THE AUSTRALIAN LEFT: BEYOND LABOURISM?

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A decade ago it was popular to argue that the two major parties in Australia were no more different than Tweedledum and Tweedledee. This kind of thinking, if it can be so called, fed on a traditional refusal among the Australian Left to take seriously the problem of labourism. This refusal has now, in the eighties, returned with vengeance, as farce. Many on the Left are now subservient to the very Labor Party which they had earlier derided. Labor itself has developed in particular corporatist directions. Many on the Left have seized on these developments as offering a new beginning, beyond dogmatism, beyond cliched militancy, beyond ultra-leftist rhetoric and headbanging. But there is little prospect that any of this will lead beyond labourism. In the Australian case as in the English, labourism encompasses a pragmatic politics where the essential focus is on concrete demands of immediate advantage to the working class and organised labour. Labourist politics in Australia, as in England, of course takes place on, and accepts, the terrain of capitalist social relations. Yet labourism has a magnetic effect on the Australian Left, and this is a tendency which has been strengthened over the last ten years.

In 1972 the Whitlam Government came into office. The conservative ice age was ended; this was the first Federal Labor Government to be elected in Australia since the post-war reconstruction period. The response on the Left was euphoric, even among those who were less than enthusiastic at the prospect of what came to be called 'technocratic labourism'. The common argument on the extra-Labor Left was that this Government had effectively been summoned by capital to do its bidding, to do what the conservatives had been unable to do: to rationalise the economy, modernise the polity and regulate and control the union movement. The Whitlam experience was, however, cut short by vice-regal intervention; the Left was now forced to re-evaluate its often cavalier detachment from the world of Labor politics. By the time the conservative Fraser Government was ousted by the Hawke Government in 1983, many Leftists had shifted their perspectives to the extent that they were prepared to become willing servants of this labour movement. The Labor Party and Labourism itself have long provided the central focus for the Australian Left; much of the Left had thus returned to its historic home, in and around the Labor Party. The Hawke Government was elected on the basis of a prices and
incomes Accord, a pact which had earlier been formed between the ALP and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). Many of the Left have enthusiastically embraced this new situation as one offering great potential for change in a socialist direction. Guilt produced by an earlier abstentionism seems to have resulted in an overwhelming desire to be where the action is. Yet socialist politics in Australia seems thereby to have become ultimately little more than defensive of labourist tenets.

Ten years ago it seemed plausible enough to argue, as Winton Higgins did in *Socialist Register 1974*, that the Australian Left and indeed the Communist Party were shaping up for a great future. The Labor Party has since changed; as the mark has shifted, so has the Left around it. Today the influence of the Communist Party is at an ebb; it has just experienced its third major split since 1963. Having disgorged its Maoists in that year and its pro-soviets in 1971, the CPA split again in 1984, this time at least in part over the question of where the action was—with the ALP, or independent of it? Ironically, then, those who railed bitterly against technocratic labourism under Whitlam are now busily embracing its corporatist extension in the Hawke régime. Others who were arguing for a coalition of the Left in the seventies have not changed their tune; their political positions have been structured by the dominance of labourism across these years, the difference now being that the ALP is given a more central place in this 'coalition'. Some points of continuity emerge, then, though clearly much has also changed. Political discourse in Australia, as elsewhere, has shifted right, and the Left has followed this shift. In this context the question to be asked of Australian socialism is whether it can indeed pass beyond labourism, or even fulfill its aims. Some would argue that it can, or perhaps already has, passed from labourism to social democracy, however interpreted. Others might argue that, in these times, the problem is rather even to achieve labourism, in order to surpass it. For while the record suggests that many of Labor's victories in Australia have been pyrrhic, labourism still dominates political life for those who are committed to the struggle for socialism. This essay begins to survey some of these problems.

*The Context: Australian Politics Shifts Right*
The aura of reform still adheres to the Whitlam years. Whitlam's Government had some striking motifs; it had a cosmopolitan disposition, by Australian standards, it had a European ambiance, in the sense that its policies and image were urbane, meritocratic in social policy, expansionist in economic policy. It introduced a major social reform in Medibank, a compulsory and universal national health insurance scheme. It encouraged the growth of the welfare state and it specifically encouraged the public service to be a pacesetter in wage levels. Unemployment, rather than inflation, was now regarded as the primary problem facing the Australian
economy; the containment of prices rather than labour costs was seen as the policy priority in the early Whitlam years. While no real social contracts of any substance were negotiated between the ALP and the ACTU in these years, the Whitlam Government did seek control over prices and incomes through referenda, which were unsuccessful. This programme of gentle reform was disrupted not once but twice by conservative refusals to pass Labor's supply bills in the Senate (a prerogative peculiar to the Australian rendition of Westminster). The first refusal in 1974 prompted a double dissolution of Parliament and a joint sitting of both houses of Parliament, which momentarily overcame the Liberal programme of obstructionism. On the second occasion, in 1975, the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, circumvented the problem by precipitating a constitutional crisis, sacking Whitlam and his Government and installing Fraser, the leader of the Liberal Party, as caretaker Prime Minister pending a yet further election. The atmosphere of incompetence and sundry scandals surrounding the Whitlam Government, together with the conservative conspiracy to eject it from office, together resulted in Whitlam's final defeat at the polls. The experience left indelible marks on many in the ALP; it seemed to confirm the popular slogan of the time, that they had gone 'too far, too fast'.

