

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

Whitlam's Grandchildren: What the class of 2007 tells us about the ALP.

Introduction

Changes of government typically result in a flood of new members into the House of Representatives, especially, of course, on the winner's side. After winning the election in 2007, 32 ALP members¹ sat, and spoke, in the House of Representatives, for the first time, 39 per cent of Labor's representation in the lower house. The last time Labor had been returned to office, in 1983, 27 new ALP members (36 per cent of Labor's lower house contingent) entered the House for the first time. Comparing these two cohorts of new members can provide some interesting insights into the evolution of Australia's longest-living political party. In making the comparison, this paper uses biographical data from the parliamentary website and from the 59 first (still called 'maiden' in 1983) speeches made by these two groups of new MPs.

The class of 2007 join what is still a fairly exclusive club; only 1059 people have been elected to the House since Federation. Their fates are also politically important. Labor's new members hold 22 of the ALP's 25 most marginal seats – they are the difference between Government and Opposition. For most, the reality and longevity of their parliamentary careers depends largely on the performance of the current occupant of the Lodge. They have a lot invested in Kevin Rudd. The other 10 new members, blessed with far safer seats, include some potential parliamentary heavyweights, like Greg Combet and Bill Shorten, who may become key players in rebuilding Labor after it loses Government. Nevertheless, many of the new members in 2007 can reasonably expect to play important roles in the current government, provided it follows recent electoral experience at the national level and survives for three or more terms. Nine (one-

¹ See Table in the appendix to this document p22

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

third) of the new members in 1983 went onto ministerial positions during the period of the Hawke-Keating governments (1983 – 1996).

These large influxes of new members are rare events, especially for Labor. The ALP has only formed government as a result of an election five times since federation: Andrew Fisher (1914), James Scullin (1929), Gough Whitlam (1972), Bob Hawke (1983), and Kevin Rudd (2007). Being elected for the first time, as a member of an incoming Labor government, brings with it a special excitement. Some, at least, of the class of 2007 are conscious of being part of a new generation:

- “at the last election 25 per cent of the parliament turned over – one of the largest renewals since Federation. There truly is a new generation in this parliament” – Marles (Corio)

In 1998, ANU historian Paul Pickering published a comparison of the intakes of new members from the Liberal National Party coalition after its two big election wins in 1975 and 1996, including a detailed examination of the first speeches of incoming government MPs. Pickering argued that these first speeches were valuable because they showed us how these members chose to reveal themselves to the world.² How they chose to reveal themselves provided, in turn, valuable insights into the changing face and composition of the Liberal and National parties. These new members represented the seats won with the help of the “Howard battlers”, outer suburban bluecollar workers who deserted the ALP, much like the Reagan Democrat phenomenon in the USA a decade and a half earlier. The new LNP members were far more likely to have attended government-run schools than their predecessors and they were loud champions of small business and family values. They were loyal to their own champion, John Howard, to the last.

² Paul A. Pickering, The Class of 96: A Biographical Analysis of New Government Members of the Australian House of Representatives, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Volume 44, Number 1, 1998, pp 95 – 112.

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

The central argument of this paper is that the new ALP MPs of 2007 are the beneficiaries and bearers of the Whitlam legacy. In their first speeches there is the occasional, and mostly desultory, acknowledgement of the importance of good economic management, but what really motivates the new MPs in terms of ideology and policy is a continuing passion for the agenda that Whitlam largely created for the national parliament: health, education, community-building and social justice³. There is virtually no signs of a passion for a further instalment of the economic reforms that were the dominant feature of the Hawke / Keating years.

There is, however, a universal acknowledgement, explicit and implicit, that the ideological struggles of earlier years are over. In 2007, much more than in 1983, the language of class, and of conflict, has disappeared from the first speeches of Labor MPs. Nor is there any talk of socialism or democratic socialism. In 1983, Gerry Hand, a leader of the left, future Cabinet minister and new member for the safe ALP seat of Melbourne, used his first speech to tell the Parliament that capitalism was an “immoral” and “corrupt” system. Several new MPs also opined that Australians had voted for “socialism”, “social democracy”, “democratic socialism” or “socialist solutions” at the 1983 election. Similar pronouncements in 2007 are simply unimaginable⁴.

