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**AUSTRALIAN LEFT REVIEW : 118 : JUNE 1990**

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The IRA Regrets...

The shooting of two Australians by the IRA in Holland at the end of May was a sharp reminder that there are still parts of Europe where neither peace nor democracy can be taken for granted. In fact the bewildering changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe should serve the useful purpose of focussing attention on the sore points of the West, of which Northern Ireland remains the most obvious example.

As the province prepares for the commemoration of the 300th anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne on July 12th, it is all too easy to see the conflict in Northern Ireland as immune from outside influence, stuck in its own time-frame and with unchanging political cleavages beneath the ebb and flow of the violence. The reactions to Roermond reinforced this static view of the situation. Mrs Thatcher stated bluntly (and inaccurately) that "the IRA are now indiscriminately killing men, women and children". The London Daily Star described them as "vermin". From the other side came the equally predictable and chillingly cynical response that the two Australians were the unfortunate casualties of a colonial war between the IRA and British troops.

It is an illusion, however, that the dreadful stalemate, punctuated by outbursts of abuse and grotesque self-righteousness on all sides, is necessarily permanent. Beneath the veneer of 'stability' (which at the moment means around 100 deaths every year), forces can be detected at work which could cut the ground from under the feet of all the extremist players in Northern Ireland - Republican, Unionist and British alike.

The conflict has typically been portrayed as either a struggle against colonialism (by Republicans), part of an international campaign against terrorism (Unionists and successive British governments) or an incomprehensible religious battle among the "mad Irish" (by a large section of the British population). Now, however, and particularly in the light of Eastern Europe, such formulations, always inadequate, are in danger of being rendered completely redundant by several different factors.

One is democracy. The present troubles in Northern Ireland were sparked off by the Civil Rights marches of 1968, which themselves were partly inspired by student demonstrations in the United States and Western Europe and by the Prague Spring. Much of the blatant discrimination against Catholics which the marchers deplored has been eliminated in the last 20 years, thanks to the removal of the Unionist Party from power. Now new events in Prague and elsewhere are showing up the progress which still needs to be made if Northern Ireland is to be a part of the new democratic Europe.

The fact that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, which is a democracy, does not mean that its people are governed democratically, even by Britain's flawed standards. Both Catholics and Protestants in the province are coming to realise that they will shortly be among the least adequately represented people in Europe. They elect 17 MPs to the Westminster parliament, none of whom belong to mainland political parties, and who therefore have little input into fundamental national issues such as the economy. Nor do they have a direct influence on legislation specifically concerned with Northern Ireland, legislation which is not even subject to the normal parliamentary committee procedure.

Since the institution of direct rule from Westminster in 1972, there has been no provincial assembly with any real power, while local government has been forced to surrender just about every function more important than garbage collection. This shameful lack of genuine representation is at last beginning to exercise some minds in new directions. Some Unionists, equally as disenfranchised as the Catholics, are beginning to consider independence for Northern Ireland as a serious alternative to their beloved union with Britain.

While this in itself is hardly a promising option for the Catholic minority, it is at least evidence of the gradual disintegration of old ways of thinking about the problem. There are also moves in the British Labour party to persuade it to organise and stand candidates in the province, as the Tories have recently started to do. Labour, however, is reluctant to compromise its long-term goal of a united Ireland in exchange for meaningful representation in the here and now, and is unwilling to stand against the nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party because of the first-past-the-post electoral system. Thus the growing support within the party for proportional representation (and other constitutional changes) could prove to be another unexpected factor in the Northern Ireland equation.

At the same time, the accelerating integration of Western Europe will have a significant impact on both Northern Ireland and the Republic. Despite the romanticisation of the Republican cause by many on the Left, the 'actually existing' Republic remains one of the most reactionary countries in Europe, its government still shackled to the Catholic Church in a way long since left behind even by Italy and Spain. In 1986 its people voted four to one against the limited legalisation of divorce. Anti-abortion dogma is written into the constitution; all contraceptives require a doctor's prescription.

Such conservative positions can only be ameliorated by the moves towards a 'Social Charter' for Europe, and the adoption of laws conforming to minimum European standards. Ireland, whose woeful economy relies heavily on EEC farming subsidies, cannot afford not to change, however reluctantly. Social bigotry flourishes...
among Northern Ireland's Protestant ideologies too - homosexuality was only recently legalised in the province - and the secularisation of the laws of both the UK and Ireland under European influence will be a far more powerful factor in uniting Irish people across religious divides than any political or military campaigns.

The effects of these external influences will be long-term and gradual. Yet they represent the possibility of changing the terms of the debate on Ireland from the tired arguments about the political status of the North towards long-neglected questions of civil rights and social justice for people in both parts of the island.

Given these circumstances it's interesting to reflect on the levels of support for the most intransigent 'political' positions, represented by the IRA and the British government. Sinn Fein's vote has dropped below 10% in the North and to derisory levels in the Republic, making their claim to somehow represent 'the people' of Ireland entirely fraudulent.

On the other hand, opinion polls in Britain show regular majorities in favour of withdrawal from Northern Ireland. These two facts taken together, as well as the disillusion among Unionists with their marginalised position seem to suggest that the time is right for all parties concerned to reassess their ossified positions.

In practice, this means the Irish Republic renouncing its claim to the territory of Northern Ireland and examining its own blighted political culture; Unionists recognising the genuine fears and aspirations of Northern Catholics; and Britain according people in Northern Ireland the same democratic rights as everyone else in the UK.

No matter where the lines are drawn on the map, Northern Irish Catholics and Protestant have to coexist in the future. If they are to do so peacefully, the debate needs to be about concrete issues such as desegregating schools and ways to make local democracy work rather than 'political solutions' and 'defeating terrorism'. Although appalling events like Roermond would seem to preclude any optimism about an early end to the cycle of violence, the faint signs in the background are that Irish politics may be about to be dragged kicking and screaming into the 20th century.

Mike Ticher.

Romanian Holiday

Four short months after the dictatorship's fall, Romania's voters legitimised its successor with an overwhelming majority.

The ruling Front for National Salvation's (FNS) lopsided victory on May 20 is a severe blow for the democracy movement here. Out of step with a national consciousness permeated by the logic of the old regime, the activists must now rethink their long-term strategy. Extremist tendencies within their ranks, however, jeopardise the movement's potential as a progressive force in the country's fragile civil society.

The democracy movement is a continuation of the revolution hijacked by the former old guard as President Nicolae Ceausescu attempted to flee the country. At first only a couple of hundred students remained in the streets to protest at the Front's sanguine seizure of power. The numbers soon swelled when the FNS moved from a provisional coalition of dissenters and intellectuals to a party dominated by former apparatchiks, the old state mechanisms still being behind it.

By early May, daily demonstrations packed Bucharest's University Square. Hunger strikers and encamped activists occupied the central intersection, draping the area with anti-Front banners and artwork. Around their sunburned necks hung placards with the label FNS president Ion Iliescu has assigned them - Golan, or hooligan.

The Golans' chief objective, to ban former Securitate (Ceausescu's secret police) and nomenclature from the election, was a constructive attempt to make a clean break with the past.

In the activists' first attempt at grassroots organising and coalition building, the 'revolution's flag bearers rallied around the Timisoara Proclamation, a petition demanding the purge of the old apparatus, civil rights and reconciliation with the national minorities. The opposition amassed several million signatures and the support of hundreds of political and cultural organisations for the document.

Yet the movement, concentrated in Bucharest and Timisoara, has been unable to reach the rural population or establish broad solidarity with the working class. "Twenty million people woke up on December 24 with Iliescu as a Christmas present", noted one demonstrator. For those who never took to the streets, the marginally improved food and energy supplies appeared the tangible result of the Front's takeover. In the countryside, concepts of democracy and political opposition are as unformed as before the revolution. The 'bad father'
Ceaucescu was simply replaced by the 'good father' Illiescu.

But the Front's years are numbered, as Romania orients itself to a political culture more in tune with its past than reform communism. The fledgling democracy movement could offer one alternative. At the same time, the new emphasis on nationalist-religious values points in another direction, one with wide potential appeal here. The ideology has deep roots in Romania. It found its clearest expression in the movements of the inter-war period which culminated in the fascist regime of the 'forties.

Among the democratic movement's troubling features, no positive program is under discussion to replace the despised communists. "Down with the Front! Down with the Securitate! Down with communism!" the chants and speeches repeat over and over. Other themes, such as the environment, the economy or social problems are conspicuously absent from debate.

The one-track campaign has prevented a constructive social dialogue from opening new space within the public forum. Intellectuals and student leaders, for example, have yet to meet. The preoccupation with 'anti' themes has bred a hate psychology that could easily find less deserving victims once the Front's day has come.

Though still beneath the surface, the political vacuum within the movement has been insidiously filled by conservative values suppressed - as well as manipulated - during the stalinist era. Behind the democratic facade, the demonstrators' animosity toward the government is no less fuelled by the Front's comparatively mild nationalist rhetoric and secularism.

The religious outburst followed the revolution in reaction to the amoral politics of the dictatorship, "It's fashionable now to be religious," said one student, echoing the new-found faith throughout the opposition. While the converts distance themselves from the Orthodox Church hierarchy that collaborated with the fascist and communist governments alike, they embrace the implicitly anti-modern, authoritarian ethic of the church philosophy.

The nationalistic impulse surfaced in full force after the Tîrgu Mureș events in April when ethnic Hungarians and Romanians clashed, leaving three people dead. The violence unleashed a storm of nationalism and anti-Hungarian sentiment, encouraged by the distorted coverage of every major newspaper. The blind patriotism is the same that Ceaucescu so skilfully nurtured - only now it has room for concrete expression.

The 'Hungary complex' is most acute in the more ethnically homogeneous regions of Moldavia and Wallachia (capital Bucharest), that lack the experience of multi-ethnic co-existence. The vast majority of activists there are convinced that Transylvanian Hungarians have separatist designs backed by the Hungarian government. The distrust has perpetuated a Romanian chauvinism directed against the minority and hostility toward their demands for cultural rights.

The nationalist fervour has also drawn the movement closer to extremist political groups. Most of the protesters support the centre-right National Liberal Party. Simultaneously, roughly half the Bucharest students express sympathy with the neo-fascist organisation Vatra Romaneasca. This Transylvanian-based organisation poses as a Romanian cultural society, while espousing a crude xenophobic nationalism aimed at the ethnic Hungarians.

The movement's emphasis is somewhat different in Timisoara, the country's western-most city, in which the democratic resistance first found its voice. Timisoara and the surrounding Banat region boast a relatively harmonious, multi-cultural society of Romanians, Hungarians, Serbs and Germans. Through its propinquity to the West, democratic and mercantilist traditions give it an identity distinct from the eastern regions.

In the three-week occupation of Opera Square before the election, workers and professionals outnumbered students. An atmosphere of tolerance was evident as people gathered every evening to discuss and debate issues. A variety of citizens' groups are active, addressing different social problems through community initiatives. The Greater Romania sentiment is absent, at least from demonstrations.

The nationwide movement must follow Timisoara's example, as it has in the past, if it is to formulate a progressive vision for the future. The democratic opposition, however, confronts its course with no anti-capitalist, anti-stalinist left; nationalism on the rise; and an assortment of opportunistic parties seemingly bent on ousting the Front.

Chances seem remote for the broad social dialogue between government and opposition, among the nationalities and within the movement itself, that could build upon the existing structures of civil society.

The Front and its democratically sanctioned security apparatus could well crack down on the activists and propel them further along a reactionary, perhaps violent, path. The spirit of Timisoara has defied all odds before - its enlightenment is critical again to safeguard the revolution's legacy.

PAUL HOCKENOS writes for ALR on Central and Eastern Europe from his base in Budapest.
Egalitarian, peace-loving and a delightful shade of dark green, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles live deep in the bowels of New York - the sewers, actually - where they perfect their martial arts skills under their master, Splinter, a rat.

Like all teenagers, they're hooked on pizza, talk in sub-rap/surf speak and kid each other round with wise-cracks and put-downs. Unlike most teenagers, they're 'heroes in a half-shell', fighting all sorts of baddies with their Ninja arts and disappearing to all kinds of planets and space places to battle their foes: Rocksteady, Bebop, The Shredder and others.

The Turtles are a 'nineties marketing marvel, in fact. Their comic books (there's an adult version, still drawn by original creators Eastman and Laird, and a more light-hearted kids' version) and their cartoon series (currently showing on the Seven Network here) made them huge and desirable for kids both in the USA and many other parts of the world: the United Kingdom, Canada, Hong Kong, Malaysia and some places I can't even pronounce - according to Mark Freedman, the man who signed the licensing deal to promote the Turtles in 1986.

Playmates Toys, who make the plastic action Turtle toys, are talking $US150 million in Turtle sales. The Nintendo game has generated $250 million since it was launched. Turtlefood (cereal, cookies, burgers, pizza, pork rinds, yoghurt), Turtlegames, Turtlebooks, Turtleposters, Turtlerecords, Turtle T-shirts, Turtlevideos ... you name it, it comes in Turtle.

And now the movie which is going to bring the whole kaboodle to a peak. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles comes complete with the catchphrase "this is not a cartoon, dude!" and leaves in its trail a bunch of problems. The Turtles have been criticised for violent tendencies - the cartoon show is reported to have 34 acts of violence every hour, (though of course each episode only runs for half an hour). The film was criticised for having a similar ratio of violent acts, though its $US25 million opening weekend would suggest that few parents - in the USA, at least, - care very much about such warnings. At any rate, the aim of the live-action Turtles film was to appeal to kids and adults, rather than be a purely cuteisie production. It treads a fine line, and it will tread on a few consciences as well. Though no blood is spilt and there is, in fact, only one actual death (a semi-accidental one, at that!) parents might be alarmed by a gruesome glint in their children's eyes as they anticipate the next Turtle clobberin' in TMNT.

For what it's worth, the Turtles aren't quite as gruesome as they're painted. Indeed, one retailer explains the success of the action toys as being the inherent humour in the whole concept - apart from anything else, their thoroughly ridiculous name.

The "Mutant" in the title also seems to cause a lot of trouble for some parents and critics, even though the Turtles' mutancy is presented as completely positive (it gave them human characteristics). A recent newspaper cartoon in the Sydney Telegraph Green Guide showed one "Violent Mutiated Tortoise"
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blasting another into oblivion; the cartoon was there to illustrate an article on the uselessness of children's television in the afternoons. Richard Neville, writing in the Sydney Morning Herald, in his new guise as guardian of public morals, managed a withering comment on the Turtles' cruel and wicked battle gear currently on the market.

Of course, if the Turtles were true ‘full-on’ Mutants wearing their entrails on the outside and displaying four Freddy Kruegeresque heads ready to be blasted into blood by knives and guns, this would hardly limit their appeal to the kiddies. But as it happens, the Turtles set a fine example, as TV examples go.

Associate Professor Grant Noble from the psychology department of the University of New England, NSW, recently prepared a report on the “likely impact” of the toys from the TMNT series for the toys’ Australian licensees. Noble denies immediately that the toys are ‘victim toys’ and adds that while some of the Turtles’ enemies are rather ugly, no one in the series is suffering, damaged or mutilated.

Noble concedes that children will play with the Ninja toys in an aggressive manner - “however I would not expect these toys to invoke any more aggression in the play of children aged between six to thirteen than from many other toys currently available”.

At any rate, the good characters in TMNT are very ‘good’. “The group does not go out looking for wrongs to right,” he says. “Rather the evil plans of The Shredder tend to impinge on the turtles’ lives so they are almost forced to move into action to preserve the status quo.”

Noble is also enthusiastic about the “overall tone” of the TV show, claiming it to be “tongue-in-cheek”. “For example,” he says, “at the end of one episode one turtle comments to the camera, ‘it may not be realistic but it is a happy ending’.”

Of course, Grant Noble was doing a report for the merchandisers, and his comments have to be taken in that context. But from my own casual viewing of the program I would have to say I agree with him. I don’t enjoy watching children’s action cartoons myself and even a relatively high-calibre, imaginative concept like the Ninja Turtles is a bit of a bore for this 25-year-old. But violence in Ninja Turtledom is minimal, and death is completely absent. In fact, the overall tone of the show is more Utopian than anything else.

The film is a lot more fun, and the live-action Turtles are pretty impressive, too. Their facial expressions are the work of Jim Henson’s Creature Shop, and Ninja Turtles was the last major project Henson worked on before his death earlier this year. The film makes a few concessions to an older audience, just in case you thought you were going to be allowed not to think for an hour and a half— one reference (to The Grapes of Wrath) went right over my head. As per Noble’s judgment on the cartoon show, the Turtles are utterly victimised by a gang of thieves called The Foot before they actually take any action at all - their leader, Splinter, is kidnapped and their friend April O’Neil’s home is ruined before the Turtles manage any sort of out-and-out retribution. In fact, one wonders why they’re so slow to do anything.

