the conditions — propitious or unpropitious, depending on how we judge them — for any renewal of the Left and the project of socialism.

However, there are some real problems with this discourse of “new times”. How new are they? Is it the dawn of the new age or only the whimper of an old one? How do we characterise what is “new” about them? How do we assess their contradictory tendencies? Are they progressive or regressive? What promise do they hold out for a more democratic and egalitarian future? What political meaning do they have? What are their political consequences?

So far as description is concerned, there are several terms which have been employed to characterise these transitional times. Potential candidates would include “post-industrial”, “post-Fordist”, “revolution of the subject”, “post-modernism”. None of these is wholly satisfactory. Each expresses a clearer sense of what we are leaving behind (“post”) than where we are heading. “Post-industrial” writers, like Alain Touraine and Andre Gorz, start from shifts in the technical organisation of industrial capitalist production, with its “classic” large-scale labour processes, division of labour and class conflicts. They foresee a shift to new productive regimes — with consequences for social structure and politics. Touraine has written of the replacement of older forms of class struggle by the new social movements.

“Post-Fordism” is a broader term, suggesting a whole new epoch distinct from the era of mass production. Though the debate still rages as to whether “post-Fordism” exists, most commentators would agree that it covers at least some of the following characteristics: a shift to the new “information technologies”; more flexible, decentralised forms of labour process and work organisation; decline of the old manufacturing base and the growth of the “sunrise”, computer-based industries; the hiving-off or contracting-out of functions and services; a greater emphasis on choice and product differentiation; on marketing, packaging and design, on the “targeting” of consumers by lifestyle, taste and culture rather than by the sociological categories of social class; a decline in the proportion of the skilled male, manual working class, the rise of the service and white-collar classes and the “feminisation” of the workforce; an economy dominated by the multinationals, with their new international division of labour and their greater autonomy from nation-state control; the “globalisation” of the new financial markets, linked by the communications revolution; and new forms of the spatial organisation of social processes.

An issue that must perplex us is how total or complete this transition to post-Fordism is. But this may be a too all-or-nothing way of posing the question. In a permanently transitional age we must expect unevenness, contradictory outcomes, disjunctures, delays, contingencies, uncompleted projects, overlapping emergent ones. We know that earlier transitions (feudalism to capitalism, household production to modern industry) all turned out, on inspection, to be more protracted and incomplete than the theory suggested.

We have to make assessments, not from the completed base, but from the “leading edge” of change. The food industry, which has just arrived at the point where it can guarantee worldwide the standardisation of the size, shape and composition of every hamburger and
every potato (me) chip in a 
McDonald's Big Mac from Tokyo to 
Harare, is clearly just entering its 
Fordist apogee. However, motor 
cars, from which the age of Fordism 
derived its name, with its multiple 
variations on every model and 
market specialisation (like the 
fashion and software industries), is at 
the leading edge of post-Fordism. 
The question should always be, 
where is the "leading edge" and in 
what direction is it pointing. "Post-
Fordism" is also associated with 
broader social and cultural changes. 
For example, greater fragmentation 
and pluralism, the weakening of 
older collective solidarities and block 
identities and the emergence of new 
identities associated with greater 
work flexibility, the maximisation of 
individual choices through personal 
consumption.

The wider changes remind us 
that "new times" are both "out 
there", changing our conditions of 
life, and "in here", working on us. In 
part, it is us who are being "re-made". 
A recent writer on the subject, 
Marshall Berman, notes that, 
"modern environments and 
experiences cut across all boundaries 
of geography and ethnicity, of class 
and nationality, of religion and 
ideology" — not destroying them 
entirely, but weakening and 
subverting them, eroding the lines of 
continuity which hitherto stabilised 
our social identities.

One boundary which "new times" 
have displaced is that between the 
"objective" and subjective 
dimensions of change. The 
individual subject has become more 
important. While our models of "the 
subject" have altered. We can no 
longer conceive of "the individual" in 
terms of a whole and completed Ego 
or autonomous "self". The "self" is 
experienced as more fragmented and 
incomplete, composed of multiple 
"selves" or identities in relation to the 
different social worlds we inhabit, 
something with a history, 
"produced", in process. These 
vicissitudes of "the subject" have 
their own histories which are key 
episodes in the passage to "new 
times". They include the cultural 
revolutions of the 1960s; "1968"
itself, with its strong sense of politics as “theatre”; feminism’s slogan that “the personal is political”; psychoanalysis, with its rediscovery of the unconscious roots of subjectivity; the theoretical revolutions of the ’60s and ’70s — semiotics, structuralism, post-structuralism — with their concern for language and representation.

This “return of the subjective” aspect suggests that we cannot settle for a language in which to describe “new times” which respects the old distinction between the objective and subjective dimensions of change. But such a conceptual shift presents problems for the Left. The conventional culture of the Left, with its stress on “objective contradictions”, “impersonal structures” and processes that work “behind men’s (sic) backs”, has disabled us from confronting the subjective in politics in any very coherent way.

In part, the difficulty lies in the very words and concepts we use. For long, being a socialist was synonymous with the ability to translate everything into the language of “structures”. In part, the difficulty lies in the fact that men, who so often provide the categories within which everybody experiences things, even on the Left, have always found the spectacle of the return of the subjective dimension deeply unnerving. The problem is also theoretical. Classical marxism depended on an assumed correspondence between the “economic” and the “political”: one could read off our political attitudes, interests and motivations from our economic class interests and position. This correspondence between “the political” and “the economic” is exactly what has now disintegrated — practically and theoretically. This has had the effect, inter alia, of throwing the language of politics more over to the cultural side.

“Post-modernism” is the term which signals this more cultural character of “new times”. The modernist movement, it argues, which dominated the art and architecture, the cultural imagination, of the early decades of the 20th century, and came to represent the look and experience of “modernity” itself, is at an end. It has declined into the international style of expressway, slab skyscraper and international airport. Its revolutionary impulse has been tamed and contained by the museum. “Post-modernism” celebrates the penetration of aesthetics into everyday life and the ascendancy of popular culture over the high arts.

Can a socialism of the 21st century survive which is wholly cut off from the landscapes of popular pleasures?

Theorists like Frederick Jameson and Jean-Francois Lyotard agree on many of the characteristics of “the post-modern condition”. They remark on the dominance of image, appearance, surface-effect over depth (is Ronald Reagan a president or just a B-movie actor, real or cardboard cut-out, alive or Spitting Image?); the blurring of image and reality (is the Contra war real or only happening on TV?); the preference for parody, nostalgia, kitsch and pastiche over more positive modes of artistic representation (like realism or naturalism); a preference for the popular and the decorative over the brutalist or the functional in architecture and design. They also comment on the erasure of a strong sense of history, the slippage of hitherto stable meanings, the proliferation of difference and the end of what Lyotard calls the “grand narratives” of progress, development, enlightenment and rationality, which until recently were the foundations of all modern philosophy and political theory.

Both Jameson and Baudrillard see post-modernism as part of a “new cultural logic of capital” — “the purest form of capital yet to have emerged, a prodigious expansion into hitherto uncommodified areas”. This brings home the fact that one term which is no longer much in use, though popular in the ’50s and ’60s, is “post-capitalist”. For the very good reason that the dynamic we are trying to characterise is connected with the revolutionary energy of modern capital — capital after what we used to call its “highest stages”.

There are different ways of explaining this dramatic, even brutal, resumption of the link between modernity and capitalism. Some argue that, though Marx may have been wrong in his predictions about class as the motor of revolution, he was right — with a vengeance — about capital: its global expansion, transforming everything in its wake, and subordinating every society and relationship under the law of commodification and exchange value. Others argue that, with the failures of the stalinist and social democratic alternatives, capital has acquired a new lease of life: Some economists believe that we are simply in the early, upbeat half of a new Kondratiev “long wave” of capitalist expansion. The American social critic, Marshall Berman, relates “new times” to “the ever-expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist world markets”. However, whichever explanation we finally settle for, the really startling fact is that these “new times” clearly belong to a time-zone marked by the march of capital simultaneously across the globe and through the Maginot Lines of our subjectivities.

The title of Berman’s book reminds us that Marx was one of the earliest people to grasp the revolutionary connection between capitalism and modernity, as well as the dialectical relationship between the “outside” and the “inside” of the process. In the Communist Manifesto, he spoke of the “constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation” which distinguished “the bourgeois epoch from all earlier times”. “All fixed, fast-frozen relationships with their train of venerable ideas and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become obsolete before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air.”

Indeed, as Berman points out, Marx considered the revolution of
modern industry and production the necessary precondition for that promethean or romantic conception of the social individual which towers over his early writings, with its talk of the all-sided development of human capacities. It was not the things which the bourgeoisie created so much as "the processes, the powers, the expressions of human life and energy; men working, moving, cultivating, communicating, organising and reorganising nature and themselves..." Of course, Marx also understood the one-sided and distorted character of the modernity and type of modern individual produced by this development—how the forms of bourgeois appropriation destroyed the human possibilities it created. But he did not refuse it. What he argued was that only socialism could complete the revolution of modernity which capitalism had initiated. He hoped "to heal the wounds of modernity through a fuller and deeper modernity". Now here exactly is the rub about "new times" for the Left. The "promise" of modernity has become, at the end of the 20th century, considerably more ambiguous, its links with socialism and the Left much more tenuous. We have become more aware of the double-edged and problematic character of modernity; what Theodore Adorno called the "negative dialectics" of enlightenment. Of course, to be "modern" has always meant "to live a life of paradox and contradiction...alive to new possibilities for experience and adventure, frightened by the nihilistic depths to which so many modern adventures lead (the line from Nietzsche and Wagner to the death camps?), longing to create and hold on to something real even as everything melts".

