

Grassroots

The Local Labor Newsletter

Edition One: March 2015

Party Reform: Past, Present & Future



Letter from the Editor

Joshua Roose

Welcome to the very first edition of the Local Labor Newsletter titled 'Grassroots'

We all love and are deeply invested in the Labor Party. We spend countless hours doing unglamorous, grinding work pivotal to the success of the party; be it handing out how to votes, running community stalls, making phone calls for candidates or typing up and distributing minutes. We are not paid for our work, nor do we ask to be. We do this often thankless, challenging and time consuming work because we believe, to our core, in what Labor and our friends the trade union movement stand for: social justice, fairness and opportunity for working people to improve their lives. We believe that only Labor can build a truly great Australia with equal opportunity and support for all. *We are, in short, Labor People at the Grassroots.*

Labor people however, are too often overlooked within the party, with branches derided as unrepresentative of the wider community or as a quick avenue to power within the party through branch stacking. Our voices are subsumed in the cacophony of professional appointees and power brokers more interested in reinforcing their powerbase than in engaging with the 50,000 Australians who have chosen to join the party on the basis of our faith in the party's project. This newsletter, to be distributed far and wide, is a key platform by which Grassroots Labor Members will be able to project their voice into key debates within the party both at State and National Levels.

We will draw upon a wide base of voices from both within branches and the wider party with a view to shaping the conversation about the Party's

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future and achieving substantive structural reform. We will publish pieces of between 500 and 1500 words. These are not tabloid style pieces that can be read in a minute, but rather, substantive and thought provoking articles that will influence and shape the readers thinking. They will give you real insights from those actively involved within the party into key debates shaping our party.

We invite you to print the newsletter out, sit down with a cup of coffee and actively engage with each piece.

Our thanks go to Nicole Sherwin (Design), Gavin Ryan (Distribution) and Hugo Kelly (content feedback) for their tireless efforts on this first edition.

This Edition

This first edition of the Journal is titled *Labor Reform: Past, Present and Future*. With the 2015 State and Federal Conferences fast approaching, the issue of party reform could not be more urgent and required.

This first edition draws upon a rich blend of leading Labor voices advocating reform with over two hundred years of combined party membership. In **Part one**, the co-founder of Local Labor **Race**

Mathews details past attempts at reform, channeling the spirit of Whitlam to urge for immediate progress. **Jamie Button** argues that Labor Leaders must take the risk of opening the party up to reform in the present, arguing the pay-off would be immense. **Stuart Whitman's** inspirational piece contemplates what the Labor Party might look like in the future if reform was to truly occur.

In **Part Two**, we look at perspectives on party reform from a number of contributors. **Geoff Lake**, a member of the Victorian Administrative Committee outlines the necessary first step to tackling the specter of branch stacking, arguing a powerful case for traceable means. Fellow Victorian Administrative Committee member **Eric Dearicott**, described by one journalist as a 'fearless stickler for the rules' then provides a detailed outline of the current state of party reform. The Convener of the National Labor Women's Network **Lisa Carey** then describes how **Emily's List** can become a template for party reform. We then turn to a best practice model of party democracy, that of the Social Democrats in Sweden. **Nick Gregory**, a former electoral officer now based in Sweden outlines why Labor might look to the Social Democrats, whose longest period out of office since 1920 is just eight years, for inspiration. Finally, in **Part Three**, Cassandra Devine outlines a brief history of Local Labor.

We believe in a modern, democratic and inclusive Labor party that values its branches and membership, acknowledges the vital role of the Union movement in a modern society and in the party and adopts best practice governing models; A Labor that understands the vital potential contributions of Labor branches and seeks to draw on the vast reserves of untapped human capital within them to increase our base in the wider community.

We invite you to join Local Labor, engage with our work, to distribute it widely and to join us in reforming our great party to meet the challenges facing Australia in the 21st Century.



Dr Joshua Roose is the Editor of *Grassroots*. He is Secretary of the Prahran Branch and sits on the Steering Group of Local Labor. Joshua is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Religion, Politics and Society at the Australian Catholic University and Visiting Scholar at Harvard Law School.



Part One

Let Us Now Begin

The Hon. Dr. Race Mathews

The philosopher George Santayana wrote famously 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'.

A case in point is failure by the Australian Labor Party (ALP) to remain mindful of the circumstances and shortcomings that denied it office from the middle -1950s federally until 1972 and until 1982 in Victoria.

When I joined the ALP in 1956, it was in dire straits – reeling in the aftermath of the failed Santamaria Movement takeover of the Party and the subsequent splitting off of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP), and in the grip already of yet another extremist and in this instance ostensibly Left external body, known variously as 'The Trade Unionists' Defence Committee' (TUDC), 'the Ticketing Committee' or simply and succinctly, 'the Junta'

As noted by Gough Whitlam in an historic address to the 1967 Victorian State Conference:

"The TUDC is not mentioned in the Constitution of the Party. There is no formal link between the TUDC and the handful which selects the Central Executive. It happens, however, that the membership of both bodies is predominantly the same. Thirteen years ago, few delegates at the Conference would have known of the Movement or Mr Santamaria. No one doubts the influence that they had on the Party's affairs at the time. The Party's controllers have swung from one extreme to another."

The TUDC's domination of the Party was achieved through a 'democratic centralism' that

enabled it to dictate the composition of the Victorian Central Executive and Victoria's representation on the Federal Conference and the Federal Executive.

Prior to each Victorian conference, an initial meeting of representatives from thirteen TUDC-dominated unions compiled an 'Official Ticket' for all Central Executive, Federal Conference and Federal Executive vacancies.

Subsequently, the 'Official Ticket' was endorsed at a further meeting, where representatives of up to twenty-eight more unions were added to the original thirteen.

With the conference delegations from up to fifty unions thus locked in under caucus rules to support the 'Official Ticket', the winner-take-all' voting system of the day delivered all the available vacancies to the TUDC nominees.