Casey Jones, a (human) vigilante and Turtle ally, finds he has a heart, and wins over a large percentage of The Foot with an emotive argument rather than a whack with his hockey stick. Splinter the rat talks young Danny Pennington reasonably out of his anti-social thieving ways. Beautiful.

Australian children are Turtle crazy, there’s no denying it. But anyone who wants to condemn them outright should just look back at the state of Batman in last year’s blockbuster movie. Emotionally troubled, psychologically scarred, a lonely millionaire with a ruthless streak...now, that guy had problems!

DAVID NICHOLS writes for Smash Hits magazine.
Though founded just five years ago the Fiji Labour Party has experienced more in its brief life than most social democratic groups born out of stable democracies would suffer in generations - two military coups, a five-week government two years after the party's foundation, and now two charismatic leaders.

When Adi Kuini Vuikaba Bavadra was elected to fill the party's leadership following the sudden death of her husband from cancer late last year, the party hierarchy and their coalition colleagues sighed with relief so audibly it was heard from Nadi to Suva.

Adi Kuini is a ranking chief from the western province of Nadroga ('Adi' is a hereditary chiefly title for women used in the same way as Dame in the English system), as well as a journalist and trade union activist. She is thought by many of her followers to be willing to support what is best in the traditional Fijian chiefly system, of which she is a product, but also to ditch its negative features in favour of change and reform.

Fijian leaders are expected to be all things to all people. In a society dominated by traditional rituals and ceremonies in which time is a foreign intrusion, leaders are expected to participate for hours while traditional villagers or political supporters send them on their way.

The night before Adi Kuini left for her first overseas trip as party leader, thousands of supporters gathered in her beautiful seaside village of Veiseisei to farewell her. She was kept up till 1.30, and had to leave at 3.30 am to fly to Sydney. Following a 9am arrival, Adi Kuini then held a tough airport press conference, sustained a traditional Fijian welcome, recorded a live interview on ABC radio, five more radio interviews, a TV studio interview and a TV news interview before 4 o'clock. All in a day's work. By 5.30 she was bound for Canberra, where another round of wellwishers awaited her. More food, more wine and more speeches.

Most Pacific leaders would never put up with such a schedule, and they would certainly brook at being asked 'impertinent' questions by aggressive Australian journalists who don't conform to the script of tame interviews in their home countries.

If Adi Kuini is to go on to become Fiji's third prime minister since independence in 1970, she will need all her considerable skills to help turn traditionalists into reformists. For if the current regime is successful in implementing the draft constitution it seems almost certain that the Coalition parties will have to capture at least 70% of the vote to even have a chance of winning. Then they have to hope the army will accept the verdict.

Give or take a couple of thousand, Fiji's two main races are equally balanced numerically. In 1987 the Labour-led Coalition won because it was able to attract about 10% of the ethnic Fijian vote to add to roughly 85% of the Fiji Indian vote. The Coalition parties now believe that they can count on 90% or more of the Indian support and at least 30% of Fijian support. This would give them around 65% of the vote - a result most social democratic parties only dream of.

But in the Fiji parliament envisaged by the current military-appointed rulers, 65% is likely to leave the Coalition parties with a bare 30 seats out of 69. A combination of racially based communal voting, a whopping gerrymander against urban and western Fijians and a huge inbuilt bias against the number of Indian MPs, will make it very hard for Adi Kuini to win.

Prime Minister Ratu Mara recently claimed in the obscenity of Geneva that he envisaged elections by next year. At present Adi Kuini and the two Coalition parties are considering their options. There is support for an electoral boycott. But that would leave the government with a full house of corrupt leaders, who, like Coloured and Indian MPs in South Africa, could be paraded as international apologists for the regime. To participate in the elections, on the other hand, would legitimise the racist constitution in the eyes of the international community.

A third possibility is for the Coalition parties to take part but only with the intention of making the result a referendum on the constitution itself. On this basis it is expected the document would be rejected by a huge margin, possibly more than two to one.

Whether Adi Kuini becomes the region's first woman PM will be determined by events both domestic and international. In Fiji she has to successfully offer reform to traditionalists with a promise of a better deal under social democracy than military rule. Internationally she needs to convince specific countries and forums not to give support to a constitution based on apartheid principles. Adi Kuini's foreign policy strategy is to bring international pressure to bear on the regime in Fiji, so introducing more democratic constitutional standards, and enabling the opposition to challenge for office with some hope of being allowed to win.

DALE KEELING is editor of Fiji Voice.
Michael Stutchbury argues that the federal government's recent forays into the state of our media raise more questions than they solve.

After only months of his fourth term as Treasurer, Paul Keating has made three major decisions affecting the face of Australia's oligopoly capitalism. All three have made Keating look like a regulator and a nationalist - the opposite of his track record over the previous six years.

The first was to enforce a 20% foreign ownership level for Australia's highly regulated television network, and specifically for Alan Bond's Nine Network. The second was to reject a $3.4 billion takeover proposal by the ANZ Banking Group of the National Mutual Life Association. The third was to give the early thumbs-down to a bid by British newspaper magnate Robert Maxwell to spend $250 million buying 49% of the West Australian newspaper owned by Alan Bond's Bell Resources.

The Channel Nine and West Australian decisions are both acute examples of the big foreign debt for foreign equity swap going on in the Australian economy. As corporate 'entrepreneurs' such as Bond are forced to sell off the empires they built up with borrowed foreign money in the 'eighties, they are confronted with a buyers' market. Unlike pre-October 1987, there are no mug punters left to speculate on a bull market.

Bond and the others now find themselves in financial quicksand. Their only hope of survival is to flog off their empires to foreigners - there simply isn't much local money around, even at fire sale prices.

This means that the end result of the rise and fall of the entrepreneurs will be increased foreign ownership of the Australian economy. This is not all bad. Australia will always need high levels of foreign capital inflow to finance its economic development - the only alternative at present is a sharply lower dollar and reduced standards of living. And too much of this inflow over the 'eighties has been in the form of debt rather than equity. But are television stations and newspapers so economically or culturally 'strategic' that they should be quarantined from Keating's more general 'open door' foreign investment policy?

Television undoubtedly has strategic qualities in terms of 'national identity' - which appears to have driven opposition to foreign equity from the federal Labor Caucus and from Communications Minister Kim Beazley (who has quickly made it clear that he is no textbook economic dry). However, the cultural implications of increased foreign ownership of our private television oligopoly are overstated. It is not as if the three existing Australian-owned networks are national treasures of high quality broadcasting. They are clones of each other and regurgitate a junk diet of sport, low quality current affairs and cultural pap.

As well, there are more direct and potentially more potent ways to influence the broadcasting output than arbitrary limits on foreign ownership. The first is the two government-owned television networks. The second is direct regulation by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, such as through local content rules. A final important factor is that, by restricting foreign equity in both television and newspapers, Canberra is lowering the price that Bond can get for his media assets - and thus increasing his losses. While few will weep over this, the upshot will be a bonus for Kerry Packer and Rupert Murdoch.

Packer wins, of course, because Canberra's scratching of foreign bidders means that he ends up spending virtually nothing to regain control of the Nine Network that he sold to Bond for $1 billion in 1987. Murdoch wins because Canberra has obligingly stopped one of his strongest competitors, Maxwell, from gaining a foothold in Australia - what Murdoch used to call home before he became an American citizen.

Keating has little time for Maxwell. He had already rejected proposals two years ago for Maxwell to buy the Melbourne Age from the junk bond-ridden Fairfax group. But it becomes a very tricky business when Canberra starts to pick and choose who is allowed or forbidden to run a newspaper in Australia. What are the criteria which would differentiate between Maxwell, Murdoch, Packer or Warwick Fairfax junior?

Keating's other decision - to block the ANZ-National Mutual deal - contains similar conundrums. In many ways, the takeover is the logical result of the ground rules already set by Keating. The ANZ and the National Mutual are financial intermediaries involved in the business of tapping the savings of households. Keating's ground rules have given a tax advantage to saving in the form of superannuation rather than through bank deposits. Superannuation funds are projected to grow six-fold to $600 billion by the year 2000.

Keating's stated reason for rejecting the takeover as 'contrary to the national interest' is that a merger between Australia's third biggest private bank and its second largest insurance company would unduly lessen competition. Keating will let the banks in on the superannuation bonanza - but only if they build up custom themselves.

Here it is clear that Keating has learned a lesson about oligopoly capitalism. This one-time protege of Jack Lang has always mistrusted Australia's private banking cartel for its anti-Labor bias. This is one reason why he deregulated the finance sector and allowed in the foreign banks.

But to everyone's surprise, the local banking cartel has remained just as powerful and profitable since deregulation. Most of the foreign banks have been a flop. Some of them are now starting to pack their bags. And so Keating is not going to give the local banks a free entry into the superannuation bonanza.

MICHAEL STUTCHBURY is the economics editor of the Australian Financial Review.
UNIONS
at the
CROSSROADS

The centrepiece of union strategy for the last seven years has been the Accord. More recently, the cutting edge of union innovation has been in the field of award restructuring. Now, however, both projects lie in the balance. Accord Mark VI, according to its critics, leads unions too far down the path of the business agenda. And award restructuring, it is argued, has been mired by the push for 'micro-reform'. In our special feature on the union movement's crisis of direction, Clare Curran talks to award restructuring architect Chris Lloyd, while Peter Ewer, Meredith Burgmann and Susan Gray debate the movement's controversial advocacy of enterprise bargaining.
The Accord has become irrelevant and should be abandoned. Award restructuring is in grave danger of faltering, with government and employers intent only on quick-fix solutions. Clare Curran talked to Chris Lloyd, a key player in the development of the restructuring model for Australian industry. His views on these and other questions make startling, and often pessimistic, reading.

Chris Lloyd is a national research officer for the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union (AMWU). He has worked with the Metal Trades Federation of Unions (MTFU) since 1985. He has been primarily responsible for the development over the last three years of the metal industry award restructuring model. He spent 10 years in the Communist Party of Australia. Although he is currently not a member of a political party he has a close interest in political developments on the Left.

On March 20 this year, just four days before a federal election, the metal industry award was settled. The agreement was reached not only on the eve of an election, but also as the metal unions were poised to go out in support of claims which, for months, had been the subject of hard negotiation. One of those claims, the right to training in work time, had been fought for tooth and nail from the beginning. The end result, achieved at a time when the unions held a strong bargaining position, astonished and angered many unionists.

What was hammered out behind closed doors certainly averted a national strike by the most powerful union just days before a crucial election. So was it a political deal to protect the chances of a fourth Labor term? And if there was a deal for the sake of a Labor victory, will the government back it up with dollars as well as words? Will the metal industry award provide the crucial blueprint to reconstruct the nation’s ailing industry base?

Did the metal unions achieve what they wanted with the metal industry award?

It’s true the result wasn’t exactly what was claimed for, but as is the case in all industrial relations environments, the metal industry was never going to get everything it was after.

Was the award settlement a setback for training in the industry?

The main limitations of the award agreement is that there still needs to be an enormous commitment by government and employers to training. That means taking training committees seriously, taking consultative committees seriously. But, unfortunately, the culture of industry is not up to that.

What are the main problems facing award restructuring now that the award is settled?

It’s a problem of resources. There’s a lack of national commitment by the government, the unions and the employers to inject cash into the training system, actually to train the thousands of process workers who make Kambrook Kettles, Ford Falcons, and Email Refrigerators, to understand quality concepts or to do minor or even major engineering tasks.

Would you agree that the reason for that lack of commitment among employers is because there is no provision in the award to train their employees?

But it’s not true to say we got nothing out of them. What we got is what we’ve always had in this industry, the right to go out and achieve a result on a plant-by-plant basis. The limitation of that is obvious. In our strong shops we will achieve it, but in our weak shops we won’t. I’m not going to pretend that’s what we were supposed to get and what our membership desired. We were explicitly told paid training leave was on the agenda.

But Chris Lloyd maintains the final metal industry deal and the way it was settled is not the real concern. “The dangers of award restructuring in all industries is that flexibility will become the main agenda. And the employers will duck the training skills argument because it costs and they’re not ideologically up to understanding its purpose.”

What do you mean when you talk about enterprise flexibility?
Specifically it means working 12-hour shifts, no penalty rates, and flexibility in annual leave. Generally it means much more than that. It is the argument about enterprise bargaining. It is a compromise that has been forced on the trade union movement where there has to be a flexibility at enterprise level on everything. It doesn't matter whether it's the hours of work, the amount of training, or the number of skills you hold.

That sounds like the NSW model.

It is. But the point really is that there's a lack of commitment to the process by government and by the employers. I accept that some employers are committed to the concepts behind award restructuring...increased training, increased skills. But the problem is the bulk of their membership and the federal government is now convinced that it has to get a quick fix solution to Australia's micro-reform problems. We just don't have the power in an environment where BHP and CRA are kings in the exporting game. The government will always be thinking "Well, what's a quick way around the problem. Let's make them work harder and faster". That's enterprise bargaining. Cut workers' ability in weaker shops to be helped by a centralised negotiating process. But if we don't make investment today in the skills of labour for export products, we are finished, literally finished as a manufacturing nation.

Despite his gloomy predictions, Lloyd does point out that historically the metal unions react well to adversity by going out and achieving results in plant by plant campaigns.

“Peter Morris (the former Industrial Relations Minister) talked consistently last year about the importance of centralised awards being restructured and commitments to training. Then, during the lead-up to the election, the rhetoric changed. The government started to put up similar arguments to those of the Liberals. They argued that we have to get more flexibility at the plant level. Individual groups of workers and employers will make decisions about exactly what goes on in that plant, but they will do so without any organised national focus towards new products, new training and quality.”

The federal government's desire to pursue that track while still maintaining a rhetoric of skills and training is driven by the need for a quick fix. In other words, a quick injection of productivity. And that's got to be by enterprise flexibility. The long term gain of building up skills is not really on the agenda.”

Are the metal unions going to keep it on the agenda?

We are constrained in how much we can do because we represent manufacturing labour and are therefore always politically second best to Australia's agricultural and mining exporters. Their view is completely different from that of manufacturing. Therefore it's almost impossible to get a full commitment by government or employers to a massive investment in training. We just don't have the power in an environment where BHP and CRA are kings in the exporting game. The government will always be thinking "Well, what's a quick way around the problem. Let's make them work harder and faster". That's enterprise bargaining. Cut workers' ability in weaker shops to be helped by a centralised negotiating process. But if we don't make investment today in the skills of labour for export products, we are finished, literally finished as a manufacturing nation.

Lloyd claims there was a subtle shift in government rhetoric on enterprise bargaining during the build-up to the March federal election.

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That the NSW and federal government agendas are at opposite ends of the industrial relations spectrum is something of a myth, argues Lloyd.

“Sections 115 and 118 of the new Federal Industrial Relations Act allow enterprise agreements: they allow exactly what NSW Premier Nick Greiner wants to do. Greiner's just going a stage further with a bit of ideological claptrap.

“The federal government's desire to pursue that track while still maintaining a rhetoric of skills and training is driven by the need for a quick fix. In other words, a quick injection of productivity. And that's got to be by enterprise flexibility. The long term gain of building up skills is not really on the agenda.”

For nearly eight years of the Accord a whole generation of workers has achieved wage increases from a highly centralised process that doesn't really involve them. Most new workers aren't aware of the history of wage fixing - the Fraser years, the industrial campaigns of the 'sixties and 'seventies. Workers who do remember these things are struggling to understand why, in a period of the 'eighties when there was substantial productivity and profit improvements in Australian manufacturing, they got such dismal results out of it. It's not surprising that so many workers are cynical about individual unions or the ACTU...What is definitely missing among workers is the belief that they actually have some power in the wage fixing process. Removing that power has led a lot of them to be somewhat uninterested and cynical about the way
because of their inability to change, their inability to mould how much money the car industry seems to have poured into a quality product. It’s an appalling fact of life that no matter how many the tariff wall coming down it will mean the death of a lot of those places. But that would have happened anyway. Award restructuring was a rescue attempt. There are going to be entire sections of the metal industry that will disappear because of their inability to change, their inability to build a quality product. It’s an appalling fact of life that no matter how much money the car industry seems to have poured into new models, it still has major quality problems.

What implications are there for the Accord Mark VI? Should it continue to be supported by the union movement?

The Accord has been a tool of economic policy for industrial relations. Lloyd also claims there are a large numbers of union delegates who recognise the advantages of award restructuring. But will it advantage the semi-skilled, particularly process workers like Raelene Davis (see box) in shops where the employers aren’t so keen on training? The simple answer is obviously large numbers of places are going nowhere and with the tariff wall coming down it will mean the death of a lot of those places. But that would have happened anyway. Award restructuring was a rescue attempt. There are going to be entire sections of the metal industry that will disappear because of their inability to change, their inability to build a quality product. It’s an appalling fact of life that no matter how much money the car industry seems to have poured into new models, it still has major quality problems.