But today, the paradoxes seem even more extreme. "Modernity" has acquired a relentlessly uneven and contradictory character. Abundance here, producing poverty there. Greater adversity and choice — but often at the cost of more fragmentation and isolation. More opportunities for participation — but only at the expense of subordinating oneself to the laws of the market. Novelty and innovation — but driven by what appear to be false needs. The rich West and the famine-stricken South. Development which destroys faster than it creates. The city, privileged scenario of the modern experience for Baudelaire or Walter Benjamin — transformed into the anonymous city, the sprawling city, the inner city.

These stark paradoxes project uncertainty into any secure judgment or assessment of the trends and tendencies of "new times", especially on the Left. Are they to be welcomed for the new possibilities they open? Or rejected for their threat of horrendous disasters (the ecological ones are uppermost in our minds just now) and final closures? We seem, especially on the Left, permanently impaled on the horns of these extreme and irreconcilable alternatives.

It is imperative now for the Left to get past this impossible impasse, these irreconcilable either/ors. There are few better (though many more fashionable) places to begin than with Gramsci's "Americanism and Fordism" essay, which is of seminal importance for this debate, even if it is also a broken and "unfinished" text. This represented a similar effort to describe the dangers and possibilities for the Left of the birth of that epoch — Fordism — which we are just supposed to be leaving: and in very similar circumstances — retreat and retrenchment of the working class movement, ascendency of fascism, new surge of capital "with its intensified economic exploitation and authoritarian cultural expression".

If we took our bearings from "Americanism and Fordism", we would be obliged to note that Gramsci's "catalogue of... most important or interesting problems" relevant to deciding "whether Americanism can constitute a new historical epoch" begins with "a new mechanism of accumulation and distribution of finance capital based directly on industrial production". But it also includes: the rationalisation of the demographic composition of Europe; the balance between endogenous and exogenous change; the phenomenon of mass consumption and "high wages", "psychoanalysis and its enormous diffusion since the war"; the increased "moral coercion" exercised by the state; "modernism"; what he calls "super-city" and "super-country"; feminism, masculinism, and "the question of sex". Who, on the Left, now has the confidence to address the problems and promise of "new times" with a matching comprehensiveness and range?

This lack of boldness is certainly, in part, attributable to the fact that the contradictory forces associated with "new times" are, just now, and have been for some time, firmly in the keeping and under the tutelage of the Right. The Right has imprinted them with the inevitability of its own political project. This may have obscured the fact that what is going on is not the unrolling of a singular, unilinear logic in which the ascendency of capital, the hegemony of the Right and the march of commodification are indissolubly locked together. They may be different processes, with different time scales, which the dominance of the Right has somehow naturalised. But at this point, we encounter an even deeper problem. The Left seems not
Commodified consumption? Trivial pursuits? Yes, much of the time. But underlying that, have we missed the opening up of the individual to the transforming rhythms and forces of modern material life? Have we become bewitched by who, in the short run, reaps the profits from these transactions, and missed the deep democratisation of culture which is also part of their hidden agenda? Can a socialism of the 21st century revive, or even survive, which is wholly cut off from the landscapes of popular pleasures, however contradictory a terrain they are? Are we thinking dialectically enough?

Yet another strategy for getting at the more cultural and subjective dimensions of change would be to start from the objective characteristics of post-Fordism and simply turn them inside out. Take the new technologies. They not only introduce new skills and practices. They also require new ways of thinking. Technology, which used to be “hard-nosed” is now “soft”. And it no longer operates along one, singular line or path of development. “Planning”, in this new technological environment, has less to do with instituting a “regime” out of which a plurality of outcomes will emerge. One, so to speak, plans for contingency. This mode of thinking signals the end of a certain kind of deterministic rationality.

Or consider the proliferation of models and styles, the increased product differentiation, which characterises post-Fordist production. We can see mirrored there, too, wider processes of cultural diversity and differentiation, related to the multiplication of social worlds and social “logics” typical of modern life in the West.

There has been an enormous expansion of “civil society”, caused by the diversification of the different social worlds in which men and women can operate. At present, most people only relate to these worlds through the medium of consumption. But each of these worlds also has its own codes of behaviour, its “scenes” and “economies”, and (don’t knock it) “pleasures”. These allow the individual some space in which to reassert a measure of choice and control over everyday life and to “play” with its more expressive dimensions. This “pluralisation” of social life expands the roles and identities available to ordinary people (at least in the developed world). Such opportunities need to be more, not less, widely available across the globe. They imply a “socialism” committed to, rather than scared of, diversity and difference.

Of course, “civil society” is no ideal realm of pure freedom. Its micro-worlds include the multiplication of points of power and conflict. More and more of our everyday lives are caught up with these forms of power, and their lines of intersection. Far from there being no resistance to the system, there has been a proliferation of new points of antagonism, new social movements of resistance organised around them and, consequently, a generalisation of “politics” to spheres which hitherto the Left assumed to be apolitical; a politics of the family, of health, of food, of sexuality, of the body. What we lack is any overall map of how these power relations connect and of their resistances. Perhaps there isn’t, in that sense, one “power game” at all, more a network of strategies and powers and their articulations — and thus a politics which is always positional ...

One of these critical “new” sites of politics is the arena of social reproduction. On the Left, we know about the reproduction of labour power. But what do we really know
outside of feminism — about ideological, cultural, sexual reproduction? One of the characteristics of this area of "reproduction" is that it is both material and symbolic, since we are reproducing, not only the cells of the body but also the categories of the culture. Even consumption, in some ways the privileged terrain of reproduction, is no less symbolic for being material. In a world tyrannised by scarcity, people nevertheless express in their practical lives not only what they need for material existence but some sense of their symbolic place in the world, of who they are, their identities. One should not miss this drive to take part in the theatre of the social.

Of course, the preoccupation with consumption and style may appear trivial — though more so to men, who tend to have themselves "reproduced" at arm's length from the grubby processes of shopping and buying and getting and therefore take it less seriously than women for whom it was destiny, life's "work". But the fact is that greater and greater numbers of people (men and women) — with however little money — play the game of using things to signify who they are. Everybody, including people in poor societies whom we in the West frequently speak about as if they inhabit a world outside of culture, knows that today's "goods" double up as social signs and produce meanings as well as energy. There is no evidence that, in a socialist economy, our propensity to "code" things according to systems of meaning, which is an essential feature of our sociality, would necessarily cease — or, indeed, should.

This recognition of the expanded cultural and subjective ground on which any socialism of the 21st century must stand, relates, in a significant way, to feminism or, indeed, should.

Feminism and the social movements around sexual politics have thus had an unsettling effect on everything once thought of as "settled" in the theoretical universe of the Left. And nowhere more dramatically than in its power to decentre the characteristic conversations of the Left by bringing on to the political agenda the question of sexuality. This is more than the Left being "nice" to women or lesbians or gay men or beginning to address their forms of oppression. It has to do with the revolution in thinking which follows in the wake of the recognition that all social practices and forms of domination — including the politics of the Left — are always inscribed in and to some extent secured by sexual identity and positioning. If we don't attend to the gendered identities are formed and transformed and how they are deployed politically, we simply do not have a language of sufficient explanatory power at our command with which to understand the institutionalisation of power in our society and the secret sources of our resistances to change.

After another of those meetings of the Left where the question of sexuality has run like an electric current which nobody knows how to plug into, one is tempted to say especially the resistances to change on the Left.

Thatcherism is certainly fully aware of this implication of sexuality and identity in politics. It has powerfully organised itself around particular forms of patriarchy and cultural or national identity. Its defence of "Englishness" is a key to some of the unexpected sources of Thatcherism's popularity. For that very reason, "Englishness", as a privileged and restrictive cultural identity, is becoming a site of contestation from those ethnic and racial groups who insist on cultural diversity as a positive goal.

The Left should not be afraid of this surprising return of ethnicity. Though ethnicity has sometimes been a powerfully reactionary force, the new forms of ethnicity are articulated, politically, in a different direction. By "ethnicity" we mean the commitment to those points of attachment which give the individual some sense of "place" and position in the world, whether these be in relation to particular communities, localities, territories, languages, religion or cultures. These days, black writers and film-makers refuse to be restricted only to addressing black subjects. But they insist that others recognise that what they have to say comes out of particular histories and cultures and that everyone speaks from positions within the global distribution of power. Because these positions change and alter, there is always a politics of position.

This insistence on "positioning" provides people with co-ordinates, which are specially important in the face of the enormous globalisation and transnational character of many of the processes which now shape their lives. The "new times" seem to have gone "global" and "local" at the same moment. And the question of ethnicity reminds us that everybody comes from some place — even if only an "imagined community" — and needs some sense of identification. A politics which neglects that moment is not likely to be able to command the "new times".

Could there be "new times" without "new subjects"? Have the forces remaking the modern world left the subjects of that process untouched? Is change possible while we remain untransformed? It was always unlikely and is certainly an untenable proposition now. It is one of those many "fixed and fast-frozen relationships, venerable ideas and opinions" which, as Marx predicted, "new times" quietly melted into air.

A longer version of this article appeared in the October edition of Marxism Today. Published by arrangement.

STUART HALL's collection of essays The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left will be published by Verso in the summer.
Growing up in the rough and tumble of Sydney’s Glebe in the Fifties, Moya Sayer-Jones’ childhood was a topsy-turvy world of old communities and the new consumer icons of the Long Boom.

"Moya" was a pretty unusual name for a child born in 1953. Most little girls were Susan or Elizabeth or Rhonda or Jennifer and I might have been called that too if my two older sisters hadn’t beaten me to the punch.