Domination of the Party by

the TUDC cost it an otherwise certain victory at the 1961 elections, together with a further probable electoral victory two years later.

At the very least, it is likely that if Labor had done less badly at the 1958 elections the breakaway DLP would have taken root less successfully and been shorter-lived.

A Labor government elected in 1961 or 1963 would not have involved Australia in the Vietnam war, or failed so dismally as the Liberals to harness up behind programmes and projects of lasting national worth the great economic prosperity which Australian enjoyed between the middle nineteen-sixties and the oil price shock engendered tougher times of the following decade.

Nor was this all. As Whitlam's 1967 Victorian Conference speech also emphasised, the need for Party reform and renewal was no less acute:

"We cannot convincingly oppose the conservatism of our political opponents with a conservatism of our own; we cannot stand as a Party of change when we fear change in our own structure. We cannot expect the people to trust us with the great decision-making processes of this

nation, when we parade, by retaining an exclusive and unrepresentative Party structure, our manifest distrust of our own rank and file within the decision-making processes of the Party.

And again:

"All organisations, including radical parties, have establishments which resist change; all have vested interests. All the arguments for and against for a national organisation, with a national conference directly representing Federal electorates and unions, boil down to this question: Is the Party to be organised in this last third of the 20th century on modern national lines representative of the whole membership of the Party, or is it to remain a committee or coterie composed chiefly of State Branch officers, a significant proportion of whom are paid servants of the Party?"

By the early nineteen-sixties, frustration within the Party over the incompetence and authoritarianism of the TUDC was acute.

The flash point was reached with

the decision by the TUDC in 1965 that the provision for the election of three Central Executive members by and from Branch delegates to the Conference as adopted the previous year should be rescinded.

An official Party body of which I was secretary, the Scoresby State Electorate Council, established a 'Committee of Inquiry into Representation and Decision-making in the ALP', which addressed to Branches throughout the state a letter seeking information about their memberships and fund-raising, on which a case for the restoration of their representation might be made.

The State Secretary, Bill Hartley, thereupon issued instructions to Branch secretaries requiring that the committee's letters should be returned to him immediately, without providing the opportunity for members to hear them read. Hartley wrote:

"I have consulted on this matter with the state president, Mr W. Brown, and it is to be referred to the Executive Officers next week ... Mr Brown has also suggested that all recipients of the correspondence should take no action on it other than endorsing it with the Branch, time and

circumstances of receipt, and forwarding it to the Australian Labor Party as soon as possible."

Concurrently with the Scoresby Affair – and perhaps prompted by it – disaffected Party activists including John Cain, John Button, Dick McGarvie, Xavier Connor, Barney Williams, Michael Duffy, and Barney Cooney established 'The Participants', as a group seeking Party reform and democratisation through untiring grassroots advocacy and agitation around the widely circulated 'Labor Comment' newsletter, as edited by Bob Murray.

Their efforts in conjunction with those of Whitlam and other nationally prominent allies including the National Secretary Mick Young and the Shadow Minister for Industrial Affairs Clyde Cameron succeeded ultimately in bringing about the 1970 Federal Intervention and dismissal of the TUDC dominated Victorian Executive.

The subsequent comprehensive re-writing of the Party Rules and adoption of proportional representation voting for Party office cleared the way for the election of the Whitlam, Hawke and Keating governments.

Internally, the Victorian Party experienced what is remembered by many as 'a golden age' of creative policy development and debate, culminating in 1982 with the election of the Cain government.

Even so, the hard-won gains have proved to be ephemeral, and a new hegemony indistinguishable for all practical purposes from that of the TUDC has emerged.

What were in the immediate aftermath of the 1970 Intervention the ideologically differentiated Socialist Left and rightist Labor Unity factions have merged in all but name, through a so-called 'Stability Pact' which enables them to divide between themselves the pre-selections for 'winnable' parliamentary seats.

Concurrently the need for strict adherence to secret ballot criteria in the selection process is routinely ignored.

'Democratic centralism' is again as endemic as under the TUDC. The effect is to all but wholly exclude from pre-selection or party office members other than those who have factional endorsement.

Frustrated on rare occasions in the achievement of their preferred outcomes, the factions routinely refer them to the party's National Executive where their dominance is all but complete and uncontested, and inconvenient decisions can be overturned.

It remains for the current generation of ALP members to secure the reinstatement of democracy and the rule of law within the Party, and ensure that it is passed on unimpaired to those who come after us.

As Whitlam reminds us:

**'Those of us who were there
have a duty to educate
those who were not.'**

'Let us now begin'.



Race Mathews is a former Principal Private Secretary to Labor Leaders including Gough Whitlam, local government councillor, Federal MP, Victorian MP and minister and academic. He joined the ALP in 1956, and is a life member of fifty-eight years standing.

A Moment of Unexpected Hope

James Button

This should be a moment of unexpected hope for the ALP.

Remarkable election wins in Victoria and Queensland, the opinion polls tracking well, another Liberal Government exposed as mean, tricky and out of touch...it all suggests that after the debacle of the last federal election Labor might be back in power far sooner than anyone could ever have hoped for. The climate of ideas should be on Labor's side, too. The great policy challenge of the day – how to sustain economic and jobs growth while expanding opportunity and protecting the environment – is going to require smart, interventionist government; laissez-faire won't do it.

"The world is waiting for the Labor Party," said former Western Australian Premier Geoff Gallop when launching an Open Labor group in Sydney last year.

Why, then, do ALP members and supporters feel so uninspired?

Perhaps it is because the party's recovery seems fragile, even a mirage. Eighteen months after our lowest federal vote in more than 100 years, the ALP is still in trouble. What we stand for, and whether we have the capacity for renewal on the basis of big ideas and a compelling platform, remains unclear. Even if disenchantment with Tony Abbott or his successor gifts Labor the next election, what then? What's the long-term plan for changing Australia? Winning for its own sake is not enough.