Instead, the first speeches of the class of 2007 are populated with ideas that strongly resonate with Whitlam’s concept of “positive equality”⁵. These new MPs talk about their hopes for greater social justice in the sense of a ‘fair go’ and of government helping to remove barriers and create opportunities for individuals and communities. The ideology of the class of 2007 is middle class and aspirational, but it also appeals to the values and ideas that are seen as

³ See E.G. Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, Viking, 1985

⁴ The 2007 first speeches were made before the global financial crisis; since then Kevin Rudd and other ALP figures have criticised alleged market excesses but have not launched anything like a full-scale critique of capitalism of the sort that lay behind Hand’s pronouncement.

⁵ Whitlam, *op.cit.*, p. 3

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

traditionally, and specially, Australian; that is, aspiration within an egalitarian ethos and policy framework. This ideology is not new. It was evident in the espoused political ideas and electoral appeal of Whitlam, but also dates back to the program developed by Andrew Fisher, the ALP's first leader to win government at an election⁶.

There is a further indication of just how completely the idea of labor-capital conflict has disappeared from the political agenda. The meaning of one word, reconciliation, has changed completely during the intervening 24 years. When the 1983 intake spoke of reconciliation, they did so in support of Bob Hawke's plans to bring labor and capital, employees and employers together to overcome the economic recession. In 2007, reconciliation is seen in the context of the national apology and is always used in reference to relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

The rhetoric in the 2007 first speeches is also strongly small 'c' conservative. Labor is the party of traditional Australian values (the 'fair go', mateship and family life) and, above all, social cohesion. The 1983 intake was often savage about the events of 1975 and the divisive role of Malcolm Fraser in Whitlam's dismissal and the policies pursued during Fraser's term in office. The 2007 intake has been just as savage on the perceived divisiveness of the Howard Government, and even more eloquent in seeking to position the ALP as the true protector and preserver of genuine Australian values.

A second concern of this paper is the issue of the diversity, or lack of it, of ALP MPs. In recent years, there has been growing comment and criticism about the declining diversity in the social backgrounds of Australian MPs, including those from the ALP⁷. Arguments about lack of diversity have two main components. First, the MPs are seen as being overwhelmingly from middle class backgrounds

⁶ David Day, Andrew Fisher, First Estate, 2008

⁷ See Narelle Miragliotta & Wayne Errington, "Occupational Profile of ALP, LP and National MHRs 1949 – 2007: From Divergence to Convergence, refereed paper delivered at Australian Political Studies Association Conference, July 2008.

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

because of their education levels and choice of occupation; and, second, it has been noted that MPs are increasingly being drawn from a newly emergent professional political class, with a growing number of ALP MPs having worked as political advisers, union officials and party officials before entering parliament. This study confirms, in general terms, the efficacy of those criticisms, but suggests that we need to look more closely at their biographies and life experiences than just fairly crude indicators like education and political experience.

This study also points to a continuing dearth of genuine business experience in the ranks of the class of 2007, and, perhaps surprisingly, a lack of significant experience in Australia's large not-for-profit sector. Even after the ALP's economic reforms during the Hawke and Keating Governments, and with the absence of any sense of class conflict in the party's contemporary policies and rhetoric, Labor still seems neither to have sought nor attracted more than a handful of new MPs with any meaningful business experience and none that could claim to have had a significant career in business before entering Parliament. Similarly, even given the apparent ideological affinity with much of the not-for-profit sector, Labor does not seem to have been successful in attracting candidates with high profile involvement in this growing sector of the economy and civil society.