Since the dismissal some of the Left have produced a kind of mythology around these events and its central Labor characters; as Peter Wilenski has argued, the Whitlam period was the closest Australia had got to an experience like that of 1945 in England. Certainly some Labor supporters like Patrick White and Manning Clark look back on the period with moist eyes; as Xavier Herbert put it, in less nostalgic prose, the events had proved what bastards Australians really were. The extra-Party Left shared this distress, and not only because of its hostility to vice-regal relics like Kerr or haughty graziers like Fraser; there were mass demonstrations, even arguments for a general strike. The representatives of technocratic labour emerged, after all, as being superior to the forces of Australian conservatism. This was indeed a judgment well based. Certainly the Whitlam experience was something less than flawless; that its last budget had already initiated the process of spending cuts to be extended by the incoming Fraser Government ought to have been edifying for the Left. The Whitlam Government had made some preliminary gestures in the direction of gradualist reform at the very moment when the present economic crisis was making its first real effects felt; the Whitlam project thus accentuated the fiscal crisis of the Australian state, prompting the slide away from Keynesianism towards monetarism in economic policy. The Fraser Government substantiated this shift, if unevenly; it established a Razor Gang to extend further spending cuts, it elevated the issue of inflation as the most urgent policy priority, it highlighted labour costs over price increases, and introduced punitive industrial relations legislation. It restored the status quo ante in social policy, dismantling Medibank, the symbolic core of the Whitlam
era. Its programme of cuts, however, was less radical in some sectors than parts of the Left may have imagined; the parallel with Thatcherism here was more rhetorical than real.4

Bob Hawke, ex-leader of the ACTU, had in the meantime entered Parliament and replaced Bill Hayden as Leader of the Labor Opposition. The unceremonious dumping of Hayden in favour of the charismatic leader was symptomatic of the growing importance of electoralism in the Party. Hawke had for some time been possessed by an image of national reconciliation and consensus.5 His populist credentials stood him in good stead: he led the ALP back into office in 1983. Fraser stepped down as Leader of the Liberal Party; the Party conducted a post mortem into its second defeat in eight years, coming to the conclusion that they had not been sufficiently conservative. The report of the Commission of Inquiry, Facing the Future, argued that the Liberals had a credibility problem: they spoke the language of monetarism, but the policy basis of their practice was insufficiently different from that of Labor. The solution was self-evident—Liberal policy had to be more consistently aligned with its conservative or reactionary rhetoric.6 The Liberal Opposition, since, has developed a policy advocating further cuts in government spending, large-scale privatisation, cuts in real wages and so on. At the same time, however, the Hawke Government has been stealing its thunder; so that the Shadow Treasurer, Mr Howard, a leader of the Liberal 'dries', has been obliged to express a begrudging admiration for the achievements of Hawke's Treasurer, Keating. The Liberal Party has then clearly moved to the right, and has expressed its wish to move further in that direction in the near future. The bipartisan commitment to Keynesianism characteristic of the post-war period has been decisively rejected; thus the spectacle in which Marxists, in Australia as elsewhere, have become Keynesians. But Labor has also shifted right, and taken the broader Left with it.

Labor Shifts Right: The Hawke Era

Whereas the imagery drawn on by Whitlam was Fabian or social democratic in nature, Hawke's identity draws more on images of the labourist past, garnished with the ideology of consensus. In particular, Hawke claims an affinity with Curtin, Labor leader during the war.7 The choice of association is less than apposite; H.C. Coombs, for example, has argued that the parallel is concocted, that Curtin was a real reformer,8 while Rob Watts has shown that even this reformism was somewhat less than thoroughly committed to principles such as equity.9 The Curtin Government operated very much within the field established by 'new liberalism'10 —this in itself would seem to be suggestive of the distance between Hawke and Curtin. The Left, in any case, has seen the election of the Hawke Government on the basis of the Accord as representing a new beginning,11 opening new opportunities, formalising, as it allegedly does, the rights of
unions in political decision-making processes. The argument over the Accord is essentially one about potential; so that many Leftists would argue that while the Hawke Government is up to the same old tricks, the Accord itself offers new and real possibilities for socialist politics.

The Accord is essentially a wages-prices deal in conception, though it has in fact functioned in such a way as to actually involve wage restraint in exchange for tax cuts and social wage increases. As a political document the Accord is a masterpiece of ambiguity: it offers all things, effectively, to all men (women still do not register much on the instruments of Labourist politics). The Accord is a document which facilitates several quite distinct interpretations, and it is this which explains the diversity of argument over the question of its potential. The pragmatic subtext in the Accord rests on its bottom line, indicating a commitment to centralised indexation. The introduction to the Accord, in comparison, offers a rather more ambitious project, vitiating this bottom line, in its conception of the objective of full employment as a long-term goal. The most ambitious subtext in the Accord is yet more ethereal, being manifest in its claim that poverty can be abolished (via mechanisms unseen; the implicit and mistaken presupposition presumably being that poverty and unemployment are coextensive). The Accord also claims to address the question of equity, yet this problem is clearly beyond the scope of a wages deal based on indexation, which leaves the question of income distribution and relativities untouched. The further problem emerges, that the different subtexts of the Accord bear no necessary relation to each other, are written in without guarantee; so, for example, the Accord's proposition to restructure taxation progressively and to shift away from indirect taxation, a clause clearly inserted at the behest of the ACTU, floats freely in the text, unsecured by mechanisms which might guarantee its implementation. The document called the Accord, then, contains at least three, largely independent subtexts—a bottom line, concerning wages, an intermediate level, addressing issues like taxation and health and safety, and a maximum programme, involving claims like the abolition of poverty. All these claims are constructed within one central project: economic recovery. Rather than specifying conditions of interrelation between these programmatic levels, the Accord issues merely in a pretentiously entitled list of 'mechanics of implementation', which reduce to the construction of an Economic Planning Advisory Council (EPAC) and a Prices Surveillance Authority and a commitment to extending the current information base.

In terms of practical results it has been the lowest common denominator—the wages-prices deal—which has become the effective reality of the Accord. Yet the fact that the Accord contains other claims and projections allows some socialists to argue that here is a deal to which the Labor leadership can be held, and not only in its minimum requirements. The
most significant arguments here relate to the provisions in the Accord for industry development policy and long range planning arrangements, which have been picked up both by major unions like the Metalworkers and enthused over by left Labor academics. This is one crucial source of debate on the Australian Left, which will be returned to later.

