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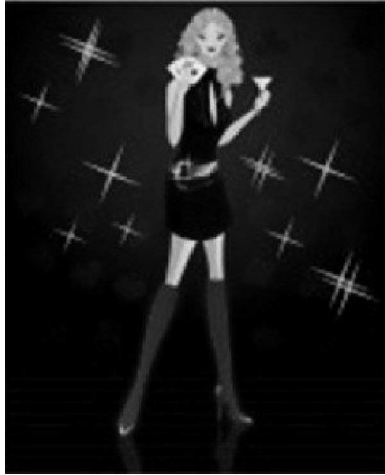
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PART ONE

THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN

Chapter 1: Push ideology and sexual liberation

I found the Sydney Push in 1962 when I was sixteen. This changed my life forever.

I had been working in the NSW Electricity Commission stenographic pool for 12 months – the result of my browbeating my parents into letting me leave the A-stream of Fort Street (a selective girls' high school) on receiving my Intermediate Certificate when I was 14, but only on the condition that I would do a year at secretarial college. They were the days of full employment for every school leaver. My overwhelming motivation, I clearly recall, was that I didn't want to be seen on the train to the city and Observatory Hill wearing a school uniform and socks when all the other local girls were already working and wearing nylon stockings. One day a workmate (her name was Maureen – bless her and her beehive hairdo) said 'Let's go down to this place called the Royal George Hotel next Saturday night'. On the way there she said 'Now don't get upset when they swear – that's what they do'.

Not get upset – I thought I'd found heaven. I'd come home. I wasn't the freak any more – it was the hypocritical repressive Australian society of the early sixties, where girls who 'did it' were sluts but boys were only sowing wild oats, that was the problem – not me. What a relief. At last I could say 'fuck the neighbours' as I escaped from suburban Australia's stultifying obsession with 'What will the neighbours think?'

The rigid religious and moral pressure on a young adolescent in Australia in the late 1950's is difficult for later generations to grasp. Add to this the total absence of intellectual and political stimulation in lower middle class society and it was like living in a marshmallow straightjacket of 'thou shalt nots'. Respectable families prided themselves on never discussing sex, religion or politics. This mindset was promoted by the then Prime Minister, Bob Menzies who governed from 1949 to 1966, and

promoted the family and private domesticity (the picket fence mentality) as the Australian way of life. Ninety percent of the population were professed Christians. For girls, careers were only a stopgap for their ultimate roles as wives and mothers which would not happen if they had sex before marriage. The White Australia policy, prohibiting Asian immigration, was still in full force; European migrants were called 'dagoes' and 'wogs'; and indigenous people were called 'boongs' or 'Abos' and regarded as non-citizens.

In the late fifties, the media had discovered a 'moral crisis' amongst Australian youth and pumped out horror juvenile delinquency stories for all they were worth. Bodgies and widgies were being replaced by mods and rockers influenced by American rock and roll culture, then surfies, as the fifties turned into the sixties. In the mid fifties we had Elvis Presley, and Little Richard's 'Tutti Frutti, aw Rooty' – shocking! James Dean in 'Rebel without a cause' played death defying 'chicken' with other hot-rod drivers, and Australian motorcycle gangs followed suit. It was a rebellion all right and one without any apparent social theory or commitment to a cause. All this was happening at the same time as U.S. evangelist Billy Graham played to packed houses in Melbourne and Sydney in 1959 and thousands of young people came forward to the podium to commit their lives to Jesus.

Long before the 'moral crisis' of the late fifties and early sixties, the Sydney Libertarians had created a lifestyle and a social theory to address the social disaffection and guilt inducing effects of the dominant culture. Like the French existentialists and the American beat generation, they responded to their post second world war surroundings and tried to make sense of their world. They were all young students or teachers at Sydney University and their special flavour owes a lot to John Anderson. John Anderson was Challis Professor of Philosophy at Sydney University from 1927 to 1958. He had a profound influence on students in a number of disciplines and on his own students who are still referred to as Andersonians or old Andersonians. The Libertarians came into existence when they broke away from Anderson's Free Thought Society in the very early fifties because of his growing authoritarianism and anti-communist stance during the cold war. He strongly disapproved of them for a long time.