Finally, this paper is also concerned with what these first speeches can reveal about the relationship between the ALP and unions. A distinctive feature of these speeches in 2007 is the lavish praise and expressions of gratitude they contain for the campaign efforts of the trade union movement, and for many individual unions and unionists. This praise and gratitude is often supplemented with rhetorical efforts to position trade unions, like the ALP, as community-based organisations defending the rights of ordinary workers and protecting key Australian values like the "fair go". The praise and gratitude is not surprising given the large investment in marginal seat campaigning made by unions in the

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

2007 campaign⁸, but it is a marked departure from the first speeches of ALP members in 1983 when there was little attention paid to unions, even though the formal ALP-ACTU accord was an important part of the ALP's election strategy and of the Hawke Government (1983 – 1991).

The Oprah Generation

In his paper in 1998, Pickering notes that first speeches are, by convention, used by new members “to place on record their hopes and aspirations for the future, and to say something about themselves, their views and motivations”.⁹ Over the past few decades, the interpretation of this convention has become ever more personal and autobiographical. Consistent with the confessional age we live in, many of the new ALP members in 2007 were more than happy to be revealing about the personal challenges they have faced to an extent that was unimaginable in 1983. For instance, James Bidgood (Dawson, Qld) told the House that he had been fostered out because his mother was a single parent. Nick Champion (Wakefield, SA) revealed: “nothing is as influential in my life's trajectory as my father's alcoholism”. Some of the revelations are startling and occasionally jocular; Belinda Neal (Robertson, NSW), for instance, tells us that her grandmother taught her “how to kill a chicken using only my hands”. Whatever its other merits might be, this self-revelatory impulse means that we learn a lot more about the class of 2007 from their first speeches than from the comparable cohort in 1983.

None of the 1983 group of new ALP members went so far as to offer this kind of introspective take on their motivations and opinions. In 1983, new members used their first speeches to give a personal take on some issues of the day, reflect on their occupational experience, talk about their electorates, mention some Labor and other political heroes, and, maybe, raise an issue they were passionate. With only one or two exceptions did they divulge the sort of

⁸ K. Muir, *Worth Fighting For: Inside the Your Rights At Work Campaign*, UNSW Press, 2008.

⁹ Pickering, *op. cit.*, p.95

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

autobiographical introspection that has become a commonplace by 2007. When it does occur in 1983, it is usually by female MPs reflecting on the paucity of women in the House and their own decisions to take up a political life. For instance, Wendy Fatin (Canning, WA) noted that she was the first woman to represent Western Australia in the House of Representatives and said: “I will first speak about the reasons why I decided 12 years ago to work towards a parliamentary career in this place”.

Another notable stylistic difference is that the speeches in 2007 have a far more effusive awards night flavour, with often extended thanking of family, friends, campaign workers and political mentors – many of whom were present in the public gallery of the House to witness the great occasion. In addition, securing election to Parliament is frequently portrayed as a fulfilment of a life’s ambition and striving to fulfil it:

- “It has been a long and difficult journey. But it is the fulfilment of a calling I have had all my adult life” – Neal (Robertson)
- “My path to this destination has, like many others before me, not been an easy one” – Trevor (Flynn) talking about overcoming his fear of flying so he could travel to Canberra.

Education is central

A popular theme for Labor’s class of 2007 was to point to experiences that highlighted their social and cultural affinity with the world of ‘ordinary people’. This reflects the fact that many have been the beneficiaries of the Whitlam era explosion in access to higher education, and perhaps many are sensitive to the criticism that they may have become, consequently, remote from the world of the ‘battlers’. Instead, these MPs argue that the importance of education in their own lives has only confirmed for them the need to ensure that more people have the same access.

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

Indeed, the importance of education for overcoming inequality is a constant theme for the class of 2007: “I came to realise that access to education and information was just as big a barrier to equality as being poor was” (Collins, Franklin). Combet (Charlton) argued in his first speech: “Universal access to quality education is central, in my view, to any decent democracy”.

Whitlam’s achievements in education are much admired. As one MP, Shayne Neumann (Blair) put it: “I studied Arts and Law at the University of Queensland, an opportunity afforded me by a Labor Government – the Whitlam Government – for which I will always be grateful”. Rea said: “Let me start by thanking the Whitlam Government. It enabled me to attend university”. To emphasise the point, Neumann (Blair) also said “high school was an educational opportunity denied to both my parents and their parents before them”. Similarly, Clare (Blaxand) noted: “I was the first in my family to go to university”.

