

draft December 2015 - H. McQueen "*Constant Revolutionising*"

Chapter five

A cacophony of Accords

Beaten from Neo-s to POST-isms

Which Accord?

A surge in unemployment to over 10 percent shadowed every **move** by the ALP and the ACTU as they crafted their first Accord late in 1982. Between 1974 and 1983, 230,000 manufacturing and 83,000 construction jobs had gone. The metals and manufacturing sectors lost 3.5 percent of their workforce every year from 1980 to 1984; by then, the average duration of unemployment for workers from those sectors approached thirty-five weeks. The most disadvantaged were those aged 15 to 24. School retention rates at the time were around 70 percent after year ten so that a larger fraction of working-class youth could be attacked as dole bludgers but supported by **Action??**

In July 1981, a Special National Conference of the ALP had revised its objective but retained the formula of 'the democratic socialisation of industry, production, distribution and exchange, to the extent necessary to eliminate exploitation and other anti-social features in these fields.' That rhetoric proved a blind to what was underway. Only two of the 180 pages *The Socialist Objective Labor & socialism* (1983) deal with unemployment. A chapter on inequality takes up social investment, notably in housing. THE REST Bruce Harnett became a major contributor to the ???? restructuring inside workplaces

John Matthews

No alternative from the ALP Left which switched to support the Accord although NSW Nurses delegate J??? Haines put her hand up for 'No' because she had not been told of the change in her faction's position.

The Accord looked like prices and income schemes with a few bells and whistles

Intended to make the ALP electable in 1983 Fraser lost the snap elections in March to Hawke.

The Left bleats 'the Accord' as if that term explains everything that went wrong in the 1980s, indeed, as if 'the Accord' had a life of its own, and had been a single 'Thing' rather than ten years of unfolding processes. 'The Accord' was not the prime cause of anything. Rather, it became a sequence of means for meeting the needs of certain segments of capital and of labour. It was a patchwork of reactions to events beyond the control of Australian governments and beyond the ken of that economic ignoramus Keating.

Exorcists of 'the Accord' as the devil incarnate do not care to be reminded that what became Medicare was part of the initial deal, anymore than most have ever seen why that scheme is unfair and has never worked, contrary to the current slogan. Do they want to dump it because it was part of the Accord? It seems not, since they rushed onto the streets in 2013 to oppose co-payments

without voicing a critical note about its flat-rate levy which opened the gate to a slurry of regressive taxes.

Our Accordionists still cannot see what was really wrong with the Accords. They therefore give no thoughts as to how we should have taken up issues such as the 'social wage'. They rail against 'class collaboration' when there was none. Most union leaders collaborated. Most bosses continued to slash and burn. Nothing short of a mass movement putting pressure on state apparatuses could have limited the corporate onslaught let alone screwed concessions out of capital. Hawke, as the C.I.A.'s pick for A.C.T.U. president in 1969, was not going there. He had proved his worth as an asset in stopping stop-words after the Kerr-C.I.A coup.

These global gales could not preclude local deal-making inside the ALP. The Burke-led ALP for WA Inc. lent on their factional mates not to use the Commonwealth's 1967 power to achieve land rights and the funds into the NSW Right to buttress Hawke in Caucus. This dirty deal left it to the High Court to rule on native title in Mabo and Wik.

The pilots' strike to save Hawke's mate Sir Peter Abeles at Ansett.

The Left remnants seem united on one point: the Accord was one of the Bad Things of History. Megaphone Marxists revel in their ignorance about one of their pet hates.. Were they to take the trouble to find out what **seven**-and-a-bit MARKS between 1982 and 1991 sought to do to and for both labour and capital would mean having less time to prepare for Lenin's second coming in the Holy Land or to lead magical mystery tours across Latin America.

and why the latter's agents had to keep tacking

Secondly, the grouplets rabbit on about how the Accord was a Bad Idea in the minds of Union Bureaucrats. This version typifies of their philosophical Idealism, paralleling their anti-materialist cast of mind by treating a category - 'the Accord' - as if it were a living person, They do much the same with 'Neo-liberalism', as if an ideology could be the cause of policy, rather than its rationalisation. And market REPAT

The mite of the dollar

How many Left critics of the Accords could describe the impact that the Plaza Accord of 1985 and the Louvre Accord (February 1987) had on Australian workers?

