

Left in the cold as ALP shifts right

Left-wing party politics in the Illawarra has been in a state of flux over the past several months.

The Illawarra Workers Party was set up recently by George Petersen and others who resigned from the Labor Party.

On October 13 there was the public launching of the Illawarra Group for a New Left Party.

There may also be one or two other parties, of the red or green variety, launched in the near future.

In addition, a few months ago, the South Coast Broad Left Coalition was established.

The Broad Left is not a party, but rather brings together members of a number of groups — including the Communist Party of Australia and the Socialist Workers Party — and non-affiliated individuals.

What is behind all this activity? Undoubtedly, the rightward shift of the Australian Labor Party is an important factor.

To begin, the ALP has jettisoned much of its platform and traditional policies.

It has continued uranium mining, compromised Aboriginal land rights, and cut aid to the unemployed.

George Petersen left the ALP because of the NSW Labor Government's weakening of workers' compensation legislation.

Labor's adoption of Liberal policies on deregulation and privatisation has been startling.

Labor has deregulated the monetary system, allowing massive foreign takeovers of Australian industry.

The previous Fraser Liberal government never attempted to do this.

Likewise the push for

Briefings

BEHIND THE NEWS ANALYSIS

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selling government assets and balancing the budget at the expense of social programs is a traditional Liberal plank, ironically one seldom carried out by the Liberals.

Under Labor in the 1980s, those on low and moderate incomes have had declining purchasing power, while the rich have become much richer.

Labor's rightward move has caused a crisis among those on the left.

One commonly heard complaint is that Labor leaders have sold out, sacrificing principle for pragmatism. But there are deeper reasons involved.

Governments of any complexion derive their revenues from the economy.

Therefore they have a continuing interest in maintaining conditions to serve the most powerful economic groups.

As transnational corporations become more important within Australia, Australian governments become more concerned about providing them with

suitable incentives — investment opportunities, profits, a stable political and economic environment.

Deregulation is one way to achieve this. Another is the Accord, which stabilises labour relations.

Those on the left have long argued that capitalist economies regularly suffer from serious social problems: unemployment, poverty, pollution, poor educational and other social services.

Traditionally they have seen the solution to this coming through government action, backed by popular support.

This hope has been dashed time and time again, as 'reform' governments go back on their promises.

There are many examples around the world of left-wing governments, elected in times of massive social ferment, which have acted to dampen social demands.

The message from these experiences is that party politics is not enough to lead to permanent changes in social arrangements.

Yet those on the left, in the Illawarra and elsewhere, continue to look to governments for the solution to social problems.

History suggests that yet another political party will not provide the vehicle for a real change in society.

What is required is a change in the way social decisions are made, an alternative to campaigning and voting for political party representatives.

Changing the system of party politics is indeed a fundamental challenge.

It is so big that it is assumed it can't be done, or shouldn't be.

How much easier it is to work within the system by setting up a new party!