By the time I came along, Mum and Dad were drained of inspiration. Two daughters with two names each meant four good ideas already. The post-war baby boom was partly to blame. It left our family crowded with namesakes of every available relative. One aunt was still to be honoured but she had big, flashy breasts and a de facto and so was never a real consideration. I was ten days old before Mum saw a picture of an Irish tap dancer in the afternoon paper. The girl was very beautiful with long hair, slim legs and small breasts and there was no mention of extra-marital sex. Her name was Moya.

The day Mum and Dad brought me home from the hospital our street had a big party. There were streamers hanging from the electricity poles, fireworks, trestle tables covered in sandwiches and laundry boilers filled with bottled beer. Everyone was really excited. No cars were allowed in after six o’clock but this wasn’t too much of a hardship for the residents because no one in the street owned one. Dad carried me in the bassinet from the bus stop. It was a long walk, winding through the trestles and shaking hands with all the people, but Dad didn’t care. He said a new queen didn’t arrive every day. He wasn’t talking about me. It was Queen Elizabeth. She was crowned that day.

Anyway, it was a good coincidence really and cheered Dad up. He was a bit disheartened about having yet another daughter. He’d been really depressed four years before when my sister Sue was born. He was convinced she’d be a boy and organised a big party up at the farm for his fishing mates. Then “George” turned out to be Sue and he was humiliated.

I think he was humiliated about the farm too. He’d bought it so that the family would be self-sufficient when the depression came. He had this theory that depressions follow wars. He’d thought it up in 1941 while he was in the navy, watching for underwater enemy activity.

He’d signed up the day war was declared and spent the next six years sitting on the Harbour Bridge waiting for the Japs to come. He waited and waited, but was on day leave the day they did. He was pretty bitter about it all, especially when it was all over. He’d tried to join the Returned Soldiers’ League in 1945 but they wouldn’t accept him because he hadn’t returned from anywhere. Well, anywhere except the northern pylon.

So then he waited for a depression to come and, of course, it didn’t. There was a boom instead. This meant the mountain place was empty most of the time with Dad working on his business. He never was able to use it to save his family from hunger and poverty. Mum said the post-war boom was one of his greatest disappointments.

Not that we were rich. We lived in Glebe in a House rented from the Church of England. The Church owned most of the houses in Richmond Street then. They were tiny semis or tenements filled with massive pieces of furniture. It was like that — the poorer you were, the bigger your wardrobe and dressing table had to be. Rich people from big houses used to give the things away and, if you were poor enough, you had to take them. If you were really poor you had to take lots of odd chairs too, and radiograms that didn’t work any more. Sometimes the houses got so full of odd chairs and lowboys that there was hardly enough room for the children at all.

That’s why so many people came out into the street after tea and stayed there until it was dark. It was pretty interesting. We lived right near the trotting park and the greyhound track, so we got to watch the old men...
exercise the animals up and down every afternoon. The little men wore grey felt hats and held two or three dogs in one hand and a well-sucked Rothmans in the other. They gathered on the corner and talked about Blue Streak or Lord Charger while the dogs stood with their thin tails tucked hard along their sunken bellies and whined through muzzles. The local kids would play cricket on the road and the husbands would smoke fags on the verandah and the mothers would stay inside and try to rearrange the chairs. Everybody knew everybody and watched who came and went and when they did.

Sue and I kept track from the window in the front room. We weren't allowed to run wild after tea. Maybe because we were girls or maybe because Dad was frightened that we'd disappear.

That happened a lot in our street. People disappearing. One day someone was there and the next day they weren't. Nobody talked about them after they'd gone.

I was only three or four when I first noticed it with Susan Parkes' father. The Parkes lived at the end of the street and probably had more odd chairs than anybody else. Susan was the youngest with about five brothers and sisters. You'd never know they were from the same family though because they all looked different. Her oldest sister was even part Aboriginal. One day Mr Parkes went to work and never came back. That's when Mrs Parkes put her head in the oven and disappeared as well. Then Susan stopped coming outside and we never saw her again either.

The street sucked up lots of families like that, but particularly fathers and sons. Like Johnnie Herrington. He was always vanishing. He was about fifteen and had lots of tattoos. He'd come home with a new car or a wireless or lots of money in his pocket and within a few days some policeman would arrive and Johnnie would be gone again. Just when he was starting to do well, too.

And there were the people who disappeared because they were sick, especially the women. You could always tell who'd be the next one to go. They'd either get very thin or very fat. The thin ones had TB and sometimes would never come back. The fat ones had babies and usually came back, but not always with the babies. Children got polio and came back with braces on their legs, and old people just lay down and died. There was a lot of coming and going and funerals and visiting the courts. That's where Mum's black net pillbox hat came in handy. All the ladies in the street borrowed it when they needed to dress up.

Mum was like a princess in Richmond Street. Everyone called her Mrs Sayer because she had the hat and Dad had a trade. He was a third-generation master painter. He'd take his ladder and brushes with him on the trams in the mornings and bring them home every afternoon. If there was no work he's paint our place to keep in practice. From the outside it looked as bad as everyone else's, but inside it was all done up. The house got smaller and smaller with all those layers of Royal Magenta and Arctic Blue, but it was pretty exciting. You never knew what colour the kitchen was going to be next.

We had the phone on and were the first people to buy a television. The Herringtons got one not long after but it was the kind where you had to put a shilling in the meter every time you wanted to watch something. Ours worked for nothing because we were a bit better off. We didn't have much more money than everybody else, but at least Mum never had to wear the black pillbox herself.

Sue, four years older than me, was the entrepreneur of the family, and a really good swimmer. Mr Hill, the swimming teacher at the pool, said she might be the next Dawn Fraser. Mum and Dad got worried about that because Dawn Fraser's shoulders were so big she looked like a man. They stopped the lessons straight away. Sue was short and blond and took after Dad.

Rhonda was ten years older than me. She was the eldest, dark and slim, and looked a lot like Mum.

“Why have you got all that bloody muck on your face, Rhonda?”

“Because I'm going out, Dad.”

“No, you're not.”

“Why not?”

“Not with all that bloody muck on your face you're not.”

Dad and Rhonda had the same fight all the time.

Rhonda was very particular about her appearance. She loved her nails especially and really looked
Barbie at the Barricades

The Barbie doll turns 30 in the new year. And in the so-called 'post-feminist' era she's had to change to keep up with the times, reports Jennifer Craik.

Barbie seems to have enjoyed every trend in all areas of culture and aesthetics for the last twenty-eight years. But there are some areas that are forbidden to her. Barbie never had a pet rock. Nor did she have a mohawk or a stud bracelet ... She never had a T-shirt with a political slogan or announcement of any kind of liberation. She never went streaking. She never smoked cigarettes ... *(Barbie: Her Life and Times, 1987.)*

Barbie has undoubtedly been a huge success since her launch in 1959. During the early 1960s, over six million Barbie dolls were produced annually. Even now Mattel, the manufacturers of Barbie, expect to sell two million of each type per year, a million in the US alone.

Not only is her appeal to children; Barbie has become a collector's item, fetishised both for rarity and for documentary statements: There is no other collectible in history that tells the story of a nation, its struggles, its fads, its glories, better than Barbie! Better than a textbook, Barbie shows a three-dimensional view of youth in person as it was.

How can we account for her enduring popularity? How has she been able to maintain her appeal through numerous redesigns and changes in cultural tastes? In what way should we read her as a document of the post-war generation?

Fundamentally, Barbie has addressed the development of a youth culture that embodies fashions and consumerism, not just in clothes but increasingly in lifestyles. Perhaps unexpectedly, this has involved desexualising Barbie, playing down her exaggerated physical features, sophisticated make-up and couture fashions.

It is Barbie's explicit adulthood that is her most distinctive feature. Unlike most other dolls which had unformed bodies, Barbie exhibited an obviously mature figure onto which, argue her supporters, children could project their own personalities and futures. Barbie combines "functional doll play" with her role as "a courier of fashion".

Here was a three-dimensional form of paper doll, an enduring fascination for children, except that these clothes were accurate in every detail, with zippers, buttons and accessories. Barbie's 30 cm height and thin body made her the perfect size for a little hand to hold while dressing or play-acting (in contrast to traditionally proportioned dolls for children, or Barbie's rival Cabbage Patch, who is usually found where Barbie is but whose human baby size invites different kinds of play, more as a comfort object).

Barbie is the essence of the teenager — half child, half adult; oscillating between the freedoms of one and the responsibilities of the other. Her progenitor was a provocative character called Lilli, who started life as a popular cartoon character in the German newspaper, *Bild-Zeitung.*

Lilli was more cosmopolitan than Barbie, a kind of post-war butt of jokes in a nation rebuilding itself and coming to terms with "modern" circumstances. Her cult status led to her transformation into doll form in 1955, in which the emphasis was on
after them. She wouldn't even play Scrabble because she reckoned you chipped your polish when you picked the letters up. Anyway, for some reason her thumb nail started to grow faster than all the others and she was obsessed with it. It made Dad sick to look at it, and he told her she had to cut it. She wouldn't, and it was almost long enough to butter bread with. That's when Dad blew up and Rhonda went mad and bit it off. Right there, in front of him. I think she must have frightened Dad by that because the next week he let her out with the boy next door, named Bob.

She had been seeing him secretly for months, anyway. No one knew except Sue. Rhonda would give Sue her old lipsticks so she'd carry the love letters back and forth. She got lolly money on delivery from Bob as well, and was very disappointed when Dad relented and Rhonda got to carry her own letters. Things settled down for Rhonda after that except for the odd flare-up like Mum hiding her bikini or letting out her pedalpushers or confiscating her eyebrow tweezers. Rhonda and Bob got serious pretty quickly and it wasn't long before he was in our place almost every night.