Bill Shorten has said he wants to rebuild the party and grow the membership to 100,000. He has set the scene for the July National Conference to enact reforms to make party structures and the preselection of parliamentary candidates more democratic.

Shorten's focus on party reform is admirable, and if he has a real shot it could place him with Labor leaders like Ben Chifley, Gough Whitlam and Bill Hayden, all of whom renewed the party from opposition, but will this Bill be bold? And if so, can he bring the factions with him?

Based on the ideas of his reform speech in April last year, Shorten is likely to push for increased rank-and-file say in selecting candidates and delegates to National Conference, consideration of trials of primary-style preselections that involve Labor supporters as well as members, and lower fees and a one-click sign-up model to supersede the absurd obstacles that confront many people trying to join the party today. These are all worthy ideas, but unless Shorten's ambition is greater than he has revealed to date, they fall well short of a substantial reform package.

Reform matters for many reasons; for one, it might break down the mistrust that runs deep between the leadership and ordinary members, and renew hopes that there is still a place for ordinary people in politics beyond working the phones and handing out cards in election campaigns.

The members mistrust the party professionals, whom they see, with important exceptions, as focused on personal advancement over principle and unwilling to share power with the rank-and-file. The leadership, for its part, mistrusts the members – they are too few, too old, too prone to fighting lost causes and too out of touch with the realities of Australian life to be entrusted with a real say in candidate selection or party policy. The mistrust is partly a predictable consequence of professionalised politics, yet it must end if the party is to flourish again. How?

The onus is on the leadership to take a risk and to commit itself to internal democracy in the faith that a party in which ordinary people have a say will be a larger, stronger and more representative party.

Opening up preselections to members is a good place to start. For the Senate and state upper houses, which should be forums for Labor's best policy thinkers not retirement homes for party functionaries, members should get 50 per cent of the vote now, and a commitment for the proportion to increase as party membership grows. Imagine the democratic potential of a statewide campaign for Senate places, candidates having to sell their platform to the people. Similarly, in lower house seats, the proportion of the local vote should gradually increase in line with membership increases in the electorate.

A growing proportion of delegates to state and national conferences should also be directly elected from the membership.

At the same time, the leadership needs to retain the capacity to intervene in local votes to ensure the selection of a particularly high quality candidate or when a vote looks like it will be compromised by low numbers or by mischief. But these should be the exception and when the leadership does intervene, it needs to be honest about why it has done so. At present it rarely is. Major decisions, such as central intervention in the Victorian Upper House preselections in late 2013, or last year's bringing forward of the Senate preselections of Kim Carr and Steve Conroy to ensure they are exempted from the party's own unanimously endorsed affirmative action rules, are made behind closed doors and never explained to the membership.

A democratic party that respects its own people can't run this way.

The party should be able to explain everything it does with a clear, honest statement on its website. If it can't, the action is almost certainly something it shouldn't be doing it in the first place.

Secondly, the ALP must begin the long and difficult conversation about reforming its relationship with the union movement. This should be an opportunity for democratic renewal on both sides. Unions affiliated to the party have a million members; another million belong to unaffiliated unions. Most of these people are natural Labor supporters; if Labor is to expand its franchise for selecting candidates for office, this would seem a good place to start. But it must be on the basis of one vote, one value, in elections conducted by secret ballot. The bloc votes wielded by a small number of union secretaries on behalf of their factions is indefensible in a party that professes to be democratic.

Giving ordinary unionists a direct say in party processes could go a long way towards renewing not only the ALP but the union movement as well, as senior party figures John Faulkner and Greg Combet have written.

Open Labor and Local Labor have also jointly proposed reforms that would enfranchise ordinary union members while removing the power of bloc union secretary votes.

Finally, how will the party renew its thinking? This is the most important question, because ideas, far more than rule changes, will bring people to the party.

Among the four million Australians who voted Labor at the last federal election are many of the country's smartest and most engaged people. Many of them, even after years of disillusionment, would welcome the opportunity to contribute to Labor policy. Imagine a party that engaged the country's best minds to help it develop policy through an open process that included not only private advice but public meetings, online forums and wikis.

Such a process could help Labor embed itself back in the community. While a growing membership is vital, at a time when most people aren't joiners, the party must find other ways to draw on the ideas and energies of its supporters.

None of this is easy or without risk.

But the alternative – doing nothing – is a recipe for slow decline as the leadership and membership grow further apart, and the party becomes ever more closed off from the main currents of Australian life.

There is a great opportunity for brave, democratic reform. The people who see the need for it – in the party, unions and the electorate – are dispersed but their number is growing. The time to act, though, is now. The world is waiting for the Labor Party. It won't wait forever.



James Button is a member of the operating group of Open Labor, a movement created in late 2014 to work toward a more democratic and open ALP and a braver, more principled politics in Australia. New supporters welcome: sign up to our mailing list at www.openlabor.net.au



Labor 2035

Stuart Whitman

It's 2035, and Labor members from an inner suburb of Australia's largest city are gathering in their local community centre to welcome the new Labor Prime Minister on her first official visit to the electorate.

The recently elected Prime Minister is returning to her childhood community to congratulate its Labor branch on their Community Action Programs and to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the ALP National Conference that changed everything.

Since the party reforms were passed at the 2015 ALP National ALP Conference, the Australian Labor Party has been transformed into Australia's largest grassroots activist and political movement of nearly 200,000

members with Labor branches overseeing sustainable neighbourhood projects coordinating everything from community gardens, to small cooperative businesses and neighbourhood literacy programs across the country, as well as being engaged in community dialogue and participation in the development of Labor policies and the election of Labor candidates.

Tonight is an important opportunity for the Prime Minister to reflect on how her own life was changed by joining her local Labor branch, and how that experience might serve

as a lesson to her party and her country about engagement and participation.