The Accord, this wages/prices deal between the ALP and the ACTU, was broadened into a de facto tripartite deal at the National Economic Summit held in April, 1983. The Summit was a brilliantly orchestrated, and televised, public relations coup, which effectively developed the Accord into the basis of a tripartite deal by extracting capital's consent to the arrangement. The Summit brought together a massive cast of representatives from the three major power blocs in Australian society, business, labour and government, as well as a smattering of others who spoke from positions less powerful and influential. Welfare, for example, was represented at the Summit, but its voice was ignored—its pleas for the recognition of the pressing needs of those who were suffering most in society fell on deaf ears.\(^\text{16}\) The central motif of the Accord—that economic recovery could best be facilitated by a wages/prices deal—now emerged again as the central motif of the Summit. Treasurer Keating, speaking immediately after Bruce McKenzie, the welfare representative, set the agenda for the Summit by returning the focus to the real issues—the relationship between business and unions, prices and incomes, and the size of the deficit.\(^\text{17}\) The Summit finally culminated in the issuing of a communiqué which consolidated the Accord by securing the post facto consent of business to its basic proposals.

The simple point is that such radical potential as might arguably exist within the Accord has not been realised.\(^\text{18}\) Partly this is so because of the very nature of corporatist or tripartite arrangements. The net effect of the Accord has been that profits have been increased, while via indexation the wages of better-placed workers have been more-or-less maintained. Some stronger unions, for example in oil and in construction, have managed to do deals outside of indexation, while smaller unions like the Food Preservers and furnishing trades have been bludgeoned into accepting its limits. Lower paid public servants have highlighted the internal contradictions within the Accord by arguing for increases outside indexation in order to maintain the parity between public and private sectors which the Accord also claims to provide for. The Hawke Government has seen this general pattern of events as accurately representing the potential of the Accord—its object, as we are frequently told, is to bring Australians together, to soothe away the contradictions of class relations and difference (at the expense of those excluded from its arrangements).

The Accord has been implemented within a process which has seen the consolidation of the right-wing economic programme foreshadowed but barely enacted by the Fraser Government. The Hawke Government
has actually initiated policies of economic deregulation the likes of which Fraser had only contemplated: it has deregulated the banking system, allowing foreign banks into the domestic economy; it has floated the dollar, prompting speculation both of the monetary kind and of the political kind, that Australia's economic path is leading towards third-worldisation. Meanwhile the Hawke Government has been revealed to have a foreign policy well to the right of previous Labor Governments, and has drawn little substantial inspiration from the policies of its sibling in New Zealand. While it has established Medicare, child of Medibank, it has funded it in an anything but adequate way, it has refused to actually restructure the health care system or to confront the power of the Australian Medical Association, and it is driving those who can afford not to queue into the arms of the private insurers. It has argued for the re-introduction of the tertiary education fees abolished by Whitlam and it has privileged the private school system over the public, contrary to Labor policy. It has developed an obsession with the size of government deficit and with being seen to please business. It has argued very forcefully for regressive changes in the taxation system, and has moderated these arguments only in the face of overwhelming opposition from the Labor State Governments, the unions and other non-business interest groups (this was one occasion on which the union movement argued that preferred Labor policy would jeopardise the Accord). It has used Labor's own 1984 National Conference in order to override branch level opposition to uranium mining and to further marginalise the Left within the ALP (though some would argue that the Left's marginality is self-inflicted). It has at this same Conference formally shifted its own economic platform further to the right. It has reneged on its somewhat less than radical proposal to increase welfare benefits to 25% of average weekly earnings. It has systematically avoided addressing the fact that three of fifteen million Australians at least live in poverty or on benefits. Both Hawke and Treasurer Keating have publicly tongue lashed welfare lobbyists who have sought to draw public attention to these issues, substantiating the worst fears that there is now to be an authorised representative of the public interest—the Hawke Government—which cannot, in principle, be disagreed with. This Caesarist touch has prompted some to draw analogies between the regimes and personalities of Mussolini and Hawke. Such analogies are bent: the problems are different, and contemporary arguments about corporatism throw more light upon them than such fanciful parallels. But these are issues which have barely been registered by the Australian Left, many of whom have fallen into either celebratory or antagonistic positions on fairly predictable grounds.

*The Left Shifts Right, or Consolidates*

How could the Left draw inspiration from any of this? The answer can
best be rendered in terms of arguments about the potential embodied in Labor Governments in general and in the Accord in particular. The Left within the ALP has drifted with this tide, arguing typically in terms of the 'potential' of the Accord, as has that part of the CPA which split in 1984, eventually to form the Socialist Forum. Some Left Labor politicians have argued that the Accord could function even as an Alternative Economic Strategy of sorts; at the same time other Labor politicians have argued that the present Government would do best to return to the socialist tradition within labourism. These responses in different ways raise questions about what labourism in Australia traditionally has stood for, and what it means today. The problem is essentially the same one, as the labourist tradition still today dominates Left Labor thinking.

Different parts of the ALP have of course struck up rather different positions over the question of socialism and Labor. Until recently the most radical faction, the Socialist Left, was dominated by old socialists whose views were often indistinguishable from those of older communists, and whose influence rarely extended into the Parliamentary Labor Party. They had a clearer set of policy priorities over questions in the Middle East than within Australia; it is now generally conceded that their arguments helped establish the irrelevance of socialism in Australia. New blood within the Socialist Left has produced a fairly dramatic change over the past two years. These newer, younger Socialist Leftists are less given to Stalinoid dogmatism and more predisposed to technocracy. They now have Cabinet representatives in State Labor Governments like Cain's in Victoria, but remain more marginal within Federal Government. Like those who remain in the CPA, the new Socialist Left are given to supporting the Accord and simultaneously arguing for the extension of welfare. But their views hold relatively little sway within the inner sanctums.

