

THE TROCSIN

FLAGSHIP PUBLICATION OF THE

**JOHN CURTIN
RESEARCH CENTRE**

Labor ideas for a better Australia

Issue 7, July 2019



Federal Election Review Special

Featuring Senators Kim Carr
and Kimberley Kitching,
Misha Zelinsky,
Emma Dawson,
Kosmos Samaras
and
Nick Dyrenfurth

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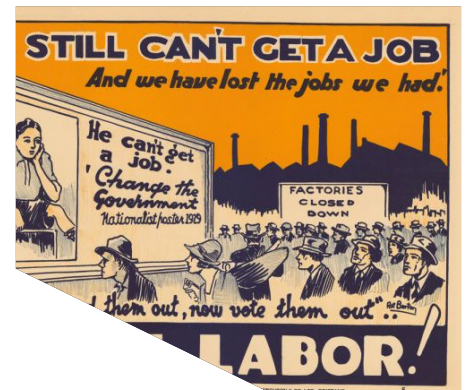
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Editorial

Executive Director, Dr Nick Dyrenfurth

18 May 2019 was a tough day at the office for Laborites. Under Bill Shorten's unifying leadership, federal Labor offered a bold social democratic agenda. Ultimately the electorate decided to give the Coalition another three years. When the John Curtin Research Centre was launched in January 2017 I remarked of our mission: "We at the John Curtin Research Centre draw inspiration from the enduring relevance of our nation's trade unions and the Labor Party's rich 126-year-old tradition. We are a party of government, not impotent opposition. We are a movement which at its best is in touch with the basic concerns, needs and aspirations of Australians whether they reside in our suburbs, cities, regions or remote areas and one informed by traditionalist and progressive values; and both patriotic – unashamedly patriotic – and internationalist in its outlook. With growing disillusionment towards mainstream parties the world over, and the core vote of centre-left parties in particular fracturing, there has never been a more important time for we, as social democrats, to win the battle of ideas.' Those words are truer today than when uttered over two years ago.

Today and over the next three years the fight for a better, fairer Australia begins anew. The 2019 election has galvanised the John Curtin Research Centre. We have an exciting line-up of publications and events scheduled for the rest of the year. We begin with this the seventh edition of our flagship magazine, *The Tocsin*. This federal election review special edition features new writing on the election past and the way forward for Labor by Senators Kim Carr and Kimberley Kitching, Misha Zelinsky, Emma Dawson, Kosmos Samaras, John Mickel and yours truly. Elsewhere, Andrew Dettmer writes on Industry 4.0 and the future of work, while Geoff Fary and Lawrence Ben put forward their vision for a revived unionism. And from an international perspective, Adrian Pabst surveys the prospects of European social democracy. Your correspondent's election overview *Getting the Blues: the Future of Australian Labor* is shortly released, and in August we publish an important new discussion paper, 'Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work' written by the JCRC's Adam Slonim in conjunction with scholars from the Adelaide-based Australian Institute for Machine Learning. The report will be launched on

August 5 in Adelaide by South Australian Labor leader Peter Malinauskas. The JCRC will shortly embark upon 'Pathways to Federal Government' series with details of speakers to follow. Finally, in coming weeks we will release details of our third Annual Gala Dinner with special guest speaker, Richard Marles, federal deputy Labor leader. Stay tuned for more news on a range of other exciting Australia-wide events and publications.

As you can see the JCRC has recommitted itself to the battle of the ideas – will you? Signing up will help us fund the research to prosecute big ideas and spread our social democratic message of hope and opportunity for all. It provides exclusive access to all of our reports and *The Tocsin*. If you have not yet signed up to fight the battle of ideas alongside us do so now: www.curtinrc.org/support.

In unity,



Dr Nick Dyrenfurth

Editor of The Tocsin

Executive Director, John Curtin Research Centre



Getting the Blues

Labor must ditch its self-image as a 'progressive party'
writes Nick Dyrenfurth

On 18 May 2019 federal Labor was rejected by voters at the ballot box. The loss may have technically been narrow but the Australian people balked at its 'progressive' policy offerings and a very decent, centre-left leader in the form of Bill Shorten, who led a united party for five and a half years. It was a shattering defeat for True Believers yet followed an all too familiar pattern. Since World War Two Labor has won office from Opposition on just three occasions and only four times since the First World War.

Millions of words will be written analysing Labor's surprise election defeat. Some will simplistically blame the leader or campaign headquarters, or Labor's 'big target' policy agenda, notably its so-called 'Retiree Tax'. Others will – and already have – targeted Queensland or its big spending populist millionaire, Clive Palmer, writing off its denizens as 'bogans' undeserving of a ballot paper. Some will blame the Murdoch press and Coalition scare campaigns. Blaming others is an inevitable element of dealing with loss. Yet it will do little to ensure Labor wins the next election in three years' time or even presents as a credible opposition in the meantime.

Labor's recovery must start with the sixty-six per cent of Australians who did not give the nation's oldest political party their first preference vote on May 18. This is roughly the same number who did not vote Labor in 2013 and again in 2016. Three elections in a row. Two-thirds of the populace, most of whom reside in our middle and outer-suburbs and regions. It cannot win national government without changing the votes of a good proportion of these people. By the next election due in 2022, Labor will have won national government in majority terms just twice: in 1993 when Paul Keating's party won the unwinnable election, campaigning against the threat of a GST and an extreme right-wing economic policy agenda proposed by the Dr John Hewson-led Coalition and in 2007 when Kevin Rudd took the ALP into office on the back of the anti-Work Choices campaign spearheaded by

the union movement. Both victories were won on material, 'hip pocket nerve' factors where federal elections are always won. Labor never wins campaigning on its perceived state-based strengths: health and education. The environment has not in of itself led Labor into government. If climate change was a factor in 2007 it was because 'Howard-lite' leader Kevin Rudd neutralised economic management.

Twice within the space of twenty years the Labor Party can boast of having the best prime minister who never was in two leaders: Kim Beazley and Shorten.

Labor's troubles are now thirty years old. They are bigger than one person or policy. The first thing MPs and activists ought do in the election's aftermath and every day until the next election is strike up a conversation with a stranger, preferably outside a 10-kilometre radius of the CBD of one of our major cities. Don't ask them about policy or personalities or what they want. Don't ask them about the election or politics or inquire as to whether they are 'progressive' or 'conservative' or 'left' or 'right'. Ask them what it is they care about. They'll almost certainly come back with the same answers. First, they care about their families, and I'm not just talking about nuclear families, but the full spectrum of relationships. How is the marriage? Are the kids ok? What about their ageing parents? Do they have enough to make ends meet? Are they indebted? Second, they care

about work: having a job, a job providing sufficient wages, hours and security, and whether it is meaningful work. Third, they care about place – community and country. Most Australians – "quiet Australians" as Prime Minister Scott Morrison put it on the night of the election – love their country, they don't want it radically changed unless for a very good reason, they care about whether the places they reside are safe from violence, including the threat of terrorism, and care about whether they are well-served by basic amenities and services: schools, hospitals, transport and have police on the local beat. They care about the environment they will pass on to their children and grandchildren, about climate change. And they care about

Labor has never been and should never be some straightforwardly 'progressive party'. Progressive ideology, while not wrong on many subjects, ranging from the justness of same-sex marriage to acting prudently on climate change, adopts a Manichean view of the world: black and white, right and wrong. It starts not from where people are and not by taking account of things they care most about – family, work and the places where they live and the country they love – but from where it would like them to be, in other words, in agreement with progressives. Ironically, progressives, while championing diversity, barely tolerate diversity of thought.

how these things will be paid for – about debt.

There is then a path forward for Labor – spelt out in an unlikely manner. If Labor listens carefully to the speech given by PM Scott Morrison on election night therein lies its salvation. The Coalition's victory, Morrison said, owed to the 'quiet Australians'. He proclaimed, without reservation: 'God bless Australia'. If 'progressives' shifted uneasily at the mention of 'quiet Australians', invoking God must have knocked them out of their seats. But they should be listening carefully.

Labor's defeat should not be seen in isolation. Most centre-left parties are struggling to define themselves in a world defined by free-market orientated economic globalisation, declining union density and technological disruption. Centre-right parties govern across most of Europe. Jeremy Corbyn's British Labour is a basket case. Like its social democratic cousins, Labor is increasingly detached from its working-class base of blue-collar and precarious white-collar workers. Its activist middle-class base, many MPs and staffers have more and more come to express the views of a progressive elite. Historically, a labourist party largely focussed on the material concerns of working Australians, since the 1970s Labor has become an aggressively secular, small 'l' liberal party espousing progressive policies and talking the language of 'equality', 'diversity' and 'inclusivity'. Talk of change saturates Labor's thinking. It's 'the vibe of it' as The Castle's bumbling lawyer

Dennis Denuto might have put it – and Australians aren't feeling it.

Labor has never been and should never be some straightforwardly 'progressive party'. Progressive ideology, while not wrong on many subjects, ranging from the justness of same-sex marriage to acting prudently on climate change, adopts a Manichean view of the world: black and white, right and wrong. It starts not from where people are and not by taking account of things they care most about – family, work and the places where they live and the country they love – but from where it would like them to be, in other words, in agreement with progressives. Ironically, progressives, while championing diversity, barely tolerate diversity of thought.

None of the above is rocket science. It is politics 101. Yet some Labor people recoil in horror at these observations. Socially conservative or reactionary, they mutter. If that's the case, they are fundamentally hostile to people and what they really care about. It means they will learn nothing from May 18. You can have the best policies in the world and still lose. You can have a very decent party leader and lose. If political parties don't start where people are at, and instead focus on where they'd like people to be, they will lose. Every. Single. Time. The Australian people are in the right place. Federal Labor isn't. Anthony Albanese and the entire labour movement must proceed from that basic assumption.

The Task Ahead

**Senator Kim Carr urges Laborites
to respond cautiously to electoral defeat**

How is it that an exhausted conservative government with no agenda, internally divided and without key members of Cabinet who had decided to quit politics, won enough seats – especially in Queensland and Western Australia – to be re-elected? And how could such a government have won at a time when increasing numbers of voters feel alienated from a political and economic system they believe does not work in their interest?

The mercurial nature of politics – and the shallowness of much commentary – is evident in the differing media reactions to this election and the previous one. In 2016 Malcolm Turnbull was dismissed as a failure because the Coalition was returned with the thinnest of majorities, 76 seats, yet now Scott Morrison is hailed as a political genius and conservative messiah for winning 77. Much of the attention has understandably been on Labor's soul-searching about its self-inflicted wound. How did we lose the election most polls and commentators expected us to win?

In trying to answer that question, too many people in the party seem content to accept a dominant media narrative about the election. In this narrative, the need to assess the causes of our defeat becomes code for junking the platform we took to the election. The line is: don't bother distinguishing between the merit of our policies and the mishaps and mistakes in our messaging. Just wipe the slate clean and start again. That assumption dovetails with another, touted as the conventional wisdom vindicated by most Australian election results. This is the belief that a big-target reform agenda risks almost certain defeat, but small-target "you'll be safe with us" electioneering does not. Those who argue this way conclude that the next Labor government will be elected by emphasising its opponents' failures, not by setting out a program for change. There are two problems with this analysis. It repudiates a social democratic party's reason for existence, and it does not recognise the real reasons for our defeat. Failure to understand and properly respond to those reasons would really make success at the next election unattainable. The

reasons are evident in the pattern of voting on 18 May, and they should focus our attention on the faults in our political messaging.

Class and politics

The Coalition's victory did not come from a broad swing away from Labor to the Liberals or Nationals. It came from a surge in support for populist parties of the far Right, One Nation and the United Australia Party, among blue-collar voters. The preference flows from those voters kept Scott Morrison in the Lodge. What does their reluctance to support Labor's reform agenda tell us about our campaign? It says that we paid insufficient attention to the anxieties and insecurities that working-class families have about the future. This is about cultural identity as much as economics. These anxieties were already evident in the 2016 election, when Malcolm Turnbull's enthusiastic spruiking of disruptive change almost wiped out the Coalition's majority. They are a deep-seated reaction to the effects of automation in industry, to stagnant wages growth, and to increasingly precarious employment practices. Above all, they are a response to the effect of all these things on the shifting balance of wealth and power between the inner cities and the outer suburbs and the regions.