This is her speech.

"Men and women of the Australian Labor Party, my friends, comrades and Labor supporters.

I feel I have returned home.

You know, I grew up just a few streets away in government housing not long after my family arrived as refugees from South Sudan. I went to the state school just around the corner from this community centre.

This is where it all started for me. This is where I found my sense of belonging in this strange new country that gave my family safety. This is where I was inspired to give back by serving my community and my fellow Australians in public life and this is where I was provided the opportunities to realise that dream.

I am pleased that so many of my Labor friends and mentors from that time are here physically and virtually tonight to share this celebration.

I am grateful that we are also joined by some veteran delegates of the 2015 ALP National Conference who were able to put

their factional and personal differences aside long enough to embrace a new way of thinking for Labor, a higher standard for the way we conduct ourselves as a party and as a result breathed new life into our Labor cause for our times, changing politics forever in Australia.

Who would have thought back in 2015, when Australia's prospects looked so bleak under the short-lived but destructive Abbott Government that we could have come so far as a nation. In those years we saw rapidly rising unemployment as our manufacturing sector crumbled under a Government that didn't care while jobs flowed offshore. And just as the numbers of jobless were soaring they were removing the foundations of our world-renowned social safety net and increasing the burden on the most vulnerable of our citizens, while closing off future job and education opportunities to our youth. And when the world's scientists were warning us Australia would be the nation most impacted by climate change, our Government was doing everything possible to place obstacles in the way of our transition to a low carbon economy.

Australia was at the cross-roads. We were faced by the dual challenges of being left behind by the third industrial revolution as countries that invested in digital infrastructure, education and

innovation overtook us, and with a declining capacity to mitigate and adapt to the ravages of climate change. We needed an alternative government that not only understood the difficult choices to be made by our country at that cross-roads but that it would take the full engagement and participation of our people and their collective talent to chart a better way ahead.

The reforms that were passed at the 2015 National Conference unleashed the great, untapped potential of Labor members that for too long had been taken for granted by power blocs that sought only to sustain their own power. As a result, many other Australians were drawn to join the ALP because they saw it as an organisation that really acted on our commitment to social democracy and the empowerment of the powerless.

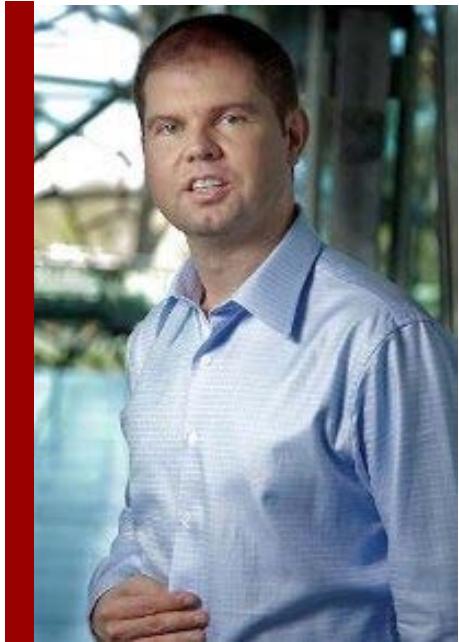
You see the key to the success of any organisation or community is the extent to which members feel they belong. If the community embraces the individual, and values and empowers him or her to share their knowledge and experience, then the whole community thrives. It was the same for my family arriving in

Australia at time when Australia did not have a good record on the treatment of refugees. But by being welcomed by my local community, and finding a home in my local Labor branch, I discovered my voice and my potential.

At the 2015 conference we embraced the participation of our rank and file members across the country in selecting our federal and state leaders and key party officers, a greater say for local members in choosing their lower and upper house candidates over the will of the central machine, the resourcing of sustained community organising campaigns for local branches and supporters between elections, multiple ways of engaging with the party's policy development, the engagement of our local communities in Labor pre-selection contests, and training programs for branch office holders and branch rebuilding initiatives.

These reforms enabled us to become the party of participation that we are today

In the age where technology allows participatory democracy on a scale unmatched in human history, we became the Labor Party for our times. The Australian people in all of their diversity responded in kind, many more voted for us and many more saw the value in joining us in our Labor cause.



Stuart has been National Convener of Local Labor since 2011 and is a former Secretary of the Malvern branch. Stuart has worked as an electorate officer to Mark Dreyfus, Federal Member for Isaacs and he is currently assisting Senator Jacinta Collins in her work as Deputy Chair of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

The transformation of the Labor Party into a 21st century political movement and organisation has also transformed Australia into a proud republic with flourishing social capital that has overcome its fears and toxic politics and that is adapting to the great economic and environmental upheavals of the past two decades and has healed past divisions, not least the treaty we have signed with Australia's indigenous people. The rest of the world now looks to Australia as an example of what can be achieved by a progressive and fair society that seeks to empower its citizens to solve problems for their common good.

We look back with gratitude to the foresight of the delegates to the 2015 ALP National Conference, because their courage made possible a Labor Party that fully lives our values of democracy, fairness and empowerment, and as a result we have built an Australia where all of our citizens can politically, socially and economically participate in our local communities and national life. And we are the better for it.

Part Two

Why Traceable Means Reform Must Come First

Geoff Lake

After years of deferrals, referrals and general intransigence on major rule reform, last year the party agreed to hold a special rule change conference on 28 March 2015.

While there has been a nine month lead time since the conference

was set, and with a few notable exceptions (such as this newsletter), there has been a disappointing lack of engagement on rule changes across the party. It will be telling later this month the extent to which this lack of engagement results in further deferral.

Andrew McKenzie's 2014 report on how the party could implement the various 'party elder' reports of the

last few years provides a readily accessible blueprint for key reform.

One proposed rule change which has had a higher level of discussion has been Bill Shorten's proposal to increase the rank and file vote in preselections from 50% to 70% for federal electorates with more than 300 members with a corresponding reduction in the influence of the Public Office Selection Committee (POSC) from 50% to 30%.

