

Letter from Australia

In December 1991, the parliamentary members of the Australian Labor Party decided to dump Prime Minister Bob Hawke. This was the first time a serving Labor PM had been deposed by his own party.

In conventional terms, Hawke was doing fine. He had led Labor to victory in an unprecedented four elections, beginning in 1983. He was also highly popular with the public.

Hawke was replaced by Paul Keating, the Treasurer and second most powerful figure in the government for most of the Hawke period. Why was Keating preferred?

Not because he offered an alternative political direction. After all, he had been quite satisfied with the policies he and Hawke had implemented over the years. Nor had Hawke done something special to discredit himself.

Furthermore, Keating was and is much less popular with the public than Hawke. Indeed, Keating is perhaps the most detested politician in Australia. He comes across as exceedingly arrogant. He called himself the world's greatest treasurer and is renowned for heaping abuse on those who criticise him. (Hawke no doubt is arrogant too, but he projects a different image.) Finally, Keating is closely identified with the current recession which he said, before the economy became so bad, was "the recession we had to have". This quote is now frequently used against him.

So why in the world would Labor parliamentarians trade in a proven popular PM for a substitute who had no new ideas and was an electoral liability? The answer: in-fighting and media pressure.

Paul Keating is intensely ambitious and, unlike some politicians, isn't afraid to wreck things to get his way. Keating had long pushed privately and publicly for Hawke to step down so that he, Keating, could be official kingpin. When Hawke stayed on as PM longer than expected, Keating started yet another push for the top office, using various methods to destabilise the situation.

In essence, Keating became PM because his own campaign for the office was causing woeful damage to the Labor Party. Parliamentarians were being lobbied relentlessly by stalwarts for Hawke and Keating. Public pronouncements and leaks were embarrassing the government. The job of developing and implementing policy was an afterthought while the struggle for leadership continued.

After one of his unsuccessful challenges for

Australian political antics

the leadership, Keating moved to the backbench but maintained his campaign. Some parliamentarians eventually supported Keating because it was apparent that he would continue causing disruption until he became leader. They preferred an unpopular PM to continuing instability.

The other main culprit was the mass media, especially the Canberra parliamentary press gallery. In Parliament House, the main focus is personalities. Instability makes for a good story, and so readers were treated to interminable stories about behind-the-scenes power plays. Labor plotters and schemers always had a convenient outlet in the media.

The media helped turn 'instability' into a self-fulfilling prophecy. The substance of governmental policy-making took second place to the ins and outs of power struggles.

The substance is that the Labor government has implemented more policies which have served big business and hurt the average worker than any previous Australian government. Following the ideology of the 'free market', the economy was opened up to the 'winds of competition'. The exchange rate was floated, tariffs were slashed, controls over investment were eased. The result was an orgy of speculation by rich entrepreneurs, later followed by spectacular crashes. Rather than improving the economy, Labor's policies hindered productive investment and caused massive losses through speculative operations. Average real wages declined while the rich became richer.

There is insufficient space to mention the way in which the Labor government failed to implement its promises concerning Aboriginal rights, the environment, foreign policy and many other areas. Suffice it to say that the Liberals – as the conservatives in Australia are called – could not have imagined pursuing such a radically conservative programme.

The former Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser has taken to writing newspaper columns. Fraser's government from 1975 to 1983 was considered then to be exceedingly conservative. Fraser now sounds like a left-winger as he criticises Labor policies, arguing that the government should do more to protect the workers and the disadvantaged!

Fraser is also at odds with the present Liberals, who have moved steadily right. Where else could they go with Labor taking over their most extreme policies?

There are a few familiar lessons from this

depressing story. It is pointless to expect progress from a different party in government. Labor has been much more successful in bringing in the serve-the-privileged policies than its opposition could ever have been.

Paul Keating PM symbolises the rule of ambition in party politics, which attracts the worst individuals and brings out the worst in those it attracts. I have not mentioned the personal friendship between Hawke, Keating and various wealthy (and, some say, corrupt) businessmen. Keating is a 'working class boy' but now is more noted for his expensive suits and his passion for expensive antique clocks.

Another lesson is that it is usually a diversion and waste of time to study the in-fighting within governments and parties. While it seems that journalists are providing an insight into the real operations of the state, the sort of perspectives they provide give only a spectator's view of struggles between personalities. Few journalists examine structural dynamics: the mechanisms of capitalism, of male domination, of state power. Fewer still question the role or

existence of these social structures.

Recently I attended a meeting at which a young activist in the New Left Party argued vehemently that the left should be mounting a campaign over the next eighteen months to make sure that Labor is re-elected and that the Liberals, with their ultra-right policies, are prevented from gaining office. This seemed very forgiving of Labor's move to the right since 1983 and its continual rejection of left views.

This is all the more amazing considering that a large fraction of members of the New Left Party are former members of the Communist Party of Australia, which has officially disbanded. It is plausible to think that if the Communist Party had somehow been elected by mistake, they would have ended up not much different than the present government.