NOWHERE TO GO

Award restructuring isn’t going to make much difference to the women who work with Raelene Davis. Most are process workers with non-English speaking backgrounds. She believes there isn’t much likelihood of training opportunities giving the women access to more skills and better pay. The first barrier for most is learning English.

Raelene is a shop steward at Containers Packaging in West Footscray, Melbourne. Most of the 300 workers belong to the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union (AMWU) - 80% are non-trades and of non-English speaking backgrounds.

The factory has been running English classes for several years. But Raelene says most women can’t take advantage of them because they are held during the daylight hours, and most work shifts. “A lot start the courses, but have to pull out. An extra hour out of work time doesn’t sound much, but it is when you’ve got to pick the kids up.”

Raelene believes more women at the plant would take up the courses if they were held during the rostered shift times. She says those who have attended classes are definitely better off. “Their jobs become easier, they can communicate better.”

But while award restructuring and English classes may be helping the men to improve their skills, the women are being left behind and may even lose their jobs. “In the past the mechanic has run the machine and the packer packed the product. The company’s view of award restructuring is for one person to do both. Most women don’t want to be mechanics. And they haven’t got much chance of that happening anyway. They’ve nowhere to go.”

centrally determining wages. Obviously a centralised wage fixing system is still necessary to ensure wage protection. But there has to be a question mark over Accord Mark VI. There has to be commitment by government, by employers and by ourselves to long term change. While I understand and follow the rhetoric of the ACTU...the reality is that to most (union) members Accord Mark VI looks horribly like the in-print version of the government’s rhetoric on enterprise bargaining. There is a real danger of unions destroying the last links of credibility with their members.

So where do you stand on the Accord?

I think it should be abandoned in its present form. I’m not opposed to an Accord process, but it’s got to change. Most unionists don’t understand what it is and if they do, they know it’s bad. The Accord Mark VI is in real danger of simply being an instrument to force everybody to enterprise bargaining. I’m not sure it’s useful any more for the Accord to be negotiated solely between a peak union body and governments. I think it’s time we started negotiating on an industry basis. The Australian trade union movement has some experience with that in the steel industry for example. It’s a better model than simply going out and making decisions about wage fixing, which is really all Accord Mark VI does.

Are these questions being debated?

No, not really. I think the Left has a problem intervening at the moment because the main supporters of this process have been Left unions. And we supported it for good reasons, to maintain a centralised wage fixing system. But it’s ironic that a lot of the Left who in the past have been highly critical of Kelty and the government are now supporters of the Accord process. The lack of debate about an alternative Accord process is a big problem, Lloyd believes. While he would not support wholesale abandoning of the Accord, he does urge debate on changing the process. But he concedes there is distinct lack of forums within the Left to allow credible alternatives to surface.

“What forums are available? The ACTU is not a forum for alternatives to be discussed. And the Labor Party? I’ve watched the Labor Party use its forums as battlegrounds between personalities and pre-selections. And that’s the reality of bureaucratic life...power. The traditional base of criticism for the union movement Left and the academic Left, the social welfare Left and other related interest groups is the alternative political parties. It used to be the Communist Party. Now we need a new organisation.”

But that new organisation doesn’t appear to be surfacing. In the case of the New Left Party it appears to be struggling.

Yes, it does. But the objective conditions for a new organisation are excellent. The Labor Party’s membership is declining or fundamentally changing its nature. There is an enormous electoral space out there for a party which is capable of coming to terms with the issues that matter to the people who vote in that space.

CLARE CURRAN writes for ALR on industrial issues. Her last article was on the Tasmanian Green/Labor Accord.
The current debate over enterprise bargaining contains within it a powerful irony. After all, it is not so long ago that smashing (or at least marginalising) the award-based arbitration system was an article of Left faith, a sentiment exemplified by a succession of plant-level over-award campaigns.

Yet nowadays strategic employer organisations and the Liberal Party are offering just that, while the energies of the Left are absorbed in award restructuring.

The conversion of the Left to the defence of a socially regulated labour market is no doubt heavily informed by the debacle over financial deregulation. On that occasion, outright opposition to deregulation avoided coming to grips with the more fundamental capital market. Largely bereft of ideas along these lines, it was no wonder the Left was reduced to the role of spectator as the deregulatory juggernaut rolled on.

Fortunately, the Left's response to the challenge of either modernising regulation of the labour market, or seeing that regulation swept aside, has been more energetic (and, thus far, successful). And who seriously could question that modernisation was not necessary? The infinite division of labour contained within the country's largest federal award - the Metal Industry Award - was truly a triumph of scientific management. Classification 216 might hopefully serve as a tombstone of Australian Taylorism, defined as it was thus - "Fitter, making, repairing, assembling, reassembling setting, installing or testing cooking stoves, ovens, gas or electric stoves over 900mm in width and up to 1500mm in width". (P.S. No thinking allowed.)

In struggling to remove such dead wood from the regulatory regime, the metal unions have sought to establish a nation-wide career path of fourteen celebrated levels, based on portable skills and accredited training. In reply, the employers have emphasised 'flexibility provisions', to be negotiated at the plant level, an agenda undoubtedly motivated by the desire of the Metal Trades Industry Association (MTIA) not to isolate itself from the Business Council of Australia (BCA) line. The subsequent inclusion of both these positions in the restructured Metal Industry Award opens up some testing issues about how they might be reconciled.

The inclusion of enterprise bargaining within awards began with agreements negotiated by the National Union of Workers and the Clerks Union, which opened up for negotiation at the plant level any matter, provided the outcome was agreed by a majority of workers involved and the union, and it received the sanction of the Industrial Relations Commission. With these precedents established, other awards have followed suit.

To a very large extent, then, 'enterprise bargaining' is already with us and, indeed, in the form of over-award payments, has been for a very long time. The question is whether negotiations over 'flexibility' are pushed to the point where the integrity of the national or industry award - and particularly the new career paths and accredited training - are undermined.

Politically and industrially the preservation of this national framework is fundamental to organised labour. For example, without the portability of skills provided by a national training system, not only will the career prospects of workers be undermined, but the organising capacity of the union movement will be prejudiced. Tied to particular plants by skills and training not recognised elsewhere, workers will have fewer grounds of interest with their colleagues in the rest of the workforce. While such an outcome will not get capital back to the glorious age of an atomistic labour market, the logical corollary of this form of enterprise bargaining is the individual contract.

For this reason, the resolution passed by the ACTU Special Unions Conference in March assumes particular importance. This conference was called to endorse the agreement negotiated with Keating over the 1990-91 wages deal, an agreement which includes provision for bargaining over a flexibility component of 1.5-2.0% based on increases in productivity and profitability. While access to this element of the package remains unclear - will it be determined at the industry or enterprise level, and will it be a repeat of the trade-offs of the second tier? - the Left successfully amended the resolution to include the fourth item thus:

Any claims in respect of productivity and profitability shall be subject to the maintenance of the integrity and strength of the national in-
FEATURES

15

A MISTAKEN Enterprise

Meredith Burgmann contends that neither the approach of the ACTU nor that of the employers offers much to women.

Internationally, the struggle for equal pay has had varied results. One of the major factors inhibiting success in the industrialised countries has been the presence of enterprise bargaining structures. Those countries with the greatest reliance on decentralised wage fixing have the worst wages gender gaps (Japan and the United States) and those with the most centralised wage fixing systems have the smallest wages gender gaps (Australia and New Zealand).

The wages gender gap is defined as the difference between male and female hourly rates for the job. In Australia, women earn 81.7% of the male wage for every hour worked, therefore the wages gender gap is 18.3%. Although this is not acceptable it is the best rate in the world. In Japan, that much vaunted utopia of enterprise unionism and magical productivity, women earn an astonishing 44.3% less than men.

Japan, of course, is crucial in the enterprise bargaining debate. The Business Council of Australia (BCA), the rightwing think-tanks, and now the NSW government have looked at the Japanese economic 'miracle' and mistakenly equated productivity with enterprise bargaining. Far from being a rational system, enterprise unions in Japan grew up haphazardly in the chaotic post-war years, in many cases carrying on from the patriotic employee organisations which had been devised by the militarists. This process resulted in the formation of over 75,000 unions. For answers to the Japanese economic success we need to look elsewhere.

The other major factor in the wages gender gap is the existence of a strong trade union movement. To some extent, these two factors go hand-in-hand. It is the strong trade union movement that has been able to deliver centralised wage fixing.
A strong trade union movement is crucial because wages discrimination is essentially an industrial problem. Those countries which have sought to solve wages discrepancies by legal or bureaucratic means have failed. Many Canadian provinces and American states have tough equal pay legislation backed up by well-resourced and pro-active Pay Equity Bureaux yet they have failed to dent their wages gender gap (Canada 34.5%; US 29.7%) by more than a few percent. Complaints-based legislation cannot solve an industrial problem at the macro level. Individual women can achieve redress of grievance but the class of low paid work remains.

Why does enterprise bargaining operate against women workers? Women are historically located in the weakest, least unionised, least strategically important, most geographically diverse and lowest value-added manufacturing areas. Australia, in fact, has the most sex-segregated workforce in the OECD countries. So women's capacity to bargain is restricted by their location in the economy as well as by other factors such as socialisation, low status and a lack of English.

It is precisely these groups in the industrial relations system which are protected by centralised wage fixing. The wage rises won by the strong unions are shared with the weaker areas of the economy. However, under enterprise bargaining outside a centralised framework, a market-driven free-for-all develops, most aptly summed up by the adage "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer".

Under these conditions, women suffer in two ways. First, they can be coerced into trading off wages and conditions. An all too familiar scenario would be "listen dears, either you all take a $10 cut or we have to close the biscuit factory/child care centre/boutique tomorrow". The NSW government's new Industrial Relations Bill specifically allows for this scenario. Enterprise associations set up under the Act can negotiate sub-award wages and conditions. As long as a minimum standard (at present set at a ridiculous $294) is adhered to, other hard-won conditions can be abolished. The employers (especially the BCA) are particularly interested in hours of work as a 'flexible' working condition, and attacks on maternity leave are also common.

The second way in which women's wages will suffer is that some areas of industry will achieve massive wage blow-outs under enterprise bargaining. Militant sites in the building, metal, oil and other boom industries will achieve substantial wages agreements. This will have the effect of having off the militant areas of the industry so that the less industrially competent shops will be left to fend for themselves. The traditional metalworkers' strategy of using their 'hot shops' to apply pressure for an industry-wide agreement will no longer be possible. Under this scenario, not only will some male wages rise dramatically but weaker male areas and female wages will gradually deteriorate.

A good example of the way decentralised wage fixing can affect women's wages occurred during the 4% second tier negotiations in the second half of 1987. These negotiations took place on an industry by industry basis. In the August quarter, male wages rose 1.9% and women's 1.5% while, in the November quarter, men's rose 1.6% and women's only 0.8%. (ABS figures.)

The ACTU has recognised the effect that decentralised wage fixing has on women. In its Women's Pay Strategy Statement adopted at the 1989 ACTU Congress it declared that "a centralised wage system should apply since industry and enterprise bargaining disadvantages less well organised and less industrially powerful groups". The statement also declared that wage fixing systems should not be based on productivity bargaining as this "disproportionately affects women workers who are clustered in service industries, the public sector and low value added manufacturing areas".

The debate within the unions and the Left over the past year has been confused. There has been some support for 'enterprise bargaining' from union officials who believe that it has been taking place in their industry for many years. Even Bill Kelty has been guilty of this misapprehension. What has occurred has been over-award enterprise agreements arrived at by negotiations at the union level. Rarely has true 'enterprise bargaining' taken place. The workers on the shop floor are generally the weakest bargaining unit for a variety of reasons - personal loyalty, inertia, experience, intimidation and the possibility of victimisation, among others. It is not an accident that the BCA, Nick Greiner, and John Howard all espouse enterprise bargaining. They want a quiescent and ineffectual workforce. With enterprise bargaining they will get it.

MEREDITH BURGMANN teaches in politics at Macquarie University and is a member of the Women's Pay Equity Coalition.

FOOTNOTES
1. Because of the different data on which these figures are calculated, they cannot be treated as strictly comparable. However they are a good indication of the magnitude of the difference and are the most accurate figures available. Department of Employment, Education and Training: Women's Bureau, Pay Equity: A Survey of Seven OECD Countries, AGPS, Canberra, 1988.

2. For further discussion of this point see National Pay Equity Coalition, Enterprise Based Bargaining Units: No Equity, No Unions, May 1990.
The debate about enterprise bargaining is certainly not a new one. However, it has been given added impetus by the Industrial Relations Commission, and by the current focus on microeconomic reform.

Enterprise bargaining can provide a mechanism for employers, obsessed with the balance sheet, to force shortsighted change onto a resistant workforce without consultation or information. Or it can be taken up by the trade union movement as an opportunity for union members to play an informed and unprecedented role in improving their working environment and job security.

The not-so-hidden agenda of the employers is the erosion of hard-won award conditions in the drive to reduce costs: elimination of penalty rates, 12 hour and evening shifts, banking of overtime hours, and the creation of a casual seasonal workforce. For many on the Left this makes enterprise bargaining a danger to be resisted at all costs. Yet enterprise bargaining has been given the imprimatur of federal and state industrial tribunals and is now a feature of many industrial awards.

But unions need to more than just react to the employers’ agenda. We can now simply go down the path of damage control, or we can attempt to turn the process to members’ advantage. Enterprise bargaining can offer the opportunity for the workers in an enterprise to raise matters like work-based childcare, occupational health and safety, special purpose leave, job redesign and work organisation, job sharing, and training, promotion and career opportunities.

Many workers, especially women, find flexible working hours, evening shifts and part-time hours attractive. Unions in the past have treated workers as an homogeneous group. The task for the union movement today is to take greater account of the diversity of workers’ needs, and particularly those of women, young workers and workers from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and to increase the participation of these groups in unions.

Unions need to address directly a far broader range of members’ concern than they have traditionally, and to take greater account of the diversity of their needs. Unless they do this, membership will continue to fall rapidly, particularly among young people, women and part-time and casual workers.

So how can unions ensure that enterprise bargaining provides positive results for their members? Firstly, they can establish ‘national standards’ and identify award conditions which are clearly not up for debate - such as award wages, the 38 hour week, rest breaks, leave entitlements and redundancy pay.

Secondly, it is fundamental that unions establish in awards agreed procedures and consultative mechanisms as a prerequisite to enterprise bargaining. Of course, establishing such procedures in a national framework is not enough in itself. They must be made to work to ensure that consultation is not a sham.

Are unions and workers well enough equipped to withstand the drive to erode hard-won conditions and turn enterprise bargaining to their advantage? On the one hand, union resources are strained. Negotiation of new skill structures and wage rates, new training arrangements and career paths have added another layer to the workload.

At the same time, the culture of the Australian workplace has traditionally excluded workers from participation in decision-making. Many workers, including union delegates, lack the skills, confidence and support necessary to negotiate enterprise agreements. Workers do not have access to information about the operation of their enterprises. Australian management is notoriously reluctant to surrender ‘managerial prerogative’.

In this context union education becomes all-important. The Textile, Clothing and Footwear (TCF) unions have
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trained approximately 1000 members in the skills of participating in consultative committees. The courses examine the impact of the TCF plan and the links between award restructuring, work organisation and the production of higher value-added quality products. Workers do not get this information from their employers. And yet all these factors affect the work they perform and on their job security. Until they get access to this information they cannot fully participate.

There is a need to ensure that workers have a legitimate and recognised right to consult with all fellow workers concerning any proposals to be discussed by the consultative committee. In TCF workplaces this requires translation of proposals into languages spoken at the workplace. Decisions which affect workers in an enterprise must no longer be taken by management in isolation and without consultation or discussion of workers’ concerns.

If handled badly, enterprise bargaining could be a backward step for workers. If handled well, it could be one factor in widening the reach and relevance of the Australian trade union movement.

SUSAN GRAY is the federal organiser of the Clothing and Allied Trades Union.

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Identity Crisis

One of the revelations of Eastern Europe has been the resilience of local and ethnic identity after the breakup of communism. Not for the first time, the language of 'class' has come off second best. Colin Mercer argues that the politics of identity is undergoing a resurgence worldwide.

A relationship between 'politics' and 'identity' has been central to the working of modern forms of government since at least the beginning of the 19th century. It is basic to the ways in which the modern polity works that some sort of contractual relationship should be established between an individual identity, whether of subject, citizen, comrade, welfare recipient, householder or victim - or any combination of these - and the general arrangement and apparatus of government. There is nothing new about the politics of identity, notwithstanding the ways in which this expression seems to be enjoying an ascendency in some Left or 'post-Left' thinking.