This created a new tension. Not that we didn't like him. We did. It was more to do with the telly. The arrival of television at our place in 1957 generated incredible changes. The lounge room became the TV room overnight and we had to buy a lot of new furniture. There were TV chairs and TV tables and even TV cups and saucers. But despite all these purchases there were never enough seats, and some of us to take the pouf or sit on the floor.

We had a carefully worked-out system of rules. Whoever got a chair first could keep it for the whole night, so long as they said "I bags this" if they needed to go to the toilet or answer the door or something. However, even with a "bagsing", you lost your spot if you stayed away for more than two commercial breaks. The only person who was exempt from these rules was Dad, who could come and go when he liked, but I don't know why. Mum usually took the pouf voluntarily because she couldn't stand all the fighting.

When Bob started coming it threw the system right out. Good manners demanded that, as a visitor, he could have any chair (except Dad's) without any bagsing at all. On the other hand, he came so much that he wasn't really a visitor. In the end we accepted him into the family and he had to sit by the same rules as the rest of us. He never got used to it, though... he was always shocked when he'd get up and the girls would throw themselves into the seat screaming about "bags". He was particularly surprised when even Rhonda started doing it.

He never got used to Nana's noises, either. She broke wind constantly in front of the telly, in loud, long bursts, and all the girls knew we weren't allowed to laugh or say anything. We'd all sit there as though nothing was happening, surrounded by pops, burps and bad smells, and Bob thought we were crazy. But every family has its own rituals, even in Glebe.

We had another one on Friday nights. We always ate fish. Not that we were Catholic, it was just a habit Mum got into during Lent one year. She gave up sugar in her tea the same way. Fish nights were always stressful because Mum and Dad were paranoid about one of the girls choking to death on a bone. Mum would watch us so carefully that if you so much as cleared your throat, you knew you were in for it.

"Jesus, Sid, she's got a bone in her throat."

Dad'd be up quick as a flash and before you could say "Jack Robertson" you'd be upside down being shaken by the ankles. The dog would be barking and going crazy and Dad would be screaming: "Give us some bread, give us some bloody bread!"

Four or five slices of Tip Top would be shoved in your mouth and you knew you had to swallow the lot before the procedure would stop. It was a big price to pay for a nice piece of fried flathead, and the ritual went on for years. It only changed when we all got too heavy for Dad to lift and Mum started buying fish fingers ...


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dressing her up in fashionable clothes. She was not a great success, however, and was eventually bought up by Mattel Toys Inc., an American company looking to expand its prospects.

There has been some dispute as to whether Mattel used the Lilli mould for the prototype Barbie. Certainly the two were remarkably similar. Four Barbies later, the authentic Barbie emerged with "Americanised" blue eyes and curved eyebrows, flesh-tone vinyl skin, and new saran hair.

She retained Lilli's figure, which was to become a source of continuing controversy, although her defenders claim that it merely reflects the ideal of "maturity of figure". According to her biographer "She has the ideal that Western culture has insisted upon since the 1920s: long legs, long arms, small waist, high round bosom, and long neck."

These ideals, however, hardly correspond to reality and Barbie's clothes have had to be carefully cut to accommodate the mono-bosom, the cinched waist and the misproportioned thighs atop the impossibly tapering legs and permanently arched (minute) feet. Nonetheless, the very preposterousness of Barbie's figure seems to have been the source of her longevity.

The emphasis on her body was underlined by the fact that her first two outfits were underwear and lingerie, allowing children to familiarise themselves with this unusual bodily form. From then on, the emphasis was on *haute couture* fashion, for which Mattel representatives viewed each season's Paris collections. Barbie has a more extensive collection of Paris fashions than any woman or museum, a feat celebrated in her extraordinary biography, *Barbie: Her Life and Times*.

Following on from the example of Hollywood movies, Barbie became a wonderful living advertisement for the new collections, a trend that inspired American designers to emulate her. Barbie's Parisian clothes were exchanged for American designs, becoming a boost for, and sign of, changing styles and conventions of dress, make-up and hair.

But while her body has remained intact (in every sense), her face and hair have changed with the times. The biggest changes came in 1967 with the era of the Bendleg Barbie: Dramatic New Living Doll Barbie was the most posable Barbie doll ever made. She swivelled at the waist, neck, hands and legs. She was bendable in natural ways at the elbows, knees, ankles and wrists. Her head tilted beguilingly... "As posable as you are", claimed the advertising.

Much of Barbie's attraction lies in that malleability, the flouting of everyday restrictions through the glamour and make-believe of Barbie. Barbie represents positive values of American life, though, interestingly, these have translated readily into other cultures, nowhere more so than in Japan.

While the American doll acquired biographical details — middle name, Millicent; last name, Roberts; a student at Willows High (in the mid-west); with a best friend called Midge — the Japanese Takara Barbie, now called Jenny Lifestyle, came with physical details: blood type A, 165 cm tall, 83 cm chest, 58 cm waist and 83 cm hips. The Japanese put her birthplace as Los Angeles and made her face more innocently round, with huge round eyes — surely the quintessential signs of occidentalism in Japanese culture.

Nonetheless, Barbie has managed to combine fantasy with reality via suburban settings in which to display her glamorous wardrobe. This has involved the creation of a Barbie family of much more down-to-earth characters; as well as a shift away from *haute-couture*.

The friends of Barbie have, until recently, been marked by their prosaic qualities. The controversy over Barbie's sexualised body was behind the launch of her friend Midge in 1963. Midge's name and different head mould gave her that suburban touch — "a wider face, freckles, green eyes, and a flip hairdo".

The appeal was to the everyday, to more realistic play situations and to making Barbie more human (though still, of course, more special and aloof!). Symptomatically, with Midge came Barbie's dream house, thus reinforcing the middle America icons of suburban life and its priorities.

Shortly after came Barbie's erstwhile beau Ken, whose altogether larger frame, stiffer body and more radically than Barbie's, so that he bears an uncanny resemblance to various male pin-ups including Robert Redford, Warren Beatty and Neil Diamond. Ken's transformability may be some comfort to some — one boy's head is as good as another's! Ken has always had a slightly distanced role in Barbie's life.

In 1964, Barbie gained two more friends, Skipper and Allan, based on the Midge and Ken head moulds respectively. Their presence
increased play and double-dating possibilities.

Barbie’s world began to expand. The emphasis on couture fashion began to be replaced by street fashion and lifestyle clothes — including travel fashions (national dress), theatre costumes, and an airline uniforms series. Barbie also ventured into the workforce as nurse, candy-striped volunteer, stewardess and, of course, fashion model.

But Barbie’s world was being shaken up by the rapid changes of the ’60s — cultural, political and even physical. Barbie’s shape was no longer the “ideal”: with the Twiggy phenomenon, she seemed “matronly and dated” and too heavily made-up and coiffed. So Francie Fairchild was introduced in 1966 with a less shapely figure, rooted eyelashes and bendable legs. She could flaunt the Mod fashions. In 1967 she was followed by the first special edition doll, Twiggy, who had the same body but a specially modelled face to mimic Twiggy.

A black version of Francie was also introduced amid controversy, leading one report to herald that “Barbie was a leader in civil rights” by introducing a black playmate for Barbie. Children accepted the black dolls very readily. Although black Francie herself was not very successful, her successor, Christie, with Barbie’s body, but a specially moulded face and more glamour has maintained popularity. Mattel has taken considerable pride in its black dolls, regarding them at a minimum as an index of social upheaval and changing mores.

Even Barbie has changed: in 1967, her hair reflected the preference for long straight locks; she acquired a slimmer younger face, less make-up and rooted eyelashes: “Her face was now younger, more wide-eyed, more innocent, and much less sultry”.

This is the only change in the head mould for Barbie herself, a change with which Mattel wanted to erase the old version. Consequently, a trade-in campaign was held to swap old Barbie (plus $1.50) for the new model. Millions of old Barbies were swapped, an episode which Alvin Toffler read as symptomatic of a throw-away society — of materialism, consumerism and transience.

But Barbie’s constant updates were not sufficient to guarantee her success beyond reflecting fashion trends over the period. Even the introduction of wigs and different hair styles and colours for Barbie did not work. By the mid-’70s, Barbie (and Mattel) were in real trouble.

She turned to slotting into real life occasions, such as the 1975 Olympics, back-to-nature movements and so on, thus rekindling the successful 1964 World Fair campaign when Barbie shifted from a miniaturised, self-contained world to the wider human world.

Mattel designed matching outfits for Barbie and Midge to wear to the fair, but also designed miniature Barbies and Midge for the dolls: the dressed minidoll even had a miniature red Barbie case with a portrait of Bendleg Barbie on the cover. As well, they designed matching child-sized outfits: Now a little girl could dress like the Barbie she was carrying, who was also carrying a Barbie!

From then on, Barbie had a place in everyday life. And her sixteenth birthday in 1979 afforded an opportunity for publicity and the Sweet 16 Barbie. But her real saviour came in the form of the disco revolution of the seventies which provided a whole new backdrop of leisure and pleasure against which glamorous fashions and glamorous careers could be promoted. Whole new ranges of friends and a new more dynamic boyfriend, Derek, completed this transformation.

Today, Barbie combines the glamour of the rock world with professions like astronaut and doctor, though the emphasis is still on her glamorous clothes and transformation at night into a partying young thing. Other Barbies read the TV news, dance (disco and ballet), exercise and generally lead “active” lives or occupations. For balance, Barbie still has her kitchen, poolside, barbecue, and other domestic sets literally to come home to.