Anderson remained a controversial figure in the broader society. As late as 1959, the then Anglican Primate of Australia, Archbishop Gough, virtually accused Anderson of 'corrupting the youth'. The public

controversy surrounding Gough's assertions continued into the early sixties. A similar charge had been made against Socrates in Athens more than 2000 years previously because of his insistence on people thinking for themselves and his rejection of unexamined wisdom. Despite disapproving of the Libertarians, there was eventually a rapprochement and John Anderson still came to Push parties after his retirement. He died the month before I found the Push.

The Libertarians retained Anderson's Socratic emphasis on the need for constant and uncompromising critical inquiry to expose illusion and his opposition to religion and the authoritarian state, which promoted servility in its citizens. They built on his adherence to the ideas of an even earlier Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, who said that there is nothing permanent except change, by insisting on the role of permanent protest and adding their own brand of non-utopian or pessimistic anarchism. Libertarian social theory also emphasised the role of sexual freedom in resisting authority. Sydney Libertarians are leftwing and not to be confused with American libertarians who are far right.

I will from time to time be giving you enticing glimpses of aspects of Sydney Libertarian philosophy, in my own homespun style. For those who want to know more about Libertarian social theory, two of the best websites are the Australian Marxists and Anarchists sites¹. The Jim (A.J.) Baker papers to be found there are strongly recommended, especially the ones called 'Ideologies' and 'Sydney Libertarianism'. Baker was a founding Libertarian.

The Libertarians were the philosophic core of what came to be called the Sydney Push. The word 'push' itself derives from the early larrikin gangs in Sydney's inner city areas which were commonly referred to as the 'Rocks Push' or the 'Woolloomooloo Push' etc. If you just use it the way Aboriginal communities use the word 'mob', you won't be far wrong. From the early fifties to the early sixties, the Sydney Push expanded from the university into the 'downtown' CBD, gathering, talking and drinking in a succession of coffee lounges and pubs and giving papers at various university and downtown venues.²

¹www.marxists.org/history/australia/libertarians/index.htm; and www.takver.com/history/sydney/indexsl.htm

² This book is not a history of the Sydney Push. If you would like to know more about its beginnings and early days, see A.J. Baker's 'Sydney Libertarians and the Push' on the takver website; *Sex and Anarchy* by Anne Coombs; and also *Appo: Recollections of a Member of the Sydney Push* by Richard Appleton.

By the time I made my entrance, in 1962, the Royal George hotel was the Push pub, down near the wharves in Sussex Street. It was full of people talking, from immature discussions about the meaning of life, to sophisticated arguments about philosophy, society, politics, art and literature. The conversation was non-stop, but so was the folk-singing, partying and forming and re-forming of sexual liaisons. I'd never seen



17 year old Witch Girl in back room of Royal George. The rat was used by Morag McInness to teach biology to the convent girls. (photo Doug Nicholson)

pre-Push boyfriend, Kelvin, down to the Royal George to save me from the immoral Push with its 'free love'. I have always appreciated irony and this was a good one. As I laughed at Kelvin and told him to piss off, the irony was that Kelvin had been rooting me steadily for some months with

such fun or imagined such a good game. I rushed right in and never really left. The established Push men were considerably older than me (from their early twenties to mid-thirties). They loved to teach and I loved to learn. I almost immediately left home when I was nearly 17 and moved into my first Push house – luckily I had temporarily kept my job at the Electricity Commission so was relatively sought after to help pay the rent; and, also luckily, the contraceptive pill was by then available to the initiated with access to tame doctors.

Of course my parents were not pleased. They sent my

his mother's complicity and sly looks. (What's more, he managed to break my nose and chip my tooth when he ran his car into the back of a truck.)

I have always felt uncomfortable with hypocrisy (even when I was too young to give it a name), so it is unsurprising that the very first bit of Push theory I internalised was about the hypocrisy of the male and female sexual double standard, where girls who fucked around were immoral while the boys who kept pestering them to get their ends in were just being lads. This is one of the reasons I identified strongly, two decades later, with Fay Weldon's heroine, She-Devil, who turned the tables on her faithless husband by demonstrating the sexual power of the ruthless female.

At that stage I hadn't been exposed to all of the various philosophical positions that made up the Sydney Libertarian line, but I certainly understood that first one, and its broader context of anti-moralism. Anne Coombs wrote a book in 1996 titled *Sex and Anarchy: The Life and Death of the Sydney Push*, which mainly correctly set out Sydney Libertarian social theory, but in which she dismissed Libertarian theory as no longer relevant because it had been overtaken by the permissive society, feminism and post modernism. I hope that you will agree with me, by the end of this book, that Anne's announcement of the death of the Push in the mid-seventies was decidedly premature and that a number of aspects of Libertarian social theory are not only highly relevant today, but will remain so.

