

## **A VIEW FROM THE LEFT. THE NSW STATE ELECTION, THE MEDIA, AND THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE**

After the heroic East German uprising against Soviet occupation in 1953 the German playwright Bertold Brecht, who was an enigmatic Stalinist politically, wrote a short poem, "*The Solution*".

"After the uprising of the 17<sup>th</sup> June, the Secretary of the Writers Union had leaflets distributed in the Stalin Alee stating that"

"The people had forfeited the confidence of the government and could bring it back only by redoubled efforts."

Would it not be easier  
in that case for the government  
to dissolve the people  
And elect another.

To capture the reality of the recent election, in NSW, substitute the words "the media" for the words "the government" in the above poem. As former Premiers Wran and Carr have remarked, there hasn't been a State Election in living memory in which the media in NSW has gone into such hysterical overdrive against a State Labor Government. Week after week. Day after day. Real problems of government constantly spiced up by extravagant and crude beat ups. Dozens of columnists and alleged commentators on the case, most of whom are just hacks and hackettes, but some of whom should have known better. The News Ltd papers, particularly the tabloid Daily Telegraph, whose readership demographic is concentrated in the Labor voting working class and migrant areas of Sydney, went into an almost stratospheric alternative universe of its own creation. For donkeys years it has run on its letters pages a curious email poll of its readers, the ones who bother to respond, to dog whistle reactionary questions. On this occasion the Daily Telegraph created a kind of virtual reality world in which, surprise surprise, the inhabitants were voting Liberal and National in large majorities all over the State. This kind of journalism applied to the real world is just about as wacky as you can get. In the more elegant, largely broadsheet Fairfax Newspapers, which circulate in the Labor voting inner west and the Liberal voting North Shore, the tone was one of a kind of hand wringing moralism, again belted out implacably, day by day, with the bottom line, vote Liberal. None of this journalistic frenzy seems to have affected the outcome much.

## **THE WAR OF THE ATTACK ADS**

This election campaign was largely a TV war of attack advertising. The bottom line is that the Labor attack ads proved to be deadly political weapons. The main Liberal attack ad, also proved to be a deadly political weapon unfortunately, for the Labor Party, not at all what was intended. The Liberal attack ad, was the "Three Wogs" ad, an attack on three ethnic Labor Ministers over planning, implied corruption, and financial abstractions. The problem with this ad was the issues that it tried to raise were only comprehensible to political and journalistic insiders, but the implicit racism, as Michael Costa pointed out, which selected these three ethnic Labor Ministers, to make them look like the Sopranos, was obvious to all. A carefully thought out pitch no doubt, but one that hadn't noticed the

dramatically transformed ethnic and cultural mix in Australia. This sort of dog whistle politics clearly blew up in the Liberals faces. What member of any ethnic group of the 150 or so in NSW, other than a few benighted Anglos, is going to respond positively to that stuff. The results of the election demonstrate that that ad offended everybody, including civilised non racist Anglos. This is demonstrated by the electoral results in areas like Earlwood and Drummoyne, where pretty affluent second or third generation Greeks or Italians, might be expected to shift to the Liberals, but this did not happen. The Liberals racist advertising explains this failure of the vote to shift. In more economically working class migrant areas, like Granville, Parramatta, Lakemba and many others, the Labor vote went through the roof due to a combination of the obvious Liberal racism and the Workchoices issue.

## **LABOR'S ATTACK ADVERTISING**

By way of contrast Labor's attack advertising worked in spades. The personal attack on Debnam was effective. It underlined his Vacluse and navy officer credentials, not good features in most of the rest of the State, and it focussed on establishing him as a certain type of not too successful small scale speculative entrepreneur, now turned to Liberal politics. A type with whom many are acquainted and don't particularly like. The anti Workchoices ads which were a culmination of the general labor movement advertising campaign of the last couple of years, clearly resonated with the electorate. The other Labor attack ad which focussed on Debnam's threat to sack 20,000 public servants clearly had an enormous impact. There's no real question now that Workchoices as a whole is on the nose with the whole population. The proverbial blind Freddy can see that even if all the conservative spin doctors try to push it away. Taken as a whole, the labor movement owes a debt of gratitude to Mark Arbib, Luke Foley and the ALP Head Office Team who crafted this deadly barrage. We also owe a secondary debt of gratitude to the Anglo dills in the Liberal Party back room who dreamed up the "Three Wogs" Sopranos ads.

## **THE LABOR GREENS PREFERENCE DEAL**

Left politics in Australia is now divided between a large mass Labor Party with a big trade union, ethnic and liberal middle class component, and a smaller largely tertiary educated group, The Greens, who get around 10% of the vote compared to the ALP's 40%. These two mass formations compete for votes and influence, which is a pretty healthy kind of competition, and is often expressed in policy clashes and discussions. The differences are real, but the common interests in defeating the Conservatives ought to be paramount. In this election the negotiators on both the Labor and the Green side threaded their way through the obvious minefield, and reached an acceptable preference arrangement despite the problems. This arrangement delivered a number of marginal seats to Labor in the Lower House and may well deliver a Labor-Greens majority in the Upper House for the first time. A good outcome!

## **MORRIS IEMMA AS A POLITICAL PERSONALITY**

Morris Iemma, is the first Labor Premier of non-British migrant background in this State. He and his minders deliberately cultivated a rather conservative personal demeanour for him though they didn't entirely succeed in helping him to overcome the camera conspiracy to photograph him side on to make him look shifty. In this campaign he emerged as a credible capable Labor leader, who made a point of emphasising his migrant background and

celebrating it, and the family history that emerged during the campaign of a proud leftist father and a proud religious Catholic Mum would have made members of many ethnic communities, Greeks, Italians and Arabs, and even Irish Catholics laugh, because of the way it replicates family history and life in the labor movement. Anyone who didn't warm a bit to the lemma tribe during this campaign, lacks a both a heart and any sense of the real social history of Australia. Lemma is now clearly going to be around for quite some time as the Labor Premier of this State. He is rather right wing for my taste, on such questions as public private partnerships, and some aspects of multiculturalism, and he has got some hard dries in his Cabinet, like Mick Costa. These questions will have to be resolved by serious political struggle in the ALP, the Unions and the broader labor movement which now includes the Greens.

I worked on Saturday, as I always do, for the ALP, at the Church in the middle of Newtown, which has now become the Greens Tiger country enclave in the generally Labor voting seat of Marrickville. I yelled myself hoarse and my agitprop slogans for the day were *"Ditch Howard, Debnam and Fred Nile! Vote Labor! Put the Liberals last! If you are voting Labor or Greens for the Upper House, stick to the ticket and get rid of Fred Nile!"*

My message to the reptiles of the press is look at the maps of the electoral results in all your papers on Monday after the election. Those maps, particularly in Sydney, Newcastle and the South Coast, are also, as well as being political maps, maps of class and ethnicity. The urban areas of the Illawarra, Newcastle and the Central Coast show a solid mass of Labor seats. Rural areas are divided sharply between mainly the Nationals and populist independents with 2 or 3 Labor seats. Sydney with 70% of the voters in the State is sharply divided between the working class South and West which votes solidly Labor and the leafy North Shore with the highest incomes votes solidly Liberal.

These electoral results underline the dramatic changes that have taken place in Australia in the last 50 years. If you want your predictions and propoganda to have any impact on reality in the future, study those maps carefully. Australia is not the Anglo dominated, conservative country it used to be. The circulation of the print media, is, as we all know, in free fall. If you want to have any impact in the future, you should take all of these factors into account, instead of babbling about abstractions like leadership, which most people can see that in this context, masks the class interests of your proprietors.