This year Mattel has launched the California Dream Barbie which comes with a record by the Beach Boys called, you guessed it, Living Doll. The rationale is that Mom, recalling the Beach Boys of her youth, should be inspired to buy it for her five or six year-old — a target group which, as a spokesperson put it: “The Beach Boys feel this is their new audience”.

Barbie has nursed, if not nurtured, a generation into consumerism and lifestyles based on display, transience and imitation. Her mute witness to index of the post-war generation indicates a certain tenacity. Yet politics and action have been reduced to stylistics and gesture: though this may have achieved more than other dolls and toys. Barbie can uniquely reach diverse classes, ethnicities and nationalities — even lifestyles. Cultural politics at least make an appearance on Barbie’s agenda.

Yet, on the question of gender politics, Barbie has been less than a role model. She embodies a cruel parody of the female body, fetishised for its very absurdity. For Barbie, her very body is her prison; possibilities are encased in that materiality. As a poem in a Barbie Magazine Annual put it:

The sidewalk is a magic street, Beneath our Barbie’s pretty feet, In a suit of black, white and red, She finds fame and fortune straight ahead.

While not a tool of revolution, Barbie has adapted to changing circumstances as profitability vies with unpredictable popularity and an unstable social and political agenda. Whether she can survive into the future will depend on capturing aspects of future changes in lifestyle and consumption. Undoubtedly, she represents pure pleasure and certainty in a world that fuses work with play. In a climate of harsh realities, such escapism may be tolerated or even desirable: Vive Barbie! Vive la difference!

JENNIFER CRAIK teaches in Humanities at Griffith University in Brisbane.
Welcome to the New Times

Marxism Today was the one success story of the British left in the Eighties. Now it's changed gear from critique to the analysis of 'New Times'. We interviewed editor Martin Jacques.

In 1979 the circulation of Marxism Today was four thousand; now it's over 15,000. Over that period it has become one of the most respected forums in British political life, and arguably the most interesting left magazine in the English-speaking world. It was set up in 1957 as part of a liberalising trend in the Communist Party of Great Britain following its massive loss of prestige during the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956.

It first hit the headlines in 1978 with an article, The Forward March of Labour Halted? by historian Eric Hobsbawn, which argued the then-heretical thesis that the left was in retreat rather than on the offensive. Following the election of the Thatcher government in 1979 the magazine became best-known as the coiner of the term "Thatcherism" to describe the qualitatively new form of conservative appeal represented by the New Right. Now it has launched a new explanation of the contemporary times in Britain, "New Times", which focusses on the links between the new post-industrial economic realities and the expanding spheres of consumption and the personal.

Martin Jacques, 42, has edited Marxism Today since 1977. A Cambridge history Ph.D. and former lecturer at Bristol University, he is closely associated with Marxism Today's emergence as a unique blend of leftwing theoretical journal and news stands glossy. He is also a contributor to the London Guardian and the Sunday Times. Stephen Long interviewed him in London.

Thatcherism in Britain was the breeding ground for the New Right in the late 'seventies and 'eighties. Surely things have gone so far down the track now that some of the changes here must be irreversible. How difficult will it be to get a radical social agenda up, post-Thatcher?

We've now had over nine years of Thatcherism. It's been an extraordinary period. In fact, in many ways, it's been a very unBritish period, because Thatcherism's been such a strategic political project, and it's done away with the pragmatism which has traditionally characterised much governmental practice in our country. It is true that Thatcherism has changed the nature of politics and of certain areas of socio-economic activity, permanently. The problem we've got at the moment is that Thatcherism has managed, particularly over the last two to four years, to become the champion of modernisation in an era of post-Fordism. She's clocked that this is the new order of things, and is seeking a conservative denouement for modernisation. The problem the left, and the Labour Party in particular, faces is that it hasn't really clocked these New Times; it's operating in old times. Unless it does that, I don't really think it can win office again.

But Thatcherism has provoked something of a rethink on the left. The Labour Party's undertaking a Policy Review; the Communist Party is redrafting its pioneering document The British Road to Socialism. Do these suggest that maybe the left can move into the new terrain and equip itself to battle in the era of post-Fordism?

Well, I hope so. I think both of those are good things: I think basically the Labour Party's policy review is a very good enterprise. Its results so far have been limited and uneven, and I wouldn't say personally that Labour thinking, either about its policies or, indeed, Labour culture, has moved into a post-Fordist era. But it's beginning to broach the question, which it hadn't previously done. I think that
the Communist Party's document. Facing Up to the Future, represents a much more direct confrontation with post-Fordism and those New Times, and the problems of a progressive rather than a conservative modernisation. It's much more strategic, much more coherent than the Labour Party's thinking so far. But we're at the very early stages of this process. There are still large tracts of deeply backward territory when it comes to the left's attitudes towards the new conditions, towards Thatcherism, and so on. Where the left has begun to rethink and try to renew itself, it's often been not only rather limited in terms of the left as a whole, but also concentrated on trying to come to terms with the nature of Thatcherism and the fact that the left's in a mess, and not going to get out of it by the old solutions. What it's only just beginning to do really is to rethink what the world is like in the late 'eighties and 'nineties.

What are some of the shibboleths that the left's still attached to?

Well, there's quite a few, really. (Laughs) First of all, the left, by and large, is still very attached to the old Keynesian welfare model of the post-war period. So if there's a problem with the National Health Service, or there's a problem in relation to economic policy, it thinks in macroeconomic terms. Its conception of public ownership is still very much geared to those sorts of parameters, rather than thinking about public ownership in an economy which has got some very different kinds of dynamics. Another example, a particular problem in Britain, and one where Thatcherism itself has difficulties, is the nation state. The left still conceives of its policies and strategies very much in terms simply of the nation state. There's nothing wrong with thinking on the terrain of the nation state, but we've got to recognise the profound internationalisation that's taking place and, in our case, Europeanisation specifically. But there's great resistance to that. Just as you get forms of Little Englandism on the right, you also get them on the left. It's a very powerful trend.

In specific terms, then, would we not try to take back British Telecom into public ownership; would we not put such an onus on socialisation? What does this new economic terrain mean?

I don't think it means that the public dimension is less important than it was. But it does mean that you can't simply advocate social ownership as an end in itself for the traditional reasons in the traditional areas — for example, the commanding heights. For two reasons: firstly, because we now know that social ownership in some cases doesn't work very well. That is the experience. Secondly, because of a recognition that the tradition of the socialisation of the commanding heights is geared to an economy where the commanding heights were something a bit different from what they are now. In the immediate post-war period, the commanding heights were the infrastructure of heavy industry, of coal, of steel and so on. My guess is that now the more critical areas are areas like information technology, of telecommunications, and so on. British Telecom, in this context, would need to be socialised, but not socialised in the way it was before, neither in the form nor the extent, because there are certain features — and this is a particularly British case — of the socialisation of Telecom which wouldn't need to be re-established. The supply of domestic phones doesn't need to be publicly done, it can easily be privately done — probably more effectively done. But the infrastructure of communications should, I think, be socially owned. The other difference, it seems to me, is that we need to place much greater emphasis than has been the case in our tradition on regulation. Regulation can be a very potent weapon, but it's something we haven't really thought about enough.

So there would be room for a regulated market .... ?

Yes, certainly. What we've got to think about much more is getting away from certain set reflex knee-jerk reactions to what we think the public forms are. And think much more creatively, firstly about a whole diversity of pluralism of public forms of intervention in the economy, but also to face up to the new conditions so that we're shaping them to real effect rather than on the basis simply of ideology.

On a political level, this suggests some sort of decentralisation. You'd perhaps be looking at giving more emphasis to community groups rather than the state as all-powerful provider ...

Traditionally, state intervention has been very centralised, and has been very statist, and not particularly responsive to the workforce. But what has become increasingly important is that it is not responsive to the consumer either, something the left traditionally has neglected.

Take the question of public ownership. How are we going to create a situation where people genuinely feel they have a stake in firms which are publicly owned, because they haven't in the past? Can we create some form of social share ownership, which enables people to feel that they have a stake in these firms in a direct way? And what forms of democracy can we introduce in relationship to them? For example, if you resocialise British Telecom, would it be possible to create regional elected boards? In some ways, the American electoral system has merit here, because there's a whole stratum of public officials and so on who are elected. I'm not suggesting that we actually repeat the American experience, but there's some good features in it.

A lot of the hard left have accused Marxism Today of watering down socialism, watering down the socialist commitment, flirting with socialist consumerism, and making an accommodation with the market. How would you respond to that?

That sort of criticism seems to me to come from two sources. The first is the view that your socialist parties are cast in stone, and you don't really need to think about the new conditions that you're faced with. Or, if you suffer a series of defeats from the right, then it means
you just redouble your socialism, and you don’t have to do any serious rethinking — you don’t have to respond to changes, and so on. Which means that you’ve got this kind of thought police, or political police, who go around with their measuring rods to work out the latest deviation from the norm. And quite frankly, that’s not going to get us anywhere. That’s the death of socialism, in every sense, culturally and politically. It’s got nothing to offer.

The second impulse that informs this sort of attitude is a kind of fear. A fear of the unknown. One of the problems that we, as socialists, throughout the world are having to face now is this. Once there was a sense of certainty about socialism; we knew where we were going; we knew the left was on the side of history. In Britain now it’s not the left that speaks with a sense of confidence about history, it’s the right. It’s Mrs. Thatcher who says socialism is dead, socialism is about yesterday. One of the things that’s been happening.

Thatcherism still commands the times. Labour doesn’t seem as if it’s got a sense of the future. At the moment, notwithstanding the policy review and so on, it’s still got a long way to go to feel like that. So I’m not an optimist. It doesn’t mean that I would rule out the possibility of a Labour victory but, at the moment, it doesn’t look very likely.