These discontents are not a uniquely Australian development, of course. They have emerged in every industrialised democracy and are part of the story behind Donald Trump's election in the US, Brexit in the UK, and the rise of far-Right nationalist parties across Europe. This kind of politics is a challenge to social democratic parties everywhere. We cannot assume that people will always vote in their best interest. And, we must understand that voters are entitled to be sceptical about people who insist on telling them what is good for them. That does not mean turning our backs on science and becoming knuckle draggers. It means that we can't be arrogant in the assertions we make in arguing our case

Fraudulent campaigning

The parties of the hard right were able to tap into these anxieties in a way that we were not. In a thoroughly unscrupulous way, the far Right made assertions that were not taken seriously but which magnified Coalition scare tactics about "retirement taxes" and "rental taxes", and blatant lies about "death taxes". In this context, the \$60 million that Clive Palmer spent on advertising – dwarfing Labor's \$18 million and the Coalition's \$30 million – paid off handsomely for him. To point out that the UAP won no seats misses the point. What is far more significant

is that Palmer was able to say things that no respectable political party could say. Such as that the Chinese were going to invade, or that Labor would leave hundreds of thousands of pensioners destitute. It was Trump-like in its absurdity, but it appealed to the darkest elements of Australian political culture – to people who don't believe that the political system works for them anyway. Add in the relentless hostility to Labor in much of the mainstream media, especially the News Ltd mastheads, and the dangers in getting the messaging wrong should have been obvious.

Yet, especially in the first two weeks of the campaign, we were constantly wrong-footed. While the Coalition and the far-Right parties heaped up lies and distortions about our tax reforms, we did not explain to enough people the connection between the tax changes and increased

spending on schools, health care and childcare. Even worse, we did not talk enough about investment in new high-paid, high-skill, secure jobs, which is what economically insecure voters most want to hear.

It wasn't "franking credits" that lost it

The most misleading way of portraying the election result would be to see it as an emphatic rejection of the proposed tax reforms by those materially affected by them. The fact that Labor's agenda involved collecting increased amounts of revenue from high-income voters does not appear to have deterred many of these voters at all. On the contrary, the Coalition's scare tactics about dividend imputation and negative gearing worked best in electorates where voters owned the least number of shares and the fewest investment properties. People in the ten seats that recorded the biggest swings to Labor receive four times the amount of franking credits each year as people in the

ten seats that recorded the biggest swings to the Coalition. And the NSW south coast seat of Gilmore – the only seat Labor won, as opposed to two gained by redistribution – has one of the highest densities of self-funded retirees in the nation. For a social democratic party, the most depressing election statistic has been charted by the Grattan Institute: polling booths in the top income quartile swung to Labor, with the other four quartiles swinging to the Coalition. This breakdown of the vote by wealth is paralleled in a breakdown by educational profiles. Areas with low levels of tertiary education swung strongly to the Coalition in Queensland and NSW, though the swing was lower in Victoria. And in areas with high levels of tertiary education, there were solid swings to Labor. Simplistic explanations such as "it was franking credits that lost it" miss the mark. That kind of analysis is as deceptive, and as unhelpful, as loading all responsibility for the defeat on to an individual or individuals. (That must be a collective

responsibility. This was, after all, an agenda from which there were no dissenters as we went into the campaign.) But, if Labor's redistributive tax policies did not sway the result in the way that facile media commentary has suggested, the campaign of lies and distortions about those policies certainly did.

Where the votes went

Labor's share of the national primary vote – 33 per cent – was significantly lower than the 36-38 per cent range most polls had predicted. But, as I have noted, voters who swung away Labor mostly voted for One Nation, not the Liberals or Nationals, with preferences determining the result. This is a change from previous elections, in which One Nation and the UAP have not had disciplined preference flows. In 2019, the far-Right populist parties took on the role that the DLP played from the 1950s, of denying government to Labor by directing preferences to the Coalition.

In Queensland, for example, where the two-party-preferred swing to the Coalition was highest, at 4.3 per cent, the LNP's share of the primary vote rose only 0.3 per cent. But One Nation and the UAP had a combined swing to them of 6.7 per cent, most of which flowed back to the LNP. Most disturbingly of all, although this pattern was strongest in Queensland it was evident in Labor's blue-collar heartland seats across Australia, and in marginal seats in the outer suburbs and the regions that we should have had a chance of winning. The role of One Nation and the UAP can be seen by examining the result in some of the seats Labor lost. In Herbert, based on Townsville, the 2PP swing to the LNP was 8.4 per cent but the primary vote swing was only 1.6 per cent. The LNP's winning margin was boosted by preferences from ON (11.1 per cent primary) and UAP (5.7 per cent primary). In Longman, further south in Queensland, the 2PP swing to the LNP was 4.1 per cent, but on first preferences the LNP actually received a slight swing against it, of 0.4 per cent. The 13.2 per cent of Longman voters who voted ON and the 3.4 per cent who voted OAP delivered the LNP's victory. The pattern is starker in the Tasmanian seat of Braddon, where there was a 4.1 swing against the Liberals on primaries. But preferences from One Nation (5.5 per cent of the primary vote), the UAP (3.7 per cent primary) and the Nationals (2.4 per cent primary) flowed into victory for the Liberals with a 2PP swing of 4.9 per cent.

Economic insecurity

What voters in all three seats have in common is economic insecurity, with unemployment rates, under-employment rates and average incomes significantly below the national figures. Voters in seats with this socio-economic profile were susceptible to the Liberals' scare tactics. It came down to this: we lost the trust of too many of our own people, while paradoxically winning the trust of many voters in seats that have long been Liberal heartland, such as the now marginal seat of Higgins in Melbourne's inner-east.

Does any of this mean that Labor's redistributive

agenda, paid for by reform of the taxation system, was a fundamental mistake? Of course not, but clearly there was a massive failure of messaging. That failure explains why voters in affluent inner-city seats were more receptive to Labor's policies on climate change than voters in the outer suburbs and the regions, and why the proposed Adani coal mine in the Galilee basin became a huge stumbling block for Labor. The issue of Adani became a broader issue about Labor's attitude to the development of resources and to climate change, with consequences in WA as well as in Queensland. If the Queensland Government had announced approval of the mine a month earlier, there might have been a different result on 18 May. Queensland seats like Herbert, Dawson and Capricornia, where voter perplexity about Labor's attitude to Adani was most acute, have almost twice the national unemployment rate. When coal miners are earning an average of \$125,000 a year it is not surprising that voters in central and northern Queensland wanted an endorsement of Adani's plans. The fact that the mine will not create thousands of jobs, as originally claimed, and perhaps only as few as one hundred after the construction phase, does not change this – it just makes people all the more anxious to obtain one of those scarce jobs.

The task ahead

By some potentially misleading measures, the election outcome did not change much. As noted above, the Coalition will have 77 seats in the House of Representatives, one more than it had after the 2016 election, and Labor will have 68, one less than in 2016. In two-party-preferred terms the swing to the Coalition was only 1.2 per cent, and Labor won a majority of the two-party-preferred vote in a majority of the states and territories. But this was not a status quo outcome. The Coalition won six of the nine seats that changed hands and, most importantly, it won 23 of the 30 seats in Queensland and 11 of the 16 seats in WA. The result in those two states overwhelmed Labor's majorities elsewhere, and if we cannot perform significantly better in both states building a winning majority will be very difficult.

The greatest difficulty posed by the election result is that Labor's grip on the seats it retains is now much less firm: of the 25 seats on margins of less than 4 per cent, Labor holds 16. That will embolden the Coalition to make further forays into Labor heartland, almost certainly with a similar campaign of deceit and distortion, and very probably with the same allies on the far-Right as it found this time.

Labor failed because its messaging essentially appealed to affluent voters rather than to the blue-collar voters who provide – though not as strongly as was once the case – its core support, and who typically decide federal election outcomes. A higher Labor vote in Liberal seats won't deliver government, but a continuing loss of support in outer-suburban and regional seats will certainly consign us to the electoral wilderness. That is the challenge as Labor strives to rebuild for the next election.

Kim Carr is a Labor Senator for Victoria.

We're not all postmaterialists now

Full employment must remain Labor's
Light on the Hill says Emma Dawson

There is no one simple reason why the ALP was unable to win the votes of enough people in enough seats to form government after the 2019 federal election. The Coalition's scare campaign around the so-called retiree tax, Clive Palmer's extraordinary, \$60million advertising blitz to paint Bill Shorten as "shifty", and fake news spread on social media that convinced an apparently large number of voters that Labor intended to introduce a "death tax", have all been blamed for Labor's unexpected defeat on the 18 May. As Julia Gillard has said, though, it's too soon to make a definitive diagnosis of the complex reasons for Labor's loss. Certainly, the results across Australia were mixed, with voters in different regions swinging to and from the major parties in varied ways.

Yet one phenomenon seems, on the analysis of voting patterns, to hold true, and it is one we have seen repeatedly across the Anglosphere in recent years, including in the UK's Brexit referendum and the 2016 election of Donald Trump: people across society voted against their own economic self-interests. In the wealthiest electorates in our biggest cities, in often previously "blue ribbon" Liberal seats, voters swung towards the ALP. Those who had most to lose from Labor's bold tax reform agenda apparently elected to put the greater good of society, most especially in relation to action on climate change, above their hip pocket concerns. Yet voters in regional and outer-suburban seats, whose material prospects would have been boosted under a Labor government, chose to stick with the Coalition, despite the complete lack of concrete policies they offered to improve people's incomes, job security and standards of living.

In the weeks since May 18, a school of thought has emerged that the era of people voting primarily according to informed economic self-interest is over; that we now live in a post-class world in which cultural identity matters more to people than the material conditions of their lives. This bleak and divisive view holds that the future for the ALP is to abandon its social-democratic, labourist tradition and pursue a post-materialist, small-l liberal politics that would see it join forces with the Greens and build an election-winning support base amongst wealthy, inner-city, cosmopolitan voters, leaving the fortunes of working-class and regional Australians in the hands of the conservative parties. This argument panders to those bitterly disappointed progressive voters who, in the immediate aftermath of the election, angrily blamed Queenslanders and other regional voters, and called for their expulsion from the body politic, with the #Quexit hashtag trending on social media. Like most reactions born of anger and

disappointment, this argument for Labor to divorce itself from working class and regional voters is not only unjust, but dangerously selfish and irresponsible. While Andrew Leigh has a strong point that voters with socially liberal views are undoubtedly more at home in the Labor party than in the arch-conservative Coalition that was built by John Howard and his cronies, it's a false binary that the ALP needs to abandon its working and middle-class base in order to embrace the socially progressive voters of urban Australia.

The sneering assumption that working class and regional people don't care about climate change, or marriage equality, or any other so-called progressive social issue is both stupid and snobbish. As Amanda Cahill, who has spent years working with regional communities affected by industrial disruption due to climate change, has argued, people in our regions, who are literally at the coal-face of climate-induced economic change, care passionately about the environment and the future of their communities. The problem is they see few genuine answers for how to address the existential climate emergency without sacrificing their livelihoods and their own and their children's futures.

Progressives looking for someone to blame for the choice those people made to give their vote to conservative parties should first look to themselves. For it is the failure of social democrats to engage with the material disadvantage wreaked by globalisation, automation and the shift away from a carbon-based economy upon low- and middle-income working families, particularly in the regions and outer suburbs, that has left such voters with nowhere else to turn. Rebecca Huntley has convincingly demonstrated that the majority of Australians are social-democratic by nature, and broadly supportive of redistributive taxation and social policies. But all people are first and foremost concerned with being able to feed and house themselves and their families; and unlike the post-materialist voters in our wealthy inner-suburbs, working-class people – those who live pay-cheque to pay-cheque – can't afford to relegate such concerns to a second-order issue.

Labor went to the election promising sorely-needed tax reform. For years, its economic leadership team talked about the savings they would find by closing loopholes primarily used by the richest five per cent of Australians to increase their wealth. Only in the last few weeks did they tell people what they would spend these savings on: dental care for pensioners, massively increased child care subsidies for working families, boosts to Medicare for cancer patients. All were good policies, likely to find favour with voters, but Labor left itself too little time to persuade

people of the connection between their tax reforms and the delivery of these redistributive programs. The bigger problem, though, was that Labor's tax and transfer approach was entirely focused on taking wealth from one end of the income scale and handing it back to the other. There's nothing wrong with that in and of itself, but across Labor's platform, there was an almost complete absence of any policies to help people to help themselves.

The fact is, social democrats in Australia, as much as elsewhere in the developed world, have repeatedly failed to respect the dislocation caused by supply-side economics on working people, and the fear they have of being reliant on the state or on charity to survive. As I argued in The Guardian last month, there is strong streak of self-reliance in the Australian character. Apart from our First Nations people, we are all descended from convicts and immigrants, people whose only assets were their labour, their determination and their resilience. Australia's egalitarian culture was built on a social contract that allowed people to build a good standard of living through their own hard work. Australians are looking for a hand-up rather than a hand-out; and, in the absence of any offer from the party meant to represent the interests of working people to help them provide for themselves and their families, many people took a desperate punt on the promise that "jobs and growth" from a strong economy would, despite all evidence to the contrary, trickle down to them.