While this looks like a step in the right direction and towards more of a direct say for ordinary members, in my view this rule change is in fact a step away from that unless it is only embraced following action on the integrity of the party's current membership base.

Anyone who has been a member of the party for five minutes, as well as any casual political observer, knows that a significant proportion of the party's membership is comprised of people who are not genuinely committed to the party's principles and are members only through the agency of another person. This 'significant proportion' is not merely 10 or 20% but more like 50% or more – concentrated unsurprisingly in safe Labor held seats. This represents a staggering dead weight on the expression and influence of genuinely committed members of our party.

The party's corrupted membership base gives rise to the problems with a move from 50/50 preselections to 70/30. As long as this corrupted

membership base remains unaddressed, increasing rank and file influence in preselections (particularly when aimed only at federal electorates with the largest memberships) is nothing but handing further power and influence from ordinary committed members to branch stackers.

Would I prefer more power concentrated in the hands of a small number of ethically-challenged branch stackers in a given area or it continuing to be dispersed across a wider group of union and FEA influence? Unquestionably, the latter.

Of course, an even better outcome than the status quo would be for real and genuine action on branch stacking. While the party has previously failed at every turn in the past to curb this insidious practice, there is a sensible, logical and – above all – *readily implementable* reform before this conference which can make a meaningful difference.

That reform is simply requiring that every membership is paid personally – such as through a personal credit card, bank transfer, cheque or over-the-counter in cash by the member in person with photographic ID (i.e. payment by 'traceable means'). This will shut down the underground and well-honed

activity of the branch stacking operations which use 'bulk cash' payments to renew their hordes of unsuspecting members prior to the membership renewal deadline at the end of May each year.

This is why action on traceable means is so important at this conference. It paves the way to other reforms such as 70/30 which in a post-bulk-cash-renewals-party would be far more attractive.

There are many good people in each of the factions (and beyond the factions) who support reform on traceable means. This is a base we should all try to collectively leverage in the interests of creating the most party-changing reform we have seen in a generation in Victoria. And even better, reform which will then open the door to further party changing reform such as 70/30 and other progressive changes which can then be unlocked without setting us backwards.



Geoff Lake is a state conference delegate from Hotham FEA and a member of the party's Administrative Committee.



Will the Party Embrace Reform?

Eric Dearicott

In his landmark speech in Melbourne on April 27 last year, federal leader Bill Shorten announced the start of a major campaign to rebuild Labor.

He foresaw "... a Labor Party that's stronger because we have more members and those members have more say".

Bill Shorten's vision included streamlined online joining, members having a greater voice in policy formation and candidate selection, membership participation in electing their state Parliamentary leader using the 50-50 system, increasing the number of female parliamentary representatives, ensuring that central intervention in pre-selections is the exception, not the rule, and National Conference delegates being a mix of people directly elected from by Labor members and those elected by State Conferences.

At the May 2014 Victorian State Conference small steps were taken along the path to reform when affirmative action pre-selection rules were strengthened and all central Branch members who pay by traceable means were given the right to vote and stand in internal Party ballots.

The special early autumn Victorian Conference has been scheduled because Bill Shorten wanted Victoria to address more of his Party rebuilding proposals prior to the July ALP National Conference.

Specifically he has asked that the Conference consider his proposals that the weighting of Victorian local members votes in House of Reps pre-selections be increased to 70% and that Victorian ALP members participate in the election of the Labor State Parliamentary Leader.

In his April 2014 speech Bill Shorten said "When the Labor Party was born in 1891, the vision of its founders was a membership based party.

"But in recent times, the role of unions within our party has developed into a factional centralised decision making role.

"If we are to renew and rebuild the Labor Party, we must rebuild as a membership-based party, not a faction based one. A broader more inclusive Party" he said.

It is rare in any organisation for those with power to relinquish any of that power – implementing many of Bill Shorten's and other proposals before the Conference will require the factions/unions to relinquish some of their power in the interests of the Party membership as a whole – let us hope that they will be prepared to do so.

Among the other issues that will be debated is a requirement that all membership applicants pay by traceable means or even all members should pay their fees by traceable means.

Some of the key Rules Change proposals to be considered at the Conference are outlined below:

Candidate Pre-selections - Lower House Seats

Bill Shorten has proposed that the rules for pre-selections in Victoria be changed so that the weighting becomes 70% local party members and 30% Public Office Selection Committee (POSC).

He also proposed that 70/30 only apply to House of Representative seats with more than 300 Party members but other electorates remain at 50/50.

The May 2014 Conference unanimously supported inclusion of State pre-selections in the reform.

Rules change proposals for 70/30, with and without the 300 minimum have been lodged for consideration by the Conference.

Bill's 70/30 proposal would give local member some real say in pre-selections but the minimum size requirement of 300 would limit the reform almost exclusively to heavily stacked safe federal electorates and is much too big for State lower house seats which have only

40% of the number of voters in federal electorates.

The opponents of any increase in the weighting of local members' votes argue that it has the potential to reward branch stackers, whose activities they have wilfully ignored for decades, or that non-stacked locals in smaller electorates might take a less objective view of candidates than the (stability pact bound) members of the POSC, but their real motive is the protection of absolute central power.

To give local members any real say in pre-selections the weighting for their vote needs to be at least 70% (see below). There is no evidence to support holding down the local weighting to 50% if the number members in an electorate does not reach a given minimum.

In fact the evidence is that where there is high membership there is a very high probability of stacking. It is therefore large safe electorates such as those with more than 300 members for which there is a case for holding down the weighting of the local vote – but I am not advocating that.