From 1979, Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volker pre-Reagan drove up the U.S. dollar to purge the rust-bucket industries – massive devalorisation, get inflation out of system,

effects on Japan

Instead they raced around like headless chooks screaming that the sky was going to fall over a 'mega-opolis', which was never going to happen.

Left opponents of 'the Accord' have next-to-nothing to say about the floating of the dollar in December 1983 since fitting that blow into their propaganda would require recognition of how overseas trade affects the distribution of surplus-value beyond the point of production and thus of how foreign corporations exploit workers here without buying their labour-power. To go there requires serious **thought????**. Moreover, it is to fall into the mortal sin of 'nationalism', a boo-word that provokes several times more vehemence than does a mention of 'capitalism' among the moralising Left.

The ratio between exchange-rates and effective tariff rates simple enough to follow yet, until a couple of years back, remained beyond such wits as Senator Doug Cameron possesses.

The il-logic of capital accumulation that is manifest in excess capacity across the globe does more to explain the coming closures of Ford, GM and Toyota plants by 2017 than tariff cuts.

It also tells us why oligopolies are compelled to better the labour-times at their competitors.

The floating of the Australian currency from December 1983 was the single most significant de-form from the Hawke-Keating crew. Their expectation was that

Close to parity early in 1983

Their surrender to global financiers capped a drift towards deregulation of the financial sector which had been underway from the mid-1970s to service the new patterns of commodity trades within and between global corporations that therefore required freer flows of credit – that key prerequisite of capital expansion. The float opened the doors and the windows to ever more funny money. HOW MUCH IN 1980 By 1999, the annual total trades in foreign-exchange, money, share and futures markets hit \$50,000,000,000,000. Traders shave a fraction of a cent as commission off each of those fifty trillion. Small wonder that *The Banker* had anointed Keating ‘Treasurer of the year’ in 1984.

Call from New York re withholding tax and Keating

BOMA and financialisation rippled through every aspect of the economy

J-curve the value of the dollar was supposed to rise after an initial fall but blurted out the Banana Republic line during a radio interview conducted from a restaurant kitchen in May 1986.

July despair in cabinet over interest rates

They had done everything the market wanted and they were still being punished.

Reserve pushed up to percent

Dirty float as revealed again by the recession that Treasury had to have because it had surrendered every arm of policy except the setting of interest rates which it drove up to around 20 percent, thereby foreclosing on mortgages from householders and the withdrawal of overdrafts to small and medium businesses, bankrupting Whelan the Wrecker Westpac almost went down forcing the

Collapse of the State banks in Victoria and South Australia after thinking they could outsmart the money traders

Rural closures pull back of public works in rail and closure of abattoirs for live-export trade with continuing effects on employment of indigenous Australians Mutual obligation the workers had already paid for export etc Into long-term unemployment and then of the books onto disability pensions

Whose Economism?

Despite the Left’s ignorance of the economic drivers behind ‘the Accord processes’, the critics are not wrong to object to the automatic cost-of-living adjustments that were supposed to replace any need to struggle for wage

increases. Even here, the denouncers are no more than half-right. Only a minority of unions had ever fought. Most workers, officials and unions had rarely if ever gone against the Conciliation and Arbitration system, which had been their bit of the state machinery. The 1969 O'Shea strike is legendary because it is unique. The AWU, the VBU, the SDA and the Clerks had 'roll-over' and 'sell-out' stamped on their foreheads. At worst, the promise of automatic adjustments offered officials who had retained some sense of fight an excuse for going quiet. Those who persisted were stomped on by arms of the state outside the Accord.