So, what's next for Labor? The answer is deceptively simple: the party must engage urgently with the task of creating real, sustainable, reliable jobs in a post-carbon economy. Yet doing this will be complex and challenging. It must start with overturning decades of accepted macro-economic thought that holds that there is a non-accelerating rate of unemployment, and that it sits at around five per cent. The Reserve Bank has recently acknowledged that this measurement is out-of-date, and that, given the slackness in our labour market, the capacity of monetary policy to stimulate the economy and create full employment and wage growth is severely limited. It is imperative that the ALP, under new leadership, grasp the economic debate, loudly declare its record as the superior managers of our economy, and radically reframe the role of government in growing our economy and sharing the spoils of our common wealth by putting full employment at the centre of its policy platform. Labor has done this before, both before and after the second world war. It necessitates a shift away from market solutions and back towards direct government involvement in job creation and industry support. Many social democratic thinkers in Australia are

proposing the US model of a "green new deal", with a Job Guarantee as developed by Australian Modern Monetary Theorist (MMT) Bill Mitchell and now championed by Stephanie Kelton, a key economic adviser to Bernie Sanders, as the solution to this problem. However, this is an inappropriate response to our uniquely Australian challenge. Our population density, geography, climate, and structure of employment and wage setting makes the importation of a US-style job guarantee a poor fit for

the realisation of full employment. Creating a pool of workers on one minimum wage, engaged in "green jobs" such as land care, or aged and disability care, as advocated in the US, would undermine the award system.

A different approach is needed. Fortunately, Australia is uniquely placed to create a comprehensive plan to achieve full employment in the post-carbon economy. By drawing on our own history of full employment policies and programs, in particular those of the post-WWII period resulting from the 1945 Curtin white paper on full employment, we can develop a multi-faceted solution to the loss of meaningful, secure and well-paid work in our regions and outer suburbs. This means not just an active fiscal policy, but the direct intervention of government in the labour market, through infrastructure investment, leveraging government procurement, revitalising industry policy, increasing support for research and development and – yes – even the direct creation of jobs in the public sector. The creation

of new, government-supported jobs in infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, renewable energy and other new and emerging industries will require all levels of government and industry to cooperate across multiple policy settings. Developing the policy architecture for this work will be the core business of researchers and policy thinkers at Per Capita over coming months. It's an ambitious agenda, but one we cannot shirk. To abandon the interests of working and middle-class people to the laissez-faire, trickle-down policies of conservative parties, as advocated by some on the left, would be a scandalous dereliction of duty. Our task is, as it has always been, to create and protect a fair society that leaves no Australian behind. To do so, we must reject the politics of division and post-materialism, rediscover our solidarity, and do the hard work of building a new economic system for a post-carbon world.

Emma Dawson is Executive Director of public policy think tank Per Capita. She was a senior adviser to Minister Stephen Conroy in the Rudd and Gillard Governments.

Labor's lost that loving feeling

Misha Zelinsky on reconnecting with working-class Australians

In handing Labor one of its most heartbreaking electoral defeats, it is now clear that Australians have fallen out of love with modern Labor. While the party should debate the causes of our stinging defeat, a central question Labor people must ask ourselves is this: have we fallen out of love with Australians? While it's been close on a two-party basis, the truth is only one in three Australians choose to vote Labor at three consecutive federal elections. As a party, we must reckon with this truth. Part of that reckoning lies in our attitude to the people we represent. After his passing, much was made of Bob Hawke's love affair with his country. Australians adored Bob. And he adored them. This mutual affection meant voters were happy to buy into Hawke's vision for Australia – even when it meant some pain along the way. While Labor's policies contain much that would improve the lives of Australians, we've lost the emotional connection and sense of partnership that existed under Hawke. Trust – a crucial ingredient. A scan of my social media feed after the election confirms this trend. Shock and grief gave way to contempt for voters. Queenslanders, in particular, copped the blame for being naive, stupid – or both – in choosing to vote for the other side. Fingering Queenslanders isn't just unfair – it's counterproductive. Blaming the customer doesn't work for business and it won't work as a political strategy. If you want proof, look no further than Donald Trump's supporter base. Mocking 'deplorables' only served to lock voters in behind their 2016 choice.

The fault must lie with Labor. We didn't get it right – three elections in a row. What should really keep us up at night were the swings against the party in traditional heartlands. Many voters identifying as religious, on lower incomes, without university degrees or living in a regional mining community walked away from Labor. Coordinated scare campaigns against Labor policy worked as intended, as did the outrageous intervention of Clive Palmer's millions. However we must also ask if many of these traditional Labor voters felt they were no longer welcome as part of the Labor family and voted accordingly. Labor's passion for progress leads us to blindly focus on the benefits of change and ignore the real human cost. This can manifest itself in a tendency to lecture on the problems and race ahead with the answers. If you can't keep up – well that's just too bad. On climate change, the party of working people should know a one-sided bargain when we see one. Rather than prosecuting a false choice that demands mining communities 'take one for team planet', activists should address the legitimate anxieties of those asked to shoulder the economic burden of carbon

reduction. A coal miner placing the immediate financial security of their children above collective environmental action is acting – and voting – rationally, and not out of some backward desire to kill the Great Barrier Reef. We shouldn't be surprised when Australians demand clear policies dealing with this economic dislocation – a genuine conversation – before voting to upend their communities. Listening and providing answers broadens support for action and takes the bite out of scare campaigns.

On social justice, Labor must find a language that connects with spirituality and tradition without abandoning our values. While falsely gratifying, collectively dismissing groups as 'bigots' only assists actual bigots to hide in plain sight and prosper. Focusing on messages of equality and love would allow common ground with religious teachings without alienating persuadable allies. On economics, Labor can be wedded to elegant, technocratic policies that leave us flat-footed against hip pocket politics. For example, while Labor had superior policies benefiting tradies, none were as tangible as the \$10,000 increase in the small business tax write-off. When focusing on the big picture we can sometimes forget how the little things can matter in a big way.

In failing to explain or persuade, refusing to listen and – where appropriate – modify our policies to address genuine voter concerns we send Australians into the arms of false prophets peddling easy answers. With social democratic parties in perpetual opposition globally, Labor must change tack. All is not lost. The Coalition's win was narrow – a majority of one – and represents a half-hearted endorsement of Scott Morrison's threadbare agenda. The big policy challenges remain: youth unemployment, rising household and government debt, wealth and income inequality, automated workplaces, gender inequality, stagnant wages, rising energy bills, falling school standards, urban congestion, regional malaise, housing affordability and climate change – to name a few. To meet these challenges honestly and fairly, Australians need the Labor Party at its best. For Labor to win in 2022, we need to persuade one Australian in a hundred to switch their vote. It can be done, but it won't be easy. In order to win the trust of Australians, we would be wise to remember that it is a lot easier to trust something that loves you back. Just ask Hawkie.

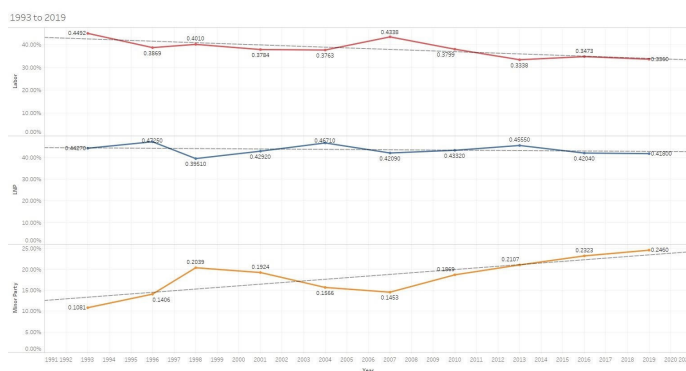
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Labor's Culture War

Labor's 2019 election defeat was decades in the making,
writes Kosmos Samaras

Sixty seven percent of Australians did not vote for the Australian Labor Party in the House of Representatives at the 2019 election. Seventy one percent of Australians did not vote for the Australian Labor Party in the Senate. These are stark statistics for a party that was once able to secure close to half of all eligible voters at any given federal election. Yet in 2019 the federal Labor barely secured the support from a third of voters. In the mining states of Queensland and Western Australia, its primary vote for the House of Representatives has taken on an unsettling resemblance to the performance of Europe's failed Social Democratic parties. 26.68% in Queensland and 29.80% in Western Australia. How did this happen?

Many political and media commentators have attempted to make sense of the recent federal election result with little success. We have the negative gearing and franking credits theories. We have the quiet Australians, Aspirational Australians, Tony's Tradies and Howard's Battler stereotypes. Then of course we have Adani theory and the Bob Brown convoy of class privilege. There is some truth amongst all of that and in some way these theories are woven into a broader tapestry that is suffocating, ever so slowly, federal Labor. Yet any truthful analysis needs to be performed with a much wider lens, one focused on a longer period between two elections that stunned all political commentators and observers. Federal Labor's unexpected victory in 1993 and the most recent unexpected loss on May 18. It's during period where a more accurate picture emerges, one illustrating the steady decline of federal Labor's electoral coalition. It's also during this period where we see the decline of the two party system in this country, driven mainly by multi-generational decay of federal Labor's primary vote.



Labor, LNP & minor party primary vote 1993-2019 federal elections

That decay is cultural. Culture is not just about our customs, the food we eat or how we dress but also how

we express our values and it's the expression of these values that has gotten Labor into a lot of political trouble. Like most established political parties, federal Labor now largely expresses its values via a middle-class filter. The political party of the working class has not been run by train drivers and assembly line workers for over sixty years. You will need to travel back to the 1950s to find a federal Labor party that would look more at home in St Albans rather than North Fitzroy.

Everyone joins political parties for very personal and just reasons. They do so to help elevate and advance issues important to them, issues shaped by their own values and upbringing. So there should be an expectation that middle-class political activists would join a political party to advance their issues and policies and if there is enough of them, as is the case within Labor, these policies will be pushed to the front of the queue. Their numbers are helped because joining a political party and giving up a lot of your time, actually costs you money. Yes, political participation has become an extension of class privilege. In 2019 most (but not all) working people don't have the money, time or will to join a political party.

So what policies made it to the front of the queue? Free trade and the environment. Only the turnbacks refugee issue would come close to soaking up nearly as much of federal Labor's internal policy debate. Either at federal Labor's national conference, during countless media appearances, free trade and the environment would dominate how federal Labor would express itself to the country. As a result, federal Labor became the custodians of not just advocacy within these important policy areas but they would, unfortunately, own the economic consequences – the millions of working-class jobs that free trade and environment policy would impact. If you come from a middle-class family, free trade may be an economic theory you accept as established sound doctrine. Oblivious to the wrecking ball swinging through streets like Blair Street in Broadmeadows, globalisation would have been a positive experience for anyone growing up in a middle-class family. Your first real exposure to it may have been at university, where you were taught the so-called importance of free trade. By the time you had obtained your degree, you would be already joining the many others within federal Labor arguing for a more open economy. During the 1990s and early 2000s, it was almost a right of passage for many middle-class activists within Labor, utterly blinded from the devastation the open economy was having on blue-collar communities.

They did not get to see the tears, the lost homes, the broken families that job losses inflicted upon many living in the countless working-class communities around the country. To be fair there were many within the labour movement that were openly highlighting this problem, especially unions. Their warnings fell on deaf ears. Did the decision makers within federal Labor lack empathy? Did they think that the economic pain being felt by many working class communities was temporary? Or more likely, did they assume that the working class would just keep voting for federal Labor because there was no real alternative? Whatever the answer, it was a fatal collection of assumptions.

From the 2001 federal election and throughout the next six federal elections, federal Labor in some part continued to base its strategy on these assumptions. It at times ignored the only reason working class people vote for Labor - personal economics. Their job, their wage, their workplace conditions. A marriage all about economics. The first big sign the marriage was on the rocks was the 2004 federal elections. The fuse was primed and all it needed was a hammer to fire the shot. Queue the next fatal step federal Labor would take. During that campaign it embraced a historic (for all the wrong reasons) environmental policy, promising to protect 240,000 hectares of Tasmanian forest and again oblivious to the impact this policy would have had on the working-class communities that relied on timber for their jobs. The workers' union protested, they warned of the impending consequences, but their warnings were ignored. On 9 October 9 2004, the blue-collar baseball bats delivered Labor a horrendous defeat. Labor strategists at that time pointed to their polling, which suggested the environment was one of the highest issues of importance. They failed to comprehend that perhaps their polling was demographically blind, or that it was class blind. A side note - it's still today.

The baseball bats were given a rest as federal Labor was given a reprieve at the 2007 federal election, thanks to John Howard's arrogance. Many within its ranks were now convinced the hemorrhaging of its working-class support was over, the faithful had come back home. They were wrong. Within six years federal Labor's working-class base had started to swing their baseball bats again, decimating its vote in the key mining states of Queensland and Western Australia. But the damage was a lot deeper and in many seats across the country, it was permanent. Coal miners in Queensland, production line workers in Melbourne, and timber workers in Tasmania had all lost faith. They were to never believe again.