The centrist or Fabian current in the ALP, its guiding theoretical 'conscience', has now mobilised in the newly-formed Centre Left faction, which claims to function as a moderator between the Left and Hawke's power base in the Right (largely to the latter's advantage, apparently). Given the dominance of the labourist tradition within Australia, it would seem reasonable to expect that it would be the gradualist politics of social justice which have held the theoretical roost. The hegemony of this position can be detected in the ongoing, if somewhat less than enthusiastic, debate about Labor's Socialist Objective. The ALP's formal commitment to the Socialist Objective has never been as forthright as that in Clause Four of the British Labour Party's Constitution. Since 1921 the Socialist Objective has been qualified by the rider that socialisation was appropriate only where necessary to prevent exploitation or the antisocial use of the instruments of production. Clearly the presupposition here is that exploitation is accidental to capitalist production, the result of bad will on the part of evil men; the argument indicates the
fundamentally populist nature of labour thinking in Australia. This imprecision notwithstanding, attempts have been made to dilute the Objective yet further; the arguments that have been put in this direction are reminiscent of Gaitskell's, for the primary motivation is that even 'socialist' rhetoric is an electoral liability, that language can easily be 'modernised', the old connotations sloughed off and social democratic intentions still be adhered to. Some Party socialists merely negate this case; other socialists like Bob Connell within the Party and Agnes Heller from outside it have put stronger cases for the maintenance of a socialist identity. While socialists like Heller have made much of the idea that socialist arguments must be democratic, indeed that socialism ought best be canvassed as radicalised democracy, other defenders of socialism have often tended to manipulate murkier arguments about an allegedly strong distinction between the social democratic tradition and that of democratic socialism. Some unreformed reformists within the Party argue that Labor ought see itself as social democratic, in the Bad Godesberg sense, and argue that the Whitem experience can best be understood in this light. Others, more concerned with maintaining socialist credentials, insist that democratic socialism is more powerful a nomenclature; this is the terminology used by the Centre Left of the Party in its odd ideological moments. The argument of course reduces to the proposal for parliamentary socialism, with the caveat that the process of transition 'of course' involves more than that.

The language of socialism, however contrived, has little to do with Labor practice, and when it is used it is often inauthentic. The Socialist Objective, even as it stands, is light years away from present Government concerns. Socialist argument within the ALP is typically rhetorical, and usually private. And when it comes to a socialist programme rather than a socialist objective, the result is again either posturing and irrelevant or pragmatic and ill-considered. And yet people persist in expecting great and indeed socialist things of the ALP, arguing, for example, that the Accord could somehow lead forward to socialism. The fundamental issue, oft-avoided, here, is the difference between the Labor Party and Labor Governments. It may be possible to argue that the Labor Party is wedded to some conception of socialism, but the record of Labor Governments suggests a different story. And yet those who enthuse for the socialist potential of the Accord always seem ultimately to presume that Labor Governments will, at the very least, be well-disposed to union-led initiatives in the direction of socialism. The will-to-socialism does not inhere in the ALP; yet those who argue for the Accord as an AES-type strategy must ultimately presume that Labor can become a vehicle for a committed Left wing parliamentary majority with such a will and an appropriately revolutionary policy package.

It is this situation which has in the past led Australian socialists into
'independent' Left parties like the Communist Party. Yet given the ineffectiveness of marginal politics in Australia and the hegemony of labourism, the smaller Left parties have always been to some degree structured by labourism. The Communist Party is probably the best example here, for despite its occasional fits of sectarianism, it has often tended to function as though it were the Left wing of the Labor Party. Frontism is a strong current in its history, indeed popular frontism and social fascism are expressive of its two basic moods, reflecting its fundamental ambivalence toward labourism: we need the Labor Party, but it spurns us yet; we support it, yet it betrays us.

Winton Higgins has indicated, if unwittingly, the enthusiasm for Althusserian Marxism among the young revolutionaries who came to the Communist Party in the early 70s. The Althusserians arrived from the desert, so to speak, and they were armed with theory. In some ways their arrival was timely, for apart from an early entente with Gramsci the CPA was not oversupplied with the theory which was gripping European intellectuals. This was the period before the recognition that there was a crisis in Marxism; so it could easily be argued that the theory-practice relation had lain undeveloped because of an absence of good theory. It followed that an immense theoretical revolution was a necessary prerequisite to good practice. This is not the place to offer a general assessment of the effect of Althusser in Australia; suffice it to say that the results were mixed, that some young Marxists around the journal Intervention put Althusser to good use, in developing a political economy of Australian capitalism, while elsewhere the effect was foreclosure, sclerosis and involution, culminating in the identification of Marxism with Althusser and prompting, in the eighties, disappearance into Francophilic anti-Marxism.

In his Socialist Register paper, however, Higgins radically overstated the impact of Althusserian Marxism, to the extent of suggesting general CPA leadership sympathy with these arguments. What Higgins' case overlooked—and the point is of course made easily in hindsight—was that outside radical intellectual circles, the new arguments, if accepted at all, were assimilated into the existing communist wisdom of frontism. The fact that Poulantzas, for example, had directed much of his energy against the frontist tradition was of no import within the rank and file of the Communist Party. It was the Eurocommunist element in Althusserianism which took seed, as it complemented an ongoing tradition; its revolutionary element found no ground, particularly after the defeat of Whitlam. The 'coalition of the Left' policy developed in the late sixties may have fed on radical sources, but came to depend ultimately, again, on the Labor Party. The reception of Gorz's 'revolutionary reforms' and Holland's AES-type strategy likewise needs to be located in this context; these arguments, regardless of their own potential, were read through the frontist grid which was necessarily labourist. Thus, for example, major
communist unionists like Laurie Carmichael could enthuse for Holland's arguments knowing but not acknowledging that in the absence of a vital Communist Party in Australia, the role of vanguard would fall by default into the lap of... the Labor Party.