Although the Sydney Libertarians formed the philosophic core of the Sydney Push, in those days the Push itself was a much larger collection of bohemians from all sorts of places. There were various sub-groups identified by such names as the Scrag Push, the Fringe Push, the Scunge Push and the Baby Push to distinguish them from the Libertarian or central Push. The Scrag, Fringe and Scunge Push distinctions were only one of terminology – they referred to the same amorphous group which included folksingers and poets, artists, musicians, conmen, gamblers and other bohemians loosely aligned by a rejection of bourgeois social values and a determination to have a good time and live the good life. The Baby Push was a corruption (according to my impeccable historical source) of the Bayview Push, a collection of very young ragers from Sydney's north shore, including a substantial number of gay boys. I think this is where the budding actors also belonged. There was also the Paddington Push who mainly derived from the East Sydney Arts School mob with no Libertarian core but with whom there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing for

some of us. And there was friendly visiting between the Sydney and the Melbourne Push, with some Melbournians becoming established in Sydney. The Melbourne Push had a much better established artistic bohemian background but no defined philosophic base.

A decade or so later, with the decline of the inner city pubs and the subsequent loss of the heart of the Sydney Push, the Paddington Push became a refuge for me, and the emerging Balmain Push (with a literary rather than artistic base) served the same purpose for many others. There was lots of friendly visiting (you're right, this is a euphemism) between these two groups.

Although Libertarian theory influenced everyone in the Sydney Push, many of us would not have claimed to be Libertarians. Everyone did, however, and many still do to this day, claim to be Push (even people no-one can remember being there). The Push was a seminal influence on many people's lives, not only mine, even if they were around only briefly. Clive James, for instance, who was around briefly just before my time, claims the Push as an influence in his autobiography, but the Push does not claim him.

So there I was, the magic doors of the Royal George had opened and I was confronted with an enchanting smorgasbord of fun, and intellectual and social stimulation. Being a fast learner, I soon discovered that the Libertarians were the top status group so I made a beeline for them. Some people may suggest that I fucked my way to the top of the Push, but I think that is a bit unkind and also inaccurate. I really got to know and be acknowledged by significant members of the Libertarian Push via gambling – the weekly Push poker games and the races. Of course, there was a certain overlap between the fucking and the gambling, let's be fair. And I don't want to indulge in unkindness myself by suggesting that such critics were mainly unsuccessful female competitors or rejected suitors.

Speaking of the former, the second bit of Libertarianism I was instructed in was the unliberated nature of sexual jealousy. I will not even attempt to tell you yet about the Reichian theoretical underpinnings for this position. No matter how socially desirable a society free from sexual jealousy might be, my vote remains with Freud who said, following Darwin, that sexual jealousy was a basic human survival instinct which could be repressed only at your peril. However, I drank in this idea and blithely proceeded to put it into practice. It took me a year or so to work out that perhaps this principle, that everyone should get off with whomever they liked without worrying about hurting anybody else's

feelings, was more appropriate as a theory than a reality (which of course makes it a bad theory). My first inkling was when I was living with Nico during one of the relatively few times when I also cohabited with the person I was on with. Nico was a dedicated stick man with a fine appreciation of young, pretty and intelligent girls. If you don't know what a stick man is, work it out – or you can look up the Glossary of Push Slang at the back of this book. Having taken the strictures on sexual freedom to heart, I dutifully reported to Nico that I had just 'given one' to his best friend who was visiting from England, whereupon Nico promptly threw



The photographer photographed. Nico and Judy Perry, Royal George (photo Michael Baldwin)

a glass of milk at me. I was puzzled but finally worked it out – maybe I wasn't such a fast learner.

Nico is Doug Nicholson, a lifelong friend and my first major Push mentor and current impeccable authority on Push history. Although (obviously) not a professed Libertarian, he is certainly Push. By the time he was finished with that part of my education, I knew almost as much about Push history from before my time as if I'd lived through it. I almost felt I had been acquainted with various Push legends such as Lillian Roxon, Germaine Greer, Dagmar Carboch, Marion Hallwood, Lex Banning, Paddy McGuinness, Alan Blum, French Deal, Redcraze, Johnny Earls, Neil C. Hope (Sope) and Chester (Phillip Graham) – when in fact

they had all either fled to London, New York, Italy or Peru just before my arrival, or died, or disappeared into suburbia.