Was it the Carbon tax? Was it the cuts to single parents? Was it internal instability? Was it simply because federal Labor had evolved into a movement that spent more time talking about itself, its own form of identity politics and pursuing the policy interests of the middle class? Whatever the reasons, federal Labor had now lost the support of a key constituency enough times that the generational bond once enjoyed with the working-class was broken. That's why the 2019 federal election result actually took 20 years to brew and was not entirely a product of one election campaign. Blaming Bill Shorten is cheap and

lazy, it's ignoring history. When Scott Morrison visited the Governor General's abode, the canvass was already primed for what was to befall federal Labor. By the time Australians started voting in May, Labor's brand equity with working-class voters was gone. Clive Palmer may have spent \$60 million on his campaign but he could have saved himself some money if he had bothered to check his party's results back in 2013. His primary vote back in 2013 looks demographically and geographically very similar to his effort last May. He was urging people to stick the finger up at the major parties. So they did. The working class stuck the finger up to the countless free trade agreements that killed their jobs, the countless lectures from inner urban elites about how their work, their profession is 'dirty' and pollutes the environment and they stuck the finger up at the terrifying prospect of being 'transitioned' into a casual job, serving coffee or onto the unemployment queue. Rightly or wrongly, they stuck that finger up by blaming federal Labor. The people living in Cessnock and Elizabeth were the Australians asked to pay the price for embracing free trade and action on climate change and as far as they were concerned, they were paying a price for other peoples' values.

Federal Labor is facing an existential crisis. It can no longer form a big enough electoral coalition to win enough seats to form a government. It has only managed that feat once in twenty-six years and that was not by design. The only solution is to perform a complete U-turn on not just policy but its culture. But for that to happen the middle class within its ranks have to compromise but based on what I have seen since the recent election loss, that is not going to happen anytime soon. They will need to also accept that culturally they are very different to most working Australians. Most within federal Labor would find it very hard to hold down a long conversation in the countless work yards around the country. They would find working-class humour confronting, they would find gender roles confronting, and they certainly will have issues with working-class religious expression. Not all is lost. Labor has a saviour. The unions, who these days have to beg and grovel for their political wing to campaign on wages and jobs (see 2007). If they listen one day, they may indeed secure more votes where it counts whilst accepting the reality that securing the votes of the wealthy does not win Labor or labour, victory.

For the record. I live a very middle-class existence. However, I am the first in my family tree, going back countless generations that could claim that. My mother still resides in the publicly funded home I grew up in. My stepfather died destitute after his separation with Mum. They both worked in rope, clothing, and furniture factories, even a stint at Ford. They worked until their bodies could not take it anymore. I joined Labor to elevate their values, even though I am culturally now more at home with my fellow middle-class activists within Labor. But I am not blind. Personally, I would like to see everyone pay the price for action on climate change, especially those of us who can afford it and not the working class.

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Trouble in Paradise

John Mickel looks at Labor's struggle in Queensland

Labor finished the 2019 federal election in Queensland minus two lower house seats and the worst Senate result since proportional voting was introduced into Senate elections seventy years ago. How has it come to this? Simply, in 2019, Labor was outsmarted and outcampaigned. Labor needed to make the campaign a referendum on the Liberals and the leadership chaos and policy dysfunction of its six years in office. Instead, in Queensland, it became a referendum on Bill Shorten.

Consider this – the last time Federal Labor won a majority of lower house seats in Queensland was in 2007 under Kevin Rudd. Just before that election the then Federal Opposition Leader, had a 62% approval rating and 25% disapproval. In Queensland in 2019 the Bill Shorten, had 33% approval and 57 % disapproval – difficult numbers to be creating an atmosphere for national political change.

Federal Labor ran a campaign designed for Victoria and the safe Liberal seats in NSW. Certainly in those states and in safe Liberal electorates, it obtained a swing to Labor but no extra seats and shredded its chances in Queensland as a result. Labor's indecision on mining – in some commentary its active opposition – allowed the Greens and the Nationals to define its attitude to regional Queensland through the prism of one mine, Adani, courtesy of two seemingly unrelated incidents. The first was the vegan invasion of businesses – there are plenty of trespass laws but Labor was silent in seeking their use whilst Morrison argued stridently for new laws. Secondly, Bob Brown's Green 'southern convoy' signalled to underemployed and unemployed regional Queenslanders that their jobs counted for little. The Liberals simply pointed to a possible Labor-Green alliance, a re-run of the Gillard years, as evidence of what Queenslanders could expect from a Labor Government. Labor's pandering to the Greens over mining and its past alliance with them in Tasmania has been punished twice there and was punished this time in Queensland. I recall the words of former Hawke Government Finance Minister, Peter Walsh, "If you base your policy on the demands of a minor party, you are destined to become one."

Queensland, with a primary vote of 26.68% in the House of Representatives and one senator with 22.6% in the Senate – the lowest in Australia – is more advanced than others in achieving minority party status. Labor's campaign against the big end of town may have resonated when Turnbull was Prime Minister but Labor persevered with the rhetoric well past its use by date. Morrison, the Rugby League going, billiard playing, churchgoing leader in a baseball cap out campaigned Shorten didn't evoke images of the big end of town. Former Abbott Chief Of

Staff and Sky News Commentator Peta Credlin's taunt of Turnbull, as Mr Harbour Side Mansion, was never going to stick to Morrison.

History repeated badly for Labor. Paul Keating won the unwinnable election in 1993 campaigning against one tax – the GST. John Howard won the majority of seats but the minority of votes in 1998 promising the introduction of the GST and the abolition of a series of taxes to offset it. Labor was campaigning on tax increases in 2019 to pay for a series of initiatives where the would-be winners were never convinced on how much better off they would be. "If you don't like it don't vote for us" – they were told and in Queensland, they didn't like it and didn't vote for us. The unsaid factor behind the Prime Ministerial change from Turnbull to Morrison was that Liberal Party donors had abandoned the party. The Longman by-election had been fought on a shoestring – the shift from Turnbull changed all that – the donors were back. The re-emergence of Palmer in a populist rant underwritten by millions of dollars against Shorten and Labor in Queensland simply financially topped up the Liberals campaign. Labor, the Unions and Getup! each with their own message lacked the simple punch line of the Conservative advertising push. Labor's primary vote suffered from a combination of One Nation and Palmer votes. The LNP primary vote barely moved but their two party preferred increase came via preferences from the right-wing minors. Enough to win.

To win decisively federally, Labor must win a majority of seats in Queensland – at the moment it holds six out of thirty seats. In the other resource state, Western Australia, Labor holds five out of sixteen. So the combined resource dependent states give the Coalition a massive electoral advantage and electoral dominance. The task for Labor is not to dismiss Queensland as a place of racists and bigots as some on Twitter have alleged but to do the hard grind of examining what is needed to make Labor competitive at the next Federal election when the votes in Victoria and South Australia have already been maximised.

Labor needs to rediscover that vital axon that wins elections – the hip pocket nerve. In Queensland, where some of the poorest electorates in the nation reside, finding that nerve is the task for Labor over this term.

John Mickel is a former Queensland state Labor MP and Speaker of the House, Adjunct Associate Professor at Queensland University of Technology and JCRC Advisory Board Member.

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ALP must keep the faith

Progressives have to stop treating religious voters as backwards — and remember not all progress is forward

For ALP supporters Saturday, May 18, was shattering. Just two days after the great Labor prime minister Bob Hawke passed away, the Australian people rejected its progressive policy offerings and very decent, centre-left leader in Bill Shorten.

There is however a path forward for Labor — spelt out in an unlikely manner. If Labor listens reflexively to the speech given by Prime Minister Scott Morrison on election night therein lies its salvation. Yes, you read that correctly.

The Coalition's victory, Morrison said, owed to the "quiet Australians". He proclaimed, without reservation: "God bless Australia". Laborites and "progressives" fretted uneasily at the mention of "quiet Australians", invoking God to have knocked them out of seats. But they should be listening carefully.

Labor's defeat should not be in isolation. Most centre-left parties are struggling to define themselves in a world defined by market orientated economic globalisation, declining union density and technological disruption.



NICK DYRENFURTH

Australians, since the 1970s Labor has become an aggressively secular, small "T" liberal party espousing progressive policies and talking the language of "equality", "diversity" and "inclusivity". Talk of change — change for the sake of change — saturates Labor's thinking. It's "the vibe of it" as The Castle's bumbling lawyer Dennis Denuito might have put it — and Australians aren't feeling it.

Labor has never been and should never be some straightforwardly "progressive party". Progressive ideology, while not wrong on many subjects, ranging from the justness of same-sex marriage to acting prudently on climate change, adopts a Manichean view of the world: black and white, right and wrong. It starts not from where people are and not by taking account of things they care most about — family, work and the places where they live and the country they love — but from where it would like them to be, in other words, in agreement with progressives. Ironically, progressives, while championing diversity, barely tolerate religious people and religious ways of life.

The unease of progressive politics with religion cuts against the grain of Labor history.

Labour Party, "owed much more to Methodism than to Marxism", the same is true of early Labor (combined with the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church).

A clear majority of prime ministers since 1901 have identified as Christians, including Catholic Laborites Jim Scullin, Ben Chifley, Paul Keating and Anglican convert Kevin Rudd. Even

counter with a voter thus: "Some people were hostile, many indifferent; others were glad to see me, giving me the thumbs up, shaking my hand, even hugging me. One stood out. It was the youngish man, clean-shaven and in a cloth cap, who assured me that he would be voting for me. But then he hesitated, asking "If I vote for you, do I get your invisible friend too?"

Progressivism can too often use the language of individualism and rights rather than stressing one's obligations to a larger whole. By contrast, the communal ethos of religion sits comfortably within mainstream Australia's desire for mutual obligation and respect for hard work and a fair go at work, family, community and country.

It is heartening then to hear new Labor leader Anthony Albanese and NSW Labor MP Chris Bowen urge their party to re-engage with religious people. Albo has repeatedly said that he was raised by "three great faiths: the Catholic Church, the South Sydney Football Club and Labor." Sentiments will only get Labor so far.

If the federal Labor Party is serious about re-engaging with people of faith in coming months it should hold shadow cabinet meetings to discuss

“Ironically progressives, while championing diversity, barely tolerate religious people and religious ways of life”

lapsed Christians such as John Curtin, Gough Whitlam, Hawke and Julia Gillard were influenced by faith. Bill Shorten has urged

Interregnum – the fall and rise of European social democracy

Adrian Pabst surveys the prospects for European parties of the centre-left

Is European social democracy reviving? Recent results seem to suggest so. In the European Parliament elections in May, centre-left parties defied expectations and pulled off some victories. The Dutch Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid [PvdA]) staged an impressive comeback to secure twenty per cent of the national vote in a crowded field of main parties. Their main candidate Frans Timmermans might yet end up being appointed President of the European Commission – the institutions that holds executive power in the European Union. In Spain, the Socialist Party (PSOE) topped the polls in both national and European elections. And following her success in the Danish parliamentary elections, Mette Frederiksen is set to return the Social Democrats to power. After a long ebb that saw the centre-left defeated and demoralised across Europe, the tide is seemingly turning.

Or is it? Since the onset of the 2010s, European social democratic parties have not just been ejected from power but also fallen to historic lows. The German social democrats won just over twenty per cent in the 2017 elections – their lowest vote since 1933 and close to their historic low in 1889. Since renewing the grand coalition with the centre-right Christian Democrats in late 2017, they have collapsed in the polls and been overtaken by the Greens and the right populist party Alternative for Germany. In Italy, the Democratic Party was expelled from office at the 2018 elections and is currently at about twenty per cent in opinion polls. After the elections in September 2018, the Swedish social democrats are the largest party, but their twenty eight per cent is the lowest vote since 1908. Social democracy is rapidly receding in its continental European heartland.

The decline of social-democratic parties is even more dramatic in France, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Ireland where support for the centre-left has fallen to single figures. This mirrors the experience in Greece where the PASOK party tumbled from 44 percent in 2009 to just 5 percent in 2015. Pasokification is now commonly used to describe the collapse of social democracy in the West and the rise of populist parties that are variously more left or right-wing but either way nationalist and protectionist in outlook. The Greek case where the far-left party Syriza recently governed with the radical right-wing Independent Greeks party demonstrates this realignment.

How to conceptualise the current condition of European social democracy? The centre-left is struggling to define itself at a time when the two models that have been dominant since 1945 are in crisis. First of all, the post-war

settlement of ‘embedded liberalism’ that was regulated by Keynesian economics of full employment and underpinned by universal welfare. Secondly, the post-1970s settlement of ‘neo-liberalism’ that was driven by Hayekian economics of controlling inflation and enacting supply-side reforms. Social democracy built the first and embraced the second, but since the 2008-09 GFC nothing has replaced them.

The Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci coined the term ‘interregnum’ to describe the end of hegemony: “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there is a fraternisation of opposites and all manner of morbid symptoms pertain”. Syriza’s coalition with the far-right is only one such example. In Spain the Socialists depend on the votes of nationalist parties. Elsewhere in Europe social democrats forge progressive alliances with the Greens that end of up alienating the left’s traditional base of blue-collar workers (a point to which I shall return). For now, the fundamental point is that the British and European centre-left is stuck between the socio-economic liberalism of self-styled modernisers and the statism of the far-Left. This is exemplified by the German social democrats who are torn between staying in the ‘grand coalition’ with the centre-right or doing a deal with Greens and the far-left Die Linke.

The UK Labour Party has oscillated between New Labour’s free-market capitalism and Jeremy Corbyn’s post-Brexit project of ‘socialism in one country’. Whatever the policy differences, this is a fraternisation of opposites insofar as both Corbynism and the remnants of New Labour are equally committed to open-border cosmopolitanism with little to say about the national bonds binding Britons together by what Paul Collier calls “the gentle pressure of self-respect and peer esteem”. Something similar applies to the US Democrats who are still fundamentally torn between Bernie Sanders’ statist socialism and the old centrist consensus embodied by the Clintons, Obama, and now Joe Biden. As the American commentator, David Brooks has said: “After 30 years of multiculturalism, the bonds of racial solidarity trump the bonds of national solidarity. Democrats have a very strong story to tell about what we owe the victims of racism and oppression. They do not have a strong story to tell about what we owe to other Americans, how we define our national borders and what binds us as Americans.”

The lack of a patriotic narrative is true of much of British and European social democracy that has been on the side of social progressivism, change, and perceived cosmopolitan contempt for the nation. The populist insurgency on the far left and the radical right sweeping the West is fuelled

by a popular backlash against the socio-cultural effects of immigration and free trade. These are not only economic issues linked to pressure on wages and job losses, but also touch on questions of self-worth and mutual recognition: Do politicians and businesses value cheap labour and cheap goods or services more than respect for their fellow citizens? The experience, or threat, of dispossession and humiliation feeds a sense of humiliation that either leads to disaffection or alienation from politics, or else finds a profoundly problematic expression – support for political extremes, combined with nationalism, xenophobia, and even racism.

A simple reassertion of social progressivism around equality, diversity, and inclusivity risks making a polarised politics worse by not addressing fundamental questions of nationhood and citizenship. What are the boundaries of a shared political community? How do we recognise the importance of borders for many citizens while also being generous to ‘strangers in our midst’? Do we owe particular obligations to our fellow citizens that we do not owe to the citizens of other countries? What, if any, is the moral difference between refugees and economic migrants? If the centre-left does not tell a story that addresses these questions, then it has got little hope of gaining and retaining power.

Here it is instructive to consider the case of the Danish Social Democrats who won the elections in June 2019. Its leader Mette Frederiksen appealed to the working class by saying “you didn’t leave us; we left you”. She won not by ditching core values but by returning to them, notably a sense of stability in relation to immigration and wage stagnation. Crucially, she recognised that one way to win back provincial or rural blue-collar workers is to deal with levels of economic and cultural insecurity, which also affect metropolitan and university-educated white-collar workers living in increasingly precarious circumstances.

On one level their interests might diverge, as the former face an economic situation characterised by stagnant wages, low household savings, and insecure work, whereas the latter confront a ceiling on their aspiration which is linked to the hollowing out of skills and a lack of strategic investment. On another level, these two sections of society are bound together by common values – a longing for stability and recognition, which translates into a concern for more secure, meaningful jobs and an acknowledgement of diverse talents and vocations. Both groups have overlapping material interests and immaterial values. They will vote for a party that offers a sense of common purpose to achieve a transformative agenda, matched by a sense of mutual obligations to deliver it. Both parts of society are attached to their individual rights and freedoms, but they also accept and cherish the fact that they have duties to others: to their families, neighbours, colleagues, fellow citizens, and immigrants – ‘strangers in our midst’.

In their book, *Democracy for Realists*, the American political scientists Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels argue that the most important bases of political commitments and behaviour are “group ties and social identities”. For the great majority of citizens, politics is not primarily about assessing the policies of one party against

another. It begins with the question, “Where do people like me fit in?”, and then, “Which party is for people like us?” Culture is interwoven with economics because people tend to vote for redistributive policies that benefit those to whom they have a connection, which is anchored in a shared sense of belonging and solidarity. To re-establish credibility and trust, social democrats need a number of signalling actions – limiting economic migration while being generous in relation to political refugees; a more active role of government at the same time as devolving power to people and places; balancing patriotism with internationalism. One way to for the centre-left to act responsibly on immigration is to promote integration and citizenship. As Paul Collier has argued in relation to the Danish Social Democrats: “Common beliefs spread through crucibles of social inclusion and interaction: pre-school, sports, music, work, clubs, all have this potential. Discussion of immigration policy can no longer be divorced from such practical processes of integration. Long ignored — dismissed by an exclusionary right and rejected by a left obsessed by individual entitlements — it is now part of the suite of twenty first century Social Democrat policies. Frederiksen is pioneering the renewal of European social democracy: at its core is the rebuilding of shared identity, common purpose, and mutual obligations that eludes the metropolitans.”

Here it is instructive to return to Gramsci. Once a settlement is no longer hegemonic and in crisis, politics enters an ‘interregnum’ when, according to him, the political contest shifts to a ‘war of position’ that is a battle over ideas, common sense, organisation, and leadership. So beyond substantive issues, British and European social democracy also needs to organise and lead – trying to reshape the terms of debate and provide leadership on key questions. The key to this is to recognise that politics as usual defies the common sense of the people and social democrats struggle to assemble a coalition of estranged groups through which it can lead rather than simply manage. Going forward, the democratic contest will be over which party can offer a ‘national popular politics.’ Gramsci describes this rather vaguely as an alignment of popular aspirations with national culture. Intellectuals – including politicians, party members and all those active in politics – play an important role of mediating guidance in bringing together people and the nation into a unified political form, something that he calls the ‘people-nation’. The task is to combine feeling with knowledge in ways that generate mutual understanding and avoid extremes: “The popular element ‘feels’ but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element ‘knows’, but does not always understand and, above all, does not feel. The two extremes are pedantry and philistinism on the one hand and blind passion and sectarianism on the other”. In conclusion: to command majority support for a national popular politics social democracy requires a cultural change by the political class that reflects the common sense of the people rather than the opinions of technocrats.

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Rebuilding Unionism: an Australian Perspective

Organised labour must change, argues Geoff Fary

The television in my home is in frequent danger of missile attack when there is yet another reference to “union bosses”. Unions have been uncharacteristically slow to combat this negative imagery ascribed to them by political conservatives and the Murdoch press. Unions are democratic organisations that have elected leaders. Businesses by and large have appointed bosses. Yet the union movement – and the community generally – have come to accept the oxymoronic, value-laden terminology of “union bosses” and “business leaders”. Even that paragon of even-handedness the ABC regularly uses this phraseology in its news programs. And for decades now the union movement has allowed this to go unchallenged. Labels are important – particularly to potential union recruits! The recently returned Morrison Government, prompted by the Reserve Bank and various industry associations, has suddenly gone into hand-wringing mode about the impact of stagnant wage growth on the economy. It’s hardly surprising given they and their ilk have spent much of the previous quarter of a century demonising unions and placing every possible impediment in the way of them accessing and representing their members.

From a high-water mark of more than fifty per cent of the eligible workforce, over the past forty years Australian union density has dropped to below fifteen per cent and is even lower outside the government sector. In light of these record low levels of union density and Labor losing the unloseable 2019 federal election – despite a multi-million-dollar union air and ground campaign – it is timely to reflect on the role of unions in the twenty-first century, and how they arrived here. Union membership has declined in most industrialised countries. This has been in part associated with the privatisation of previously publicly owned assets such as electricity, telecommunications and railways; industries that had very strong trade union density. Outsourcing has also been a factor. In many instances when functions and services were provided directly by government, they also had high union penetration.

In most cases privatisation and contracting out has resulted in significant declines in union membership. The additional workloads arising from enterprise bargaining has also had considerable impact on the role of unions in this country. And at the same time in the private sector there has been a substantial reduction in traditionally highly-unionised industries such as manufacturing. Newer industries like professional services have experienced significant employment growth – but much lower levels of unionisation.

Interestingly, in Australia this reduction in union density has coincided with similar declines in many other membership-based organisations such as service and local sporting clubs, political parties and established religions. Paradoxically, two groups to buck that trend have been charismatic religions and the membership of clubs that participate at the elite level of Australian Rules Football; both have demonstrated dramatic membership increases over the past decades. Overlaying this situation is the fact that Gen-X and the Millennials face different working lives than those of their parents, such as the rise of casualisation and contracting. It has been suggested that many don’t see the need for or relevance of unions to the same extent as previous generations.

For almost a century, the cornerstone of Australian industrial relations was a system of centralised wage fixation and dispute resolution. This was coupled with the legislatively mandated encouragement of the formation and maintenance of unions. As well as providing a favourable environment for high union membership, it could be argued that this environment led to a degree of arrogance and complacency amongst some in union leadership positions. The adverse consequences of changes to that national compact were not adequately foreseen. Many unions were ill-equipped to protect their membership in less favourable circumstances, let alone grow. Other factors that may have impacted union membership have been changes in management philosophies and practices. There has been a move away from reliance on corporate

Despite their manifest current challenges, unions remain a hallmark of modern democratic societies. A brief perusal of the last century history demonstrates that when despots want to tear down democracy, they start by attacking unions. On the other hand, when people have sought to build genuine democracies, they have started by creating unions. Undoubtedly, the role and legitimacy of unions is under challenge by conservative forces throughout much of the western world.

level industrial relations experts to an approach where local managers are equipped with the necessary skills and authority to develop and implement plant or site level employment arrangements. This has a consequence of overstressing union resources.

During the same period, many higher performance enterprises have recognised that keys to their competitiveness and sustainability have included a genuine engagement with their employees at all levels. This is in stark contrast to traditional Taylorist hierarchical systems and involves a focus on empowered teamwork and a values-based respect for the rights of employees. In such an environment, for unions to remain relevant they often need to move away from adversarial relationships to ones that involve independent equitable partnering. Where unions have been slow to recognise and act on this, there has often been a decline in recruitment and retention – particularly amongst younger employees. It has even been argued in some quarters that unions need to look to their past in the form of workers guilds to better understand the strategies that would be required for the twenty-first century. There has been the growth of large numbers of gig-economy organisations and individual contracting arrangements that often do not have the collective culture or bargaining of the past. We have witnessed the emergence of small artisan groups based on quite specific, even esoteric, skills. Thus, there may be a need for organisations representing those employees and self-employed contractors to model themselves along the lines of nineteenth century guilds/crafts unions and provide a wider range of support than twentieth-century industrial unions, e.g. professional development and employment-related services.

The importance of developing and supporting activist members and a local enterprise-based union structures should not be underestimated. This is critical to the effective operation of unions and underpins their membership recruitment. In the end, being invited to join the union by a workmate remains the most effective form of recruitment. The development of workplace activists, including through union education and training programs, is essential to ensuring their effectiveness. However, the changed employment context and in an era that focusses on individual needs and expectations requires unions to do more than they have traditionally done to be relevant to members and potential members. A comprehensive internal strategic union movement review following the 2019 federal election should be an urgent priority. In my view there are a number of factors which could be included in such a review:

Productivity and Efficiency in Progressive Employers

We live in an increasingly polarized society and economy. For some years now there have been two contrasting employer approaches:

- Hostile organisations seeking to isolate and marginalise unions and place impediments in the way of representing employees, or
- More enlightened ones recognising the rights of

employees and seeking to constructively engage with those unions that represent them.

If unions could work constructively with the enlightened ones to assist them be more productive and competitive than those in category (a), why wouldn't they regard that as being in their best interests? From employee opinion survey data there is a lot of evidence to suggest that such a move would be welcomed by both the employees and employers concerned.

Occupational Identity

A key selling point for a modern union is that it provides a basis for reinforcing the occupational or professional identity of its members. Many employees, particularly those in newer or growing occupations, are proud of their professional backgrounds and status. Anything that a union can do to reinforce this status will be seen as a positive. This reinforcement of occupational identity, which is particularly relevant for Gen-X and Millennials, could be further developed by the union concerned having an effective relationship with any relevant professional societies or industry associations. A further aspect of occupational or professional identity that should be considered is the development of a formal recognition or accreditation system. Not all occupations are statutorily required to be covered by formal accreditation. A union system of elective professional recognition, including the awarding of post-nominals, could also provide a basis for the reinforcement of their relevance to prospective members.