What started out as a useful agitational slogan and political emphasis was fused into a way of resolving, through an act of will, conflicts between the public and private spheres. This, according to Sheila Rowbotham, had negative consequences:

Because the political was fused with the personal, and because there were no external structures and formally elected leaders, there were no mechanisms for distancing feelings of hurt, betrayal and anger, and the movement fractured.

Nonetheless, the emphases and new ways of thinking produced by the proposition that the personal is political served to return to the agenda something that had been either forgotten or displaced: that the 'borders' between politics and personal identity formed by family life, ethnicity, lifestyle orientations and a range of other factors relating to our 'subjectivity' or sense of self are so porous as not to be borders at all. Child care is an example of this tangle of lines and one where it would clearly be unproductive to say categorically that this set of responsibilities lies in the public domain and this set in the private. As with housework, or domestic and community health and hygiene, the demarcations will remain a matter of political calculation rather than being enshrined forever in a balance sheet of public and private responsibilities. So, the personal is political but there is little to be gained from repeating this as a mantra until due attention has been paid to the detail of the democratic mechanisms which are necessary to realise and exploit its implications.

This is the 'governmental' side to the relationship between the personal and the political which establishes a
relationship between private individuals and the public state. There is another dimension of this relationship which results from the fact that we live not just in any old state but in a particular nation state. This aspect of the relationship between the personal and the political which we might call 'cultural' has recently been dramatically highlighted in an international reminder of the persistence and importance of the politics of identity.

Ethnic Armenians in Azerbaijan, Poles in Lithuania and the Ukraine, Hungarians in Romania, Germans in Poland, Albanians and Slovenians in Yugoslavia in the wake of the Gorbachev reforms attest, in a worst-case scenario to a resurgence of mitteleuropean, Baltic and Balkan nationalisms of an ugly hue. More dispassionately, they can be characterised as the failure of a marxism in theory and in governance to recognise and come to terms with the politics of identity in its most resilient form: ethnicity. While at a purely formal and legal level Stalin and his successors may have settled the 'nationalities question', it is absolutely clear that the profound ethnic substrata of these 'nations' remained untouched. In fact, they were untouchable by a doctrine whose fundamental category of identity and classification remains that of class.

These two aspects of the politics of identity are closely related. Your identity as a member of a family, for example, or as a citizen holding a passport, is not a purely abstract or legal matter. Both the family and citizenship are overlain and defined by layers of national-cultural affiliation. Ideas concerning behaviour, values, dispositions, and even size, mark out what is to be understood as a typically Australian, Vietnamese or Italian family. The manners and mores of family life are often the most difficult things that a student of languages has to learn. The legal identity offered by citizenship is usually related to ideas about national character reproduced in literature, histories and the print and electronic media. National identity and character retain a strong currency in Australia and the inevitable and very boring metaphors of the Bush and the Bushman will keep cropping up in movies and public debate.

So, the politics of identity is real, historical and integral to the development of modern nation-states. Where does this lead us? First to the recognition that the politics of identity has a long history which is dense, resilient and complex. Second, to the recognition that the politics of identity involves definite forms and mechanisms - political, administrative, cultural, linguistic, historical - which enable identities to be formed, secured and reproduced. We need to say, in other words, that, yes, the personal is political in a very general sense but the job now is to differentiate the slogan and to 'un'- or de-fuse the two terms; and to ask more particular and discrete questions about how, why, in what terms and through which processes and mechanisms the personal gets linked to the political.

A recent example from Eastern Europe might serve as a starting point. Ethnic Poles in the Ukraine are, on the whole, a very religious community. They share with many Ukrainians a profound historical adherence to the Church and they attend the same churches for worship. After the Mass has been celebrated, however, the Poles often stay behind in order to celebrate Mass again, this time in their own language and with their own ethnic or national icons. The performance of this ritual, the language in which it is
performed and the icons deployed matter a great deal to ethnic Poles.

There are three factors here which are important in offering, securing and reproducing social identity. First, there is the role of the Church in providing religious practices which, while theoretically international, nonetheless provide a distinctive and tangible 'home' for proto-national and ethnic sentiments. The Catholic Church has historically been very good at the adaptation of distinctive regional ethnic and national icons and practices to its own liturgy.

Second, there is the fact that we are dealing here with a regularly performed ritual which punctuates and gives a structure and rhythm to the lives of those people who participate in it. The performance of the religious ritual - not so very far down the spectrum from attendance at political party meetings and rallies - doubles here as a simultaneous affirmation of daily ethnic existence. You know, more or less, who will be at the meeting, that they will be performing gestures and saying things and offering respects to icons in the same way as you and in the same language. As Pascal once said, there is no need for a programmatic theory of religious belief: you kneel, you pray and therefore believe. In this case you perform these practices, recognise the icons, believe in God and participate in the general communion of Catholic Christendom but you know also that you are doing this at a particular time and place and simultaneously confirming an ethnicity or other sense of 'belonging'. Ritual practices are important in securing and reproducing social identity.

Third, there is the matter of language. This is a profound historical and cultural index of ethnicity and, for that matter, of any form of sub-cultural identity. The language of political meetings again springs to mind. Language makes you a 'member' of a community, culture or sub-culture insofar as it gives you a visible and audible mark of adherence and affiliation. It is one of the most obvious ways along, perhaps, with dress, that marks you out as a 'foreigner' and it has been one of the primary forms of identity and affiliation of 'belonging'. Ritual practices are important in securing and reproducing social identity.

Another example from daily and routine existence: food and eating. Eating, including access to a viable market of appropriate commodities and forms of preparation is, like religious ritual and language, a social and cultural marker and classifier and, like language and ritual, can lead to dramatic forms of conflict. In Bradford, in the north of England, at the moment there is an uneasy political and cultural truce over eating. This is between the large Muslim community for whom the Halal method of animal slaughter and preparation is essential to the practice of their religion, and bodies like the RSPCA and animal welfare groups to whom this practice of slaughter is barbarous. In such a situation of an intense politics of identity, one can imagine that the proposition that the personal is political won't get you very far since it is glaringly obvious but offers no answers.

Of course the personal is political, will say the local Labour Councillor who happens to be a devout Muslim. That is why my access to food prepared in accordance with Islamic doctrine is an issue, being fundamental to my personal lifestyle and religious preferences. Of course it is, will come the response from a member of the same Labour Party branch who also belongs to Animal Liberation and is committed to multiculturalism. That is why it is absolutely justifiable for me to resist these practices in order to protect both animals and my own deeply felt humane sentiments about their treatment and place in the order of things.

The arguments could be multiplied in relation to dress, gender, sexual orientation and preference, and so on. The politics of identity produces a multitude of new problems which are not resolved by the old solidarities, forms of allegiance and logics which characterise traditional political organisations. But it is not worth being too triumphalist about this. The politics of identity is not, as some advocates of post-Fordism, postmodernism and 'New Times' seem to suggest, a liberated zone of daylight into which we are now emerging after the dark age of the blue-collar worker and the factory system. It has been around at least as long as them although obscured by a political choice which preferred one form of identity over others.

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What the agenda of the politics of identity calls for is not the triumphant affirmation of a 'new reality' because it is, after all, not so new. And there is no point either, in the 'hundred flowers' mode, of simply celebrating the emergence and proliferation of 'democratic identities'. Not all identities are democratic and there is no reason why we should expect them to be. Rather than romantic affirmation, what is needed

"That the personal is political is glaringly obvious but offers no answers."
is a way of posing the question of the relationship between democracy and identity, between the political and the personal, which takes into account the sorts of tensions and conflicts mentioned above over ethnicity, religion, language, eating and those other multiple goods and services, commodities and daily activities which define and shape the substance of people's daily lives.

These dimensions of the plurality and complexity of the personal/political relationship are not well-met, either, by the sort of political romanticism with distinctively antidemocratic implications which, as Sheila Rowbotham argues, was one of the outcomes of the 1970s argument that the personal is political. The theory was

that by politicising all aspects of life it would be possible to bring democratic relationships into being. Only when this split (of the personal/political) was overcome could political participation be 'self-actualising' and integrate women as whole people.*

In effect, she says, this fusion only served to construct new boundaries. One obvious negative outcome of this politicisation of everything and the failure to differentiate between the different levels and complexities of the personal/political relationship was a tendency which all on the Left, hopefully uncomfortably, will recognise: to lay claim to a sententious jurisdiction over political and moral and ethical life as a whole. This was possible since everything was political and the moral and the ethical were simply analogous and transparent domains.

The problem with this easy interpretation is the degree of 'transparency' it assumes between, say, sexual relations of power and other forms of social power. There are, of course, connections but they are not always so easy to make and they are certainly not automatic. Things get in the way; things like external democratic mechanisms vested in, for example, family law and things like personal obligations and commitments vested in the nature of the family or household as an institutional form.

These too are the components of a politics of identity but they have not been well-addressed by the 'psychologisation' of the personal/political relationship. The problem here has been the assumption that the real and experienced demarcation between the personal and the political, the private and the public is actually a 'split' which needs in some way to be healed, resolved or overcome. This is a classic Romantic conception of the world. First, organise the world into those things that are associated with reason, feeling, imagination, spontaneity, etc. Then draw up a program for reconciling and transcending this split and by this means shall ye reach the threshold of liberation. It is possible, of course, to recognise a certain traditional distribution of male and female attributes under these headings and possible also to recognise how a post-Freudian logic might lend credence to this idea of a split. This is no accident.

But it is a pity, from the point of view of both pluralism and the recognition of democratic mechanisms, that the demarcation between personal and political, private and public, has to be thought of in this way. Why think of this demarcation as 'split'? It seems to me, on the contrary, that the relationship between the personal and the political or the domain of identity and the domain of government is not at all characterised by splits and divisions but rather by historically variable forms of alliance. Social identities are secured and reproduced by establishing a relationship between a specific 'sense of self' and a range of institutions, everyday practices, commodities, objects and rituals - families, schools, communities, workplaces, the market, meat, clothing, shopping, styles of eating, religious and quasi-religious rituals, leisure activities, political parties and so on - which we might call the 'material culture of everyday life'. This, after all, is what most people's experience of politics and the issues that matter is all about.

One of the consequences of this complex set of alliances is that people are not 'whole' or 'full' or 'actualised' identities, but a combination, to a greater or lesser extent, of a whole range of partial identities determined by their everyday practices, rituals, affiliations and relationships to other people, objects and commodities. This includes, obviously and importantly, a class-relationship and access to the purchase of objects and the uses of them in distinctive lifestyle patterns but this is only one powerful relationship among others. A politics of identity should, therefore, be about recognising and engaging with the whole complex extent of this array of practices rather than either the realisation of the whole person or the incarceration of that person into a single affiliation.

Identities and personalities are multiple. This is not a postmodernist credo or a problem

Identities and personalities are multiple. This is not a postmodernist credo or a 'problem' which needs a Freudian cure. The multiple nature of social identity is a basic and operational principle of modern forms of government, the aims of which have been, to put it simply, to orchestrate identities under an umbrella of national affiliation or citizenship.

On II Pluviose, Year II in the French revolutionary calendar (January 31, 1794), a man who might be said to have inaugurated the politics of identity in its most coherent form - the Abbé Grégoire - advised one of the Chambers of the French National Assembly that

When one reconstructs a government anew, it is necessary to republicanise everything. The legislator who ignores the importance of signs will fail at his mission; he should not let escape any occasion for grabbing hold of the senses, for awakening republican ideas. Soon the soul is penetrated by the objects constantly in front of its eyes; and this combination, of facts, of emblems which retracts without cease for the citizen his rights and his duties; this collection forms in a manner of speaking, the republican mold which
gives him a national character and the demeanour of a free man."

This logic of government - one which establishes, as a condition of its existence, a social identity who is simultaneously national, free and republican - is not so arcane. It is a logic which is not very far from a recent experience in Australia. Think back a couple of years to the 1988 Bicentenary and recall the importance of 'signs' there in 'getting hold of the senses' and 'penetrating the soul'. Add language, the rituals of community and daily life, characteristic and preferred images of a national landscape and the configurations of a national character and you come up with a continuing rather than a one-off Bicentennial and celebratory logic.

Bicentenaries and other, more regular, forms of spectacular national celebration, rehearse, albeit in accelerated and condensed ways, a politicisation of the stuff of everyday life and demonstrate the persistence and importance of the relationship between the 'personal' and the 'political'. This is transacted and negotiated through the central category of the citizen which is contractually related both to the state and the apparatus of government and of the nation and the less formal cultural accretions of national identity, or, even more informally, that 'sense of belonging' and 'sense of place' which have such a central role in Australian political and cultural history.

Where do these senses and this texture of a distinctive everyday life get elaborated and consolidated? In institutions like the family, the school, the workplace and the pub. In practices like eating, worshipping, rallying, watching the television and reading newspapers and other forms of literature. In forms of behaviour like dress, language and other forms of 'self-presentation'. In the print and electronic media, in icons and emblems and government documents and in forms of local, regional and national celebration. Everywhere, in fact.

This is the hard and compacted ground of a politics of
identity. It is compacted and therefore complex because it is the accumulated result of a long process of securing a resilient relationship between 'people', 'nation' and 'state'. The objective of this politics of identity would be the consolidation, progressively at arm's length and in increasingly negotiated ways, of 'manageable' and preferred forms of social identity. The nation becomes, in this context, a time, with a specific and identifiable and 'meaningful' history), a place (with demarcated borders but, more importantly, a distinctive sense of place, land and landscape) and, for want of a better term, a lifestyle (with distinctive ways of living, manners, customs and behaviours which are peculiar to this time and place, this nation and no other).

These forms of social identity have been amassed under the general category of citizenship. And what is crucial about this category and the ways in which it has developed - and which give it a significant potential in rethinking the contemporary politics of identity - is that it is not a purely legal-constitutional definition. To be effective in holding together multiple possible forms of identity, citizenship has depended crucially on its interconnections with a whole network of cultural identifications and points of reference.

These have been secured through popular education, through the development of the print and electronic media, through the histories, literatures and reports dealing with the preferred attributes of national character and other forms of training in 'personal', 'cultural' and 'civic' attitudes. Citizenship is, in this sense, much more than having your name entered on a register of births or making an oath at a naturalisation ceremony. It involves entry into - and forms of affiliation with - a cultural network of institutions, identifications and practices from the British monarchy right down to the backyard barbie.

Which brings us to the rub. If the politics of identity and the politics of the personal are inextricably tied up with the politics of citizenship, what then?

Bertrand Russell once advised in a rather squeaky and imperious way that every democrat should have what he called 'a portion of the governmental mentality'. This point is well taken but we would need to tread carefully here to avoid another regime of sententious moralising which might rival the worst aspects of the personal is political' push and produce another Jacobin Terror of invigilation and condemnation. The question of citizenship is far better approached not simply from its civic, constitutional or governmental dimensions but rather from the range of related identities which have accumulated around it. These are its more resilient and complex dimensions and they include questions of ethnicity, of gender identification, of religious and political affiliation, of being a member of an indigenous or ethnic community. These forms of affiliation are often the fundamental medium which determine our relationship to government.

To say that the citizen is a white bourgeois male with a single ethnic affiliation is probably overstating it a bit but not too much. The birth of the citizen in the late eighteenth century was in the context of a certain relationship to property rights, a certain legal classification of the individual, a certain definition of gender and a certain sense of a homogeneous national culture. Some countries, notably the UK, are busily reinventing these initial constraints in order to deal with problems like Hong Kong and local government financing in the explicit name of the 'active citizen'. This indicates some of the problems associated with the inherited concept of the citizen, the fact that it is, for large sections of the population, through gender, inequality of income and educational opportunity, only ever a partial citizenship. But while signalling its limitations, these factors also indicate the potential of a politics of citizenship when elaborated in terms of a more general politics of identity.

The politics of citizenship means, in this context, a politics which would enable us to coherently address questions of social and economic justice, of access to the market defined not in purely economic terms but rather in terms of quality of life, of rights of access to and participation in social and natural environments and the custodianship or stewardship of them. The politics of citizenship offers a strategic way of addressing these nitty-gritty components of 'lifestyle' - how people get clothed, fed and live - by recognising that these are simultaneously 'economic' questions of resource allocation and distribution and 'cultural' questions of identity and quality of life.

There are, of course, the legal and constitutional dimensions of citizenship which would enable this reworked politics of identity to be firmly rooted in due legal process and the governmental domain. This is important in order to prevent it from being romanticised into the ether of personal or even group liberation.

The politics of identity, when thought of in terms of citizenship, is not about the celebration of the 'exceptional' identities associated with race, ethnicity or gender. Rather, it is about enabling access to social justice in those institutions and practices of everyday life like domestic organisation, work, schooling, the market, the environment and the community which is where identities get constructed and mobilised in the first place.

