



THE HOLY TRINITY



Photo : Peter Schuller

INTERVIEW : Michele Barrett

Michele Barrett, socialist feminist theorist and sociologist from London's City University, came to Melbourne University last week. She was on a gruelling six-day visit to Australia, booked for several speaking dates but invited principally as the Ashworth Memorial guest lecturer on "Recent Changes in Social Theory".

There has been some criticism of the fact that Dr Barrett's only public lecture was confined to the realms of the comparatively obscure; but then her subject matter was determined by the conditions of the tour's funding. In her seminars, though, she addressed contemporary theory and practice in a way more pertinent to socialist feminism. She questioned modern trends in social theory, and seemed to conclude that in practical terms, a greater and more productive challenge to the socialist feminist

agenda has been posed by Black Feminism, and its insistence on the specificity of black women's oppression.

The questions raised by these developments — questions like "Is 'Sisterhood' possible?" and "Is there a unifying radical politics beyond the recognition of different oppressions" — are massive, and certainly not to be answered by one theorist in a short series of talks. Perhaps it is a measure of Australia's lateness in taking up these questions, or of our collective inferiority complex when confronted with an internationally published (and respected) "authority" that many of us looked forward with such breathlessness to hearing Michele Barrett herself, although she is the author of *Women's Oppression Today* and numerous articles, co-author (with Mary McIntosh) of *The Anti-Social Family*, and has co-edited *The Politics of Diversity, Ideology and Cultural Production*, *Feminist Review* and *New Socialist*, commented that she hadn't realised she was "an authority" until she arrived here!

Unrealistic expectations aside, Farrago knows a political guru (not to mention a woman of interesting and informed opinions) when it sees one, so we were pleased to be given one of the few opportunities to interview her during her trip.

How do you view the present political situation in Britain today and how is it affecting people, in particular, women?

What the Government is doing, which is widely understood now, is literally creating two nations. So there is the employed, affluent, metropolitan south-east and London, and then there's the north of England and Wales and Scotland which are suffering terrifically high levels of unemployment and are in very severe poverty. That's been a terribly class divisive strategy. Obviously, women bear the brunt of an enormous amount of that poverty. . .

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that have endorsed this proposal are doing so with the best of intentions. A study centre in itself is a good thing if it involves the objective academic study of another society. However the signatories of the proposal cannot guarantee that the Center would not be subject to the influence of the organizations in the U.S. that will supply the money. Nor has anyone looked into the setting up of any control or checks on the sources of the Center's funding.

To assume that the Center would be apolitical, or that it would not attempt to influence Australian government policies or public opinion, does not seem consistent with the Foundation's objectives. Our "potential differences over nuclear or missile testing issues" is an obvious reference to their wish for us to join their Star Wars program (Strategic Defence Initiative). Reagan is looking for as many partners as possible on this project, as it will cost many hundreds of billions of dollars and will require a large commitment from the scientific community. It is in this latter respect that Reagan is having problems, because the technology required is decades away and few scientists want anything to do with it, even within the U.S.A. The U.S. goes to great lengths to recruit scientists for S.D.I., such as offering scholarships to students as an enticement to join the Livermore Laboratory in California upon graduation, unaware that they will be designing nuclear weapons. The "transfer of research and technology" and the intention of the Center to "initiate and support advanced research", could be taken to refer to the recruitment of Australian scientists for S.D.I. research in Australia. In this light, a profit making organisation such as the huge U.S. arms manufacturing industry would have a vested interest in funding this Center.

The Center's "outreach" objective, aimed at "informing the Australian public about American culture"; and the proposed inter-country student and faculty exchanges, fellowships and scholarships could easily be used to further indoctrinate the U.S.A.'s culture and moral values on Australia.

For over thirty years now the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of Defence have each been running what they call a 'Participant Training Program'. An Administrator of USAID explains how this program works: "The Agency annually brings to the United States 6000 foreign nationals for study and training in technical and professional fields...Their training is directly related to development objectives in their home countries. They live and work with us, they travel throughout our country and share our recreational and social life. They return to their homes to add not only increased skill and competence, but whatever they have absorbed of the values of our society...The opportunity for broad social and political orientation exists at every point in the total experience the participant has while in the United States...Our basic, broadest goal is a long range political one...An important objective is to open up the maximum opportunity for domestic private initiative and to insure that foreign private investment, particularly from the United States, is welcomed and well treated...The problem is..to evaluate the manner in which the program can make the greatest contribution to the totality of U.S. interests...We give serious consideration to how we can most effectively influence (countries) in the direction of policies and programs which accord with U.S. objectives."

How about a quote from the much larger Department of Defence Participant Training Program for military and police forces which invites 30,000 participants yearly: "It is difficult to measure (the success of the program), except when the chips get down and you see (which military establishment) is supporting a U.S. position, whether it be in the U.N. or in some dispute that is going on in the country, or whether it be a problem of a new government and its attitude toward the United States. We can see - I think I can report confidently - that those who have been trained here have a great friendliness for us."

It comes as no surprise then when we find governments or the military in many Third World countries adopting a pro-U.S. stance; or with development policies that plunge the poor in their country to further depths of hunger and starvation, while increasing export markets for U.S. multinational companies.

It is the U.S. intellectual Establishment that is the major conspirator in these Participant Training Programs. According to Susan George in her book 'How the Other Half Dies' (from which these quotes were extracted), these programs scored their greatest international political coup in Indonesia in 1966. U.S. sponsored students joined the army (whose officers had been trained on U.S. bases) in the massacre of hundreds of thousands of peasants, and President Sukarno was deposed - after having been elected on a platform of land reform for the peasants. "The United States was now back in the saddle." And one may, well ask what the real story is behind the recent coup in Fiji, where the newly elected 'anti-U.S. bases' government was ousted.

Susan George goes on to add: "One of Orwell's principles in '1984' was that real control is thought control and that the pinnacle is reached when the controlled person (or society) no longer realizes that the concepts and the terms of reference he uses have been superimposed upon his mind by an outside agent."

You may be asking what has all this got to do with the proposed American Studies Center at Melbourne University. Well I am attempting to show just how far the U.S. is prepared to go to further its interests. To quote 'The The': "It ain't written in the papers but it's written on the walls". Only a naive person (with a short memory) could expect the U.S. government or private organizations to fund the Center and not attempt to further their own interests - and both work in the interests of another - and further entrench their moral values on our society. The Foundation has obviously asked for the Center to be located on University grounds in order to give it greater credibility and eminence, and therefore greater influence within our community. Perhaps we really will become 'the 51st State of the U.S.A.'

If the U.S. Government would like to be taken seriously, and would like us to embark on further academic studies of their society, then perhaps they would consider ceasing to behave like cannibals and slaughtering innocent people. Otherwise we will just be setting up a Center devoted to the study of American decadence.

In case we think this argument is too simple for a complicated modern world we can turn to the words of George Kennan, a prominent politician, who, as a senior advisor to the U.S. State Department in 1948, prepared the following advice for the President: "We the U.S. have about 50 per cent of the world's wealth but only 6.3 per cent of its population. In this situation we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford today the luxury of altruism and world benefaction. We should cease to talk about vague and unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are hampered by idealistic slogans the better."

George Scrinis

For the sake of consistency, the word "American" has been used throughout this article to denote things pertaining to the United States. The author would like to stress, however, that this practice is not generally recommended. It tends not only to obscure the existence of certain other countries outside the U.S. (e.g. Nicaragua, Chile, Mexico) which are "in America", but perhaps also to lend some legitimacy to a common assumption of "ownership" of these nations by some U.S. "Americans".