The effect of the Stability Pact assuming 90% of POSC are bound to vote for the candidate anointed by the faction who "owns" the seat (it's

probably higher) is below:

- Local Weighting 50% POSC 50% Local vote required to overcome stability pact: 90%
- Local Weighting 70% POSC 30% Local vote required to overcome stability pact: 68%

Senate and Legislative Council Pre-selections

The TWU has proposed introduction of Local Panels to pre-selections of Legislative Council and Senate Candidates:

By postal ballots members to elect separate 100 local members panels for the Senate and each of the 8 Legislative Council Regions – these local member panels would vote with the POSC to pre-select the candidates for these multimember tickets.

The weightings would be 70% local panel and 30% POSC.

The CMFEU has proposed direct member participation in Senate and Legislative Council Candidates be elected with 50/50 weighting (local vote by postal ballot).

For the Legislative Council the Kyneton branch has proposed the current system of a direct local member vote candidates with 70/30 weighting local vs POSC.

Currently the Victorian Senate Ticket is pre-selected by the POSC sitting alone.

The Party is moving towards direct

member involvement in ballots. Voting for a panel who then vote for the candidates on their behalf, is not direct member involvement at all.

A direct vote for members in selecting the State Parliamentary Leader

Two options are proposed:

- The State Parliamentary Leader elected by a postal ballot of all Vic Party members in equal weighting with a ballot of the State Parliamentary Party (similar to the Fed Leader election).
- A ballot for leader with weightings one third party members/one third Union State Conference delegates/one third Party state parliamentarians.

Traceable Means Membership Payments – An Antidote to Branch Stacking

With the aim of increasing the integrity of ALP internal ballots rules change proposals have been lodged for consideration at the Conference, that either all members and applicants should be required to pay their membership by traceable means (eg personal credit card or cheque) or those who choose non-traceable payments (eg cash, money orders) cannot participate in internal elections.

The traceable means requirement helps ensure that unseen applicants are actually paying for themselves and not being joined up and paid for by a branch stacker who will dictate how they vote in internal elections.

Approximately 40% of Victorian local branch members are ‘stacks’ paid for in bulk lots with cash.

Some argue that a requirement to pay by traceable means would not be fair to those who neither have a cheque book nor credit/debit card.

This is not a credible argument. All members have a bank account and can pay their membership from that account by automatic renewal.

Changes to Limit Pre-selection Interventions

In recent years the Administrative Committee and the National Executive have frequently withdrawn the rights of local Party members to participate in the pre-selection of the candidates and then appointed the candidates themselves.

The removal of the rights of every Victorian member to vote in the pre-selection of their Upper House candidates for each of 2006, 2010 and 2014 so that deal determined candidates were guaranteed pre-selection is the most outstanding but by no means the only example.

The prime motivation for interventions to remove local members' pre-selection voting rights has been to ensure that pre-determined outcomes of pre-selections are protected from the vagaries of a local vote.

Based on recent history the SDA's

Conference proposal requiring 25 Admin Committee votes to permit central intervention is a blank cheque for it – the lowest recent vote for pre-selection interventions was 30 out of 33 but usually it has been 32 of 33 in support of intervention.

Prescribing a time limit, such as 2 months, from an election before which the Administrative Committee cannot initiate intervention in a pre-selection either by itself or by request to the National Executive (as proposed by the Kyneton Branch) is more likely to curtail withdrawal of local members voting rights.

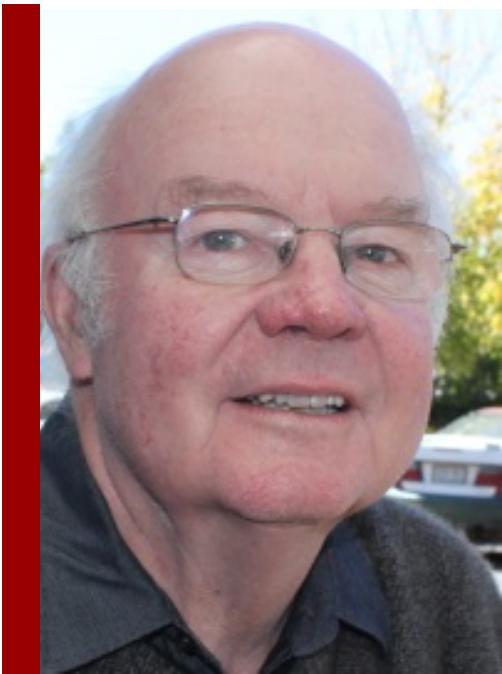
Secret Ballots

Three local Branches have proposed that all ballots within the Party should be secret ballots with no-one other than the voter filling in, seeing the completed ballot or placing it in the ballot box.

Currently at the highest levels State Conference and POSC and in a handful of FEAs almost all ballots are collected for voters and either filled in or checked by factional operatives and placed by them in the ballot box.

Direct Election of National Conference Delegates

Scullin FEA has proposed that half of Victoria's National Conference delegates be elected via a single postal ballot by and from Victorian rank and file members and the other half by the affiliated Trade union delegates eg. the State



Eric Dearicott, Independent Member
Victorian ALP Administrative Committee

Conference.

In my view a single state-wide ballot is unlikely to result in a more diverse set of delegates than the current State Conference based ballots. Dividing the State up into manageable pieces, Legislative Council seats for example, where there would be greater likelihood of voters knowing the candidates may be a preferable approach.

If there is to be a central component of delegates, election of those delegates by the entirety of State Conference delegates as opposed to solely the union appointed delegates would be a more membership based democratic model and would still give the unions a significant say.

Other Proposals

Other important proposals to be considered by the Conference include establishing a Central Policy Branch, establishing Policy Networks, election by State Conference of the State Secretary and Assistant Secretaries and changing the nature of local branches so that in the main there is just one branch per State electorate.

Emily's List: The Positive Possibilities of Reform

Lisa Carey



EMILY's List Australia (EMILY's List) is a financial, political and personal network for supporting progressive Labor women candidates into parliament.