Professional Development

Unions should consider entering into relationships with distance education providers to offer discounted programs for union members. In Australia a significant number of employees expect to undertake ongoing or post graduate study. Given the crowded education market, unions would be wise to negotiate arrangements with existing providers rather than attempt to conduct professional development programs themselves.

Wages/Remuneration Surveys

The conduct and publication of remuneration surveys for the key occupations or professions sought to be covered by union membership could be an important area of research. Particularly with the decentralisation of wage negotiations, and given that the outcome of the 2019 federal election meant that Labor's package entertaining the possibility of industry bargaining will not be implemented, it can be expected that the inequity in remuneration levels across industries will continue to grow. The publication of remuneration survey information will become an increasingly important input into individual employment choice and in enterprise bargaining. For individual union members such survey information would provide significant added value from their membership allowing them to assess their own position in the market.

Member Benefits

Well-developed member benefits could be expanded and become revenue earning centres for unions. An area of significant potential revenue may be services such as job and income protection and/or professional indemnity insurances. Unions could source partner insurance companies to provide preferential premiums and provide online services as part of their membership offering.

A Kiwi Exemplar?

One antipodean union that has managed to not only withstand the changes in its operating environment but continued to thrive and grow under governments of both conservative and progressive persuasions, has been the New Zealand Public Service Association (NZPSA). It has well understood and embraced the different role unions are required to play in changed political and employment environments, and in circumstances where governments are under increased pressure to deliver public sector efficiency and effectiveness. While maintaining its integrity and relevance to its members, the NZPSA has changed stakeholder perception of it from being “part of the problem” to being “part of the solution”. In the 21st century the NZPSA has demonstrated impressive growth. It now has around 70,000 members (an Australian equivalent would be an organisation of some 350,000) and is now the largest union in New Zealand.

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of unions is under challenge by conservative forces throughout much of the western world. The compositions of workplaces are now more gender, ethically and culturally diverse than in previous times. Unions need to understand the dramatically changed environment within which they are now operating and urgently develop and implement principles and strategies that will ensure that they remain relevant to the interests of members and potential members. It is important unions methodically assess the threats and opportunities associated with the return of the Morrison Government. This assessment must take into account the external environment, support strategic development and achieve buy-in from key stakeholders and the broader community.

A critical element in unions moving from a ‘captive’ membership of the last century to a ‘voluntary’ membership of contemporary times will be the need to significantly enhance their member value proposition and develop ranges of services to provide a greater level of individual member support for their employment and lifestyle interests. However, there is no substitute for having an active and involved membership. This will require a robust commitment to the development and support of groups of workplace-based union activists and representatives. For well over 125 years some unions and the Australian Labor Party have been partners in a formal affiliation relationship. Looking to the future it may even be time for a mature and rational dialogue about the contemporary worth and relevance to both parties of that structural arrangement. But that, of course, is scope for a whole separate discussion piece.

Geoff Fary is a Life Member of the ALP, a former Assistant Secretary of the ACTU, former Deputy Chair and a Life Fellow of the Institute of Managers & Leaders; Australia/New Zealand, and a JCRC Advisory Board Member.

Rebuilding Unionism: an American Perspective

Lawrence Ben reports on the state of US Labour

A total of 14.8 million United States’ workers currently belong to a union and in a trend not dissimilar to Australia, total membership density is currently 10.5 per cent of the workforce – with 6.4 per cent density in the private sector and 33.9 per cent in the public sector. Comparatively speaking, Australian union density currently sits at 14.5 per cent, with 11.0 per cent in the private sector and 38.0 per cent in the public sector. Unions in the US continue to face nearly insurmountable challenges when organising new workers. The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), the equivalent of Australia’s Fair Work Act, has not been

amended in a pro-worker manner for more than seventy years. Instead, the pivotal right to organise, enacted by the depression-era Roosevelt administration, has been all but dismantled. Recently, the National Labor Relations Board ruled that union organisers can be banned from talking to workers in a public space. In this case, hospital management had ejected two union organisers who were simply speaking to workers about union matters in a public cafeteria. Organising new workers in the US is incredibly challenging because it is strictly regulated by the NLRA in favour of the employer. In order to represent and bargain on behalf of workers, a union must receive

majority support in a NLRA worksite ballot. During these elections, unions often face multi-million dollar ‘union-busting’ efforts from employers, including professionally orchestrated misinformation campaigns and immense political pressure. A recent campaign by the United Automobile Workers (UAW) at the Tennessee Volkswagen plant failed amidst no worksite access for the union as well as threats from the company and Governor Bill Lee that the plant would move interstate if the 1,700 workers voted in favour of the union. The NLRA offers few robust protections for unions facing these tactics. Large-scale campaigns, like UAW’s, require an enormous investment of resources that comes at great risk. If the union fails to win a recognition ballot it will be left with no members at a worksite it has spent years trying to organise.

Although US public sector unions have five times the membership density of private sector unions, they continue to face their own existential challenges. In 2018, the Supreme Court’s decision in *Janus v AFSCME* outlawed mandatory bargaining fees from non-union members, allowing the option of workers to make zero contribution towards a union-negotiated agreement. Surprisingly, in the twelve months following *Janus*, public sector unions recorded less than a one percent decrease in membership and some individual unions recorded membership growth after years of stagnant recruitment. For many unions, *Janus* meant that they had no choice but to reform internally and actively recruit new members, otherwise they faced extinction.

Many US unions are trying to creatively work outside of the confines of the NLRA. The Service Employees International Union’s (SEIU) ‘Fight For \$15’ campaign is a prominent example. After years of unsuccessful attempts to unionise workers at fast food outlets, such as McDonalds, the SEIU launched a campaign calling for direct legislative action from state and federal governments. The campaign has now achieved the \$15 minimum wage in eleven states plus D.C., with a staggering forty five million workers to receive the new minimum by 2025. Fight For \$15 has seized the imagination of a public increasingly in tune with growing economic inequality. Its strikes and rallies, recently expanded to combat sexual harassment and other workplace issues, have also become a frequent campaign stop for a raft of Democratic Presidential candidates leading up to the 2020 election. The Fight For \$15 campaign has helped transform the lives of thousands of workers subjected to poverty wages and rampant levels of exploitation. Despite these achievements, it is still yet to yield large-scale membership growth for unions. In New York alone, only a few thousand fast food workers are fee paying members of the SEIU’s offshoot, known as Fast Food Justice. Translating a political movement into large-scale membership continues to be a major challenge. It should not be the only measure of success but driving membership from major campaigns must be addressed to ensure the long-term viability of unions. Ultimately, it may require a complete overhaul of traditional notions of what it means to join a union and be a union member.

Fast Food Justice is a prominent example of the increasingly popular worker centre model. It’s another

demonstration of unions attempting to work outside the NLRA to support and potentially organise workers with little hope of winning a union recognition ballot. Community groups and unions have established these centres to cater for workers looking for advice and support in the absence of a formal union contract. Worker centres also have the added advantage of having more options to take industrial action that is often illegal for unions under the NLRA.

The Organization United for Respect (OUR) grew from the ‘OUR Walmart’ project established by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union. It has orchestrated campaigns that have generated huge publicity and several important wins, including increases to base pay at Walmart and better bankruptcy laws following the collapse of Toys ‘R’ Us and Sears. Its digital campaigns, shareholder activism and political engagement have helped deliver real outcomes to workers who had little chance of winning a NLRA union ballot against some of the world’s largest corporations. Like Fast Food Justice, the ongoing challenge for OUR is translating its campaign successes into more than a few hundred dues paying members.

For decades, U.S. labor laws have chipped away at the influence of unions and pushed them to the margins. At this critical juncture, we have seen the resurgence in union-led campaigns that change social dialogue and push governments to take bold measures to address economic inequality. The greatest challenge is translating their work into a sustainable membership model amidst ever-declining density figures. Australian laws have maintained a slightly fairer balance for unions seeking to organise workers. However, a national ban on compulsory unionism and bargaining fees has resulted in hundreds of thousands of ‘free-riders’ enjoying higher wages and benefits from union-negotiated enterprise agreements without making any contribution to the collective bargaining effort. Simultaneously, Australian unions are finding a record number of workers covered by industry awards, with a thirty four per cent drop (more than 600,000 workers) in workers ceasing to be covered by an enterprise agreement since 2013. Organising non-union workers who benefit from successful union campaigns to improve awards minimums, is not dissimilar from the structural imbalances facing Fast Food Justice and OUR. The current political moment provides an opportunity for US unions to capitalise on the power of their social movements to deliver the legislative change needed to fundamentally rebalance the nation’s unfair labor laws. For Australia, building social movements that change the political narrative could be an invaluable method of mobilising unorganised workers but it must come with an effective model for driving membership growth. A failure to successfully address these challenges at this uncertain moment could be fatal for unions in both Australia and the US.

Lawrence Ben is political coordinator for the US-based Retail, Wholesale & Department Store Union. He previously worked for the SDA (South Australia-Northern Territory Branch).

Getting to know...

John Curtin Research Centre Committee of Management Member, Ken Macpherson

What got you interested in politics?

I have been interested in politics for as long as I can remember. Neither of my parents were ALP supporters but I was letterboxing and handing out how-to-votes for the ALP with my great mate from kindergarten Greg Moran, long before I was ten. As kids, in between cricket or football matches most afternoons, Greg and I would be discussing and debating the Vietnam War, South African Apartheid or how hopeless Billy McMahon was.



Tell us about you

I have spent the last thirty years of my life in politics. I took leave from the tedium of a low-level researcher for the student union at the University of Queensland to help from Mike Kaiser, I found myself in Con Sciacca's office to Queensland Health Minister Ken McElligott's office. Ludwig made me an offer I couldn't refuse and I joined the Workers Union. In mid-1994 I was approached by the Government for the 1995 state campaign and placed as an advisor to the Industry and Regional Development. Shortly after I moved to the Health portfolio and I was made his Chief of Staff. I worked for Opposition Leader (working for Jim and Peter Beattie) and Development. When my daughter was born in 1997, I took a year off to grow up and was approached by Bruce Hawker to join his team. Hawker Britton. In late 2003 I started up my own consultancy until 2011 when I decided to try my hand in the public sector. I was nearly a year before an opportunity came up at Rio Tinto. I spent more than two years of happily beaver away at Rio Tinto. Bill Shorten approached me and asked if I'd consider joining his team. I couldn't say no to despite having always thought of myself as a staffer. Going back to being a staffer after thirteen years in the relentless 24 hour news cycle and the complexities of politics were new challenges. Fortunately, in Bill's office I was supported by people who more than compensated for my flaws and Bill Shorten. I fell ill twice and just was not able to get back to work so I reluctantly left the role. I have now been at Govstrat for four years.

Any advice for young activists?

Follow your beliefs, enjoy yourselves along the way and there is nothing to be gained from hating those who don't share your views.

Tell our readers an unusual fact about yourself

As a student I was a spray-painting activist in BUGA UP, Billboard Utilising Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions!

our working life.

My working life in and around politics. I started in the Commonwealth Public Sector job to be a policy adviser in Queensland in 1988. Then in 1989, with a bit of luck, I got into Bob Carr's electorate office for two years before moving to the State Government office as his only policy adviser. A year later Bill Bligh spent two years working for Bill at the Australian Government and then went back into the State Government to work on policy as his only policy adviser in Jim Elder's office as Minister for Business and Trade. Afterwards Jim was "promoted" to the troublesome Treasurer's office. I then followed Jim through Transport, Deputy Premier (Beattie) and Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development. In early 2000 I decided I wanted to know her as she was a woman and then spent a great three and a half years at the State Government in public affairs and lobbying business which I ran in a world of large corporates, working for Thiess for a while and then Rio Tinto which I jumped at. After a little more time at Rio Tinto the opportunity of a lifetime came knocking. To consider being his Chief of Staff, it was an offer I couldn't refuse. What I had moved past needing the rush of being a Chief of Staff was something of a shock to the system, the challenges of a coalface role at the federal level presented by a team surrounded by an amazing team of professionals. It was fantastic to work for. After two years with Bill Bligh I was better quickly enough to do the job justice, and now I have been working with Damian Power and couldn't be happier.

What do you like to get up to outside of work?

I have three children aged 28, 19 and 16 and any time I get to spend or do things with any or all of them is cherished. I am also a complete sports nut and love attending any Brisbane Lions, Melbourne Storm, Melbourne Rebels, Brisbane Roar, Wallaby or any Queensland or international cricket matches I can get to.

What is the one big policy problem facing Australia and the solution?