From humble beginnings

Claiming a humble beginning, however, goes well beyond participation in the explosion of higher education participation in recent decades. MPs point to poverty, early loss of a parent, the deprivations of social problems and the hardships of working class (including poor rural workers) life as key shapers of their political views and ambitions. Many of the backbench stories of overcoming early hardships, resonate with the Prime Minister’s own life story.

Here is a selection from the more compelling accounts:

- “I was born on the wrong side of the tracks” – Bidgood (Dawson)
- “From my mum, who did shift work at Coats Patons Wool mill in Launceston, I learned of the resilience of working people” – Campbell (Bass)
- “Dad works ... in the manufacturing industry” – Clare (Blaxland)

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

- “My father died in tragic circumstances when I was five months old leaving my mother a widow at just 19” – Collins (Franklin)
- (I) “came from good working class stock” – Collins (Franklin)
- My path here has been from a simple home life where politics was never discussed. My father was a carpenter and my mother was a secretary. .. I left school and went into the full time workforce when I was 15 years old; I have cleaned tables; I have worked as a receptionist ... I commenced my education at night school” – D’Ath (Petrie)
- “My immediate family suffered through the devastating pressures of debt and poverty” – Kelly (Eden-Monaro)
- “We stayed at a migrant hostel before settling into our state housing house, this would be home for the next 13 years” – Gray (Brand)
- “I had a good deal of unhappiness in my early years, which is why I identify with scratchy teens” – McKew (Bennelong)
- “In my childhood, I was exposed to the twin evils of alcohol and gambling. I lived through the poverty caused thereby and the pain of the divorce which followed” – Neumann (Blair)
- “I started my working life as a part-time cleaner at Dinmore Meatworks” – Neumann (Blair)
- “I had a very humble and somewhat uncertain beginning” – Raguse (Forde)
- “My dad grew up on his father’s dairy farm, later becoming a Gladstone train driver” – Trevor (Flynn)
- “My parents ... grew small crops and ran cattle” – Turnour (Leichhardt)

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

Another popular way of emphasising a working class background and, continuing identification with ordinary people was to speak with pride of a public school education. Raguse said: “I enjoyed a good public education”. State high schools like Ravenswood, Kapunda, Cosgrove, Redcliffe, Whyalla and Bundamba were singled out for special mention by their proud former students. One primary school, Ipswich East, also got a plaudit.

A professional political class

There is nothing inherently wrong with having some political experience before deciding to enter Federal Parliament. Indeed, gaining some prior familiarity with politics and the political life could be said to be wise for the individual concerned, as well as for the party they are going to contest the election for. In addition, it is hardly surprising that a large percentage of the people who seek and win pre-selections have been active in politics for a long period. Nevertheless, a valid concern exists about whether drawing too heavily on this professional political class means that the ALP’s parliamentary base is too narrow in terms of life experience.

In this study, five occupations were used as indicators of membership of a political class. They are paid employment as a political staffer, party official or union official; or previous experience as a political representative in local or state government, and, in one case, the Senate (Neal).

Some of the new MPs had filled a number of these roles. Only 4 of the 31 new MPs had not had a professional political class experience along the way. Overall, 12 had been union officials, 9 had been political staffers, 8 had been local government councillors, 4 had previous parliamentary experience and 2 had been full-time party officials.

While these numbers seem to add weight to the argument that the ALP is tending to produce ‘cookie-cutter’ MPs, there are good reasons for not taking them at face value.

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

For a start, the four MPs with no professional political class experience had pursued notable careers outside politics: Kelly (army), McKew (journalism), Neumann (law) and Parke (university lecturer, UN lawyer). This at least indicates that professional political class experience is not compulsory.

Second, some, at least, of the trade union officials have had high profile and highly successful careers and can be hardly be justly considered to be hacks or to be the products of some 'cookie cutter' process: the two most notable examples being Greg Combet and Bill Shorten.