Based on the US organisation of the same name, EMILY is an acronym which stands for Early Money Is Like Yeast, reflecting the belief that early financial investment for women candidates helps them rise.

EMILY's List Australia was established in 1996 by a committed group of Labor women, determined to address the lack of women representatives in parliament and to shape public policy making for the benefit of women.

Affirmative action within the ALP - a slow process

Despite the ALP adopting an affirmative action model for internal party committees - a 25% gender quota – as far back as 1981, by 1994 it was clear that much more needed to be done to increase and enshrine Labor women in parliament.

Joan Kirner and Carmen Lawrence, who had, by this time, become Australia's first state political leaders, were determined to ensure that they were followed by as many progressive Labor women MPs as possible.

Together with such other Labor women as Meredith Burgmann, Jan Burnswoods, Kay Setches, Cheryl Davenport, Judy Spence, Carolyn Pickles, Sue Mackay and Fran Bladel, they joined emerging labor women leaders Julia Gillard, Helen Creed, Candy Broad and Leonie Morgan, to set about making structural change within the ALP.

With increasing support for a gender quota – a mandatory target for the pre-selection of women in winnable seats – labor feminists campaigned to embed structural mechanisms which would ensure 50/50 gender equity in labor parliamentary causes by the year 2000.

Although Labor women were not able to achieve this aim at the 1994 national conference, the party instead voted in its first affirmative action rule - a 35% mandatory gender quota in all state/territory and federal election pre-selections for winnable seats by 2002.

However, despite Labor women winning the debate within the party rank and file, the 1995 pre-selection round for federal seats saw women's numbers actually decrease rather than increase.

It was obvious the gender quota would need to be supported by major cultural change. EMILY's List was the result.

EMILY's List Australia was launched at Parliament House in

Canberra on 11 November 1996. In the 18 years since, the organisation has raised more than \$4 million to support some 300 women to run for parliamentary office.

More than 160 of these women have been elected, with EMILY's List member milestones including Julia Gillard becoming Australia's first woman Prime Minister; Anna Bligh the first popularly-elected female premier; Carol Martin our first Indigenous woman MP and Nova Peris the first Indigenous woman Senator.

In the recent Victorian election, the organisation supported a record 34 candidates – 23 of whom were elected. Significantly, nine of our members were also appointed to the first Andrews Cabinet. In the January Queensland poll, we endorsed 14 candidates, with eight elected. Of these, four were ultimately made Ministers.

A watchdog

Alongside this primary focus, however, successive EMILY's List leaderships have also ensured that the organisation has acted as watchdog over the party's compliance with its affirmative action rules.

As the phased in timeline for meeting the 2002, the 35% target grew closer, EMILY's List launched a *Lift the Target* campaign, promoting a rule change to 50/50 representation.

Again, EMILY's List fell short of gender parity, but once more the target was lifted and a new affirmative action rule adopted - 40/40/20 by 2012. The new rule made mandatory pre-selection of both women and men candidates in 40% of winnable seats; leaving a further 20% of seats available to either gender.

In 2015, this situation is no longer acceptable.

At the National Labor Women's Conference in late 2014, a unanimous motion was passed calling for the party to work towards 50% representation of women in all areas of decision-making, including in the ALP national and state/territory secretariats and cabinets.

Under the leadership of Senator Anne McEwen, Tanja Kovac and Lisa Carey, EMILY's List will, this year, take a leading role in debates about party reform, particularly strengthening affirmative action provisions so that the milestones achieved within the parliamentary caucuses match those within the party's organising structures.

Unlocking the huge potential contribution of women in Labor

Women make up some 40% of Party members, yet only at the parliamentary level would women be represented proportionally across the party.

We need to see women more involved at all levels of the Party – as branch presidents, FEA Executives and ALP State officers. This requires further culture change as well as a commitment to promoting women throughout the ALP. The fact that there is not a single female ALP State Secretary at this time, and only a couple of female assistant state secretaries, shows the great need for change.

There are many ways to increase women's participation in the decision making processes of the Party and potentially lead to some being prepared to run as candidates. This would involve investment by the Party to improve networking opportunities

and provide training and programs for women members covering topics such as campaigning, ballot counting and public speaking.

We also believe support networks, like the Labor Women's Networks, need to be better explained to members and new members when they join.

Modern and accountable processes

The Affirmative Action Working Group, which arose out of the last ALP National Conference and chaired by Lisa Carey, has been working on a report that addresses the accountability of the AA rules, bringing back a sanction and giving better direction to the definition of the term "winnable seat".

Without sanctions and a real definition of what is a winnable seat in this era of massive swings in some pockets of the electorate, there will continue to be issues with meeting affirmative action targets and getting more women into our parliaments.

Unlocking the potential of branch members to contribute

As part of the work done by the Affirmative Action Working Group, female ALP members were recently surveyed about the barriers to them becoming more involved in the Party.

Several key themes emerged – better information was needed about the Party and its internal structures so that new members

could become better informed about potential roles; a "buddy" system would encourage new members to feel more welcome and branch meetings need to be at family-friendly times and locations.

These results prove that there is still a great deal of cultural change needed within the ALP. Great advances have been made in recent decades, but a great deal more needs to be done.



Lisa is the National Coordinator of EMILY's List Australia and the Convenor of the National Labor Women's Network. She is a member of the Glen Iris Branch and State Conference delegate for Higgins. She has previously been Assistant State Secretary of ALP Victoria Branch.



International Best Practice Model: The Swedish Social Democrats

Nick Gregory

Last year (2014) the Swedish Social Democrats were returned to power after eight years in opposition, the longest period the party has spent in opposition since the first time they formed government in 1920.

They are the most electorally successful social democratic party in the western world. This is in a large part due to their ability to continually reform themselves but also because the party's membership play an active role in the political process both internally and generally. The structures, institutions and processes of the Swedish Social Democrats help to maintain an active membership and promote party democracy.