Citizenship is about rights, entitlements and duties and all of these have been given distinctive new profiles on the political agenda by feminism, anti-racism, the environmental movement and various campaigns on social justice and policy. It would be a pity to lose these profiles for want of a political logic which is able to address them together, strategically and coherently. Two hundred years after its first formulation the concept of citizenship may, in the context of the porosity of national borders, the reality of multiculturalism and the new politics of identity, be ready for a transformed existence.

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FOOTNOTES:
2 Ibid., p.90.
The Year of TRUTH

1989 was the most dramatic year in Europe for four decades. Here, in a provocative extract from his new book We the People, Timothy Garton Ash argues that, like 1848 in the West, 1989 was the year of the citizen in Eastern Europe.

1989 was the year communism in Eastern Europe died. 1949-1989 R.I.P. And the epitaph might be: Nothing in his life, Became him like the leaving it. The thing that was comprehensively installed in the newly defined territories of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, and in the newly created German Democratic Republic after 1949, the thing called, according to viewpoint, ‘socialism’, ‘totalitarianism’, ‘stalinism’, ‘politbureaucratic dictatorship’, ‘real existing socialism’, ‘state capitalism’, ‘dictatorship over needs’, or, most neutrally, ‘the Soviet-type system’ - that thing will never walk again. And arguably, if we can no longer talk of communism we should no longer talk of Eastern Europe, at least with a capital ‘E’ for Eastern. Instead, we shall have central Europe again, east central Europe, south-eastern Europe, eastern Europe with a small ‘e’ and, above all, individual peoples, nations and states.

To be sure, even without a political-military reversal inside the Soviet Union there will be many further conflicts, injustices and miseries in these lands. But they will be different conflicts, injustices and miseries: new and old, post-communist but also pre-communist. In the worst case, there might yet be dictators; but they would be different dictators. We shall not see again that particular system, characterised by the concentration of political and economic power and the instruments of coercion in the hands of one leninist party, manifested sociologically as a privileged new class, in states with arbitrarily limited sovereignty.

Of course, if we walk the streets of Prague, Warsaw or Leipzig we can still find the grey, familiar traces: the flattened neo-classical stalinist facades on all the Victory Squares, the Lenin boulevards, steelworks, shipyards, the balding middle-aged officials with their prefabricated lies, the cheap paper forms for completion in quadruplicate, the queues, the attitude of ‘We pretend to work and you pretend to pay us’. Yet even the physical evidences are being removed at a speed that must cause some anxiety to conservationists. (In Poland there is a scheme for preserving all the old props in an entertainment park. The proposed name is Stalinland.)

If 1989 was the end, what was the beginning of the end?
To read the press you would think history began with Gorbachev.

That Moscow permitted the former 'satellite' countries to determine how they want to govern themselves was clearly a sine qua non. But the nature and direction of the processes of domestic political self-determination cannot be understood by studying Soviet policy. The causes lie elsewhere, in the history of individual countries, in their interaction with their East European neighbours and with the more free and prosperous Europe that lies to the west, north and south of them.

The example of Solidarity was seminal. It pioneered a new kind of politics in Eastern Europe (and new not only there): a politics of social self-organisation and negotiating the transition from communism. The players, forms and issues of 1980-81 in Poland were fundamentally different from anything seen in Eastern Europe between 1949 and 1979: in many respects, they presaged those seen throughout Eastern Europe in 1989. If there is any truth in this judgment, then there was something especially fitting in the fact that it was in 1989 that the Russian leader and the Polish Pope finally met. In their very different ways, they both started it.

To find a year in European history comparable with 1989, however, we obviously have to reach back much farther than 1979, or 1949. 1789 in France? 1917 in Russia? Or, closer to home, 1918/19 in Central Europe? But 1918/19 was the aftermath of World War. The closer parallel is surely 1848, the springtime of nations. In the space of a few paragraphs such comparisons are little better than parlour games. Yet, like parlour games, they can be amusing, and may sometimes help to concentrate the mind.

1848 erupted, according to A J P Taylor, "after forty years of peace and stability" while Lewis Namier describes it, with somewhat less cavalier arithmetic, as "the outcome of thirty-three creative years of European peace carefully preserved on a consciously counter-revolutionary basis". The revolution, Namier writes, "was born at least as much of hopes as of discontents". There was undoubtedly an economic and social background: lean harvests and the potato disease. But "the common denominator was ideological". He quotes the exiled Louis-Philippe declaring that he had given way to une insurrection morale, and King Wilhelm of Württemberg excusing himself to the Russian minister at Stuttgart, one Gorchakov, with the words: Je ne puis monter à cheval contre les idées ("I can’t mount my horse against ideas"). And Namier calls his magnificent essay, "The Revolution of the Intellectuals".

Like 1848, this, too, might be called a ‘revolution of the intellectuals’. To be sure, the renewed flexing of workers’ muscle in two strike-waves in 1988 was what finally brought Poland’s communists to the first Round Table of 1989. To be sure, it was the masses on the streets in demonstrations in all the other East European countries that brought the old rulers down. But the politics of the revolution were not made by workers or peasants. They were made by intellectuals: the playwright Václav Havel, the mediaevalist Bronislaw Geremek, the Catholic editor Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the painter Bärbel Bohley in Berlin, the conductor Kurt Masur in Leipzig, the philosophers János Kis and Gaspár Miklós Tamás in Budapest, the en-
The inner history of these revolutions is that of a set of ideas whose time had come, and a set of ideas whose time had gone. At first glance this may seem a surprising statement. For had not the ideology ceased to be an active force many years before? Surely the rulers no longer believed a rod of the guff they spouted, nor expected their subjects to believe it, nor even expected their subjects to believe that they, the rulers, believed it? This is probably true in most cases, although who knows what an old man like Erich Honecker, a communist from his earliest youth, still genuinely believed? (One must never underestimate the human capacity for self-deception.)

Yet one of the things these revolutions showed, ex post facto, is just how important the residual veil of ideology still was. Few rulers are content to say simply: "We have the Gatling gun and you do not!" "We hold power because we hold power". Ideology provided a residual legitimation, perhaps also enabling the rulers, and their politbureaucratic servants, at least partly to deceive themselves about the nature of their own rule. At the same time, it was vital for the semantic occupation of the public sphere. The combination of censorship and a nearly complete Party-state monopoly of the mass media provided the army of semantic occupation; ideology, in the debased, routinised form of newspeak, was its ammunition. However despised and uncredible these structures of organised lying were, they continued to perform a vital blocking function. They no longer mobilised anyone, but they did still prevent the public articulation of shared aspirations and common truths.

What is more, by demanding from the ordinary citizen seemingly innocuous semantic signs of outward conformity, the system managed somehow to implicate them in it. It is easy now to forget that, until almost the day before yesterday, almost everyone in East Germany and Czechoslovakia was living a double life: systematically saying one thing in public and another in private. This was a central theme of the essayistic work of Václav Havel over the last decade.

The crucial "line of conflict", he wrote earlier, did not run between people and state, but rather through the middle of each individual "for everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system". A banner I saw above the altar in an East Berlin church vividly expressed the same basic thought. It said: "I am Cain and Abel!"

In order to understand what it meant for ordinary people to stand in those vast crowds in the city squares of Central Europe, chanting their own, spontaneous slogans, you have first to make the imaginative effort to understand what it feels like to pay this daily toll of public hypocrisy. As they stood and shouted together, these men and women were not merely healing divisions in their society; they were healing divisions in themselves. Everything that had to do with the word, with the press, with television, was of the first importance to these crowds. The semantic occupation was as offensive to them as military occupation; cleaning up the linguistic environment as vital as cleaning up the physical environment. As one talks in English of a 'moment of truth' for some undertaking, so this was a year of truth for communism. There is a real sense in which these regimes lived by the word and perished by the word.

For what, after all, happened? A few thousands, then tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands went on to the streets. They spoke a few words. 'Resign!', they said. 'No more shall we be slaves!' 'Free elections!' 'Freedom!' And with the walls of Jericho fell. And with the walls, the communist parties simply crumbled. At astonishing speed. By the end of 1989, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party had split in two, with the majority of its members leaving for good. In January 1990, the Polish United Workers' Party followed suit. Within three months, East Germany's Socialist Unity Party lost its leading role, its name, and at least half its members. The inner decay of these parties recalled the remark of a German poet in 1848: "Monarchy is dead, though monarchs still live".

With the single, signal exception of Romania, these revolutions were also remarkable for the almost complete lack of violence. Like Solidarity in 1980-81 they were that historical contradiction-in-terms, 'peaceful revolution'. No bastilles were stormed, no guillotines erected. Lampposts were used only for street-lighting. Romania alone saw tanks and firing squads. Elsewhere the only violence was that used at the outset by police. The young demonstrators in East Berlin and Prague laid candles in front of the police who responded with truncheons. The Marseillaise of 1989 said not 'aux armes, citoyens' but 'aux bougies, citoyens'. The rationale and tradition of non-violence can be fixed in the history of all the democratic oppositions of East Central Europe throughout the 1980s. Partly it was pragmatic: the other side had all the weapons. But it was also ethical. It was a statement about how things should be. They wanted to start as they intended to go on. History, said Adam Michnik, had taught them that those who start by storming bastilles will end up building their own.
Yet almost as remarkable, historically speaking, was the lack (so far, and Romania plainly excepted) of major counter-revolutionary violence. The police behaved brutally in East Germany up to and notably on the state’s fortieth anniversary, 7 October, and in Czechoslovakia up to and notably on 17 November. In Poland the systematic deployment of counter-revolutionary force lasted over seven years, from the declaration of a ‘state of war’ on 13 December 1981 to the spring of 1989. But once the revolutions (or, in Poland and Hungary, ‘refolutions’) were under way, there was an amazing lack of coercive countermeasures. The communist rulers said, like King Wilhelm of Württemberg, “I cannot mount on horseback against ideas”. But one is bound to ask: why not? Much of the modern history of Central Europe consisted precisely in rulers mounting on horseback against ideas. Much of the contemporary history of Central Europe, since 1945, consists in rulers mounting tanks against ideas.

So why was it different in 1989? Three reasons may be suggested. They might be labelled ‘Gorbachev’, ‘Helsinki’ and ‘Tocqueville’. The new line in Soviet policy, christened by Gennady Gerasimov on 25 October the Sinatra doctrine - “I had it my way” as he actually misquoted the famous line - rather than the Brezhnev doctrine, was self-evidently essential. In East Germany, Moscow not only made it plain to the leadership that Soviet troops were not available for purposes of domestic repression, but also, it seems, went out of its way to let it be known - to the West, but also to the population concerned - that this was its position. In Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union helped the revolution along by a nicely timed retrospective condemnation of the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion. Throughout East Central Europe, the people at last derived some benefit from their rulers’ chronic dependency on the Soviet Union, for, deprived of the Soviet Kalashnikov-crutch, those élites did not have another leg to stand on. Romania was the exception that proves the rule. It is no accident that it was precisely in the state for so long most independent of Moscow that the resistance of the security arm of the powers-that-were was most fierce, bloody and prolonged.

None the less, the factor ‘Gorbachev’ alone does not suffice to explain why these ruling élites did not more vigorously deploy their own, still formidable police and security forces in a last-ditch defence of their own power and privilege. Is it too fanciful to suggest that the constant, persistent harping of the West on certain international norms of domestic conduct, the East European leaders’ yearning for international respectability, and the sensed linkage between this and the hard currency credits they so badly needed, in short, the factor ‘Helsinki’, played at least some part in staying the hands of those who might otherwise have given the order to shoot?

Yet none of this would have stopped them if they had still been convinced of their right to rule. The third, and perhaps the ultimately decisive factor, is that characteristic
of revolutionary situations described by Alexis de Tocqueville more than a century ago: the ruling elite’s loss of belief in its own right to rule. A few kids went on the streets and threw a few words. The police beat them. The kids said: You have no right to beat us! And the rulers, the high and mighty, replied, in effect: Yes, we have no right to beat you. We have no right to preserve our rule by force. The end no longer justifies the means!

In fact, the ruling élites, and their armed servants, distinguished themselves by their comprehensive unreadiness to stand up in any way for the things in which they had so long claimed to believe, and their almost indecent haste to embrace the things they had so long denounced as ‘capitalism’ and ‘bourgeois democracy’. All over Eastern Europe there was the quiet flap of turning coats: one day they denounced Walesa, the next they applauded him; one day they embraced Honecker, the next they imprisoned him; one day they vituperated Havel, the next they elected him president.

1848 was called the Springtime of Nations or the Springtime of Peoples: the Volkerfrühling, wiosna ludów. The revolutionaries, in all the lands, spoke in the name of ‘the people’. But the international solidarity of ‘the people’ was broken by conflict between nations, old and new, while the domestic solidarity of ‘the people’ was broken by conflict between social groups - what came to be known as ‘classes’. “Socialism and nationalism, as mass forces, were both the product of 1848,” writes A J P Taylor. And for a century after 1848, until the communist deep freeze, central Europe was a battlefield of nations and classes.

Of what, or of whom, was 1989 the springtime? Of ‘the people’? But in what sense? “Wir sind das Volk,” said the first great crowds in East Germany: we are the people. But within a few weeks they were saying “Wir sind EIN Volk”: we are one nation. In Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, the crowds were a sea of national flags, while the people raised their voices to sing old national hymns. In Hungary and Romania they cut the communist symbols of the flags. In East Germany there were, at first, no flags, no hymns. But gradually the flags came out, plain stripes of red, black and gold without the GDR hammer and dividers in the middle: the flag of Western - and before that of united - Germany.

In every Western newspaper commentary on Eastern Europe one now invariably reads that there is a grave danger of something called ‘nationalism’ reviving in this region. But what on earth does this mean? Does it mean that people are again proud to be Czech, Polish, Hungarian or, for that matter, German? That hearts lift at sight of the flag and throats tighten when they sing the national anthem?

Patriotism is not nationalism. Rediscovered pride in your own nation does not necessarily imply hostility to other nations. These movements were all, without exception, patriotic. They were not all nationalist. Indeed, in their first steps most of the successor regimes were markedly less nationalist than their communist predecessors. The Mazowiecki government in Poland adopted a decisively more liberal and enlightened approach to both the Jewish and German questions than any previous government, indeed drawing criticism, on the German issue, from the communist-nationalists. In his first public statement as President, Vaclav Havel made a special point of thanking “all Czechs, Slovaks and members of other nationalities".

Of course there are counter-examples. One of the nastier aspects of the German revolution was the excesses of popular support for a Party-government campaign against Polish ‘smugglers and profiteers’ and abuse of visiting black students and Vietnamese Gastarbeiter. In Hungarian opposition politics, the fierce infighting between the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Free Democrats was not without an ethnic undertone, with some members of the former questioning the ‘Hungarianness’ of some members of the latter, who replied with charges of anti-Semitism. Thousands of Bulgarians publicly protested against the new government giving the Turkish-Muslim minority its rights.

If one looks slightly further ahead, there are obviously potential conflicts over other remaining minorities: notably the Hungarians in Romania, the Romanians in the Soviet Union (Moldavia), the Germans in Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union, and gypsies in several countries. There are the potential political uses of anti-Semitism. There is the difficulty of forming a combination of Czecho- and -Slovakia fully satisfactory to both Slovaks and Czechs. And there are the outstanding frontier questions, above all that of the post-1945 German-Polish frontier on the Oder-Neisse line.

Yet compared with Central Europe in 1848 or 1918/19 this is a relatively short list. Most nations have states, and have got used to their new frontiers. Ethnically the map is far more homogeneous than it was in 1848 or 1918: as Ernest Gellner has observed, it is now a picture by
Modigliani rather than Kokoschka. The historical record must show that 1989 was not a year of acute national and ethnic conflict in Eastern Europe west of the Soviet frontier. Quite the reverse: it was a year of solidarity both within and between nations. At the end of the year, symbolic and humanitarian support for the people(s) of Romania came from all the self-liberated states of East Central Europe. A springtime of nations is not necessarily a springtime of ‘nationalism’.

In any case, what was most striking was not the language of nationhood. That was wholly predictable. What was striking was the other ideas and words that, so to speak, shared the top billing. One of these was ‘society’. In Poland, a country often stigmatized as ‘nationalist’, the word most often used to describe the people as opposed to the authorities was not ‘nation’; it was społeczeństwo, society. In Czechoslovakia the word ‘society’ was used in a similar way, though less frequently, and here it could not simply be a synonym or euphemism for ‘nation’ because it covered two nations. In both cases, it was as meaningful to talk of social self-determination as it was to talk of national self-determination.

Everywhere stress was laid on the self-conscious unity of intelligentsia, workers and peasants. Of course in part this unity was created by the common enemy. When communist power had been broken, and real parliamentary politics began, then conflicting social interests were robustly articulated. Thus probably the most distinctive and determined group in the new Polish parliament was not communists or Solidarity, left or right, but peasant-farmers from all parties, combining and conspiring to advance their sectional interests.