Militancy was not choked by any of the Accords. The killers came from the Trade Practices Act and the old Arbitration system. The Plumbers Union never got over the \$500,000 fine it copped in **198??**. Torts and Peter Costello and now Freehills. Secondary boycotts

In place of a 'new province for law and order' in industrial law fashioned in the early years of the Commonwealth, the state switched back to the criminal and commercial regime of the nineteenth century for Masters and Servants.

The BLF was not knocked off by the Accord but by the state's tightening a ring of steel **around employers and craft unions**, following a Royal Commission and criminal proceedings.

But unions were crippled with self-inflicted blows, notably the B.L.F.

But also rigid official and corrupt ones in some sections of Meat Union.

Dollar Sweets and Mudginburra

Union leaders and shop stewards were **happy** to die in a ditch defending the prerogatives of members who had no jobs. Printers had become so stuck in the pride of their skills that they were unable to accept the constant revolutionising of newspaper production even as they were being displaced by **computers**. The closure of shipyards made the shipwright irrelevant as a specialist metal-worker.

Gallagher came out of prison for contempt to attend Hawke's Economic Summit and that he was in the front rank of swapping **Superannuation** for a nine-dollar wage rise in 1984.

Where has super got us? A tax transfer of wealth towards the haves
The poorest left with little or nothing, especially women
Costs the budget more in dodges than the pension scheme
And still chasing overseas investors – eg Blackrock
And corrupt union officials onto Boards

Social wage

Critics of the no-struggle adjustments to wages are right – as far as that rejection can go. They go awry when they throw out the 'social wage'. To spurn that principle is to fall for neo-liberalism and its individualist user-pay precepts, **not to mention** a retreat into the economism inherent in workplace tussles over wages and conditions. The call for a social wage should be a battle cry for collective struggles across workplaces and out into communities for advances in education, health, transport, housing and employment, the five pillars of working lives. Extending the social wage into campaigns for free hospitals, free schools, free libraries, for public housing and public transport, is how we shall reach out to socialism. Winning free housing and free transport will carry us on to communism.

What was wrong with the social wage as enforced under the Accord process was that the Left failed to make its social components the sharp end of struggle in workplaces to revive the participatory democracy of 'worker control', which had got underway again in the late Sixties. Instead of being bought off with Medicare as a scheme to enrich private practitioners and corporate providers, **we** should have campaigned for preventive, social and community health centers in workplaces, along the lines initiated in by the Footscray meat workers, and as that system was adjusted by women and indigenous Australians.

Social wage in the Green bans for public housing at ???? now not even welfare housing rates of homelessness

or the Port Phillip pipeline water and forests

In another grand gesture, Whitlam abolished university fees instead of boosting scholarships for the workers's kids now getting through Year 12. Free tertiary places was a boon for the children of doctors soon to be enriched by Medibank/care and the offspring of accountants thriving after the Barwick Court had made the payment of income tax voluntary.

Social wage and education for the majority in schools

HECS in place of progressive tax on the higher incomes available from tertiary qualifications.

But Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976) too

Do **they** want penalty rates to pay for their children to attend non-government schools, a la Short-on?

So far as I know, no group at the time thought to politicise the social wage in these ways. Past failure is no excuse for passing up opportunities to do better by putting the social back into socialism.

Labour reconstructed

'The Accord' gets muddled in its critics' memories with the 1987 ACTU Congress when its executive dumped *Australia Reconstructed* and *Strategic Unionism* on the movement. Both documents were the offspring of the erstwhile Amalgamated Engineering Union, folded into the Amalgamated Metal Workers and more recently into Amalgamated Manufacturing. That sprawl of coverage indicates the shrinkage of workers in engineering, then metals, and now manufacturing.

Strategic Unionism took a sledgehammer to peanuts. Micro-unions were already dead in the water. Even those with a few thousand members could not look after on-the-job needs, **let alone** contribute to a strategy for the labour movement. Amalgamations had been underway for decades. Rough-stuff cutters **blackers** Tanners and boot-makers had combined in the Allied Leather Trades Union. The catch-all of the Missos – now United Voice – says it all. As rural work disappeared, the AWU found new grounds to poach coverage among process and building workers.