Third, many have combined their political experience with apparently successful stints in other fields; examples include Bidgood (medical centre owner), Bradbury (solicitor, Blake Dawson), Clare (corporate relations, Transurban), Dreyfus (Barrister), Gray (senior executive, Woodside Energy), Perrett (school teacher, solicitor), Neal (solicitor), Rishworth (psychologist), Saffin (school teacher, solicitor), Sullivan (travel consultant, airline clerk), Trevor (lawyer), Turnour (agricultural consultant) and Zappia (fitness centre manager).

It should also be noted that the age profile of the new MPs suggests that they typically come to parliament mid-career. Their ages at the time of the 2007 election ranged from 29 (Rishworth) to 64 (Debus), with the average being 43.25 and the median being 43 years old. Sixteen of the 32 MPs (50 per cent) were aged 40 to 49 when elected, a further nine were aged 30 to 39.

Finally, five of the new MPs (15 per cent) can also claim to have had genuine blue-collar experience (i.e. not just a student job): Bidgood (printer and platemaker), D'Ath (various low-skilled occupations), Hale (Australian Apprentice of the year, 1991), Raguse (composer) and Symon (electrician).

While, the life experiences of the new MPs are more diverse than some commentaries have suggested, there are still some clear deficiencies. In terms of education, the most notable is the preference for legal qualifications and the

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

choice of the law as a pre-parliament occupation. Fully 15, virtually half, of the new members have an LLB qualification. By way of contrast, a total of five have qualifications covering science, medicine, engineering and agriculture. A total of seven have a business, commerce or economics qualification.

Two other main deficiencies are also obvious. Business experience among the new MPs is isolated and marginal. An even greater discrepancy is the absence of representation from Australia's large not-for-profit sector, an area that we might consider that the ALP has a natural affinity with.

One member, Raguse (Forde) made much of his business experience, but this is noteworthy for its rarity as much as anything else:

- as “a former small business owner and operator who employed a significant number of staff, I understand well the dynamics of running a business. I was a member and executive member of two chambers of commerce and served as a president of one and vice-president of another over a number of years”

The register of MP interests also reveals that very few of the new MPs have any on-going business interests or investments (except for superannuation and the occasional residential property held for investment purposes). Although, some former senior union officials, e.g. Shorten (Maribrynong), have had experience as directors of large industry superannuation funds.

Australia's not-for-profit (or NGO) sector employs nearly one million Australians¹⁰, yet few of the new ALP MPs seem to have been attracted to it. Nevertheless, there are a few interesting exceptions:

¹⁰ Report for Australian Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. 2008, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/communities/pubs/documents/relationship_matters/p1.htm

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

- Butler (Port Adelaide) spent several years as a member of the South Australian Social Inclusion Board which brought him into contact with social service delivery issues (the major component of the NGO sector in terms of employment)
- Debus (Macquarie), a long-time member of the NSW parliament before entering federal parliament, was National Director, Australian Freedom from Hunger and Community Aid Abroad, 1988 – 1994
- Dreyfus (Isaacs) was a field officer for the Northern Land Council, Darwin (1979 – 81) and a research fellow at the National Research Institute of Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine in 1982
- Gray (Brand) was Executive Director, Medical Research Foundation, 2000 – 2001
- Neumann (Blair) spent a decade as a health community councillor and 14 years as a Queensland Baptist Care board member
- Parke (Fremantle) was a senior international lawyer with the United Nations (Kosovo, Gaza, Lebanon, Cyprus, New York), 1999 – 2007
- Sullivan (Longman) held a senior role in the organisation of the high-profile Woodford Folk Festival.

Gender is another problematic area. Although female participation in the national parliament has improved considerably in recent decades, the goal of equal gender representation still seems a long way off. Only three (3) of the 27 new members, 11 per cent, elected in 1983 were female. By 2007, this had more than doubled with nine (9) women among the 32 ALP MPs elected for the first time in 2007, 28 per cent. Only one of these women, Parke (Fremantle), was elected to a safe seat, as opposed to nine first-time male MPs who won safe seats.