Within the CPA, then, the revolutionary rhetoric of the late sixties and early seventies has finally given way to a sensible pragmatism. The change can indeed be seen in its rhetoric. John Sendy has observed, for example, that the period of 'ultraleftism' was so fulsome that the CP's 1974 Congress political document used the words revolution and revolutionary no less than 54 times in nine pages. Even during this period, however, central figures in the Melbourne leadership were making much ado about Engels' aside concerning the obsolescence of barricades in order to promote the cause of parliamentary socialism. The argument was drifting towards social democracy, if in the traditional sense; it is very likely now the case that 'democracy' is the magic word, the associations again being traditional rather than innovative. Eurocommunist arguments were well received in this environment, particularly in Melbourne, because they facilitated this process of pragmatising socialism. Leading communists in Melbourne had been heading in this direction at least since the early seventies; viewed retrospectively, what is surprising about the 1984 split is that these liquidationist tendencies took so long to surface. In April 1984 twenty-three leading members of the Victorian CPA announced their collective departure, at least partially in response to what they viewed as abstentionist tendencies over developments like the Accord. Some who stayed within the CPA clearly saw the split as premature, for the 'Prospects for Socialism' debate canvassed within the Party since 1982 had already produced strong arguments for liquidation of the Party. The most recent communist manifesto, Towards Socialist Renewal in Australia, indicates a general commitment to the idea of a new socialist party. What all this seems to suggest is that the dispute between the CPA and those who departed reduces to the terms and conditions of fellow-travelling with the Labor Party. While the CPA remains committed to an alliance of independents, those who now form Socialist Forum eschew independent party forms and policy, and avoid the prescription clause of the ALP by refusing themselves party identity. The Forum's Statement of Identity could be said to read like an argument for social'democratic agitprop, though it also suggests an openness which has not generally characterised the communist tradition in the past. The Forum's generalised endorsement of the Accord is suggestive of something else.

Unfortunately the animosities between those who left and those who have stayed in the CPA seem to be sufficient to prevent a debate of the kind which has occurred in Britain in, around and over Marxism Today. The CPA's equivalent, Australian Left Review, has become, on occasions at least, so pluralist as to be almost meaningless, or at least self-
contradictory, combining new-look graphics and sometimes punky arguments with the views of old-timers, side by side. The CPA can, for example, simultaneously publish feminist anti-Marxism in *Australian Left Review*, and punctuate the Letters columns of its weekly *Tribune* with complaints from its pro-Soviet elders. While feminism has a strength and attraction which Marxism today cannot rival, its new hegemony has been achieved largely through displacement rather than an open exchange of ideas about, say, class and social movements. Debates over strategy or policy have thus barely begun within *Australian Left Review*. While the Sydney CPA have produced usefully temporal arguments about the reform of the taxation system, and argued that the Accord itself needs reforming, the Socialist Alternative Melbourne Collective associated with the Melbourne CP has furthered debate by producing a pamphlet on Socialist Melbourne, 2000 AD. It can be observed, with some irony, that these arguments about a marvellous socialist Melbourne not only seem to reflect classical utopian views, but also retread the path of local communist utopianism; Ralph Gibson, for example, had already anticipated a *Socialist Melbourne* in a 1951 CPA pamphlet. Clearly the dates needed adjusting. Those whose memories reach back this far could also observe that the Socialist Forum is a kind of second coming, and wonder whether the new Forum might follow the direction of its namesake, into the mainstream of the Labor Party. Here, then, can be witnessed the limits of a process of returning to local traditions, or recalling the ghosts of the Australian past.

Some attempts have also been made to stimulate argument on the Left by highlighting ongoing debates in England. Clearly the arguments advanced in *Marxism Today* have a strong attraction to younger sections of the Communist Party. Unfortunately, however, some of this argument has been derivative in a crippling way. In the document *Socialism in Australia—toward Renewal?*, a dossier including Australian communist arguments and those of Stuart Hall and Beatrix Campbell, David McKnight, for example, argues in effect that Australian problems are English problems. While drawing attention to some very real problems facing the Australian Left—the growth of social movements largely outside the Left, for example—McKnight argues as though the real problem centres on developing 'Thatcherist' tendencies in the Liberal Party, as though the ALP leadership has been unaffected by such tendencies." The argument is that Thatcher is novel, as though Hawke were not; Hawke, indeed, on this view, is Callaghan. The Liberal Shadow Treasurer is castigated for free market rhetoric, while Labor's Keating somehow remains immune. The Accord is dealt with only in terms of its allegedly socialist potential. The specific differences between Britain and Australia are here eclipsed; the arguments raging in Britain are applied mechanically rather than creatively. The specific nature of labourism, as a major concern, once more eludes scrutiny.
Beyond the mainstream Left, sects like the Spartacists of course vehemently oppose labourism. The International Socialists, lacking the strength of their British counterparts, are still waiting for world revolution to beat a path to their door. The Socialist Labour League, in Australia as elsewhere, relies on catastrophist economics and exclusivist dialectics for its mass appeal. More significant but still peripheral parties like the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party and the pro-Moscow Socialist Party of Australia have struck up an unprecedented alliance against the Accord: they have swum through the proverbial river of blood separating Stalinists from Trotskystis to clasp hands, midstream, against class collaborationism. This collaboration itself raises controversial issues about the precise relationship between Stalinism and Trotskyism; it is clear that on this occasion at least the two are united in their pro-Sovietism. The SWP’s pro-Sovietism has also been manifest in its role in the peace movement, where its entrism helped to precipitate a major split within the newly-founded Nuclear Disarmament Party. In any case, these new-found allies in the SPA and SWP have together argued that the Accord is to be understood in traditional terms as a capitalist attack on the working class movement, which they of course offer to lead, now in tandem, to the barricades. Yet, simultaneously, both parties must still acknowledge the centrality of the ALP, as they do. It is of course quite possible to be allied to Sovietism and labourism at the same time. The question of the status of the Soviet Union remains largely undebated on the Left; rather the stock positions are merely struck up. In the mid-seventies arguments within the CPA had divided, with some like Eric Aarons arguing a Deutscherist position, that the Soviet Union was 'socialist based', while those allied with Intervention had argued for the 'transitional' category in the manner of Mandel. Today there seems to be an unstated consensus that Eastern Europe functions as bad publicity for the Left, but there is no real debate over the nature or lessons of the experience of Soviet-type societies. This remains a major limit on the peace movement in Australia. It seems to be reflective of a residual Sovietism in terms of images of the future, one which is entirely compatible with the populist and fabian traditions.