The message is that the system of parties, bureaucracies and central administration shapes the people and policies, not vice versa. The system of representative democracy has a remarkably strong grip on people's thinking. The system has betrayed its believers numerous times and survived, and no doubt the believers will persist through quite a few more betrayals.

Brian Martin

News from Northern Ireland

It's all change but no change down south with the resignation of Charlie Haughey as Taoiseach. It was always going to happen and the only amazing feature is the amount of 'dignity' Charlie has been allowed as he stepped down. I can only assume that the mass of people down south are so alienated from politics that they don't give a fuck what the politicians do. Why didn't anybody call for criminal proceedings to be launched against Charlie? In any event, he's move on and, a bit like his friend Maggie Thatcher, his memory is being lionised by the bastards who spent the previous three years trying to stab him in the back. The man most likely to get the Taoiseach's job is Albert Reynolds, variously described as coming from a Republican background and being bland on Northern Ireland. In any event, there is not likely to be any significant change in the south's attitude to political change in the north. If anything it would seem that while the Unionist bogey-man, Charlie Haughey, has stepped down Reynolds may not be 'green' enough to swing his party behind the changes that London and the Unionists seem to be requiring. And through all of this the people in the south can be assured of an ever-worsening economic and social situation and the people in the north can be assured of yet more insensitivity and crassness.

Is this an environment in which anarchist ideas can flourish? Protestant and Loyalist people were furious at Peter Brooke's stupid songburst on RTE television. Then to make matters worse he stayed in Dublin to watch a rugby match. As a Loyalist friend of mine said: "If there was a motorway crash in England, where would you find the Minister of Transport?" The total ignorance and insensitivity of English politicians in the wake of the Teebane Cross murders was further illustrated by the fact that, though he was in Belfast, John Major chose not to pay his respects at any of the funerals of the victims of the IRA bomb. Letter writers to the *Ulster Newsletter*, a Unionist mouthpiece, were furious at the behaviour of the politicians who represent the state to which they

pledge allegiance. How long can that go on? And is that the reason behind the IRA's current phase of military activity? To underline the total lack of will and desire on the part of English politicians to tackle the Irish issue, in any shape or form?

Stiffing workers seems to be what it's all about. The seven at Teebane Cross for working for a building firm erecting a security force base in Omagh, a black-taxi driver for being a Catholic and prominent in Irish language activities, a bread-man in Dungannon for being a Protestant. Various Trades Councils throughout the north have held public meetings under the banner 'stop the killings' and 'smash the bigots' and a mass rally is planned by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in Belfast. Is this a route for the development of anarchist ideas in Ireland? And yet any response to violence that does not set the context supplied by the British and Irish states must surely come to grief. And so where do anarchists in Ireland engage the public in this process? In their unions, their community groups, the dole queues, the workplaces, the leisure centres, the pubs, the shops ... where?

Some friends of mine joined me in writing and performing a drama piece as part of the Bloody Sunday Initiative activities to mark the twentieth anniversary of Bloody Sunday. Afterwards a fellow came up to me and said: "So yeez are all anarchists then?" We hadn't planned or written the piece like that, so his question was a fillip in a day of very exciting discussions and debates. Everything from christo-pacifism to armed struggle Republicanism was aired, and lots more besides, in a very imaginative series of workshops, forums, concerts and other events. It was obviously good to relocate the discussion in the Bogside. It's there, and in places like it, that the real discussions can take place. And it's from those communities that movements for real peace and justice will arise, because it is the people in those communities who best understand the interconnecting ways in which the states and the paramilitaries oppress their lives.

Dave Duggan

French mutualism, yesterday and today

Pierre Joseph Proudhon did not invent mutual aid, but he certainly promoted the concept with more vigour than any of his contemporaries. Having observed the Lyon workers' mutual aid societies, he developed the basic principles of anarchism from them. It was his true genius to have based his anarchy upon the living practice of working people rather than creating some 'perfect system' out of the air as did the utopian socialists. Proudhon extended the mutualist idea to include factories run by workers' association and his famous People's Bank – a forerunner of the credit union. The mutualist principles which are as true today as they were in 1840 are:

- democratic structure
- necessity of maintaining an a-political stance
- egalitarianism
- solidarity
- federalism
- local autonomy
- non-profit (or sharing of profits).

These practices are quite different from those of the capitalist corporation, even though both market and money are maintained.

While the People's Bank was no great success, co-operatives and mutual aid societies began to develop throughout France and other parts of the world.¹ This occurrence comes as no surprise since mutualism was an eminently practical solution to many of the problems faced by workers and artisans. (Much more so than 'waiting for the revolution' or joining a phalansterie.) By 1852 there were 2,500 societies with about 250,000 members in France.² Five years after Proudhon's death the membership figure had grown to 900,000. Expansion continued uninterrupted until the outbreak of the Second World War, when 9,800,000 people were enrolled in mutualist organisations.

Such was the legacy of Proudhon and the French workers' movement. But how fares mutualism today in modern, computerised and consumerist France? With at least twelve

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