Even were Labour to win, could we see a situation similar to that of countries like Australia, where the defeat of the radical right has seen the rise of a very tame social democracy which is undoubtedly better than Thatcherism, but is still not the direction in which we want to go?

If you look at where the left has managed to get somewhere despite the conservative ascendency of the last decade revolving, such as in France, or Australia, it’s been a very pragmatic, very technocratic left. Its project has broadly been a kind of humanised version of modernisation in the shadow of the hegemony of the radical right internationally. I’m talking about Spain, New Zealand, Australia. Now, I’d give my bottom dollar to have that sort of government in Britain as against what we’ve had over the last decade: that would mark a big advance for us. But, of course, what we would like to see is something much more transformative. In the context of the Western left at the moment, however, I don’t really see a transformative left on the terrain of post-Fordism beginning to call the tune anywhere. I can see a transformative leader on the left, but it’s not in the West, it’s in the East; it’s Gorbachev. I don’t see that in the West.

So how do we get there?

I don’t think there are any simple solutions. The only thing one can stress is the importance now of left forces existing in and coming to terms with the terrain of these New Times, and finding the solutions appropriate to it; and feeling comfortable with it, and not living in the past — whether the past is a long time ago or the ’sixties and ’seventies. It’s the ’nineties that are the problem: it’s what’s going to happen into the next century. Of course, at the same time, it’s important not to let go of those large tracts of society which are not post-Fordist, and where our traditional roots lie. The problem so far is that the left has been basically operating on the ground of the old, not a combination of the new and the old. We need a project which can combine the two. And Thatcherism, of course, did do this. Thatcherism hasn’t just operated on the ground of the new; it’s also operated on the ground of the old — very successfully. It’s transformed conservatism: a combination of modernism and traditionalism.

Is part of it making the left saleable? Marxism Today in particular has been associated with what’s been derogatively termed “designer socialism”, a trend which is concerned with making left thinking appeal to the consumer. Is part of it the same process in political terms?

Yes. I think so. Nothing more clearly reveals the inability of the left to address modern times than its own media. Take the leftish media here — particularly the labour movement press. By and large, it speaks to itself. It’s very predictable. It reflects the hierarchy of the organisations that publish it — the message from the general secretary, or whatever. It assumes that the readership might somehow be interested in this. It hasn’t confronted getting itself on sale in the marketplace, in the newsagents and so on: which is where you’re going to sell to an essentially catholic, diverse, pluralist public. By and large, the labour movement press sells internally, and therefore just sells to the converted. This is also true in design terms and so on. This varies from country to country: in Italy and elsewhere on the Continent, the situation is a bit different. But everywhere I sense that the left is still lagging behind when it comes to the massive changes in the mode of communication over the last two decades.

STEPHEN LONG is a freelance journalist.
Bewinged


Textured in silver and with an eerie, almost translucent quality — as though it could easily vanish into thin air — Wings of Desire is populated by angels, actors and an aerialiste who hover between heaven and earth, between film and everyday life.

And that is where Wings of Desire would like to position itself: as a collection of images from "no man’s (sic) land", a commentary from the place where contradictions meet.

While most of the film is impressionistic — an essay in the fragmentary and alienating condition of post-war (and post-modern) existence — it is informed by a love story of sorts. Lurking in the wings (and wings are a significant reminder of a certain part of the female anatomy) is Marion, the aerialiste. In her character oppositons can be reconciled: she is both of the air and the earth. She looks angelic, and her name is a derivative of Mary, but she also inspires less than angelic feelings in Damiel, the angel who falls for her and becomes human in the process. In becoming human, however, Damiel relinquishes his angelic state:
unlike Marion, it seems, he cannot be at the point of contradiction.

All this, of course, sounds far too familiar, and given the flying start that feminism has made in analysing the insidiously repetitive representations of “Woman” as both virgin and whore (contradictory enough to hold in herself the physical and the spiritual), it’s disappointing to have to watch yet another film that positions women as symbols of an unholy mystery. Especially with the mawkish sentimentality of Wings betrays Damiel is not only drawn to the circus ring and Marion but also to the movie lot and a well-known American actor: Peter Falk playing himself. Another fallen angel. Falk inhabits a shadowy world bounded by TV screens and a persona that’s public property. As an American winging to the Germany of his ancestors (by aeroplane, having hung up his wings). Falk’s character obviously has some sympathies for Wenders himself, who, in making Wings of Desire, has returned to Germany to make his first film there after years obsessed with the North American landscape.

That Germany has been reproduced endlessly in war movies of the ilk that Falk, according to Wings’ storyline, has been flown to Berlin to make. The “real” Falk was, of course, also flown to Berlin to make another kind of film about Germany, Wenders’ own. An astute audience, schooled in reading self-conscious films, would immediately note that parallel as well as being attuned to Wenders distancing himself from that kind of mythmaking.

Yet Wenders is placing himself within what’s fast becoming another tradition of filmmaking, one that sees itself as smashing down the icons of “realism” with radical rereadings that transgress the rigid boundaries between accepted epistemologies to flat new connections. Hence the recurring image of the Berlin Wall in Wings of Desire, and the wasteland bordering it. Old men and angels remember when it was a populous part of the city, unbroken by the wall: angels, being eternal, may even remember the future. Is history being transcended, or is Wenders merely trotting out the post-modernists’ stocks in trade?

And what if connections are made between, for example, the way in which angels relate to everyday life, the structure of Western rationalist philosophy and the role of a director, if that doesn’t inform a more thoroughgoing analysis of the power relations involved? Vicariously enjoying earthly pleasures by observing others from a safe distance smacks of voyeurism. Yet we are asked to look on innocently as the invisible Damiel watches Marion in what he believes to be the privacy of her own caravan. While the preoccupations of Wings of Desire are, ultimately, eminently forgettable (has it been so successful in emptying itself of meaning?), its images haunt the retina like ghosts of themselves. A ponytailed angel reading over someone’s shoulder in the library that almost seems home to them; Peter Falk talking to an invisible angel at a roadside cafe; Damiel bewinged and atop the bombed ruins of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. That all these images refer to the angels is probably no accident: Wenders was inspired to dream of them in the first place and they are beautifully realised. On the surface of it, Wings of Desire is perfectly seductive.

**LYNDELL FAIRLEIGH is a freelance film critic.**

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**The Last Convicts?**


These are two useful and timely books yet, despite the similarity in their titles, their angles of vision are polar opposites. Panitch, the articulate Australian daughter of postwar refugees, has synthesised the so far largely unexpressed experience of her parents’ generation through hundreds of interviews and a study of letters, diaries and documents. Collins has brought together in a broad sweep the, by now, vast published literature about immigration from 1945 to the present, surveying from a left perspective the data and debates on every aspect of this question. If the voice of the migrants themselves is rarely to be heard in his pages it will, nonetheless, be an invaluable, well-written and comprehensive textbook on the subject.

Collins’ title could have served well for Panitch’s book. The experiences she chronicles are of attempts to reduce the Displaced Person refugees to undifferentiated labour power, discounting their skills, education, culture and history; to use them indeed as atomised “hands”, “the last convicts”, without families or communities, to be sent here and there according to the needs of postwar reconstruction.

Government bureaucracy and capital worked together in this. In the camps, couples were separated and parents were classified as “childless” if their children had passed the age of 18. Husbands and wives were directed to labouring jobs hundreds of miles apart. These refugees had held the fragments of their families and their identities together through the war and the European camps, and the fear of being split up motivated resistance, though for most the fear of deportation was even more powerful. Some were destroyed by the experience, but most held on until their two-year contracts were up, and then set about rebuilding.
their social existence, as more than mere mobile “hands” of capital.

Non-Anglophones in Australia have had to wait for the next generation to record their experience. The people who came at that time, and their children, will find a passionate interest in this book; but it has more than just historic relevance. History is repeating itself with new subjects, who again lack a voice. In the spirit of the FitzGerald report, families divided by war remain split today and immigrants as a whole find it hard to bring out their parents or other relatives because the economic rationality of the points system blocks them. Yet, in the intervening decades it was the logic of the migrants that reasserted itself through the prevalence of chain migration which reconstructed family networks and multicultural (often working class) communities. It was through these, not through bureaucratic welfare provisions, that new waves of newcomers gained the confidence and knowledge to claim their rights and to participate in the new society and in its labour movement.

Collins’ book, with a wider, if more distant lens, surveys the place of immigrant workers in Australian capitalism, from the refugees of Bonegilla to those of “Vietnamatta” (and the groups in between). He looks at the economics and the politics of the process, the exploitation of men and especially of women, evaluating the outcomes for Australian society and for the immigrants themselves, including the second generation. He outlines the major debates: on the economic advantages and disadvantages; on racism and prejudice; on assimilation and multiculturalism; and concludes with a set of mainly generous and soundly based guidelines for an Australian immigration policy. The past experience, he sees as, on balance, successful, because of the enormous efforts and sacrifices of the newcomers themselves, and because the indigenous population proved able to progressively largely overcome their long heritage of racism.

Collins’ guidelines support multiculturalism and family migration and non-racial selection (he would indeed like to see an opening of doors to Black African refugees), and he sees a continuing immigration policy as beneficial, if cautiously pursued. He has doubts, however, about the future applicability of an “immigration led recovery” and is concerned lest too large an intake put strains on the “apparent contemporary trend of increasing tolerance”; a view strangely at odds with his belief that it is the scale and diversity of immigration itself which has brought about this trend. Indeed, his words here are somewhat disconcertingly similar to Howard’s talk of the importance of “social cohesion”. We must not forget how the British labour movement in the 1960s caved in before the Powellite predictions of “blood in the streets” and joined a Dutch auction with the Conservatives in reducing immigration in the name of multiracial harmony.