The trade union movement remains closely allied to Left labourism and communism. With the exception of a few unions allied with the SWP/SPA or with the remnants of Maoism, most unions and indeed the ACTU are locked into the Accord, arguing simultaneously that the Accord can have a minimum function of preventing further ALP leadership perfidy and a maximum function of opening new possibilities, especially with reference to saving jobs via the development of industry policy. Traditionally militant unions like the Metalworkers have taken on and developed the notion of industry development policy from the Accord in their document, Policy for Industry Development and More Jobs. In the
Foreword to the AMFSU plan, Laurie Carmichael argues that full employment can be restored through a programme of first, expansionary macro-economic strategies; second, a programme of redistribution of tax and wealth; and third, effective industry strategies including modernisation, expansion via increased exports and tripartite decision-making. 

Apple's introduction to the plan then clarifies its basis in the ideology of endless growth, the logic of economic recovery being one in which nominated industries would be developed first for local consumption, second, sequentially, for export, while the third step in the process would involve the withdrawal of Government support from successful firms and the reallocation of resources to the next set of industries selected for development. The logic at work in the plan itself is Keynesian and masculinist. Full employment is not problematised as full (male bread-winner) employment; feminists could readily lay the charge that the proposal is one of jobs-for-the-boys. Problems like poverty and welfare are given summary treatment as the essential motor here is the 'trickle-down' economics of reluctant collectivism, structured upon the logical chain that industry policies produce growth which produces increased employment which produces decreased inequality.

The Metal Trades Union plan is an impressive indicator of the union shift away from the old combination of revolutionary rhetoric and wages-and-conditions militancy. It arguably provides a policy for economic recovery, which Australian capital itself has sought but been unable to achieve. Yet, in a sense like the Lucas Combine Plan, it has simultaneously inspired outsiders but has achieved no substantial results in its own terms. Perhaps there is a pattern here; Sweden also seems to attract more admiration outside its own boundaries. Business in Australia in any case has offered a rather less interventionist view of industry policy and it seems to be the case that this view is rather closer to that of the present Government. As with the Accord, policies like those articulated by the Metal Trades Unions have been identified as a focal point for intervention. In the absence of a vigorous Labor Government neither would seem likely to have any visible impact on the socialist agenda; despite these policy initiatives, labourism in Australia remains largely inert.

**Arguments over the Accord and Corporatism**

All these developments have served to elicit theoretical debate over corporatism and the future of socialism. Regrettably, relatively little such debate has occurred within or between Left groups. So much of the Left is complicit in the Accord that it seems unable to argue reasonably over its nature. Obviously people are likely to be defensive of a project they have sponsored, argued for, defended against opponents on the right. And the argument can always be put, and sometimes is, that the Accord is better that nothing, that a system of ongoing wage indexation must be more
reliable than an erratic mess of collective bargaining arrangements, and so on. Yet the Left’s complicity ultimately seems to be more awkward than this; as the Australasian Spartacist observed, the CPA is likely to be less than critical of an arrangement which it helped plan, while other groups like the Political Economy Movement have also acknowledged the difficulty of critically assessing proposals which they have played no small part in forming. Similarly, there is no shortage of ALP members who are privately critical of the Accord and what it symbolises but who cannot speak out for fear of being construed to be anti-Labour. What this has meant is that such debate as has occurred has taken place between Left academics. Two broad positions have emerged in the debate over corporatism in Australia. Some like Clegg, Dow, Boreham and Higgins have argued that the Accord offers new directions for socialists, particularly in the direction of what they call political trade unionism; others, associated with the journal Thesis Eleven, have argued that recent developments not only foreclose on the possibilities for socialism in Australia, but must also serve to foreclose the scope of discourse about the future of socialism.

The central source of dispute here, in a sense, is the question whether Sweden offers a possible road to socialism in Australia. Clegg, Dow and Boreham argue that corporatist arrangements facilitate socialist development by allowing union politics to shift generally economic interests to specifically political ones, such as the claim to participate in the planning process. They argue that a robust capitalist economy with high growth rates and high standards of living is incompatible with capitalist social relations. Displacement of decision-making procedures to tripartite bodies is therefore potentially progressive: trade union energies can thus be progressively channelled into political unionism, facilitating the process of democratic class struggle. Clegg et al thus argue with Korpi and Higgins and Apple that the class representation of labour and capital is necessary both for economic recovery and for the transition to socialism: the premise is that recovery can be managed in such a way as to shift power decisively to the working people and their families. Social contracts can, then, in a sense be turned against themselves; a ‘war of position’ can be waged from within the bastions of bourgeois society. The process of democratic class struggle can allow unions to use tripartite mechanisms to prevent the losses inflicted on them by previous social contracts. Clegg et al argue that, in the Australian case, these principles or possibilities are obscured by the rhetoric of consensus; the important point, for their case, is that the Economic Planning Advisory Council can open up the hitherto privatised decision-making processes of capital, indeed that tripartite mechanisms like EPAC can benefit all, including those who are excluded from the labour-capital relationship, even if they don’t know it.