Another concept that played a central role in opposition thinking in the 1980s was that of ‘civil society’. 1989 was the springtime of societies aspiring to be civil. Ordinary men and women’s rudimentary notion of what it meant to build a civil society might not satisfy the political theorist. But some such notion was there, and it contained several basic demands. There should be forms of association, national, regional, local, professional, which would be voluntary, authentic, democratic and, first and last, not controlled or manipulated by the Party or Party-state. People should be ‘civil’: that is, polite, tolerant, and, above all, non-violent. Civil and civilian. The idea of citizenship had to be taken seriously.

Communism managed to poison many words from the mainstream of European history - not least, as this book has repeatedly indicated, the word ‘socialism’. But somehow it did not manage to poison the words ‘citizen’ and ‘civic’, even though it used them, to, in perverted ways: for example, in appeals to ‘civic responsibility’ meaning ‘Keep quiet and let us deal with these troublesome students’. Why it did not manage to poison those words is an interesting question - to which I have no ready answer - but the fact is that when Solidarity’s parliamentarians came to give their group a name, they called it the Citizens Parliamentary Club; the Czech movement called itself the Civic Forum; and the opposition groups in the GDR started by describing themselves as Bürgerinitiativen, that is, citizens’ or civic initiatives. (In the East German case, the actual word was probably imported from West Germany, but the fact remains that they chose this rather than another term.) And the language of citizenship was important in all these revolutions. People had had enough of being mere components in a deliberately atomised society: they wanted to be citizens, individual men and women with dignity and responsibility, with rights but also with duties, freely associating in civil society.

There is one last point about the self-description of the revolution which is perhaps worth a brief mention. As Ralf Dahrendorf has observed, Karl Marx played on the ambiguity of the German term bürgerliche Gesellschaft, which could be translated either as civil society or as bourgeois society. Marx, says Dahrendorf, deliberately conflated the two ‘cities’ of modernity, the fruits of the Industrial and the French Revolutions, the bourgeois and the citizen. I thought of this observation when a speaker in one of the mass rallies in Leipzig called for solidarity with the bürgerliche Bewegung in Czechoslovakia. The bourgeois movement! But on reflection there seems to me a deeper truth in that apparent malapropism. For what most of the opposition movements throughout East Central Europe and a large part of the people’s supporting them were in effect saying was: Yes, Marx is right, the two things are intimately connected - and we want both! Civil rights and property rights, economic freedom and political freedom, financial independence and intellectual independence, each supports the other. So, yes, we want to be citizens, but we also want to be middle-class, in the senses that the majority of citizens in the more fortunate half of Europe are middle-class. We want to be Bürger AND bürgerlich! Tom Paine, but also Thomas Mann.

So it was a springtime of nations, but not necessarily of nationalism; of societies, aspiring to be civil; and above all, of citizens.

TIMOTHY GARTON ASH’s We the People: The Revolutions of 1989 was released in Australia in June by Granta Books. This extract is reproduced by arrangement with Granta Books.
BOHEMIAN

Rhapsody

Civic Forum’s win in Czechoslovakia on June 8 was the only victory for the former dissident groups in Eastern Europe - the same groups which led the revolutions of 1989. To find out why, Paul Hockenos talked to Civic Forum leader Jan Kavan in Prague.

Jan Kavan, 45, is an elected member of the Civic Forum executive council and head of the group’s information department. A leader in the student and worker passive resistance movement during the Prague Spring, Kavan was forced into exile a year later. In London, where he has lived for the past two decades, Kavan co-founded the quarterly journal East European Reporter, and the Czechoslovakia Solidarity Fund. He returned to Prague in November 1989. The interview was conducted in the Civic Forum headquarters on Wenceslas Square.

Mr Kavan, the former dissident groups that have recently contested elections in East Germany and Hungary have fared much worse than expected. Yet Civic Forum (CF) has now been elected in its own right as the new Czechoslovak government. Why has CF’s vote held up so much better than, say, the Free Democrats in Hungary or New Forum in the GDR?

I’m not sure that I would compare the fate of the Free Democrats in Hungary and the opposition groups in East Germany. New Forum and the others did very badly for specific GDR reasons. CF doesn’t run the risk of becoming marginalised in the way that New Forum now is. The Free Democrats did less well than they had hoped, but they are still the second strongest party in Hungary.

Obviously, if we had had an election in January, or even March, we would have won by a landslide. But since then CF has experienced a loss of popularity. In the post-revolution period there was a great feeling of euphoria with the abolition of the status quo after forty years. People thought that we were just going to walk into paradise. Of course, no opposition could fulfil such high expectations. So, as the quasi-governmental party, CF has been blamed for the many problems that persist.

At the same time, CF is a very broad political movement which encompasses a spectrum wider than any traditional political party. This is both a weakness and a strength. Some people argue that it is too all-encompassing and not specific enough. Yet it unites within the framework of its political program quite a large number of people of different political opinions.

But popular fronts have a history of short life spans.
What will keep these forces together? How divergent are the views within CF?

The common denominator was the desire to build democratic structures again, to ensure that fair elections take place and to maintain a role for CF after the elections. Creating real democratic structures is much more complicated than preparing one set of elections. That will take several years. CF not only embodies the ideals of the revolution itself, but it is also a guarantor for democratic conditions here.

There is a clear Left and Right wing within CF. For example, I'm perceived as being on the Left and when I address voters I will elaborate certain aspects of the CF program such as social justice and programs to deal with the high levels of unemployment.

Right factions also exist, such as the Alliance for Democratic Citizens which runs on the CF ticket. It is a party which has views very close to some of the neo-conservative philosophy behind Thatcherism. The strength of the Civic Forum is that it incorporates such diverse tendencies within a democratic bloc.

Does the CF's concept of democracy differ from that of western parliamentary democracy?

The idea that we were brought up with in our schools here, that there is bourgeois democracy and there is social democracy, is a distinction that I always found hard to understand.

The restoration of parliamentary democracy is definitely very important to us. But that does not mean that all of us wish to restrict expressions of political life only to parliament. The political activities of individuals shouldn't be limited to going to the ballot box once every four years.

I sense that CF will develop into two kinds of bodies. One form will be closer to a classical political party with a hierarchy and membership. Another would remain a political movement and operate on a regional and district level. Its function would be to help ensure the involvement of people in political life outside of political parties. Also, as a representative of grassroots citizens' movements, it could act as a kind of corrective not only within CF, but to anybody who is in power. Hopefully, the new assembly will pass laws on popular referenda. There are many forms of participatory democracy which would ensure that the gap between politicians in power and the people would never be too great.

So the notion of anti-politics, as formulated by Václav Havel and the Hungarian philosopher Gyorgy Konrad, is still alive in CF.

Yes, at least in the movement as such. Once we no longer have to fight for power, it will go back to some of the original ideas of last November. Anti-politics will still be necessary to encourage the development of civil society, a kind of network of citizens' initiatives and interests that exist in the grey area between government and the rest of society.

In such work, activists are governed more by ethical and moral considerations and therefore it would be closer to what Havel and Konrad described as anti-political politics. It's part of the legacy of the pre-revolutionary struggle, the rejection of the classical perception of politics and, above all, of the methods of the Communist Party. The opposition tried for years to articulate that there's an alternative to
official politics or angry silence. An ethical approach filled that gap very well. Now we have more democratic conditions, but there is still the need for building a strong civil society on this basis.

The government has already announced some tough economic measures to put the Czechoslovakian economy on a competitive, market-oriented basis. Is this transition compatible with the notion of social justice that you're talking about?

It's going to be difficult. CF is making it clear that it can offer no short-term solutions to the economic crisis. Most people don't really believe that they will be hit by economic measures, so it's not a big issue at the moment. Unemployment will have its impact after the first elections.

On the whole, I think that some measure of economic reform is compatible with social justice and social welfare. CF is in agreement that the economy should be more sensitive to market relations, that it reflect the genuine price of goods and so on. We must phase out these totally inefficient and unproductive big industries.

Some of us emphasise accompanying measures to retrain redundant workers and to assist workers in setting up their own businesses and co-operatives. Steps to institutionalise what you call the welfare state are a priority.

Others argue for a quick shock policy to achieve a competitive level of efficiency as quickly as possible. Social policies will take a secondary role to closing the gap between us and the technically more advanced western countries. After a short period of sacrifice, they say, all of us will be better off.

I understand that we must pay a price for restoring sense to this economy. But I differ from some of my colleagues on the magnitude of that price. A hasty transition would result not only in strikes, but social upheaval in general.

Along the same lines, environmental protection is at odds with 'efficiency' and a profit-oriented economy.

The high level of pollution here makes this country one of the dirtiest in Europe. We are very clear that we want an ecologically oriented, efficient economy. That may sound as if we want to have our cake and eat it too, but it conveys that we put those criteria on an equal level. CF opposes economic policies that may guarantee greater profits but would affect the environment adversely.

For me, a country cannot be prosperous if it is surrounded by a devastated countryside, polluted water and this heavy, dirty air. Our position is very close to our friends in the Green Party with whom we are co-operating in the election and possibly afterwards in some form.

CF ran against a strong Christian conservative coalition similar to those which took the votes in East Germany and Hungary. How do you assess them?

The Christian democratic parties have polled quite strongly, especially in Slovakia where they will quite likely be the strongest party. Our traditions are more social democratic than Christian-conservative, but the social democratic tradition has received a major knock on its head from forty years of communist party rule. They discredited not only socialist ideals, but social democratic views, too.

We are witnessing now a natural swing of the pendulum. People are endorsing the opposite of what they lived through. Many people, not necessarily religious, support Christian views as a reaction to the really narrow-minded amoral atheism that had been forced upon them. In the not too distant future, the pendulum should swing back to the middle, reflecting Czech traditions more.

Another factor is that the Western Christian parties have been very generous in their support for their groups and parties here. The same type of assistance from socialist and social democratic parties has been less than impressive, to put it mildly.

How does CF see the relationship between the Czech nation and Slovakia? Any differently from the way the Communist Party did?

The Public Against Violence (PAV) is our sister organisation in Slovakia. PAV is fully independent, although we consult one another and co-operate very closely. CF supports the idea of a federation with the two nations being absolutely equal.

We do not, however, feel that all of the investment policies of the old regime were fair. Some of these must be re-evaluated without in any way endangering the autonomy of Slovakia. Some MPs from industrialised northern Bohemia, for example, argue that an undue percentage of its wealth was invested in Slovakia. The party's aim was not so much to close the gap between the north and the less industrialised south as to build a power base for the party there.

A considerable nationalist movement has emerged in Slovakia with some groups even calling for secession. Does this worry you?

All nationalism worries me, not just Slovakian. It is an understandable phenomenon now that the empire has broken up. These feelings are fuelled by resentment over the injustices that people have suffered for years. But that doesn't mean that it mustn't be combated.

On the one hand, such nationalism is obviously out of place in an integrated Europe. On the other hand, one shouldn't reject it completely because it reflects the need to have one's national identity respected, which is something the past regimes didn't do.

Nationalist feelings will subside when an appropriate balance is struck between nations and between nations and their minorities, when nationalities are treated with dignity and sovereignty. Not that it will be easy, but I think that we will succeed in Czechoslovakia. I hope that Czechoslovakia will play a minor role in bringing this region together. By integrating this part of the world slowly, but surely, we can help pave the way for the integration of the whole of the European continent.

PAUL HOCKENOS writes for ALR on Central and East European issues from his base in Budapest.
Neville Brody was the graphic designer of the 'eighties. Not even ALR's logo is exempt from his influence. Here Craig McGregor assembles the Brody credo for the 'nineties.

It was more like a visit by a rock star than a graphic designer. Wherever he went during his recent visit to Australia, Neville Brody was hung around with design groupies, students, hero worshippers. His public talks, two in Sydney and two in Melbourne, were packed out. He had more media exposure than most visiting film 'personalities'.

Brody, of course, has the sort of reputation which might justify all this. He is the young Turk/guru of British graphic design and today one of the most influential designers in the world; at the age of 31 he has virtually revolutionised British typography. As one English critic, Martin Colyer, writes: "When it becomes time to produce an '80s volume of Pioneers of Modern Typography it is possible that the British section will be a one-man show. Write 'B for Brody', large."

The magazine which made Brody famous is The Face, the contemporary lifestyle magazine which is still a sort of trendy bible for hip young people all over the world; he was art director and designer for five years and helped turn it into an astonishing success, so much so that it has spawned imitators in the UK, Europe, the United States and Australia. He is currently art director of Arena, a more laid-back fashion magazine, but during his visit revealed he would be leaving it shortly. Some years ago
he redesigned City Limits, the London entertainment guide; his work spreads across to posters, book jackets, record covers and various forms of packaging.

Brody, like another first-class English designer, Dave King, has a history of designing for Left magazines and movements as well. He designed the cover and letterhead for the New Socialist, the British Labour Party’s then monthly magazine, using bold constructionist imagery and a brilliant red to create one of the best magazine covers I’ve ever seen. Says Brody:

“There was no point in trying to appeal only to the party faithfuls - NS needed to start competing on the newsstands, so the first priority was to improve the covers. I have them stripping across the top which was neither black nor white, using colour in a very direct and obvious way.

“The NS logo followed through to the contents page, and with other headings like ‘Front Line’ I wanted to create a corporate flow so that the reader could open it at any page and recognise it as New Socialist.

“With the layout, I created a modern feel, but used typefaces like Bodoni to give a classical balance that reflected the magazine’s history of theoretical writing. A much greater emphasis was placed on the use of photographs, because I felt that the potential new readership had been largely brought up on television’s fast imagery. The magazine was trying to state its relevance to modern life. The fact that it spoke out against many aspects of this did not mean that I could afford to ignore the prevailing modes of expression.

“Needless to say, the whole exercise triggered a ‘designer socialist’ backlash. Even though it was what I had suspected might happen, I got fed up with being tagged a leftwing designer.”

Brody had such an impact on designers in the ‘eighties that art directors and graphic designers everywhere began copying his style, his flash and funk layouts, his hand-drawn typefaces, his irreverent and rule-breaking approach. It became trendy to do a Brody - and during his visit there were street posters all over Sydney which were clearly Brody lookalikes. But Brody himself has moved on to what he calls a sort of “revised Modernism”, in which spaces and shapes are much more restrained and almost classically balanced. In his public talks and private conversations he came across as serious, thoughtful, image-conscious, something of a play-actor, passionately committed to the graphic tradition and to extending it...and still fairly Left. Here are some of Brody’s thoughts from his whirlwind Australian tour.

**Designer as Communicator**

“A designer has quite a responsible role, and there is a choice. Either you can use the tools of manipulation in order to continue that manipulation which means basically that it’s money-gearred, that is greed-gearred...if your choice is that you went into design to buy the right car...The other choice is to actually see yourself in public service in a way. It’s your responsibility to try and communicate your information as honestly as humanly possible.”

**The politics of design**

“Design has to start addressing the fact that there’s a world out there, there are people out there, not just clients and accounts and expensive cars. What we’ve seen in so many countries is that people have finally been able to be in control of their own destinies, people power becomes much more important...the revolutions that went on were beyond the control of media. This was nothing to do with advertising, it was almost nothing to do with propaganda. This
was something to do with something much more genuine as a human feeling, a human desire, and design has to start addressing that fact."

**Ethics**

“You have to believe in something, you have to have the courage and conviction of this point of view, and if a client is telling you to do something you feel ethically worried about, that you think is wrong, then it's your position as a designer to say to the client ‘No!’ or ‘Think about this in another way’. In fact you're not so much the client's representative speaking to the public but the public representative speaking to the client. You're in this mid-position, you've got dual responsibilities, you have to look both ways. It's no good saying ‘this job was shit' because the client told you to do it. That is no excuse, I mean how can you live with yourself...unless you have a nice car.”

**Recycling**

“We’ve been getting a lot more into recycled material...Most clients seem to think that a job is only well-designed if it uses all six colours and if it’s printed on six hundred sheets of expensive Japanese paper...This is a lie...in fact a good design should be able to work on any material and the more expensive the message I think the smaller the message is.”

**Rebellion**

“When I was at college the punk movement came along. It gave me and a lot of fellow students some sort of reason for doing things. We could see outside the college that other people were thinking and trying different ideas and it gave us a lot of encouragement to go out and see what the tutors were telling us wasn't necessarily the truth, and it wasn't necessarily the best way to do things.

“We would be trying ideas at college and the tutors would come along and say ‘you can't do that'. I mean there is no such phrase in design as ‘you can't do that'. We decided to push along anyway and develop our own ideas because I felt that this was the only time when someone was going to pay you to be sitting for three years and mucking about and developing ideas yourself...At the end of the course the internal tutors failed me, they said I had no commercial potential. Two years ago they asked me to come back and teach, so you can never believe what your tutors tell you!”