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

Nor are the new MPs particularly diverse in ethnic background. Only five of the 32 (16 per cent) new MPs were born overseas. Two of those were born in the UK (Bidgood, Gray), two in NZ (Cheesman, Thomson) and one in Italy (Zappia). A few others pointed to non-British parents or grandparents (e.g. Combet, Bradbury, Dreyfus, Symon), and one noted a recently re-discovered indigenous connection (Rea). According to the 2006 census 22 per cent of Australians were born overseas, this included 1.2 million Australian residents born in Asia. In fact, for the first time, more Australian residents were born in China than in Italy¹¹.

The ALP frequently claims to be the one political party that represents all Australians; while its parliamentary representation is not as monochromatic as some critics claim, it is none the less some distance from being a genuine cross-section of modern Australia.

Union relationships

As noted above, nearly a third of the new MPs were full-time union officials during their pre-parliament careers. Many of the new MPs, especially those in marginal seats, received considerable campaign support from the ACTU, state and regional peak organisations and individual unions. For these reasons, and perhaps others, the relationships between the class of 2007 and the trade union movement is warm indeed.

All but three of the 32 of the class of 2007 mention unions in their first speeches, and 23 (72 per cent) mention specific unions and union peak bodies. Altogether, 29 separate unions and peak organisations were mentioned by at least one MP. Ten unions were mentioned by five or more MPs. The CFMEU rated the most mentions, 11, while the AWU, MUA and LHMWU each got 7 mentioned by 7 MPs. A few unions not affiliated with the ALP, notably the ANF and the CPSU, get a few

¹¹ ABS, media release, 27 June 2007,
<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/7d12b0f6763c78caca257061001cc588/e871bf375f2035dca257306000d5422!OpenDocument>

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

mentions; but, by far, the most appreciated were unions with a long history of ALP affiliation.

All of these mentions are highly positive, only Kelly (Eden-Monaro) ventured a slightly negative note:

- “the Australian union movement must take this reprieve as an opportunity to re-examine itself and explore ways to reach out to working Australians with a positive message and experience regarding the benefits of union membership. The union movement desperately needs the same fresh thinking and creative leadership that the country responded to in the Rudd Labor team. “

Generally, however, unions are described in glowing and effusive terms, often tinged with nostalgia and idealism:

- “the great Australian union movement” – Bidgood (Dawson)
- “I wish to acknowledge the outstanding contribution of the men and women of the Australian trade union movement for their role in ensuring the election of the Rudd Labor Government” – Bradbury (Lindsay)
- the union movement “also taught me that individuals can make a difference and made me proud to be part of any organisation that will fight to improve the lives of workers and their families” – Campbell (Bass)
- “the proud history of the trade union movement in defending the rights of working people” – Debus (Macquarie)
- “the union movement, which will always hold a very special place in my heart” – Marles (Corio)
- “the trade union movement has a long and proud history in community activity and community advocacy” – Rea (Bonner)

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

- (before the Howard Government) “no-one ever questioned the legitimacy of the unions or the employer. It was part of the Australian way” – Thomson (Dobell)
- “there is no doubt that the community activism (of the) union movement ... galvanised opposition to the Work Choices laws and drew people back to the Labor Party_ - Turnour (Leichhardt)

Australia’s trade unions got far less attention in the 1983 ALP first speeches. Only eight of the 27 (30 per cent) mentioned unions at all, only one of these mentioned an individual union:

- “My occupation immediately before coming to this place was as an official of the Municipal Employees Union, often known affectionately as the garbos union” – Steedman (Casey)

Peter Steedman, a one-term left-wing member from Melbourne, gave by far the longest and most passionate defence of trade unionism. He talked about the “courage” and “hard work” of trade union officials in their fight against “exploitation” and the profit-maximising efforts of big business. He also spoke against the “demonology of the union movement” by its political opponents and a “hostile Press”. Steedman’s comments were not typical, others were more muted, or merely incidental:

- “I record my personal appreciation to my family and certainly to my friends in the Australian Labor Party and the trade union movement” – Griffiths (Maribyrnong)
- “The previous Government divided the country. It divided employer against employee and it divided management against unions” – Beddall (Fadden)

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

- “The previous Government of this country used unemployment as an economic weapon, to control working people and their only real means of collective and individual – trade unions” – Staples (Diamond Valley)
- “During this seven year period (1975 – 83) it (Fraser Government) continually tried to attempted to turn the community against the trade union movement” – Saunderson (Deakin)

Only Jeanette McHugh (Phillip) mentioned the role of unions in helping her campaign:

- “It was and always will be a matter of great pride to us in the Australian Labor Party branches in Phillip that we were joined in our campaign by so many men and women from the trade unions”.