Higgins has argued a similar position, though in a more cautious manner;
his arguments in defence of political trade unionism are less explicitly related to the Australian situation. Higgins puts a very strong case for the view that the real potential of Accord-type arrangements is that they provide openings for outside voices in the development of industry policy. His is a pragmatism of a sensible, rather than snivelling, sort: the argument is that historically the Left in Australia has always lost the credibility stakes, because it has too often fallen victim to the temptation of empty sloganising, when it could have been developing an independent alternative policy of its own. The way forward for socialists is to produce more concrete and credible—and therefore radical—policies to deal with immediate electoral problems, to win more votes and then to educate 'public opinion' and win it around. Higgins and Clegg alike, acknowledge the poverty of parliamentary socialism; in common, they effectively shift primary political responsibility for social change onto the shoulders of the trade union movement, though the argument remains Swedish inasmuch as it presumes an at least well-disposed Left government. Theoretical Keynes and Kalecki are summoned here as approving authorities. The essential proposal, then, is that political trade unionism can allow the Left ultimately to pass through labourism and enter a social democratic phase, in the Swedish rather than German sense. As Higgins puts it, the Labor Party has been trapped for too long in labourism; the extra-party Left can help push it further, not into becoming a socialist party but into becoming a party with some credible socialist policies.

Beilharz and Watts have contested this case and its practical logic in defending the Accord. They pick up Triado's argument, that the problem with corporatist arrangements is that they represent producer-groups at the expense of the citizenship principle; consequently the Accord necessarily results in the political exclusion and disenfranchisement of those who are already economically powerless. In this way tripartite arrangements may be held to benefit those who actually enter into them, but they cannot be presumed to have universally beneficial effects. On this view, then, the rhetoric of consensus is no mere tactical accretion on corporatism, but is rather a significant part of its baggage. As Triado argues, the novelty of corporatism is that it furnishes the institutional means to mediate the demands of functional interest groups in capitalist society, with the aim of developing an administrative consensus over resource allocation, investment planning, industry restructuring and so on within an over-riding conception of the 'national interest'. Inasmuch as it involves the incorporation of dominant class interests or interest groups, corporatism has no socialist telos; it emerges as a form of crisis-management, the limited strategic potential of which reflects the general balance of social forces. The general balance of forces, for these critics, is something less than favourable: business is not yet a force for socialism, and neither is the Hawke Government, but nor can trade unions reason-
ably be expected to function as political vanguards. Historically trade unions in Australia have been immersed in the culture of labourism; experiences like the New South Wales Builders Labourers foray into ecological politics in the seventies are the exception to the labourist norm. As Frenkel and Coolican have shown, trade union militancy in Australia has no specifically political base; consequently it is unreasonable to expect Australian unions simply to break out of this mould and emerge as fluent speakers of Swedish. It could reasonably be expected, rather, that the Australian labour movement will be somewhat selective in what it partakes of this smorgasbord: for while unionism in Australia is political, its politics are those of labourism. This is not to say that we ought not to hope for better, but rather to ask for realistic hopes. It is also to ask that arguments for alternative policy be viewed within the real constraints which surround them.

As Triado observes, it is worrying that corporatism has elicited so little debate on the Australian left, given its pertinence to recent events. Some have argued as though the use of the category corporatism is itself a device of foreclosure, that others wish to sidestep the nature of the problem simply by naming it. The major arguments outlined above would seem to suggest the contrary—that the problem remains to explain the nature of recent developments and their potential. What seems to be occurring, rather, is that debate has not progressed far because those politically or organisationally close to the Accord do not really want to talk about it. It is in this regard that we may speak of the negative political consequences of corporatist arrangements—for these arrangements not only disenfranchise the powerless, they also effectively silence parts of the Left involved in their formation, and threaten to vaporise their critics. This is the sense in which critics of corporatism would advance the view that rather than repoliticising social arrangements, corporatism depoliticises Australian society in general and the Australian Left in particular. No longer, for example, are there cases advanced for even an Alternative Economic Strategy; the Accord has filled its place. Most of the Left seems in fact to have bought into the 'politics' of consensus. But the enthusiasm for strategy cannot of itself generate socialism.

Labourism and the Impasse of the Left

Into the eighties, then, labourism has consolidated its hold on the politics of Australian socialism, within this rightward ambit. Within the Labor Party arguments about socialism are rarely heard, unless in the guise of arguments about the Accord. The Fabians do not seem to argue much, not even among themselves. The Communist Party, which historically has vacillated between foreign inspirations and local sources, has largely left behind its Soviet and Chinese residues, drawing closer through the via Italiana to the labourist tradition itself. As Alastair Davidson noted in
closing his history of the Communist Party, the vicissitudes of CPA history were largely due to the fact that it thought the Russian Revolution was entirely relevant to Australian history: but it was not. The traditions of the later Comintern did become assimilated to some extent with local traditions; but looking outwards, because of internal failures, the search for the holy grail continued. If it can be argued that the CPA and the Socialist Forum have now returned, more or less, to an Australian orbit, then it ought also be acknowledged that this has been achieved at a high cost: the dependence on imported overseas arguments has been transcended at the cost of finally declaring its Faustian pact with labourism in Australia. Further, this shift 'into the mainstream' has been consolidated at the very moment when the mainstream itself is shifting right. Australian Trotskyism, which has always been derivative, has also been drawn practically toward labourism, even if it claims publicly to be repulsed by it. Maoism is in tatters and the smaller Left groups remain essentially irrelevant, and aggressive proportionately to their irrelevance. The old New Left which emerged in the late fifties has dispersed, in some cases into the Labor Party; its main legacy lives on in Melbourne in the journal Arena, which has become a major independent institution on the Left. There are no comparable filiations in Sydney, where Marxism is now distinctly unfashionable and radical politics has been beaten from pillar to post—the Althusserians, who may have been off the track but who did contribute to the improvement and vitality of debate in the seventies, have disappeared. The theoretical debates which raged between humanists and Althusserians, over Marx, over Chile, have long since dried up; the differences which brought about the 1984 split in the Communist Party remain essentially unaired. The debate over corporatism has barely taken off, presumably because too many of the Left are too closely involved to engage in self-criticism. Yet the debate around corporatism ought to be central, not for its own sake, but because it raises for consideration a whole series of central issues which need to be analysed, about the future of socialism, about the nature of trade unions and parties, about the adequacy of class analysis, about the necessity and nature of alliances, about masculinity and Left strategy, about the future of the welfare state and so on. But these are of course bad times; disillusion is rampant on the Left, or illusion; nihilism is fashionable, as is narcissism, and privatisation; and the dull compulsion of everyday life of course affects Leftists too.