The British outcome, in racial tension, ghettoisation and growing working class divisions and racism presents indeed a sharp contrast to the Australian experience. The relationship of Australian immigrants (especially the non-Anglophones) to the indigenous working class and its organisations is perhaps the weakest part of Collins’ book, reflecting the limitations of the sources he used. In structural terms, his view of the working class as fundamentally fragmented by immigration, producing racism, is both mistaken and in contradiction with his final, more optimistic conclusions. Non-Anglophones have, indeed, been systematically excluded from white collar, professional and technical jobs and concentrated in heavy and dangerous work. However, already by the mid-1960s, even the South Europeans were to be found in large numbers throughout almost all of the organised manual occupations, including the trades, being indeed over-represented in many skilled manual jobs. Their unionisation rates were high and their wage levels were similar to those of indigenous workers in the same occupations.

Migrants, then, have not formed a separate “underclass”. Despite frequently serious neglect of rank-and-file interests by the bureaucratic unions in which migrants were often members, this outcome was, in part, due to the uniting tendency of union policies. The Australian labour movement has a long heritage of racism dating back to the 19th
Searching for Labor


Raymond Markey’s The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales aims to be comprehensive. It is divided into three parts: social and industrial structure; labour organisation; and the emergence of Laborism, the object being to expose all aspects of the story, to reveal utterly what the Labor Party is — or, perhaps, was.

Originally, according to the book’s main thesis, the movement which formed the NSW Labor Party was a class movement, its product a political party in the mould of the European social democratic parties. But, Markey argues, this working class character was lost in the mid-1890s. Then, by dint of an opportunistic modus vivendi, “utopian-socialist intellectuals” cum politicians and the rising AWU (Australian Workers’ Union) bureaucracy transformed it into a vote-catching populist machine that straddled class lines in order to be bumped into government. By 1910, in tandem with their federal counterparts, they had succeeded — one of the first labour or social democratic parties to do so. There is much to recommend this schema because Markey has strengthened both the existing evidence and the interpretive framework. However, the thesis is marred.

Markey outlines the colonial background to the 1880s but has not thought enough about the British context. The emergence of NSW Labor and, by implication, Labor nationwide should be set in a framework of imperialist rivalries and exploitation, and conflicting loyalties. It is in this decade or decades that the character of the national ambiguities, so well caught in Sylvia Lawson’s The Archibald Paradox, clearly emerge.

There is no Aboriginal presence in the book, not even an Aboriginal people’s role as a segment, but a highly symbolic one, of the shearing and general rural workforce. Race and race relations are treated substantially, but the fate of the indigenous people gets scant attention. Women do have a presence, but a small one. Markey puts most stress on feminism’s impact on trade union and Labor platforms and policies, and the attempts to mobilise working women. In the debate between Louisa Lawson and Rose Scott, he favours Lawson. Feminism is regarded as a populist program that failed to take up Louisa Lawson’s challenge of just treatment for working women.

Markey does not ignore the national question, especially its racist dimension which became, as he stresses, the touchstone of Australian sentiment. Weak as it was, an anti-imperialist critique did blend with a republican program. It was part of 1880s populism, but Markey tends to treat this program as something distracting the working class from the “class” issues.

Which brings us closer to Markey’s principal theme. Markey has probably gone further than other Australian historians and
political scientists in the search for a theoretical explanation of Labor. By any standard it is an impressive and persuasive performance and deserves the fullest consideration, fuller than I can hope to give here. However, perhaps because it's so good, its ultimate failure tends to irritate the reader. So far, so close, but still wrong! What is the problem?

There is nothing wrong with applying such traditional concepts as "social democratic" and "populist" to the Labor Party and Markey is undoubtedly effective in arraying a vast body of facts and detecting and explaining the variations, shifts and changes that give his thesis weight. But in order to make it stick he should have done more to examine whatever is validly general in these two concepts, and therefore properly applicable to Australia.

The Labor Party is like a social-democratic party, and undoubtedly it is, at times, the people's party. Its aims are broadly social democratic and it has often mobilised "the people", or perhaps more properly the people have mobilised it. Indeed, this is just what happened in 1890/91 in New South Wales. Between October 1890 and March 1891, the initiative of the Trades and Labour Council group that favoured a concerted independent labour entry into politics took off. Whereas, before August 1890, the group led by P.J. Brennan and F.B. Dixon could not muster complete support, thereafter the opposition to the movement for political labour representation crumbled. After a long debate virtually all strands of opinion now accept that it was the Maritime Strike — its causes, course and consequences — that made the difference.

The Australian Labor parties, Don Rawson has pointed out, are rather unusual. He has grouped them with the Labour parties of Britain and New Zealand, and the Scandinavian Social Democratic parties, and it is probably a fair comparison. But Australian Labor is close to being one-off, different to a significant extent to even British and New Zealand Labour, and the difference arises principally in the force of the trade union imprint.

The social mobilisation of the 1880s and 1890s which produced Australian Labor was first and foremost a trade union mobilisation. In a very special community — a small white population thinly spread over vast areas of somebody else's lands, lands which had been locked up by a combination of British capital and descendants of gentry and officer families — the trade unions by the 1880s had become symbolically and actually "the people". Markey emphasises this point although, somewhat dubiously, he stresses the importance of the urban craft unions in contradiction to some of his predecessors, who give the bushworkers top billing. But, for Markey, this was a class movement, not a popular one.

Markey draws a sharp distinction between the 1891 NSW Labour Electoral League (Labor Party) and the later Political Labor League (Labor Party). The first, according to Markey, was social democratic and the other, he says, populist. He likens the LEL to European social democracy because, he asserts, its program concentrated on democratic political and constitutional reform and new laws to strengthen industrial regulation. Such a "class" program proves, Markey believes, that the early NSW Labor Party was clearly a working class party. Later, the situation changed and a bloc of "utopian-socialist politician intellectuals" with the AWU hierarchy produced populist programs embracing broader issues, for example, women's voting rights and — reflecting the AWU's membership aspirations — land reform.

The argument has a certain plausibility, but there are many curiosities about it. One is Markey's handling of socialism and its significance in the emergence of NSW Labor. What is curious is that while, in many ways, giving an excellent account. Markey seems bent on minimising the importance of socialism, both as an ideology and a source of Labor's programmatic and policy aims.

He goes along with most other opinion in dismissing pre-1890 socialism as a significant influence in shaping working-class ideas leading to the setting up of the Labor Electoral League. Although he subtly charts the more militant and moderate wings of the Socialist League, he adores to the curious term "utopian-socialist" to describe the moderate state socialist faction that did form an alliance with moderate trade union leaders.

In short, Markey's simplistic view of working-class consciousness tends to identify it with trade union consciousness. Socialism was only one, if the most important, of a group of 1880s radical movements all of which fed into the Labor Party to some extent. In these movements, or influenced by them, were many almost classic autodidacts — a number of them, both Labor Party and non-Labor Party, were printers — who provided many of the initial cadres of the Labor Party. Certainly there was a sprinkling of men and women of wider education and background. But the great majority were radical working-class agitators or union activists. This is what characterises Australian Labor.

Certainly Markey is correct to point to the populist character of the Labor Party, but the matter is more complicated than he suggests, although the variations in the 1890s reflected the fluid nature of populist ideology. Labor populism in Australia probably has four or five major ideological strands: democratism, liberalism (radicalism), nationalism and socialism. Markey deals, sometimes splendidly, with all these. His explanation of the emergence of fin-de-siecle populism in New South Wales as a shift away from what he calls social democracy can be better explained from within his own account by studying the interaction between these components as hegemonic and would-be hegemonic class factions strive for dominance and attempted to articulate various populist ideological elements into their class discourses. In the Labor Party this process has continued without any basic change down to the 1980s.
Nihilistic blatherings

I never thought I'd read in ALR the eccentric ramblings that flowed forth in The Days of the Left printed, sad to say, in issue number 107. Such venomous play-acting has no place in progressive left journals such as ALR, notwithstanding token editorial disclaimers. As usual with such shallow writers, the face at the bottom of the well is their own — only dags cry "dag".

ALR columnist Diana Simmonds tried to suggest that: the Left is decrepit; Capital is stuffed; Marx and Gramsci were egotistical old bastards; we live in a post-capitalist world; and all "isms" have had it. This script is more worthy of a trendy TV comedy show seeking ratings above all other considerations.

We all know the left has problems. One major problem is that the left is flyblown with whingeing jeremiahs like Ms Simmonds who constantly wail about how the Right threatens to engulf us all, and so on, and on, and on! They draw some comfort from networking or brainstorming such trivia and then become totally incapable of working in a scientific way to overcoming present difficulties.

Instead, "videotronic", "post-capitalist" Diana wants to urgently seek the antithesis of the statement "that absolute power corrupts absolutely" (no joke).

I wish her luck. Such superficial endeavours are normally associated with the more insufferable elitism of pseudo-intellectual dags. dangling on the fringes of any of a dozen self-opinionated cliques spawned in the warm waters of the new left since the 'sixties.

If Marx once said: I have seen the future and I'm glad I'm dead, he must have been talking about Ms Simmonds and those of her ilk.

For the future we need less nihilistic blatherings and more serious analysis of present circumstances.

Chris Warren.
Dulwich Hill, NSW

Thanks, Di.