There are many big policy problems facing Australia, especially the need for modernising economic reforms but the issue I spend the most time and effort on is energy policy. There is a huge debate that we should be having about what we need to do to have the most efficient and reliable energy system at the lowest cost and with the lowest level of emissions. Instead at one extreme we have people pretending we can convert overnight to very high levels of renewables without any loss of reliability and at lower costs and at the other people pretending that building multiple new coal fired power stations or subsidising some existing power stations is the answer. There is no one solution to the challenge but part of any answer has to be honest debates about the real issues like the challenges of integrating renewables into our grid, the role of gas and its pricing, the pricing of storage technologies and how to manage the retirements of large coal fired stations. The key is genuine leadership at a national level from the Federal Government.

Does Work have a Future?

Andrew Dettmer on the implications of Industry 4.0

Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* was a politically brave film for 1927. It dramatised class differences and the oppression of workers, in a futuristic environment where workers resided underground to labour for the rich above. The key scene, their revolt fomented by the amoral robot, the double of the heroine, Maria, came to typify the film, and entered *Metropolis* into the popular imagination as a dystopian tale of technology gone mad. It portrayed workers revolting in response to their oppression, and was considered dangerous communist propaganda in Weimar Germany.

Lang had no idea about the technologies which we now consider commonplace - no iPhones were harmed in the making of this movie. Yet *Metropolis* is often seen as a story about the robots taking over.

Fear of modern technology, that it is the *Metropolis* of the 21st century, leading to the destruction of jobs and dignity, and enslavement to the needs of a machine, is rife. The 4th industrial revolution - Industry 4.0 - leads many workers to fear that they will be responding to machines, rather than the other way around. Such fears have their foundation in the reality of many workers' lives.

Consider the experience of workers at Amazon's "Fulfillment Centres." The key operating mechanism is an algorithm which sets pick rates in the warehouse. Workers equipped with a headset respond to an electronic voice which sends them to the relevant place in the warehouse. Workers who don't trot along quickly enough get a buzz on the wrist band they wear, to accelerate them on their way. Woe betide anybody who takes an unscheduled break, like going to the toilet.

Algorithms are one of the key technologies of Industry 4.0. At their most basic, they are simply the instructions provided to a machine to perform a specific task, in the

same way, every time. Amazon's applications show their inhuman capacity; at their worst, for instance when used in racial profiling, they "embed existing bias into code" as US mathematician Cathy O'Neil describes it. Algorithmic management is the worst of the examples of Industry 4.0. But it does not have to be that way. The technologies to be introduced are a matter of choice: they are not dictated by some impersonal "market force". The people making those choices - employers, in the main - are often

motivated by an exaggerated sense of their own needs. By fulfilling his entitlements, Amazon's owner Jeff Bezos has become the world's richest person. He, and many of his fellow capitalists, are resistant to the idea that there should be any moderation of those needs. And few, in Australia at least, consider the views of the workers who will be affected.

We have an economy in which currently all the aces are held by employers. What used to typify the Australian workplace - a vigorous contest between capital and labour, contending about new ways of making the present and the future - has been replaced by a rampant employer class, hell bent on taking as much out of the value chain as possible through executive pay rises and share buybacks. They are given succour by the Liberal Party in government, and they have taken the increasing profits which should be reinvested in productive capital, and trousered the lot. This is borne out by ABS reports which show that - contrary to any measure of economic common sense - while profits have been going up, investment has been going down. And as the low wage

increases obtained through bargaining show, those profits are not flowing to workers through pay rises. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members have always been at the edge of technological change. Our union resisted the assembly line typified by Taylorism and fought against it in the Great Strikes of 1917. We fought the campaign of the century when metalworkers took on the Fraser Govt and employers when fighting for the 38-hour week and

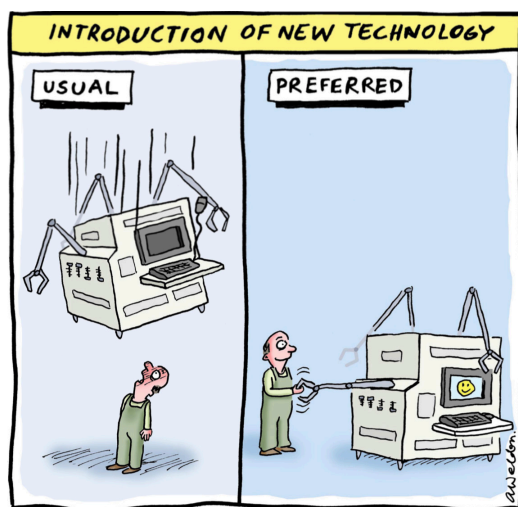
How much better would it be if the strong Australian tradition of workplace consultation hadn't been killed off by the ideologues of the Liberal Party and their employer allies? We can see from the experience of Germany in codetermination and Works Councils that the improved productivity and introduction of change is being handled with significantly greater justice than Australia. My work with the Industry 4.0 Taskforce, a joint committee of employers, academics and unions, shows the significant possibilities. German success with this model has been deliberate; the Merkel government set out to cooperate with social partners, especially unions, to ensure that Industry 4.0 can be implemented with the maximum of participation and minimal disruption.

introduction of change provisions during the late 1970s and early 80s.

Now, we are confronting the technologies of Industry 4.0, with our bargaining power weakened by successive governments, and exacerbated by the powerlessness institutionalised through the Fair Work Act. Yet what do workers want from technology?

The AMWU surveyed our delegates in 2018. We asked a series of questions about the introduction of new technology in their workplaces, some of which we also asked in 2012. The resulting publication, *Australia Rebooted*, details some of their responses and tries to make sense of Industry 4.0 trends.

While much of the focus is on the new machines and processes which exemplify Industry 4.0, the aspect of technology of most concern to workers is, overwhelmingly, what it will do to their jobs and job security. Much of the research into this has been focused on spectacular claims of job loss – in 2013, Oxford academics Frey and Osborne claimed that 47% of jobs would go. A more recent study by the OECD places this loss at between 11 and 14%. (This of course has been denied by Chris Richardson of Deloittes, who declared recently, in a publication which would make Dr Pangloss blush, that new technologies are creating just as many jobs as they were destroying. All will be well, apparently.)



No job loss is a cause for celebration, but it shows that a more reasoned argument can be had (and not just mechanistic cries of “disruption!”), without workers having the gun to their head which is mass unemployment. The problem with our workplace laws is that very little compels employers to take a cooperative view of technological

change. In the same way that, as a society, we need a Just Transition to a low carbon economy, we also need a Just Transition to an Industry 4.0 enabled future. Our survey showed that many of our delegates participate in technological change in their workplaces. There was, formerly, a requirement on employers to consult with workers about change. Those requirements, won in 1984 under the Termination Change and Redundancy case, were significantly eroded by John Howard’s WorkChoices laws (which more or less outlawed them) and have continued to be marginalised since. Despite this lack of a strong legal entitlement to consultation, delegates of the AMWU are participating in change and the introduction of new technologies; while in only 7.6% of workplaces do management “often” consult with delegates about business problems and solutions (56% “sometimes or occasionally” do), in 41.5% of workplaces management trust workers to understand what’s required. And while 30% agree or strongly agree that technological change will improve job security, and 92% are very confident about the future of the company they work for, 67% believe that it will replace existing jobs.

How much better would it be if the strong Australian tradition of workplace consultation hadn’t been killed off by the ideologues of the Liberal Party and their employer allies? We can see from the experience of Germany in codetermination and Works Councils that the improved productivity and introduction of change is being handled with significantly greater justice than Australia. My work with the Industry 4.0 Taskforce, a joint committee of employers, academics and unions, shows the significant possibilities. German success with this model has been deliberate; the Merkel government set out to cooperate with social partners, especially unions, to ensure that Industry 4.0 can be implemented with the maximum of participation and minimal disruption. Joerg Hoffman, President of IG Metall, the German metalworkers’ union, chairs the committee on skills, training and employment. As the Taskforce observed on its recent delegation to Germany, the introduction of digitalised work methods has been embraced by major elements of German industry. In one example, Siemens Amberg, a digitalised plant making switchgear has been installed next to an existing plant set up under automated lines. Very few workers have been displaced, and employment has remained more or less constant. However the mix has changed, with nearly one fifth of all workers at the plant now working on R & D. The plant also gives significant autonomy to its teams. When I asked the plant manager about hierarchy, he said that the existing hierarchy (from trades and technical

workers through to engineers and supervisors) has been maintained, but each member of the team contributes as far as his or her talent and ability provides. Even more so the training needs of the team are determined by the team members themselves. In stark contrast to Australian workplaces, where employers often complain about the cost of training (almost as if they expect skilled workers to be able to plucked like ripe fruit from TAFE or university), the manager could not tell me how much was spent on training; it was considered to be the cost of doing business. This process is assisted by the Works Council, on which workers and management are represented. In Siemens, as elsewhere in Germany, a strong culture of codetermination exists. Technological innovation is considered to be part and parcel of those processes.



Take, for instance the notion of a “digital twin.” These are becoming common methods of developing new products as well as enabling the real time monitoring of production and maintenance processes, through a digital representation which reproduces all the elements of the real thing. We saw a turbine maintenance process that uses this extensively; a technician sets up in the comfort of his/her own environment, and can guide another technician to maintain, repair or modify the turbine in a remote environment. This has been used successfully, for instance, in war zones where technicians can show others how to work on the turbine; the risk to the maintenance worker at source is nil – and it also means that even under stress the

local technician can perform tasks with certainty.

It goes without saying that it is far more efficient to involve workers in the design and manufacture of such materials – it provides understanding and commitment, as well as ensuring that the materials themselves under use can work. Under current laws, but even more so in the current environment of “managerial prerogative”, an idea which seemed to have its day in the 1980s but which has made a comeback with a vengeance, the chances of employers taking such views into account are minimal at best. In some workplaces, despite the lack of any legal entitlement, employers and unions are cooperating, and the results can be productive for the employer, the workplace and the workers. Examples of this can be found in the PwC publication *Transforming Australian Manufacturing* jointly sponsored by Swinburne, the AMWU and the AiG.

Australia does not have the luxury of just leaving this up to “the market.” It is only through vigorous social dialogue that we will come to a landing which assists in implementation of these technologies. We need to create new rights in the workplace, like the right to turn off. And we need to ensure that technologies which are introduced have a social licence – that they are not introduced without concern for social impact (algorithmic management just being one of the worst current examples). Industry 4.0 is both promise and threat. It can be the dystopia of Lang’s *Metropolis*, of Amazon, the gig economy, and workers slaving at the behest of machines – where they have a job. Or it can lead to more fulfilling, skilful jobs. This is not some romantic notion – it must be embedded in policy and regulation. *Metropolis* was in many ways ahead of its time. But there is a certain timelessness to its message (love wins out in the end), none more so than the final scene of the movie which has as its epigraph, “The mediator between brain and hands must be the heart!” It is clear that, unless we develop technology as a way of reaching human potential and fulfillment for all, the only humans to reach that potential will be the privileged, and to hell with the rest of us.

Andrew Dettmer is National President of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and a JCRC Advisory Board member.

Book Review by Kimberley Kitching

Labor’s “Forgotten People”: the Triumph of Identity Politics by Michael Thompson

Connor Court Publishing, 2019, RRP \$29.95

As I write, Labor is still raking over the coals of the devastating May 18 election loss. One month on, we are getting ready to return to the 46th Parliament having had our policy platform thoroughly rejected by the

electorate. What went so wrong? Were our tax policies too complicated? Did we fail in our messaging? Were we saying one thing in the inner-city, another in the outer-suburbs and another in the regions? Did we create the perception of class warfare? Did the fake news scare

campaign on death taxes cut through? The findings of our Election Review will give a better picture of what exactly happened but the truth is that just one of these is probably too many — let alone opening up multiple big targets with which the Coalition could spray us with buckshot. But if there's one thing we need to come to terms with from this loss, it is that our traditional base abandoned us in droves — they are now thoroughly rusted-off. Labor's two-party-preferred share of the national vote at 48.5 per cent hides the fact that we only managed to attract 33 per cent of that in our own right. Not to mention an abysmal 26.7 per cent in my original home state of Queensland.

In his pertinent and timely new book, Michael Thompson puts forward an argument that many of the structural problems that led to this loss were decades in the making. Read with hindsight, Labor's *Forgotten People: The Triumph of Identity Politics*, pinpoints our failure to confront the issues lying behind our 1996 electoral rout as one of the reasons for the situation we find ourselves in today. In the twenty years since, we have only won government in our own right once. In the decade or so preceding the ascension of Howard, the measures that Hawke and Keating took to open up the Australian economy to the world are well-known — removing tariffs, floating the dollar, increasing competition in previously protected sectors.