The broader dimensions of theoretical argument in Australian Leftism reflect these facets of life in the eighties; they might also be said to reflect the cleavage in theoretical interests which informs the Left. Two major tendencies can be identified. The first, formed around labour history and revived in the seventies by political economy, hovers around labourism as its immediate focus. Ironically, perhaps, the renewed crisis-tendencies of capitalism in the seventies represent a double blessing for many Leftists:
their arguments, apparently suspended by the post-war boom, emerged again, correct, and improved through the use of Althusserian theory, but saving, thereby, these people from the task of addressing politics in anything other than a revolutionary way. The second tendency, which is often more marginal, has fixed on ideology and culture as primary interests, again often at the expense of politics other than the personal. Certainly the Left has been much drawn to the idea of a dominant ideology, and class analysis here intersects with culturalism, to the extent that radical Australian sociology has only just begun to address the questions raised earlier and elsewhere about the same. It can also be observed that the Left has long laboured under the delusions of populist ideology, identifying conservative figures like B.A. Santamaria or Fraser or Murdoch as the source of the problem, or blaming the local or American secret police for ongoing conspiracies rather than considering the question why most Australians might be indifferent to arguments about socialism. Certainly there can be no space for arguments about magical political solutions to the impasse of the Australian Left; but the legacies of economism and ideologism remain inhibitors as far as the process of developing a specifically political discourse is concerned. Indeed, it would seem reasonable to argue that a more specifically political discourse might have the function of mediating between existing discourses. But in Australia, as elsewhere, there seems to be a proliferation of more or less hermetic radical languages which has continued unabated since the seventies. This is not to suggest that there can or ought be a unitary discourse or master language; indeed, the principle of difference and the separation between strategic and theoretical interests is in some ways vital.

What this means is that while both theoretical and strategic renewal has begun, Australian socialists are not yet facing a new beginning in any generalised sense. There is no clear sense of a socialist project on the Left. The Accord may or may not last; it is quite possible that the Hawke Government will lose office before the Accord might come to grief. The Left would seem likely to remain structured by recent developments. The Accord would seem now to be a Labor motif; like Whitlam's Medibank, it will be ready for a comeback, as Labor's generative framework for crisis-management. Whether corporatist arrangements lead in the direction of social democracy or merely consolidate labourism, the future represents a sobering challenge for socialists in Australia. A generalised recognition of this situation and the responsibilities it raises would itself pose a first step in the direction of its resolution.

NOTES

1. See further R. Miliband, 'Socialist Advance in Britain', Socialist Register 1983, p. 107 ff. The peculiarly Australian configuration of labourism is detailed by


B. Catley and B. McFarlane, Australian Capitalism in Boom and Depression (Sydney, APCOL 1981); B. Head (ed.), State and Economy in Australia (Melbourne, Oxford 1983).


See for example the references to, and quotations from, Curtin peppered throughout B. Hawke, National Reconciliation. The Speeches of Bob Hawke (Sydney, Fontana 1984).


See especially the work of Watts, and see T. Rowse, Australian Liberalism and National Character (Malmesbury, Kibble 1978).

This view has been presented in Britain by B. Hindess, in 'Bob's Bon Accord', New Socialist, January 1985.


Ibid., p. 7.

Ibid., p. 4.

Ibid., p. 16.


National Economic Summit Conference. Ibid., p. 21 ff.


See for example P. Keating, 'Opportunities for Investment and Corporate Finance in Australia', Australian Foreign Affairs Record 5612 (1985).

See for example T. Wheelwright, 'The Dollar is Down, the Debt is Up and the Government is Out to Lunch', Australian Left Review 92 (1985).

'The Strategic Basis Papers', National Times, March 30, 1985, clarified this tendency; and see B. Hayden, Uranium, the Joint Facilities, Disarmament and Peace (Canberra, AGPS 1984).


For-detail, see for example, Tribune, July 3, 1985.


See especially B. Jessop, 'Corporatism, Parliamentarism and Social Democracy', in P. Schmitter and G. Lehmbmch (eds.), Trends Toward Corporatist Inter...
mediation (Beverly Hills, Sage 1979).


27. A. Theophanous, Back to Basics, says the Left, Age, July 5, 1984.

28. T. Colebatch, 'Cliches, not Logic, behind Condemnation of the Left', Age, March 9, 1985; K. Childs, 'The New Socialist Left', Age, November 15, 1984. It has been suggested that their hand can be seen in the Victorian ALP policy document Social Justice, Age, March 7, 1985. If this is true, there is little to be impressed by: the document is, like the Accord, lacking any real rigour or adequate mechanisms of implementation.


55. D. McKnight, 'Rethinking Socialism in the 80s', in McKnight, editor and publisher, Socialism in Australia—Towards Renewal? (Sydney, 1985), p. 3.
56. McKnight, p. 10.
58. See for example O'Lincoln, Into the Mainstream.
64. O'Lincoln, Into the Mainstream, pp. 128 ff, 154. The debate had other points of significance, signalling as it did both the attraction of the Althusserians to the revolutionary legacy of Trotskyism, and the affinity between Deutscher's views and those of the frontist-Eurocommunist lineage.
65. See Mansell, 'Making Sense of the NDP Split'.
67. Ibid., pp. iii, xvi.
68. Ibid., p. 197.
71. See for example the editorial to Journal of Australian Political Economy 17 (1984).
75. Clegg, Dow and Boreham, p. 27.
77. See for example, Clegg, Dow and Boreham.
80. Triado, p. 40.
83. Triado, p. 33.
87. Barcan, *op. cit*.
89. See for example *Interventions Beyond Marx*, cf. Connell, 'Marxists and Anti-marxists', *Intervention* 18; and see the Local Consumption Series, as well as G. Gill, 'Post-Structuralism as Ideology', *Arena* 69 (1984).

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