**Tradition**

“The things we were taught at college were geared very much around the traditional notion of design which to me was quite lacking in any human content. It was not reflective at all of the everyday human experience but more reflective of an idealised experience...What we see around us in advertising is projected ideals.”

**Ideas**

“It's really critical to explore nothing to do with presentation (when you're a student) but to explore ideas. Presentation will come later, business will come later...”

**Mike Tyson poster**

“This was for a Mike Tyson fight in Tokyo and the fight lasted a lot less time than it took to design the poster.”

**The Face**

“This was the time when the experimenting had to be drawn to a sort of period of refinement...what had happened during the course of The Face was that each issue tried to challenge conventions, conventions of what a magazine design was supposed to do. We would try and question everything on the page...

“We found ourselves in the position of stripping the idea of communica-
tion right down to its root level...looking at what was necessary as part of the language and what in fact was excess baggage if you want, what was unnecessary tradition...as far as I was concerned tradition is anything that someone says to you three times.”

Record covers

“The record company that I did one sleeve for actually worked from someone’s bedroom in South London. It was run by one guy with a motorbike which meant that you could discuss things with musicians and you were left much freer to go away and produce your own interpretation of what the music was about because it was a sort of shared feeling.

“I find more and more today that the role of the designer in a record industry is to retouch haircuts or to choose the appropriate typeface to go with the appropriate makeup. When I was working on record covers then it was possible to try and influence the way people think and now it’s more important in the record industry to influence the way people dress, which to me is a great sadness and a great loss. My biggest dream is to do a Kylie Minogue cover. Vinyl is being less and less used by the record industry, which is a good thing because I think it certainly helps the environment not to use so much vinyl. Now in America most records will be released on CD only. So this becomes another challenge; the CD package is too small to put a photograph of a band on because you can’t see their haircuts so it becomes quite important for a designer to actually start to grapple with ideas again and it doesn’t just have to be the plastic package with a plastic thing inside, it could be anything, it’s a whole new creative area.”

Computer design

“I find the Macintosh a really exciting tool to work with and it certainly allows us to experiment with far more ideas in a shorter period than we ever could do before. As long as you don’t use the Mac as a solution, as long as it’s seen as the tool. I see a lot of work now which is so obviously Mac produced, which depresses me. In the seventies the parallel was the airbrush. Everything was airbrushed, you’d even airbrush a fragile sign on a box, nothing was untouched, you’d put your airbrush in your makeup in the morning. I’m sure there are designers out there who use the Macintosh to make their beds at night, but it is not a solution.

“The Macintosh is a tool and it’s just got to be put to work like everything else. I think it’s a great tool and I think that the best design of the next few years is going to come out of people who get to grips with the technology, or from people who reject it completely and go completely the other way. It’s going to polarise the industry a hell of a lot and for me the main roots should be somewhere between using your hands and using the mouth.”

The future

“What’s important about Helvetica is that it’s a modern type face and I think in the ‘nineties we’ll be turning towards something that is very pure, very basic, very simple, almost back to a modernistic sort of ethic; not the 30-storey blocks of apartments, not the mistakes. We should be able to look at the mistakes and actually go back to modernism and move on in the right direction...post-modernism was just a bit of a glitch on the horizon and has to be ignored as such...but in the ‘nineties we’re definitely going to be getting back to something which is much more fundamental but has its roots much more in communication of content and images, and the trick in a way is to try and approach that with a much more human face.”

CRAIG McGREGOR is head of Visual Communication at the University of Technology, Sydney.
MATTERS ARISING

FREE BOOK OFFER

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They've hijacked our media

An American citizen, Rupert Murdoch, has the Australian newspaper scene by the throat. Packer dominates magazines and now has the Nine Network back (cross-ownership rules don't apply to him).

Meantime, *The Eye*, having survived assaults in the High Court from Gareth Evans, keeps on beating the Big Boys to stories on the Hayden Papers, the Winchester case, insider trading, ASIS, the Arts, Labor's mates, the environment, the Yakuza in Australia, Harry Bailey, ICAC, Blackburn and many more.

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Celluloid Spring

Soviet cinema has come out of the deep freeze. Adrienne McKibbins looks at a new festival touring the country from July.

Like many national cinemas, especially those wholly funded by the state, the Soviet cinema is strikingly influenced by the current political climate.

The emergence of the 'new wave' of Chinese filmmakers in the period of liberalisation prior to Tiananmen Square is one obvious example of the effects of political trends on the cinema of the socialist countries.

Up until 1986, when a number of substantial changes were set in motion, Soviet cinema was a lifeless and most unexciting medium. True, an occasional film of merit found its way to the film festival circuit, and there were undoubtedly films of quality not suppressed or shelved. But, on the whole, Soviet cinema did not elicit the excitement or respect it had during the period when Sergei Eisenstein, Alexander Dovzhenko, Dziga Vertov and Vsevolod Pudovkin were working. These directors influenced not just Soviet cinema but the world.

In recent years filmmakers have been forced to work outside the Soviet Union for artistic freedom. Two of the best known, Andrei Mikhailov-Konchalovsky and the late Andrei Tarkovsky, are both represented in a season of "Glasnost Cinema" presently touring Australia by Ronin Films. A new colour print of Tarkovsky's Violin and Roller will be seen. Tarkovsky worked in Italy and France before making his final film The Sacrifice in Sweden. Andrei Konchalovsky (as he is now known) has had substantial success in America with the films Maria's Lovers, Shy People and The Runaway Train. The most recent film to bear his name, Tango and Cash, should not be taken as a real example of his work. Unhappy with the project, he left the film before production was completed.

This incident apart, Konchalovsky has a secure career in America, though he has not broken ties with Russia completely. He has a long-cherished project on Sergei Rachmaninov that he hopes can be made as an American/Soviet co-production.

Some of the changes taking place in the Soviet cinema will not be immediately apparent, but younger filmmakers have recently expressed themselves in such a way that Russian cinema seems to have experienced an overnight revitalisation. The season of "Glasnost Cinema" presently touring Australia will highlight the dramatic difference in cinema trends, illustrated by six recent features:

**Zero City** (1989), directed by Karen Shaknazarov - who will visit Australia with the season. His film is a subversive yet humorous political satire set in a town without co-ordinates where the inhabitants treat the most bizarre happenings as normal.

Cold Summer of '53 (1987), directed by Alexander Prochkine. A film about one of the many suppressed aspects of Soviet history. 1953 saw the end of Stalinism. Prochkine recreates a vivid atmosphere of lawlessness that developed in '52, much of it attributable to the late dictator himself.

Dolly (1989), directed by Isaac Fridberg. An uncompromising and chilling portrait of a system that strives to create champions only to throw them away without compensation when they have served their purpose. The story of a young gymnast, this film is regarded as controversial even today. It promises to be a highlight of the season.

Relieve My Sorrow (1989), directed by Victor Prokhorov and Alexander Alexandrov. A stark and unrelenting look at contemporary life in the suburbs. A hard-hitting film which raises the questions of who and what is responsible for the conditions in which the workers are forced to live.

The Kerosene Seller's Wife (1989), directed by Alexander Kaidanovsky. Another film set at the end of the Stalin era. Here, the story is told in the form of a fable full of unexpected imagery strongly following in the tradition of Tarkovsky. The director was originally known as an actor, and is well remembered as the lead in Tarkovsky's The Mirror.

Guard (1989), directed by Alexander Rogozhin. A gripping drama based on an actual event when a guard on a prison train decides to rebel against the petty stupidity and rigidity that society tries to impose on him.

Apart from the ability of filmmakers to take a critical perspective of their society, the most gratifying and, at this stage, the most obvious result of glasnost is the releasing of films which have supposedly been lost, suppressed or shelved for many years. This season will see the first Australian screenings of two films...
made in 1965 and 1971: Andrei Konchalovsky’s The Story of Asya Klashin, Who Loved A Man But Did Not Marry Him Because She Was Proud (aka Asya’s Happiness); and Alexei Gherman’s Trial on the Road (aka Road-check).

Konchalovsky made Asya’s Happiness shortly after he had scripted Tarkovsky’s masterpiece Andrei Rublev and completed his brilliant first feature The First Teacher. His next feature was awaited with great anticipation but it was almost thirty years before that anticipation would be fulfilled.

Asya is set in the remote area of Kirgizia in 1923. Filmed on location (not a common practice in the ’sixties when most films were studio-bound), it is a magnificent looking film: the story of a young Bolshevik zealot bent on educating and therefore emancipating the women in this remote feudal-based society. This topic might not seem unduly controversial. However, as with many of Konchalovsky’s films, both in Russia and the West, his earthy depiction of physicality between men and women, the forces of nature, and explicit nudity were bound to put the film in some contention. Over the years, material has been published in interviews that would suggest Konchalovsky’s filming methods were considered radical and unacceptable.

Konchalovsky cites Robert Altman as being influential on his attitude to improvisation, and he chose to work in this movie with only two professional actors, using locals from the Volga region for the rest of the cast. Many were unable to speak the scripted dialogue convincingly so they were encouraged to improvise in their own dialect. The result is a naturalism and idiomatic speech unheard in Soviet cinema until very recently. Despite all these factors it still seems strange that Asya should be unseen for so many years except perhaps for one scene where, as English critic Mark LeFanu pointed out, “the old man in documentary-like manner reminisces about his return from the camps”.

Trial is set during World War Two, its focus a small patrol which captures a German soldier only to discover he is a Russian who has joined the German advance. He is put to trial by the patrol. Its content notwithstanding, it is hard not to see Trial as, first and foremost, a very strong statement of humanism illustrating the arbitrary and illogical ramifications of Soviet censorship.

The reforms in the Soviet film industry which this season highlights began in 1986 when the Fifth Congress of Filmmakers set in motion a number of strategies to reshape the industry. These included scrapping the bureaucratic methods of running the industry; ending the ideological witch hunts and bans on films considered objectionable (for whatever reason); and removing the privileges given to a small group of so-called ‘official directors’.

After the historic meeting of the 5th
Congress which heralded more dramatic changes than those involved realised, the Union of Soviet Filmmakers secretary Elem Klimov (a director often at odds with the system) undertook a world tour to promote and discuss Soviet film.

These initiatives, however, were overtaken by an event which changed not just the film industry but affected many of the arts and society itself: perestroika. In a very short time it saw 19 major Soviet studios being given independence, not just to choose projects but also to raise finance and organise distribution. Of course, these changes will create new pressures like the need for films to be commercially viable. How this will ultimately affect the industry is not entirely clear. Audiences in the USSR tend to prefer their own cinema. The attendances speak for themselves. In the 1988-89 period, the top ten films were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Admissions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little Vera</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold Summer of ’53</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Kong (USA ’76 version)</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten Little Niggers</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Circuit (USA)</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Forgotten Tune for a Flute</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bedroom Window (USA)</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Charm of the Naked Valley</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSA</td>
<td>16.0</td>
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</tbody>
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(Unless stated otherwise, all films are Soviet.)

The season of ten films will be seen in all capital cities. It will give Australian audiences a first-hand opportunity to judge the impact of glasnost on the Soviet film industry.

**Glasnost Film Festival**

Sydney season commences July 26 at the Pitt Centre.

Melbourne season commences July 27 at the Trak Cinema.

Other states to follow.

**ADRIENNE McKIBBINS** is a freelance film writer/researcher and regular contributor to Filmmews. She also produces and presents On Screen, a radio program on cinema on 2SER-FM, Sundays at 2 pm.

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**Protecting the Patch**


I remember attending a seminar last year in Sydney on the topic covered by this book. It was sponsored by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal and the Australian Institute of Criminology, and it is the institute from whence both these authors come.

One of the interesting memories I have of that occasion was the contribution made by Tom Molomby, former ABC journalist, producer and presenter of *The Law Report* and nowadays a fully-fledged practising barrister at that enclave known as the Sydney Bar. Molomby, as so many ex-journalists turned barristers do, gave the media a scaring serve. It wasn’t so much that there is a problem with the law of defamation, he said, but more that the journalists who get into trouble in the libel courts are the ones who get it wrong. They make mistakes.

I have heard that former journalist turned advocate, Stuart Littlemore, preach the evils of a public figure test and how undesirable it would be to adopt the defamation defences available in the United States. Overall the legal profession, along with most members of the community, believe the media has too much freedom, is out of control, and is irresponsible.

There is much unsourced anecdotal material in *Journalism and Justice* from reporters and editors saying that they were not unduly fussed about the current uncertain state of the law. There were just as many practitioners of the craft telling the learned authors that they had severe trouble with the law, that its uncertainty constrains them and its application is unfair. Indeed I know of at least one leading defamation adviser for a major newspaper group who says he’s lost his nerve in advising in this area. As far as he can see everything is defamatory.

Consider the lottery of recent damages that flow from the following successful actions by plaintiffs:

- A NSW Supreme Court jury awarded Sydney businessman Jimmy Chan only $10,500 damages after finding it had been falsely imputed by SBS TV that he was a notorious criminal, a heroin dealer, owned and operated illegal casinos, and was a leader of and actively involved in organised crime.
- A few weeks earlier another Supreme Court jury awarded a Sydney restaurant owner $100,000 over an unfavourable review of his cooked lobsters.
- Somewhat after this $600,000 was awarded to solicitor N R Carson after the jury found the *Sydney Morning Herald* had published articles which imputed he had conducted himself unethically as a solicitor.

It can be readily seen that the range of money verdicts for imputations that would tend to have people of good repute shun and avoid the plaintiff is very wide. This is the fault of juries.

The thrust of the reform proposals now is to have judges determine the money verdicts in defamation actions. In other words the jury would determine whether the defences had been made out, and the judge would determine the amount. At least this is what NSW attorney general John Dowd is talking about.
But in the area of contempt law, where amounts are already determined by judges all around Australia, consistency is by no means apparent. Consider the following:

- The full bench in Victoria ultimately settled on a fine of $15,000 and 28 days imprisonment for the Hinch contempt case, while Macquarie Broadcasting was fined $15,000 and $25,000 on two counts in the same matter. In the Hinch case there was no aborting of a trial or discharge of a jury involved in the contempt.

- In the Wran case of the same year the fine imposed for remarks about the innocence of former High Court judge Lionel Murphy was $25,000. Nationwide News was fined $200,000 for publishing Wran’s remarks in the Sydney Daily Telegraph. There was no delay to the second Murphy trial as a result of this publication.

- In December 1986 the NSW Court of Appeal fined the ABC $100,000 for broadcasting material about the Age tapes after Justice Murphy had been charge with attempting to pervert the course of justice. Murphy’s trial was not aborted or delayed as a result of the broadcast.

- In the 1988 the Daily Liberal of Dubbo, NSW, was fined $10,000 for sub judice contempt for publishing the prior convictions of an accused person.

- Around the same time the Sydney Sun was fined $20,000 for describing one of the accused in the Anita Cobby case as a prison escapee one day after the commencement of the trial. The jury was discharged and a new jury sworn in a week later.

- Late last year a Melbourne barrister, Wanda Browne, said on a radio program during the course of Victoria’s first toxic shock trial that the plaintiff “would get up on this and it’s going to cost Johnson and Johnson a fair whack”. The jury in the case was discharged. The Barrister’s Disciplinary Tribunal subsequently suspended her from practice for six weeks.

It can be seen that there have been a considerable range of fines and even imprisonment applied by the courts in recent times for sub judice contempt.

The point to remember, however, is that the anodyne quality of much reporting in Australia is due to the uncertainty engendered by the laws of defamation and contempt. The reform movement is slowly building to get something done about defamation. Certainly in NSW and Queensland it is being addressed. As for contempt, it is not on the agenda anywhere, despite the excellent reform proposals by the Australian Law Reform Commission.

Grabosky and Wilson’s book provides some interesting insights for non-journalists into the difficulties the media faces in reporting the justice system. Not surprisingly the lawyers lead the charge against the media for the way it reports trials and publishes ‘investigatory’ work.

There is much vested interest in protecting the status quo, born of the tribal instincts of lawyers to protect their patch. The protection of the patch, for my money, should make way for a vigilant media, less constrained in its capacity to expose the rorts and rackets and those perpetuating them, no matter how exalted their station.

RICHARD ACKLAND is the publisher of Justinian and The Gazette of Law and Journalism. He is also a past presenter of ABC Radio National’s Late Night Live.

Ingelba and the Five Black Matriarchs tells the story of a northern NSW community of Aboriginal people and their association with part of their traditional land.

Primarily we accompany Patsy Cohen, taken from her mother as an infant, as she traces back through her life and discovers her identity, kinfolk and place. It is through Patsy we meet others, now residing in Armidale and the surrounding districts, and learn of the five Black women, the matriarchs who lived at Ingelba in the last century, from whom these people are descended.