This is what Labor governments do — we reform. These policies laid the foundation for the next twenty-eight years of continuous economic growth; economic growth that we may currently be witnessing coming to an end under this Coalition Government. It is also true that by opening up the economy to new markets some of our traditional industries fell by the wayside. Many moved offshore, into the developing world and a newly booming Asia. However, Thompson's thesis does not just re-traverse this well-worn history. He instead argues that it was not so much the economic reforms themselves that have been the lingering problem for Labor. Rather, while implementing this policy suite we failed to articulate an inclusive and alternate vision to our base. This has left us isolated ever since. Who is this base? Thompson refers to them as Labor's "Forgotten People". But this could easily be substituted with Morrison's "Quiet Australians" or Howard's "Battlers". Thompson notes that in a 2002 Review set up by the then newly elected Opposition Leader Simon Crean, Bob Hawke and Neville Wran identified this group as "skilled and semi-skilled blue collar workers and women from lower socio-economic backgrounds".

Fast forward to 2019 and who did we fail to connect with? A data analysis by Nick Evershed found that in 2019 the electorates that had the largest swings to the Coalition had, on average, lower incomes, lower levels of education and higher unemployment. These are Labor's forgotten people. However, you do not just lose a large base of your voting bloc for no reason. The second thread in Thompson's thesis notes that beginning in the 1970s, industry workers were largely replaced by "supporters of

feminism, multiculturalism, environmentalism and the like" as Labor's base. We cannot, nor should we want to, halt change. Similarly, we cannot just sit back and forget the large sections who feel increasingly isolated by this change. This abandonment is demonstrated by the proliferation of identity and values-based issues, as well as interest groups that began to be absorbed in the national conference, party platform and local branches around the same time. All the while, something as important as youth unemployment in outer suburban communities struggled to rate a mention. For example, the Mid-North region of South Australia, which includes the Barossa, currently has a youth unemployment rate of 15.3 per cent.

When we look at the available analysis, the trade-off between fringe and identity issues for those which are of core concern to working class Australia again played out in the election. The strongest swings to Labor correlated with higher education rates and employment levels. Similarly, as median weekly incomes increased, the more likely those people were to swing to Labor. An interesting side point here is that the electorates with larger numbers receiving franking credits and a higher utilisation of the negative gearing concession actually had a light swing towards us — defying some of the conventional post-election commentary.

This phenomenon is something that I have been speaking about since I first entered parliament. In an interview I gave with *The Australian* in 2018, I noted that the rise of the Greens to our Left had largely inoculated us against some of their more extreme and out of touch policies, such as those currently making UK Labour unelectable. But I also noted that a lot of the identity politics and virtue-signalling we are seeing now is intellectually lazy and has a regressive impact on the wider political debate. My final point brings me to a US-Australia analogy. While I am always weary of making comparisons to Trump's America with that of our current crop, reading Thompson's book reminded me of a sobering observation I read in another brilliant book. In J. D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy*, he masterfully explores the decline of the white-working class in America. He starts off by telling the reader: "You see, I grew up poor, in the Rust Belt, in an Ohio steel town that has been haemorrhaging jobs and hope for as long as I can remember."

"Haemorrhaging jobs and hope". That line hit me like a freight train. This is exactly what I saw and felt when visiting the La Trobe Valley after the Kennett years. The electorate of Morwell, which covers this area, for 40-years was a Labor stronghold. In 2006 they turned their backs on us and we have not been able bring them back since. We need to find a path back to giving hope to those who no longer feel like they are connected to our movement. If Thompson's *Forgotten People* provides the diagnosis, then it is the Labor Opposition's job to come up with the solutions.

Kimberley Kitching is Labor Senator for Victoria.

JCRC in the news

Catch up on all our latest musings, straight off the desks of our Committee and Board Members.

Our Executive Director Nick Dyrenfurth has been active in the media post-election.



He wrote a post-mortem for the Australian Financial Review, on the need for Laborites not to blame voters ('Labor must stop blaming voters and start actually listening to them', 22 May 2019, <https://www.afr.com/news/politics/national/labor-must-stop-blaming-voters-and-start-actually-listening-to-them-20190522-p51pxo>) and another for the Daily Telegraph on rebuilding connections with faith-based communities ('Why ALP must re-engage with religious people', 29 May 2019, <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/nick-dyrenfurth-why-alp-must-reengage-with-religious-people/news-story/7292e6a7e1ca66bfcea2709f63c93e74>).



Best wishes to our Advisory Board member Philip Dalidakis who has retired as the Member for Southern Metropolitan in the Victorian Upper House.



Congratulations to another Advisory Board member Hilik Bar who was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Georgian American University in Tbilisi, in recognition of his contribution to the development of Georgian-Jewish relations, and for fostering a peaceful process in the Middle East.



And finally congratulations to our ED Nick Dyrenfurth who welcome his third child into the world in April, a baby girl Lily.

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Vale Bill Landeryou

David Cragg pays tribute to the life of a Labor giant

The Honourable William Albert Landeryou passed away on 27 February 2019, at age 77 – a bit less than three months before his mate Bob Hawke joined him. While Hawke attracted rightly many inches of newspaper columns and TV bites, the remembrance of Bill Landeryou was more reserved for family and friends, and union and ALP members, predominantly centred in Victoria but with some adherents sprinkled across the rest of Australia.

Yet Bill Landeryou's career undoubtedly changed the course of Australian unionism in the 1970s and 1980s and was pivotal in setting Hawke on the road to the prime ministership. Born in 1941 in Moonee Ponds, Bill Landeryou left school at fifteen and after a career as a trucking company manager, he was appointed as a research officer with the Victorian Branch of the Federated Storemen and Packers Union in 1965. Landeryou was an official of the FSPU (now the National Union of Workers) from 1965 to 1982, becoming Victorian secretary in 1969 and federal president in 1979. Working with Hawke as ACTU President from 1970 onwards, Landeryou created the 'new unionism' we can still glimpse today. Innovative, inclusive, focused on broader industrial aspirations, social policy and community growth – the traditional 'struggle' of everyday workplace disputes was given a bigger picture context in Australia.

Unions in Australia were tired by the end of the 1960s, epitomized by the honourable but old-school ACTU leadership of Albert Monk and Harold Souter, competent officials whose style harked back to the 1930s, with cautious attitudes formed by the Great Depression and World War. Landeryou, the 28-year old new Victorian secretary of the FSPU played his role in wrangling the numbers for Bob Hawke at the 1969 ACTU Congress, to become its new president on 1 January 1970.

The genius of nineteenth century Australian unionism – the first 'new unionism' – had been to extend the gains of collective action from the guild-like 'craft' trades unions to the entire working population including the so-called 'unskilled'. This type of general union, like the Australian Workers Union, the 'Missos' and the FSPU, was largely unknown outside Australia. The more militant Builders Labourers' Federation covering the construction industries also fitted the bill. Landeryou saw the potential of using Australia's fragmented state Industrial Relations systems to "leap-frog" state awards against each other, continually edging up pay and conditions for relatively unskilled manual workers. Over the first five years of the 1970s, the FPSU moved from relatively poorly paid to among the best

remunerated entry-level workers in Australia. The workers loved it and loved their union! Unions were energized to put all sorts of workplace and social demands on the table, to gauge how state wages boards and commissions would respond.

Extending the range of issues dealt with in awards, and being prepared to move logs of claims into unfamiliar areas such as Occupational Health and Safety and access to training, the FSPU played an educational role within the broader movement, and sparked the imagination of younger officials leading in large part to the development of the ALP-ACTU Accord negotiated over the course of 1982-83. The core stability of the Hawke Government was built by Landeryou's FSPU. Key figures of this era such as ACTU Secretary Bill Kelty and President Simon Crean (later a federal MP and Minister) honed their political and industrial skills under the mentorship of Landeryou.

Landeryou was the first modern unionist to talk about superannuation. He sent a trusted FSPU official, Greg Sword, on a special mission to America in the late 1970s to study US union pension funds. The FSPU super trust LUCRF was formed on his return, and today Sword still serves as its chair. The original FSPU vision for super was to have explicitly union-owned and union-controlled industry pension funds which would combine the financial clout of workers' capital with worker representation at company AGMs and to put workers on company boards. With the aim of a secure and dignified retirement – superannuation had hitherto been the exclusive domain of salaried managers – Landeryou and his first super manager Harry Saint were adamant blue-collar workers could master financial know-how, manage their own affairs and become more self-reliant. In the longer run, the



Weaven-Carmichael view prevailed at the ACTU. Industry super funds traded independence and exclusive union control for access to broader categories of workers, and a strategically safer use of contracted professional services. The quality of service provided to superannuation fund members has been admirable, but certainly at a cost of ideological edge and reformist zeal.

Landeryou had been active in the Victorian Labor Party from a young age. He was President of Victorian Young Labor between 1964 and 1966 and a member of the party's Administrative Committee following the ousting in 1971 of the Hartleyite left-wingers who had controlled Victorian Labor since the split of 1955. While respecting the values and achievements of Gough Whitlam and Bill Hayden, the push to promote Bob Hawke into further national prominence was Landeryou's special project as the leader, along with Clyde Holding, of the Centre Unity faction in Victoria. Gatherings of ALP and union activists hosted by Hawke at his Royal Avenue, Sandringham home, and by Landeryou at his Pascoe Vale Road, Essendon home, helped build unity and optimism in the face of Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's savage attacks. Hawke's preselection in October 1979, in the face of virulent factional opposition and a wily rival candidate Gerry Hand (later a valued federal cabinet colleague), stands primarily to the credit of Landeryou.

Landeryou himself was elected to the Victorian Legislative Council as the Member for Doutta Galla in March 1976. For the first three years of his parliamentary duty, he continued as FSPU federal secretary – a double-up which from our modern perspective appears odd, but which had been custom and practice for union officials for the best part of a century. When in 1979 he became Leader of the Opposition in the upper house, Landeryou relinquished his paid FSPU duties. On the election of John Cain's Victorian Labor government in April 1982, after twenty-seven years of uninterrupted Coalition rule, Landeryou became Leader of the Government in the upper house, and Minister for Industrial Affairs and Labor and Industry amongst other portfolios. For a while, this was shaping up to be the Cain-Landeryou Government – Landeryou had been a key supporter of Cain's push to become the ALP's Victorian opposition leader in 1981 – and Bill at age 41 was not out of the possibility of sometime later moving to the lower house for his own chance at the premiership.

It was not to be. Landeryou's forceful style rubbed the quiet suburban solicitor John Cain up the wrong way. A year into the new Labor administration the Premier found a pretext to politically execute his boisterous upper house leader. Landeryou had remained honorary state and

federal president of his beloved union after being elected to Parliament in March 1976. He resigned the federal post on being elected as a Minister in 1982, but retained the state union role. This attachment was subsequently used to force Bill out of the ministry, following an allegation of 'conflict of interest'. The FSPU owned a number of hotels as investments, and one had a minor bottle shop application in with the Labor and Industry Department. Landeryou as the responsible minister was seen to be wearing his union hat at the same time – described at the time as something akin to "receiving a death sentence for a parking fine." Numerous arguments in exoneration were raised by ALP branches, union meetings, activist groups including the Fabian Society, but to no avail. The standing of Premier Cain was unchallengeable, and he wanted a less challenging leadership in the upper house. Predictably, the state government ran into serious industrial strife later in the 1980s, which sped up Cain's departure as premier in 1990 and the ultimate defeat of Labor in 1992. No one can doubt that Landeryou's superior industrial nous would have given the ALP a better chance to navigate the 1990-92 storm. But Bill sat on the backbench, neglected by both premiers, until his retirement from Parliament at the Jeff Kennett-led Liberal landslide election of December 1992.

Following his departure from public life, Bill Landeryou devoted himself to charitable activities, especially focused on cooperative employment opportunities in local communities and basic entry-level skills acquisition for the mildly disabled. His interest in fairness, if anything, got stronger in retirement – but his retirement from public life was sadly premature. Since the start of the 1990s, enterprise bargaining and neglect of the award system has hurt the less-skilled workforce. We have seen a return to highly-skilled elites prospering while general wages stagnate and conditions are reduced. Unions like the FSPU's successor union NUW, the AWU and United Voice work hard to get wage justice for the unskilled, but in a hostile political environment with equally harsh industrial laws. It's a tough battle uphill, but poses a fascinating question, how would a young Bill Landeryou act in 2019?

Bill Landeryou is survived by his son Andrew and his wife Kimberley Kitching, Victorian Labor Senator in the federal parliament, and his daughter Anne-Marie and her three children.

David Cragg is a former Assistant Secretary of Victorian Trades Hall Council, longstanding official of the AWU and Federated Ironworkers' Association, and a member of the JCRC Committee of Management.

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‘The nation looked to Labor,
and it did not look in vain.’

- John Curtin, 26 July 1943