Further evidence that lack of sexual jealousy, a desirable characteristic of the 'good' Push woman or man, was better relegated to the realms of theory was the time I gave one to Roelof Smilde, a founding Libertarian, when he was living with a young anthropologist. Roelof was very attractive, with elegant bone structure and an intimate charismatic manner overlaying a slightly aloof detachment. On hot summer nights, the Push often went midnight skinny-dipping at Nielson Park, an inner harbour beach. Presumably overcome with lust at the sight of my naked 18-year-old body (or perhaps it was just a fine aesthetic appreciation), Roelof took me home with him. I was busily modelling my new nightdress, a Christmas present from my parents, for him when there was the sound of a lot of door bashing and thumping and Roelof left the room, to return shortly. I had no idea what was going on, but it turned out that Roelof and the anthropologist were actually living together and she had been throwing a tantrum. Personally I didn't blame her. I've always been as jealous as a cat, and I thought it was pretty rude of Roelof, especially as I didn't have a clue that they were even on together. However, and here's the power of Push ideology for you, the tantrum thrower almost immediately showed a puzzling and newfound respect for me. From her perspective as a good Push woman, I had behaved correctly and with great style and aplomb, while she had behaved badly by exhibiting jealousy.

The reason that I said earlier that the suppression of sexual jealousy was a bad theory is related to my view on the overall role of theory. I think that a theory is good (meaning useful) if it helps to explain how things work, or if it can be applied in practice. My favourite quote in this regard is 'There is nothing more practical than a good theory.'³ The theoretical underpinnings of the Libertarian position on sexual jealousy are related to Wilhelm Reich's view that true freedom requires sexual freedom, including freedom from guilt. I have quite a few problems about any notion of true freedom, and problems with both the desirability and the practicality of erasing sexual jealousy. The latter will not come as a surprise to you given that I agree with Freud that sexual jealousy is repressed at your peril. So I do not fully subscribe to this aspect of Libertarian social theory.

³Pioneer social psychologist, Kurt Lewin, 1952.

Another illustration of the pervasiveness of the rejection of the sexual double standard (a 'good' theory) and the desirability of 'free love' occurred some years later, when my ex-husband to be, Murphy, seduced (yes, I mean that word) Margaret Bruce in my own bedroom at Fun Palace, a Push house of the mid-sixties, during one of the periods when he was on with me. Margaret Bruce was beautiful as well as being an accomplished illustrator and is now an internationally respected



Margaret Bruce (photo John Cox)

acupuncturist. She has been on for very many years with Karl Fourdrinier, an artist and inventor of the mildly pornographic cartoon strip 'Pussy Willow'. Margaret hardly ever fucked around, unlike Karl, but this particular night she was just like a rabbit hypnotised by a snake. Not being a good Push woman in this respect, I immediately kicked the bedroom door in, screamed at Murphy and rushed off in a huff with John Maze, another prominent

Libertarian as well as a boyishly charming occasional sexual partner, gambler and brilliant psychology academic - while Karl did the same with Rita Georgin, a very beautiful Estonian and fellow Fortian. The next day Karl was furious with Margaret and gave her a hard time, while Murphy and I just laughed and made it up. But this was the only time I ever heard Darcy Waters moralise. He was genuinely affronted by Karl's sexual double standard. Darcy was a founding Libertarian. He attracted nicknames: The Horse, or sometimes the Noble Horse, around the Push; and the Ragged Duke on the wharves, no doubt because of his majestic

physical presence and crowd-stopping blonde good looks. You'll be hearing a lot more about Darcy in this tale..

At this point I need to get something straight. It may be thought indiscreet to be talking so frankly about people's sex lives. But in the Push everyone's sex life – and their character, their early childhood and how they wiped their bum – was an open book. If you had raised such an objection you would have been greeted with incomprehension. I remember being puzzled at one stage when Robert Jones, a latecomer from Melbourne, was moralising about Push doctor Rocky Meyers' lack of medical ethics until I worked out that Robert had once overheard Rocky telling me that he had needed to tell one of the other Push women how to wipe her bum (from front to back rather than back to front) to avoid infection. 'She was wiping it the wrong way, silly girl' said Rocky. Robert had interpreted this as a breach of doctor patient confidentiality and was disgusted, but neither Rocky nor I, nor, I am sure, the woman in question had she been there, would ever have conceived of it in that light – it was just part of Push frankness and what's more it was useful advice.