It made sense to bring the seamen and wharfies together in a Maritime Union, and to combine primary, secondary and TAFE teachers in the Australian Education Union. Sticking Construction in with Forestry, Mining and Energy made no sense so that the CFMEU has never been more than an annual booze-up. Even the Construction and General Division rarely behaves like One Big Building

Union. And now talk of mergers with the MUA. John Cummins learnt that amalgamations were wrought by giving official grand titles and a union car.

Despite the circumstances under which the building labourers were belted into the Construction Division from 1994,

New methods and materials in every corner and crevice of the building industry had been pushing skilled workers in that direction since the 1910s. BLF Smith in 1916 from concrete

painters and plasterers from 1920s

BLF after 1961????

Once plumbing moved from lead to plastics, the plumbers were on their way to being no more skilled than the drainers. Only the electricians have not been deskilled and so can stand alone. The assault against the ETU come through sub-sub-contracting non-government jobs, and by selling out the government providers spectacularly when SEQEB sacked 1,000 linesmen **in 198??**.

The habit of colonised mentalities

On the Left in search of a Socialist Motherland, Rumania

Tax-payer funded world tours to look at

Chasing overseas models but too little of 'global'

Attracted to Swedish take-over from within via super buyouts – thought the 198?? assassination of Olaf Palme suggested that this peaceful transition had limits.

We missed the Norwegian model for managing incomes from resources and so suffered the Dutch disease of a wasting natural national asset driving up the exchange rate to lay waste to other sectors.

Worker control

Worker control surged during the 1970s, connected to the prospect of boundless leisure. Reformists such as Dunstan in South Australia responded by legislating for employee participation in line with the West German models, putting union reps on corporate boards. At the other political extreme, some hard-liners spurned 'worker control' on the ground that workers could not control anything until our class has smashed the capitalist state and built a dictatorship of the proletariat. Munday was not wrong to allege that the Communist union leaders who denounced 'worker control' feared control by their own rank-and-file.

Any out-of-hand rejection of worker control misreads the state, especially in a covert dictatorship operating behind a rule of law. The Australian state is a site for conflict. Three prime instances of how the forces of reaction can be checked are the defeat of the two conscription plebiscites in 1916-17 and of the referendum to ban the Communist Party in 1951. At less exalted levels, the state is a site of conflicts every hour of the day, each time a worker wins or loses a ruling at the Fair Work Commission, or when mass protests stiffen the resolve of Senators to block sections of the Business Council's 2014 budget.

As Gallagher never tired of reminding members: 'What you can't hold at the gate you won't get from the courts.'

More significantly, out-and-out rejection of worker control deprives workers of the experiences necessary for our class to take charge of the cycles of

production and to teach ourselves how to fashion the practices needed for a proletarian state.

The agents of capital see both aspects of the conflicts that are fought out through state apparatuses. When the managers are scared enough, they offer concessions, accepting certain union officials onto company boards, for example, the Grouper scabs running the Vehicle Builders' onto the local structures of GM-H, to solidify their sweetheart deals. As soon as the pressure come off, the exploiters go in hard in the opposite directions to remove staff and student representation throughout the education systems, and from the Board of the ABC. The pitched battle over which class was to appoint OH&S reps at Grocon exposes the bosses' alarm at losing control over the balance of class forces at the point of producing surplus-value.

The final instalment includes an independent working-class agenda
Not one which does not more than respond to that set by the Business Council,
and its parliamentary agents in either tory party.

Casualisation

Not new in itself but the two differences were

The churn initiated more by employers than by the employees

And secondly now there were more entitlements not to get than there had been before the 1970s

Paul Kelly's 'Australian Settlement'

Not a bad try for a journo but that academics took it seriously a marker of ignorance among historians and social scientists, including the econometricians who had killed off economic history and the history of economic thought