The work is the result of a collaboration between Patsy and Margaret Somerville, who teaches at the University of New England, and their quest for facts and memories about Patsy’s background and relationship with the people and history of the area. This is often a painful story for Patsy to tell. A grandmother and part-time teacher, Patsy vividly recalls the details of how, while living in a series of institutions and foster homes at an early age, she came to regard herself as white. At about nine years old she was told she had relatives to whom she was to be returned.

So anyhow the train pulled up and I was lookin’ for a white grandmother and grandfather and the next minute this old black woman came to the winder of the train and I saw these old black arms stretched out to me. The welfare officer put the winder up and I just sprung onto her and I said, “What are those people doin’ here?” And thankfully, this is not the case. An important strength of the work is that the reader is left with a firm sense of the completeness of the picture of Aboriginal occupancy of the area by these matriarchs and their forebears, as well as their descendants, and of Aboriginal cultural notions of continuity and ongoing association with land and ‘place’. In this way Margaret Somerville has done a wonderful job of preserving the integrity of the collaboration.

My criticism of the book stems from my own personal dislike of the use of incorrect spelling (such as ‘winder’ for ‘window’), dropping ‘gs’ and ‘hs’ (as in comin’ ‘ome’ for ‘coming home’), and convoluted sentence structure as a means of trying to show that interviewees didn’t speak standard English. I know of no one who speaks perfectly pronunced and sentence structure of the written form, an excellent and superior form which ends up being reserved for the writer - to the detriment of the interviewees.

We Are Staying: The Alyawarre Struggle for Land at Lake Nash, by Pamela Lyon and Michael Parsons, was written for the Central Land Council and published by the Aboriginal-controlled adult education institution in Alice Springs. It tells the long and painful story of a small group of people and their determination, over decades, to win their place. We Are Staying documents the procession of pastoralists, politicians, lawyers, administrators and journalists, as well as union and religious representatives, who, over a period since the ‘twenties, were aware of - and in one form or another, involved in - the struggle and deprivations endured by the Alyawarre people.

We Are Staying is the story not only of the Alyawarre people but of many hundreds of similar Aboriginal communities who have been, and are, obliged to battle the Goliaths of the so-called development industries. In the Lake Nash instance, wealthy pastoralists, evolved from the earlier squatterocracy responsible for the initial destruction of local Aboriginal family groups, refused to concede to the modest demands of the people whose land they had assumed. In their effort to force the Alyawarre to move, they created a situation of starvation and ill-health by denying the people access to both work and water.

The Alyawarre eventually triumphed, gaining security of tenure to a small holding in 1989. But how many other evil and ungodly stories of this nature must unfold before the federal government establishes a treaty, a reconciliation, with Aboriginal people so that justice is not always paid for in Black lives?

ROBERTA B SYKES, whose most recent book is Black Majority, is Writer in Residence at Queensland University.
Little Sir Eco


"How would you like to review this?" Jane said. "You're writing your own thriller. You might get some clues from Castro." Always ready to learn and looking for something light to read on the day-train to Melbourne, I flicked over to the cover blurb.

Pomeroy's an investigative journalist who uncovers blackmail and corruption and survives a murder attempt as he invades privileged and perverse lives. Sounds a reasonable read.

What followed left me a little worried: "But what reads at first like a compelling (love that word!) mix of spy thriller, moral tale and postmodern playfulness serves the darker purpose of exploding presumptions, as Castro unleashes storms which will disgorge the flotsam and jetsam of autobiography, love and betrayal."

Postmodern playfulness? Last time I heard a postmodernist trying to be playful I went to sleep. Still, I said I'd give it a go.

We all make mistakes. Pomeroy is not a thriller, although about half way through Castro remembers that's what he's supposed to be writing. So what begins as some fancy writing in the first part descends into ordinaryness as he tries to give the determined reader some idea of what there is of a plot. After the first eighty pages of 'playfulness', I was accepting the book for what it was. Although it's hard to accept the heroine Estreuita on any terms. Castro just finds women impossible to portray and his heroine is like something out of a Playboy centrefold or, alternatively, GH. Maybe that's why it's called a spy book, so that we can be told endlessly about his lost love, "the most beautiful woman I knew". I reckon Ian Fleming did it better.

But maybe that's just postmodern playfulness. And of course that is why even the most venal or simple-minded of his characters speak like semiotic lecturers trying to impress a first year English class. Like Frisco, the fellow reporter in Hong Kong, who offers us such gems as:

"One thing about crime, it's closely tied to myth, and myth is pretty international."

"How do you mean?"

I'd caught him with a nice cultural jab.

"The least realistic people in the world are criminals. They tend to follow codes."

"That's because myth is tied to money," Frisco said, "and money tries to represent. It drowns in its own abstraction. Realism is a hoax anyway, although it tries to be respectable. But myth interests me," Frisco said, his eyes squinting. "Innocence last summer. Someone could market that as a fragrance."

"They already have."

And so on. See what I mean?

Frisco, by the way, was accompanied by a "tall and slender girl. She had piercing green eyes and a long neck. He introduced her by saying she was of Dutch nobility. She was charming in an emu-like way, and followed our conversation with a lack of interest that suggested boredom, and perhaps vast experience."

The boredom would be understandable and as for that vast experience, well, maybe it was with postmodernists being playful.

Still, I've got to admit that once I stopped worrying about who dunnit or rather, what was done for someone to do - I found Brian Castro's little word plays and in-jokes amusing enough to push on. Sometimes he went a bit overboard: "Pope Pius X, who had declared that modernism was not a heresy, but the summation and essence of every heresy", walked up the aisle to the altar and suddenly rose three or four feet above the ground. It was clear that he already had a vision of post-modernism.

Old Umberto, of course, played all sorts of games too, though a little less clumsily. But he could also tell a yarn well enough for a film to be made from it. Which is what writing crime fiction is all about, isn't it?

Consistency is what this novel hasn't. Playing postmodernist games with form is all very well, but if you start that way you shouldn't switch to some very ordinary writing and structure halfway through to get it on the crime fiction shelves. Brian Castro at his best writes very well. He just needs something to write about.

DENIS FRENEY is a journalist and writer. His first political thriller Larry Death will be published by Heinemann early next year.
News from Nowhere

Night Noise

One of my favourite TV shows is a particularly vacuous all night news program called News Overnight. Actually, the show is called the NBC Today Show in America, but an Australian network picks it up and broadcasts it live via satellite so that you can enjoy the light of a different day through the TV window with your insomnia. Starting at the screen late at night, I sometimes think News Overnight is archetypal television.

Like many people of a generation which grew up when television not only existed but was fully established, it has always been taken for granted, part of my domestic life. You don't watch television, it just happens. It's on while you're there, a vague and ever-present murmur of the public sphere.

So it is a matter of no particular significance that the white noise of television should choose to enter my private space in the form of News Overnight. The show has a particularly avuncular weather reader called Willard Scott, and it's quite a spectacle watching this rather jolly man describe the weather on a continent that isn't yours on a day which for Australians has already come and gone. The height of useless information, one might think.

There is a point in the weathercasting when Willard utters the same invariant phrase: "Now here's what's happening in your world!" This appears to be the cue for local stations throughout the network to insert a little mini-weather broadcast, and the Australian network dutifully does the same, snapping back from the global to the national scale with a clash of accents.

"Now here's what's happening in your world" strikes me as a particularly resonant expression, and many's the time, while all this useless information about another time and place has come pouring into my room, that I've tried to fathom its greater significance, while anticipating Willard's inevitable performance of this line. It seems to encapsulate everything both fascinating and frightening about a global information system. So let's pull Willard's famous line apart and see what this piece of otherwise useless information is telling us about the way global information works.

It starts with the word "Now...": someone on the other side of the world is speaking to me from thousands of miles away, yet only a matter of seconds separates us in time.

"Now here is...": Willard's voice speaks this global network's essential power. The power to present things, to name them and tell stories about the things it presents and names, like "show and tell".

"Now here is what is happening...": Above all, this medium insists on being the globed to the national scale with a little mini-weather broadcast, and this little private world. There is a clash of accents. This world is mine, and I am its. Time keeps leaping out of a box at the end of my bed and explaining itself to me. It starts with the word "Now...": someone on the other side of the world is speaking to me from thousands of miles away, yet only a matter of seconds separates us in time.

"Now here is what's happening...": Above all, this medium presents events. Its concept of time is the time of the event, but the event is presented as discrete segments. It is the opposite of that kind of philosophical time which knows no emergency, which does not know of television's injunction to name, narrate and present something as it happens, before it ends, before the last residue of the event disappears without a trace.

"Now here's what's happening in your...": despite its global conception of itself and its instantaneous control of time, this medium insists on belonging to me and me alone, the little private world where I lie on the edge of the bed staring blankly at the screen. In this private, separate, isolated world, what do I care who else is watching, or where? It speaks to me in my home, it speaks across whole oceans and continents, yet Willard speaks in a casual, friendly voice, as if he were actually here in this little private world. There is a one-way street running from the world straight to me.

"...world": there is no private space here any more. The world keeps leaping out of a box at the end of my bed and explaining itself to me. This world is mine, and I am its. Time for a commercial break.

The reason for attempting to unpack the baggage Willard Scott is carrying when he pops into my home for a chat is to try to understand what is happening in a world which, among the many things which appear to be in flux and change, is increasingly subjected to global information flows. "All that is solid melts into air, all that is sacred is profane" is the way Marx described the dynamism and changeability of the modern world. Grabbing how contemporary media are changing both the world itself and our experience of the world (and these are not entirely the same thing) is what this column is all about. A recent example might help illustrate the weird kind of things that seem to be happening.

Another sleepless night, absentmindedly flipping from channel to channel in the 'neo-TV' manner described by Umberto Eco: "Have you ever tried watching TV news on two state channels, switching in hiccup fashion from one to the other so that you always see the same item of TV news twice, and never the one you are waiting for? Or brought in a 'pie in the face' at the moment when the old mother is dying?" If you haven't you should try it; it's fun!

The only trouble was, I kept flipping channels and getting exactly the same picture. Strange. Turning the sound up revealed that the pictures I was watching of waiting crowds and lines of police were courtesy of South African National Television. They were pictures of the crowds awaiting the release of Nelson Mandela, legendary figurehead and leader of the African National Congress.

Yet there were several very strange aspects to this event. South African TV had a monopoly on the image flow out of South Africa, so everybody in the world was obliged to carry the same pictures, as the TV voice-over announcers very apologetically reminded us, as if to say, "don't blame us for the coverage". And well we might. The images were terrible! All of a sudden
the camera would start making whip pans left and right as the camera operator did a few warm-up exercises. The voice-over announcer explained that the image wasn’t at that point being broadcast within South Africa. South African TV seemed oblivious to the fact that, while their viewers were still chewing over a soap opera episode or whatever, the rest of the world was already getting the satellite feed.

This, to me, seemed to indicate a lack of media sophistication on the part of the South African regime. Here was a perfect opportunity to make propaganda on a global scale: Mandela’s release made the government look good, it gave various vested interests a pretext to begin lobbying for the lifting of sanctions, but these images made them look like a bunch of inward-looking hicks with no concept of global media image-politics. Perhaps we should be thankful. Sure enough, Mandela’s actual release was delayed for so long that the live coverage was forced to conclude without a climax.

As I flipped between channels looking at the same shoddy pictures I began to notice that one of the voice-overs was English, the other American. Not that this is unusual in Australian television, but closer attention revealed something quite fantastic. The ABC was relaying a BBC program on Mandela’s release. One of the commercial channels was relaying NBC’s Today show. Here was the kicker: by flipping the remote button I was shifting between two versions of the same images that had travelled around the globe in opposite directions to get to me-once from South Africa to London to Sydney, the other from South Africa to New York, the other from South Africa to London to Sydney. “Now here’s what’s happening in your world.”

The Mandela mythos was another curious aspect to this. Joshua Meyrowitz has argued that media have made political figures more of an everyday presence, and this has rendered them less heroic in stature, more everyday and human, all too human. One thinks in particular of those figures who could appear to do nothing right: James Callaghan and Jimmy Carter, Or Bob Hawke, currying electoral support for Labor during the bitter Reagan-Thatcher years by playing a ‘common bloke’ role for the cameras, but becoming so familiar that even his prostate operation was common knowledge to all and sundry.

Mandela is, of course, a figure in quite a different league. Yet what seems to have made Mandela possible as a great symbol of resistance to apartheid was his very invisibility for so many years. Even his failure to materialise in the scheduled time slot seemed an appropriate gesture, a continuation of that legendary invisibility. In a desperate attempt to keep their programs alive, both NBC and the BBC replayed over and over the tiny scrap of film of Mandela, and the few still photographs. Minimal clues verifying his existence, but far from enough to render him as every day a visitor in one’s living room as Hawke or Thatcher, George Bush or Teddy Kennedy. The Mandela mythos and his invisibility seem to verify as a negative case the Meyrowitz idea of familiarity breeding, not contempt, but sublime indifference. By not happening in our world, Mandela appeared on the day of his release to belong to a better world. To promise a place beyond the spectacle.

McKenzie Wark.
Hello patients,

Let’s spare a thought this month for AIDS educators, that foolhardy group of individuals whose job it is to teach the Australian public how to shoot up and fornicate - and survive.

Let’s face it, they have a difficult and pretty silly job. They spend most of their time sitting in circles with groups of embarrassed strangers putting condoms onto broomsticks or bananas or, when they’re really caught short, onto each other’s fingers.

And when they’re not playing with prophylactics (look it up if you don’t know the meaning ... what do they teach you in schools these days!), they spend their time driving around with an ‘Education Bag’ in the boot of their car - a bag which can get them into an awful lot of trouble. This bag is filled to the brim with a range of condoms and sexual toys which would make a Kings Cross prostitute blush, and a collection of drug accessories which is the envy of every addict they try to ‘educate’.

Of course, while they’re doing the educating, the addicts are out the back nicking the ‘fits’, as they’re called, out of the boot of the educator’s car. It’s a kind of ‘instant needle exchange program’, only the teacher gets nothing back. Although I’m told that at least this way they don’t have to cope with the loony opposition they’d get if they tried to set up the real thing.

But, as I said, this Educator’s Bag can get them into a lot of trouble. Several of my AIDS Educator patients have had this unnerving experience. They were driving along a country road and suddenly they were pulled over for speeding. The eager young constable then decides to search the car and he finds The Bag. Then my patients have had to try to explain to a sceptical young country officer why their bag is filled with needles and sexual filth. It certainly tests some of the ‘communication and negotiation skills’ these AIDS Educators are supposed to be able to teach!

As fear grows in the community about the spread of AIDS, the pressure is on this band of trainers to change deep-seated and complex human behaviours - and all the public want to talk about are toilet seats and mosquitoes. (“Can you get it from that? Can you get it from that?” the average Aussie cries.)

As fear in the government grows about the cost of caring for the sick and dying, the pressure is on the trainers to stop the spread of the virus. The government wants them to ‘educate, co-ordinate and evaluate’ - but of course what the government really wants them to do is to come in under budget.

And so, with a growing public health problem and limited resources, the pressure is on the AIDS Educators to kick goals! - without a ball! It’s not surprising that they’re suffering from psycho-sexual stress at the moment. They are the people who have to answer all the questions in the wake of each new terrifying media campaign about AIDS. As all those couples start falling onto beds of needles, the phones start ringing with the questions.

The questions in country areas can be particularly difficult, for example, this frequently asked question which puts the beef industry in a whole new light: “If a man with AIDS has sex with a cow, and then I milk the cow and drink the milk, will I get it?” And “What if a mosquito bites a man with AIDS and then bites the cow, will I get it then?”

Country AIDS Educators must also grapple with what I refer to clinically as ‘The Easter Show Factor’ - that time of the year when country folk come down to the Big Smoke to have a little Creek (the Ottoman Ride) with a city prostitute and to share a needle with the stock and station agent from Elders.

But perhaps the most difficult situation to deal with is the earnest Australian male who looks the AIDS Educator in the eye and says, “Yes, I do occasionally visit the men’s toilets behind the footy club for a f.ck and s.ck” (as they so bluntly put it, I hope I don’t have to spell this out). “But I’m definitely not a poofter because I’m married, I’ve got fourteen children, I’m a Catholic, and if that doesn’t convince you, I’m a Rotarian!”

It’s at about this point in the conversation that many AIDS Educators start to think about changing to a sensible job like the Quit campaign, or the baby health immunisation program.

But even the problem of the Aussie father of fourteen pales into insignificance when the Educator is faced with the apparently sane and intelligent Australian woman who still falls for the following two lines -

“If you loved me you wouldn’t want me to wear a condom” and “I have been faithful to you for the entire 32 years of our married life.”

Patients, there’ll be more on AIDS in this column next month. Goodbye until then.

Send your problems to Dr Hartman’s secretary, Julie McCrossin, care of ALR.
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