This frankness was also notable in the early seventies when some of the Push women set up a series of feminist consciousness-raising groups. These were vulgarly dubbed the 'orgasm meetings', as one of their avowed purposes was to discuss the validity of Reich's theory that there are two sorts of female orgasms – the clitoral and the vaginal (the vaginal is the superior one). I never attended any of the meetings (in fact I ran a mile) but reported snippets suggest that there were very full and frank discussions about everybody's sex lives and the practices of their sexual partners. The only snippet I remember was about the size of John Matheson's dick. Matheson was a brain surgeon reputed to have a very big one. The only rumoured bigger one belonged to Brian Hickey. Personally, I have never been interested in big dicks, agreeing with Darcy who often quoted some famous woman whose name I forget (but I'm pretty sure it wasn't Ita Buttrose), that 'it isn't the size, it's the busyness that counts'.

A Freudian theory that was also around in the early days was about penis envy. Personally I've always thought that having those dangly bits must make men feel very insecure; much better to have it all neatly tucked up inside. But Freud thought that little girls must envy something they didn't have. Freud had some very good insights but he also talked a lot of rubbish.

Over the years I have never failed to be annoyed by female apologists for Push sexual behaviour. Following the new wave of feminism in the seventies, some books and papers suggested that opposition to the sexual double standard was a form of male conspiracy that exploited the women and benefited only the Push men. It was even suggested by some that the earlier fashion of bestowing racehorse nicknames on some of the women was further evidence of male chauvinism. It would be interesting to have asked 'French Deal' (Jan Evans) and 'Redcraze' (Jan Morrisby) for their take on this. What balderdash! Some women might not have been suited by freedom from the sexual double standard (and if they didn't like it why did they stay) but many of us were. It often gave me a perfectly delightful feeling of power, and I'm afraid I did occasionally behave a bit like She-Devil – not I hasten to add as a means of revenging myself on men or any man, but mainly through thoughtlessness with just a dash, perhaps, of ruthlessness.

I later overheard my life-long friend Blake Taylor whom I first met at the Push pub, the United States, in the early sixties, describing the sexual power I had enjoyed in my early life to Peter Botsman, Director of the Evatt Foundation, then Australia's main left-wing think tank. Botsman was considerably younger than me and loved hearing tales of the Push. He once proudly announced from the stage of a national conference (where well-known Indigenous activist, Noel Pearson, made his spectacular intellectual debut) that I had complimented him by saying he would be a suitable member of a Baby Baby Push should such a thing exist. Blake told Botsman that I was like a young Brigitte Bardot when he met me, and just had to snap my fingers to get whoever I wanted (a slight exaggeration, I thought). He then went on, unfortunately I thought but perhaps with a grain of truth, to attribute the success of my subsequent welfare advocacy career to the motivation of needing to replace this original power source, as my sexual powers waned, with a different form of power. (On second thoughts, I think I was just a bit tired of the original game and ripe for a new one. At that time, it is fair to say, there was no noticeable diminution in my sex appeal.)

Karl Fourdrinier once remarked that the supposed early demise of the Push was due to activism, not feminism. This remark about activism refers to the Libertarian emphasis on critical inquiry and permanent protest. It was thought to be utopian to believe that any reformist or revolutionary activities would result in desirable and lasting social change. The role of the Libertarian is to expose illusion, not to replace one

ideology with another. The motto for the early Libertarian Society was a quote from Marx, also used by Reich as the motto for his book *The Sexual Revolution*:



Photos Lydia Fegan & Albie Thoms



'Since it is not for us to create a plan for the future that will hold for all time, all the more surely what we contemporaries have to do is the uncompromising critical evaluation of all that exists, uncompromising in the sense that our criticism fears neither its own results nor the conflict with the powers that be.'

Some people, of course, did engage in activism via attending protest rallies and so on, but the only real form of collective activism in my day was the poster campaigns that urged people to vote informal in the 1966 and 1969 Federal elections. The first one of these was the above tasteful black and white poster with three little pigs and the caption 'Whoever you vote for a politician always gets in'. This was designed by painter and filmmaker David Perry. The second one, designed by photographer John Cox, was much more vulgar. It depicted a large fat red and black pig (the anarchist colours) with the slogan 'Politicians Pigs Arse'.