Like any party the structure and processes of the Swedish Social Democrats is complex and can be difficult to understand. It has taken me some time to fully appreciate how internal democratic processes work and where power and influence is exercised. Playing an active role in the Social Democrats has given me an understanding of the party against the framework of the Australian Labor Party. Like the ALP the Social Democrats have national, regional and local bodies where power is exercised by members.

There is a central body with an executive. It is elected by a national congress that is held every four years. This congress

is the supreme decision making body and is responsible for determining the leadership and policy. There are 350 delegates at the congress based on voting by the members. Local districts send members to the congress and the number of members sent is determined by the number of enrolled members in each district.

It is the local districts that play the key role within the party and that are crucial to understanding the democratic nature of the party.

These districts are known as worker's communes and can be best understood if you relate them to FEAs in the ALP. These districts determine local policy, party candidates for local, regional and national governments and usually have a head office with full time employees that administer the party in these regions. There are annual regional congresses but also monthly meetings open to the entire membership of that district. For example I belong to the Boras district which has approximately 800 members with 28 local branches. Our monthly meetings usually attract 100 members but can be up to 300 when meetings consider important decisions or are discussing controversial issues.

It is also important to add that while the majority of local branches within a local district are geographical there are local branches that are based around interests or union affiliation. An example of an interest based branch would be the European focused branches that have a focus on European Union politics and issues. All districts would also have a number of union based branches and these are made of members from a particular union or group of unions.

The Swedish Social Democrats have over 100,000 members. That is double the number of members the Australian Labor Party in a country that has less than half the population.

How have the Social Democrats managed to maintain such a large membership base in times when most political parties are struggling with dwindling membership? I believe it is due to their ability to keep members engaged and active while offering the membership opportunities to express views and partake in decision making processes.

Just about all active members of the party have the opportunity to take on a political role on behalf of the party if they desire. There are hundreds of positions on committees of councils, government bodies and publicly owned organisations that are available to the membership. As a result members are actively involved in

the political process and the running of their communities. A member feels they are making a contribution and a member who is making a contribution is unlikely to leave the party.

Within the party itself decision making is very democratic. Members have the opportunity to express their concerns and be heard, and the politicians have the chance to learn from these perspectives to inform decision making. All important decisions must be ratified by the broader party faithful at the monthly meetings that I referred to earlier. Every party district has an "election preparation" committee which is a bit like a central panel for the FEA. Every branch has a representative on this committee. It is this elected committee that makes recommendations regarding motions for the national congress and the candidate lists for elections. It is the most powerful committee of a district. However all recommendations of this committee must come before a meeting of the broader membership of the district to be ratified. These meetings are well attended and debate and discussion is lively and healthy.

What could Labor learn from this?

To begin with having local branches that are not necessarily geographic based is a good idea. Having branches centered around occupation or particular interests gives members the chance to join

branches that are more likely to discuss and be involved in issues that interest them. I have an interest in international politics so I would definitely join a branch that focuses on foreign affairs. This concept could be extended to other political issues like health, economic policy and the environment for example. Also, would it be possible to have local branches that have a connection to a particular union; this should encourage rank and file union members to be involved in the party. There are many possibilities and it would broaden the appeal of the party to potential new members.

A healthy and strong membership that is engaged in the political process leads to a strong party. The electoral success of the Social Democrats and their ability to implement social democratic policy is testament to this. Party bosses need not fear a democratised party with an active membership because my experience in Sweden tells me it actually provides greater legitimacy to their positions.



Nick Gregory has been a member of the ALP since 1995. He has been an active member holding various positions including local councillor, ministerial advisor and branch president. Nick is currently living in Borås, Sweden where he is an active member of the Swedish Social Democrats.

Part Three

The Local Labor Journey So Far

Cassandra Devine

The Australian Labor Party was formed 120 years ago to help build this nation and improve the lives of ordinary workers and their families, giving them a fair share in a growing economy and working to support the vulnerable. In the 21st century, we still strive to create a fair, prosperous Australia where everyone has opportunity and nobody is left out or left behind. Our core values have been with us throughout our history and the changing fortunes of our nation: opportunity, responsibility, justice and fairness.

Local Labor is a national, grassroots and cross-factional community of members of the Australian Labor Party advocating and educating for Party reform and renewal.

Our mission is to empower our members, branches and communities. Local Labor was founded in 2010 to push for the implementation of the 2010 National Review recommendations (the Faulkner/Bracks/Carr Report), charting a course for the ALP's growth and success in the decades ahead. Since then, the group has grown to over 1700 members, with an active Facebook community, and state branches supported by patrons and supporters of reform across the country.

Since its formation, Local Labor has worked to develop shared positions on key reform issues, and has acted as an important forum for discussion and debate.

Some of the highlights have been a forum with the ALP State Secretary and President, and various drinks nights and activities, many of which have included the generous participation of our State and National Patrons.

Local Labor works hard to engage with Party members across the nation, and we now have active branches in almost every state and territory. These branches have been very successful in hosting their own launches, forums and fringe events at various state conferences.

A very successful event was held at the 2014 Victorian State Conference, and Local Labor maintained a visible presence throughout the weekend with badges and Tshirts, which proved very popular with delegates and observers alike. Local Labor is a strong believer in collaboration with like-minded groups, and to this end we have formed and driven an umbrella group, known as the ALP Democracy Project, with Open Labor and various pro-reform independents.

2015 will prove to be Local Labor's busiest year yet. To date, we have managed to get up some key pro-reform resolutions which will be put to the 2015 Victorian State



Cassandra Devine is a National Convenor of Local Labor and a Research and Policy Officer at the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU).

Conference in March. We are also planning an active presence throughout the year, particularly leading up to the ALP National Conference, which will be held in Melbourne in July. Stay tuned to our Facebook page and Newsletter for more information about upcoming events.



Contact Us

Grassroots welcomes your feedback, comments and contributions. Please contact the editor

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