Political philosophies

It is conventional in first speeches for MPs to reflect on their personal political philosophies, not all of them do this explicitly. Even in 1983, big ideological claims like socialism and social democracy were a minority concern, mainly a preserve of the left. By 2007, these ideas have disappeared almost completely. Only Belinda Neal (Robertson) ventured down this old ideological path:

- ‘I am ambitious for an enlightened social democracy built on the goodwill of the Australian people and formed on the foundations of a strong and vibrant economy”

For the most part, the class of 2007 prefers to stick to more manageable ideas that resonate more easily with ordinary voters; particularly, “fairness”, “cohesion”, “family life” and “community”:

- “Family, however described, is at the very heart of this notion of community” – Bradbury (Lindsay)
- “the central importance of social cohesion” – Gray (Brand)

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

- “At the core of everything we do here should be the objectives of social justice, cohesion and equality of opportunity” – Neal (Robertson)
- “We are all tied together in a single garment of destiny” – McKew Bennelong)
- “I wish to remind all Australians that the price of harmony is hard work” – Perrett (Moreton)
- “voters “expect parliament to reflect the native Australian gradualism and pragmatism ... The Australian Parliament is the keeper of the middle way” – Shorten (Maribyrnong)
- “The fair go is synonymous with the Australian way of life ... it embodies a truly Australian ethos” – Rishworth (Kingston)
- “To me a socially just society is like woven cloth, one in which many threads come together to make a cohesive whole, a united fabric” – Rishworth (Kingston)

This moderate approach focused on fairness, opportunity and progress is reflected in the way the ALP is understood by these new members

- Labor is about justice for all – Bidgood (Dawson)
- “As a christian I feel at home in the ALP” – Bidgood (Dawson)
- “the great custodian of the progressive political tradition in this nation” – Bradbury (Lindsay)
- “Labor has shaped this nation for the better. Labor is a builder, a creator of opportunity, a driver of social and economic progress and equity.” – Combet (Charlton)

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

- the “true labor values of social justice, equality of opportunity and compassion” – Neumann (Blair)
- “Labor values are family values” – Neumann (Blair)
- “Labor is the party of innovation, the future and hope” – Shorten (Maribyrnong)
- “Labor holds as a fundamental belief the creation of a competitive economy that delivers opportunity for all Australians” – Thomson (Dobell)

Role of government

The views of government held by the Class of 2007 are consistent with Whitlam’s belief in the capacity of the National Parliament to further Labor’s equality of opportunity agenda¹²:

- “The role of government is to help all individuals overcome the barriers that prevent them from reaching their potential and fulfilling their destiny” – Bradbury (Lindsay)
- “I believe the Australian experience shows that economic development, social progress and equality of opportunity come not just from the liberty of the individual but by the active participation of government also” – Neumann (Blair)
- “I believe in the promise of good government...Government can be ... a creative and enabling force for positive change” – Parke (Fremantle)
- “Parliament, I believe, is a place where real change can occur” – Shorten (Maribyrnong)

¹² G. Freudenberg, *A Certain Grandeur*, Viking, revised edition 2009

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

Conclusion - Rekindling the spirit of Blacktown

Throughout his political career, Whitlam pursued a philosophy of “positive equality”, and he sought to change the national debate and the role of the national parliament. Positive equality is not about the old battles between capital and labour, it is about removing barriers to self-improvement and overcoming disadvantage and deprivation through national approaches to policy areas like health, education and transport that emphasise universal access. For Whitlam, positive equality was also about community-building and social cohesion. In many ways it is a middle-class and gradualist reform agenda which envisages the use of government to ensure the benefits of economic prosperity are used to create better opportunities for individuals and communities.

