Australia's Industrial Future: Communication (Selected papers and abstracts from Section 33 given at the 52nd ANZAAS Congress, Macquarie University, New South Wales, 10-14 May 1982) *edited by Mari Davis* (Trans Knowledge Associates, Melbourne, 1983) pp. 52, $8.00.

As with most papers which are presented at large-scale conferences convened under a single grand theme, the papers in this collection have little to do with the theme of the ANZAAS conference, 'Australia's Industrial Future'. None of the papers presented in this compilation explicitly presents an argument which links 'communication' with a view of Australia's industrial future. The closest one gets to such an argument is the issue of developing a communications industry in Australia.

While the papers might not reflect the theme of the conference, they can be read in a way which shows another kind of unity. Jay Blumler in 'Communication philosophy and media power', Lloyd Sommerlad and Chris Le Gras in 'Communication policy: the concept of the public interest' and John Langdale in 'International perspectives on competition in the telecommunications industry: a critique' are directly concerned with, or raise important questions about, the role of research and evidence in the public policy-making process.

The core of Blumler's paper is a critique of communication research which sees the mass media as legitimators and reproducers of an ideology which represents the interests and goals of the social, political and economic *status quo*. He argues that research in this school often involves researchers asserting and documenting their viewpoints rather than testing those viewpoints with systematic research. As an alternative to this Marxist analysis, Blumler proposes that research and theorizing should be based on a liberal democratic view of the media and society. He proposes that liberal democratic ideals should be used as a framework for generating research about the media. And one role for that research would be to improve the public debate about issues such as fairness, and reasoned and informed choice. But in proposing an alternative paradigm to the school which takes ideology as its key problem, Blumler makes the error which he earlier claimed that the Marxists were making. Quite obviously, any research which makes assumptions about the nature of the political world can be criticised by someone who approaches the problem from another political perspective.

Sommerlad and Le Gras present an interesting discussion of the notion of the 'public interest', a phrase which falls trippingly from the tongues of media lawyers and public interest groups. The authors show that public interest is often discussed in conjunction with questions of media ownership, diversity of news coverage and opinion, and whether or not public needs are left unfulfilled. But the discussion of these issues is often devoid of any reference to research and systematically collected evidence. The authors suggest that policy-related research could lead to a more rational policy-making process. In another contribution to policy-relevant discussion, John Langdale presents an excellent analysis of the notion of competition in the telecommunications industry. He presents a clear

framework for discussion of a policy issue which has generated more heat than light in Australia over the last few years.

John Tydeman's paper on the prospects for teletext and videotext in Australia presents a case for policy making based on ongoing technological, social and industrial assessments of those technologies. Once more the theme of research-based policy making emerges. John Gillam's paper on organizing for access to the Australian domestic communication satellite presents an analysis of the background to the Australian satellite initiative. While events have passed this paper by, one wonders how Australian politicians and policy makers might plan for the development of "new communication carriers and innovative services". It will be interesting to see whether systematic research will be able to contribute to the encouragement of innovations which retain the best features of Australia's present telecommunications infrastructure.

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Australia Since the Coming of Man *by Russel Ward*
(Lansdowne Press, Sydney, 1982 edition) pp. 254, $20.00.

This is neither a text for tertiary students nor a specialist study of an aspect of Australian history, though elsewhere (in *A Nation for a Continent* and in *The Australian Legend* respectively) Russel Ward has offered us both of these. In the book under review the author appears to have the general reader in mind. It has a quickly-moving and relaxed narrative style, lavish illustrations, and large-format pages in a hardcover edition.

What distinguishes this volume is, according to Ward, three themes "barely mentioned in other general histories of Australia — the doings of Aborigines, of explorers and of the female half of the Australian people". The first chapter covers the millenia of settlement prior to 1770 (a date at which most comparable histories begin), surveying the evidence and speculations of the prehistorians and archaeologists concerning Aboriginal society before white settlement. By the final chapter the Aborigines are still prominent in Ward's story, with some amelioration of their disgraceful treatment by Europeans occurring in the 1960s and 1970s.

Ward is commendably open regarding his biases in his interpretation of historical evidence. He declares:

> I am for the weak not the strong, the poor not the rich, the exploited many not the select few. I believe reason has done more for mankind that religion; and that reformist and radical political parties have done more for Australia than conservative ones ... I hate particularly conservatives who smash constitutional traditions instead of jealously guarding them.

Caveat emptor. This reviewer's concern about the book lies not in its approach or biases, but in the subsequent handling of material. It is as if Ward wishes merely to confirm the views of readers sharing his biases and