In the early seventies a different form of activism was engaged in by some Push people in the fight to save Victoria Street, a heritage and working class area of Kings Cross, from

the developers but, in general, activism was regarded with suspicion.

Libertarians were also very anti-authoritarian, holding that freedom is not served by opposing the actions of an authoritarian state with actions that are themselves authoritarian. Decisions (for instance on the Libertarian *Broadsheet* editorial committee⁴) were always supposed to be reached by consensus and there was no voting. A wide range of behaviour was tolerated. An illustration of this is the time Brian Raven, an avowed Nazi, was banned by the publican from the Criterion hotel.⁵ The entire Push boycotted the Criterion and moved en-masse across the road to the lesbian pub, the Sussex. This economic sanction was effective and we soon all moved back to the Criterion. Raven's fascist views were, of course, anathema to Push values but, like Voltaire, we would defend to the death his right to say them.

I've often thought that the last part of another favourite anecdote of Karl Fourdrinier's might also serve as a good Push motto on the subject of moralism and tolerance. The story is about a French mass murderer and serial mutilator who was arrested and convicted of a truly heinous series of crimes. When the Judge asked him whether he had anything to say in his defence before being sentenced, the prisoner said: 'Well, your Honour, I just want to say that nobody's perfect.'

However, apart from the sexual double standard, perhaps the most important piece of Libertarian social theory for me was pluralism, and its accompanying position on anti-ideology. This should not be confused with the version of pluralism nowadays taught in undergraduate university courses attempting to deal with social change and how power works. The current version of pluralism is a very conservative theory which says that people have conflicting interests but that, in this best of all

⁴ The *Broadsheet* was the main source of Libertarian theory and discussion. The first *Broadsheet* appeared in 1957, but there are no copies prior to 1960 in the National Library. The first three *Broadsheets* were reproduced in the journals *Libertarian* 1, 2 and 3 in 1957, 1958 and 1960. It was regularly produced from 1960 until 1978 when interest appears to have waned. From 1980 it was succeeded by *Heraclitus* put out by Jim Baker. There are 122 of these newsletters in the National Library, the last one published in 2006.

⁵The Push had two periods at the Criterion hotel on the corner of Liverpool and Sussex Streets (not to be confused with the other Criterion hotel on the corner of Park and Pitt) a large number of years apart – henceforward to be referred to as Criterion 1 (1965) and Criterion 2 (1973 to 1989).

possible democratic worlds, they have the ability to lobby governments and influence outcomes so that ultimately everybody gets their share. Libertarian pluralism is a much more radical theory based



Criterion Hotel 1965. Darcy Waters & Jim Baker are no doubt entranced by my youthful views on Libertarian social theory (photo Doug Nicholson)

on John Anderson's teachings that there is no such thing as the common good and that there are no God-given or a priori moral truths. For Libertarians, good is what you find desirable. That is why Push people never use 'ought' or 'should' unless it is prefaced explicitly or implicitly by an 'if...then' statement as in 'If you wish to achieve so and so, then you should do such and such'. I will be having something further to say about this element of Libertarian social theory from time to time, but in terms of Push language 'good' is always put in inverted commas. That is why the notion of a good Push woman or man is somewhat satirical.

While I'm still giving you your basic theoretical grounding as painlessly, I hope, as possible, some more of the Push tenets that appealed to me early on were an opposition to the bourgeois institution of marriage and the equally bourgeois activity of owning property. Although I can't say that most of us have stuck with these ideals, the word 'bourgeois' remains a useful and versatile epithet. A recent example is when Blake and I were having an argument and he, seeking to wound and knowing that I pride myself a little on my cooking, shouted: 'And why can't you give a man a big juicy T-bone, instead of this bourgeois little eye fillet!'

'Moraliser' is another Push-learned pejorative that has lasted a lifetime.

In terms of moralising, I have every reason to consider myself a feminist. But my feminism, unsurprisingly, is more in line with Germaine Greer's (after all we came out of the same stable) than with the more recent Push male conspiracy versions of the somewhat later sisterhood. I do not intend to engage in any argument about what is appropriate female behaviour, especially sexual behaviour. However, something needs to be said about the relationships between the women in the Push and about a pervasive Push practice known as the 'put down'.