Thank you, Diana Simmonds! At last someone on the left owns up to what a pompous, complacent lot we've become. If I read one more head-in-the-sand, self-righteous dirge about the deepening crisis of world capitalism and the inevitability of socialism, I think I'm going to have an ideological seizure. Perhaps it's about time some people on the left admitted that we don't have all the answers, and begin looking not just at why not, but at why we thought we did in the first place.

Sue Buckingham.
Sutherland, NSW.

From Kollontai to Madonna

Recently, while fossicking through my wardrobe, I came across an issue of ALR from the late '70s. A mixture of nostalgia and curiosity caused me to flick through the articles on Alexandra Kollontai, a reprint from the Cambridge Journal of Economics on theories of the capitalist state and a review of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, with, it must be added, a page of suggested readings if you wished to pursue the matter further.

An unavoidable comparison with the ALR of today followed.

It seemed that the strength of the old ALR was that it tried to provide a general sort of theoretical guide, a way of interpreting the world, or rather a world, as it often ignored the breadth of popular issues encompassed in the ALR of today.

Thus, Kollontai has been replaced by either Madonna or, in more sober moments, the likes of Jane Singleton. Analyses of the capitalist state have given way to tepid support for the Cain government; and any notion of revolution, permanent or otherwise, is now limited to reviews of Dirty Dancing. And there's no suggested reading.

But this is not as surprising as it may seem: rather, it is consistent with moving away from a general marxist theoretical journal to a popular left magazine. Although there may be some understandable resistance to this move, it does mark at least an attempt by part of the left to move beyond the traditional and, in some way certain, areas of concern, and into the field of popular culture, which is, after all, where most of us actually exist. Hogan is indeed better known than Hegel. And while Marx may ultimately be as well known for his durability as his surplus value, he unfortunately has none of the present currency of Madonna or even Minogue.

Jane Edwards.
Alphington, Vic.

No conspiracy?

In ALR 107, Jock McCulloch dismissed as a fantasy of the "fundamentalist left" the notion that a corporate conspiracy took place to conceal the truth about asbestos in the pursuit of profits. McCulloch wrote, "there is no evidence that either CSR or James Hardie ever succeeded in making money from their asbestos mines and, if any criticism is to be made of those firms, it is that they were incompetent rather than malevolent capitalists." Incredibly, he described these two corporate giants as "casualties" of asbestos.

It is absurd to suggest that CSR and James Hardie did not profit hugely from
asbestos. CSR now claims it closed the Wittenoom mine in 1966 because it "became uneconomic" — after twenty-three years' continuous operation. But the profitability of Wittenoom is really irrelevant since the big money was made from the manufacture and sale of asbestos products. For example, James Hardie, which started making asbestos sheets in 1916, admitted that, as recently as ten years ago, 97 percent of its products were "dependent on the use of asbestos".

The AMWU has established that at least 67 employees from the James Hardie factory at Camellia in Sydney have died from asbestos-related diseases. No doubt other Camellia workers who are now dead were also asbestos victims. Still others will die from asbestos diseases not yet apparent. The Camellia plant stopped making asbestos products in December 1983. When did the company know it was killing its workers?

In a document issued to foremen in November 1967, James Hardie admitted the hazards while attempting to downplay them, stating: "Asbestos, a unique and indispensable material, can only be a risk to health if substantial amounts of airborne asbestos dust are inhaled over a period of several years — say ten or more."

This was a double lie: asbestos is not indispensable and, as the company would have known then, exposure over even a brief period can kill. But even this information was withheld from the workers most exposed to the fibres.

Dozens of Camellia workers have testified that, even into the 'eighties, the factory was filthy with asbestos and they were frequently covered in the stuff. Workers say they were never told it was dangerous, there were no safe-handling instructions and safety gear was either unavailable or inadequate.

Compulsory X-rays were instituted from 1969 but results were often withheld. "They just kept telling me I had bronchitis" is a common complaint of James Hardie asbestos victims. Materials used at the Camellia plant were coded rather than fully labelled, so workers often did not know what they were handling. Consumers were also deceived: products were sold under misleading trade marks such as "K Lite" with "85 percent magnesia" but no mention of asbestos.

The number of deaths was also the subject of a cover-up. In 1978, James Hardie chairman John Reid told the press James Hardie did not know how many of its employees had died from asbestos. This was not true. The company was in receipt of statistics from the NSW Dust Diseases Board that, from February 1968 to March 1978 alone, 116 employees had been certified as having contracted "disabling asbestosis" and of deliberately understated medical these 29 had died, with 22 of the deaths attributable to asbestos diseases. Hardies had been receiving this information from at least 1975.

Finally, asbestos victims seeking compensation are frequently the objects of conspiracies between asbestos companies, insurers and lawyers to drag out legal proceedings in the hope that the plaintiff will die before settlement or judgment. The aim often is to reduce the amount paid to the victim's family who are not entitled to be compensated for pain and suffering endured by a deceased breadwinner.

The asbestos companies covered up the facts about their multi-million dollar industry in order to continue making and selling asbestos products and avoid or reduce payments as a result of litigation. The story is being repeated with human-made mineral fibres. Strong medical evidence suggests that fibreglass in some forms can be just as deadly as asbestos.

The efforts of this union and other concerned organisations to publicise the dangers of fibreglass and force companies to act have met with the same conspiracy of silence, misinformation and deceit that contributed to the deaths of thousands of workers through asbestos.

Chris Ray,
Federal office,
Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union,
Sydney.

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Eating out in Melbourne’s most interesting and cosmopolitan bayside suburb, St Kilda, is an increasingly costly business. Like other inner-suburban communities, St Kilda is being gentrified. Rents are soaring, driving out many of the original low-income residents. As the trendies move in, many of the more modest cafés and restaurants are closing and being replaced by ritzy establishments like Caffe Maximus and Di Stasio’s.

Luckily for residents of more modest means, as well as the tourists who flock (like seagulls?) to St Kilda at night and on weekends, some good eating places survive. Two of the most popular places for the younger set (and the young at heart) are the Stardust and the Galleon Cafe.

At opposite ends of St Kilda, they both provide cheap, imaginative food in interesting surroundings. The Stardust, its name holding out so much romance, is the more upmarket. Its fare ranges from deli-type food like creole drumsticks, spinach and salmon roulade, vegetable croquettes, chicken winglets. That chicken salad and the infamous Stardust veggie burger to more conventional meals like chicken Tango. Salads are fresh and varied. Desserts feature brandy snaps and a chocolate mousse voted by my friends the best in town. The Stardust also serves ‘real fruit malts’ which rival a meal. The potted palms, blackboard art and wooden furniture create a friendly atmosphere.

You can’t help but notice the Galleon Cafe’s decor. It’s the best (or worst, depending on your taste) of 1950s tack — laminex tables, red, blue and yellow vinyl chairs and lurid walls — thrown in with a model galleon, pictures of the Virgin Mary and hundreds of posters advertising cultural and political events. The Galleon is named after a St Kilda bohemian cafe of the Thirties, and it certainly lives up to its name. Artists, lefties, feminists, punks and other fringe dwellers frequent the cafe, which is just around the corner from the famous restaurant and deli section of Acland Street.

The food tends towards snacks and light meals, — soups, pasta, bratwurst, spiders, coffee, teas — My favourites are the tangy tomato and basil soup and the chicken and leek pie. The service is a bit slow, but that doesn’t seem to worry most of the clientele, who are happy to suck on their cappuccinos, chat to friends, peruse the cafe’s newspapers and magazines for hours on end, or just watch the world go by. A couple of years ago the Galleon struggled for its existence above a shop in Acland St. In its new location it thrives, and gives heart that the St Kilda of the Nineties won’t necessarily be dominated by snooty joints like Cafe Maximus . . .

Carmel Shute

January is festival time in sweltering Sydney, with that curious mixture of avant-garde dance and martial band music which is the Festival of Sydney. Highlights for the impecunious, as usual, are the Opera and Symphony in the Park (on Sat 14 and 21 Jan respectively, in the Domain at 8pm). Entrance, is, of course, for nix. This year’s opera is Puccini’s sensual and exciting Tosca, described floridly by the Festival promoters as ‘a gripping tale of murder and intrigue amid the splendours of nineteenth century Rome’. The ‘Symphony’ night, as is also customary, is a more bitty affair, with populist jabs via Gershwin’s An American in Paris and Saint-Saen’s Carnival of the Animals, among others, and the pyrotechnic extravagance of the 1812 Overture in finale.

The Domain won’t have been so crowded since the NSW government drew 100,000 with its Education Cuts Fiasco in one Act, last August . . .

Among the dramatic offerings of the festival (none, alas, free) are Montreal-based contemporary dance troupe La La La Human Steps, Knuckledusters: The Jewels of Edith Sitwell by Sydney actor Kerry Walter, and David Williamson’s latest, Top Silk. For more (recorded) info, ring 00-555-0552, any time.

David Burchell

Prahran market could provide one of the few areas of respite this summer for Melbourne followers of Australia’s cricketing Eleven. As attendances at Test matches fall in rough proportion to the declining average of Australia’s batsmen, resolve Melbourne supporters seem to deserve both the sustenance and diversion the market offers. Before trundling off to the MCG on Saturday mornings to lend vocal support for the locals, the voice as indeed the stomach could be fortified with a strong Greek coffee, a spanakopita and then perhaps a pastry or two. Should you expect the Test to last into the afternoon (and only the most unpatriotic would not) then an ample picnic can be prepared from any one of the numerous Greek delicatessens.

However the reality of the West Indies superiority is never more than a quick tram ride down Chapel Street, that is, unless you decide to opt for that side of Australian cricket which is succeeding internationally. In that case a quick nip across town to Thornbury, where some of Australia’s womens cricket Eleven are playing, is more the order of the day.

Peter McNiece
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