Whitlam saw the benefits of these positive equality programs as forming a social wage, and he believed that this social wage was more significant in promoting equality than the wage rises secured by unions. Or, at least, that the social wage could achieve outcomes that were unavailable to unions acting alone. Whitlam admitted that he failed to convince unions of his social wage idea. During the Accord period (1983 – 1991) Government and unions negotiated around the social wage to manage economic recovery and deliver some lasting benefits, notably compulsory superannuation. Since then the social wage idea has disappeared from the lexicon, but the idea still underpins the way the labour movement sees the role of government.

Speaking at the opening of the Blacktown Expo, at the Blacktown Workers Club, in 1993, 21 years after the famous 1972 campaign launch, Whitlam argued that we “need to rekindle the spirit of Blacktown” particularly in the area of co-operation between federal, state and local governments to promote regional development¹³. Whitlam’s ideas of government involvement in economic, social

¹³ <http://bancroft.uws.edu.au:20018/cgi-bin/Pdisplay.cgi/TMP.objres.17265.pdf?type=application/pdf&path=/m1/encompass/repowpmbd/clipboard/.outgoing/TMP.objres.17265.pdf&fileaddr=137.154.156.22&fileport=20042>

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

and community development fell out of favour during the recessions of the seventies, eighties and nineties. But in the first speeches of the Class of 2007 you can sense the wheel turning, and there is a new willingness to defend and promote an active role for government.

The Class of 2007 accepts, even admires, the economic reforms of the Hawke and Keating Governments, but it is to the Whitlam agenda that they are more likely to look for continuing inspiration.

DRAFT - August 2009

Trevor Cook – trevor.cook@gmail.com

Appendix: The Class of 2007

	Name	Gender	Electorate	State	Margin
1	Neal, Belinda	F	Robertson	NSW	0.11
2	Trevor, Chris	M	Flynn	Qld	0.16
3	Hale, Damian	M	Solomon	NT	0.19
4	Cheeseman, Darren	M	Corangamite	Vic	0.85
5	Campbell, Jodie	F	Bass	Tas	1.00
6	McKew, Maxine	F	Bennelong	NSW	1.40
7	Symon, Mike	M	Deakin	Vic	1.41
8	D'Ath, Yvette	F	Petrie	Qld	2.05
9	Saffin, Janelle	F	Page	NSW	2.36
10	Raguse, Brett	M	Forde	Qld	2.91
11	Bidgood, James	M	Dawson	Qld	3.21
12	Kelly, Mike	M	Eden-Monaro	NSW	3.40
13	Sullivan, Jon	M	Longman	Qld	3.57
14	Thomson, Craig	M	Dobell	NSW	3.90
15	Turnour, Jim	M	Leichhardt	Qld	4.03
16	Rishworth, Amanda	F	Kingston	SA	4.42
17	Neumann, Shayne	M	Blair	Qld	4.48
18	Collins, Julie	F	Franklin	Tas	4.48
19	Rea, Kerry	F	Bonner	Qld	4.53
20	Perrett, Graham	M	Moreton	Qld	4.75
21	Gray, Gary	M	Brand	WA	5.62
22	Champion, Nick	M	Wakefield	SA	6.59
23	Bradbury, David	M	Lindsay	NSW	6.78
24	Debus, Bob	M	Macquarie	NSW	7.04
25	Dreyfus, Mark	M	Isaacs	Vic	7.69
26	Zappia, Tony	M	Makin	SA	7.70
27	Marles, Richard	M	Corio	Vic	8.93
28	Parke, Melissa	F	Fremantle	WA	9.14
29	Combet, Greg	M	Charlton	NSW	12.87
30	Shorten, Bill	M	Maribyrnong	Vic	15.32
31	Clare, Jason	M	Blaxland	NSW	18.37
32	Butler, Mark	M	Port Adelaide	SA	19.75