

The document scanned and reproduced hereunder in a more legible type-face was written and circulated in 1966, and a copy was recently returned to me by a friend. Re-reading it for the first time in many years, it seems to me that many of the points raised have retained their relevance.

Confidential

A.L.P. Members Only

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

By Race Mathews

(Note: The following material has been prepared as a basis for discussion in A.L.P. Branches, State Electorate Councils and Federal Electorate Assemblies, and to stimulate constructive thinking among A.L.P. members about the creeping crisis in our Party organisation. The author is President of the Ringwood State Electorate Council and Secretary of the Joint State Parliamentary Labor Party and Victorian Central Executive Education Committee, of the Scoresby Committee of Inquiry into Representation and Decision-Making in the A.L.P. and of the Victorian Fabian Society. He has held all Branch offices, organised the Fedora), election campaign in Latrobe for Sam Goldbloom in 1958, for Don Pritchard in 1960 and for Moss Case in 1963, and was A.L.P. candidate for Box Hill in 1964.

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INTRODUCTION

In key areas of political activity, Labor's present level of performance is dangerously inadequate.

Membership in Victoria is at its lowest level for many years. Moreover, nominal membership figures do not fully reveal the seriousness of the decline. The A.L.P. has become an aging party, and the members shown to be missing when current figures are compared with those of earlier years are by and large the younger ones on whom its future depends.

Electoral support for Labor is not what it should be* The Victorian State

Parliamentary Labor Party and the Victorian group of Federal Labor members have both been reduced to a fraction of their former size. Liberals are being elected in what were once thought to be safe Labor seats, and the Party is hanging on to other supposed "strongholds" by a handful of votes. Far from moving out to capture the new outer suburban electorates which must be won if Labor Governments are to be formed, the A.L.P. is steadily losing its grip on inner industrial areas,

Labor policy is not being publicised effectively. In the vital fields of foreign affairs and defence, the Party's constructive and forward-looking proposals are unpopular because they are mis-understood. Failure to explain the concept of democratic socialism to the electorate has presented Labor's opponents with a propaganda advantage worth hundreds of thousands of votes. Arid even when the Party's policy follows lines which the electorate is known to approve, as for instance in education and northern development, voters often fail to associate it with these policies, and assume that the Liberals are putting them forward.

This pamphlet has been written for two reasons.

First, I believe that if Australians are to retain control of their destinies and create a way of life linked in continuity with that which we know today yet expressive of much which today is no more than aspiration, this can be done only through Labor government. The Liberal record of wasted opportunities and failure in activities as crucial as education, national development, and, above all, foreign affairs provides unmistakable evidence of an inability to recognise - much less solve - the great problems which confront us. And time is running out.

Second, I fear that a situation is developing inside the A.L.P. in which precisely those policies which hold out the best hope of Australia's being able to survive and prosper as an integral part of the South-East A region may be jettisoned. If this is done, it will not be because the Party has evolved better policies, but because the frustrations of Opposition have driven a majority of the Party's decision-makers to accept the contention of Labor's opponents that policies unacceptable to the electorate are all that stand between the Party and office.

From the opposite direction, the Party's welfare is threatened by those who, recognising that its policy is fundamentally sound, persist in attributing every defeat or failure to the work of the D.L.P. or the Press. In practice, since neither of these agencies is within Labor's control, blaming them for the Party's difficulties means passing up opportunities to work out what the Party can do to help itself.

The assumption underlying the pamphlet is that shortcomings of organisation, not defective policy or the machinations of the enemy, account for Labor's present predicament, and that thinking about ways of getting rid of those shortcomings is an activity which A.L.P. members should regard not just as proper but as obligatory.

BUILDING A WIDER BASE

The electoral strength of the Liberal Party and its ability to attract support from sections of the community whose real interests lie with Labor spring from many sources. The historical accident which brought Sir Robert Menzies to power at the opening of the prosperous fifties, the contrast between unity in the ranks of the government and confusion and schism in those of Labor following the expulsion of the Santamaria conspirators, and the widespread use of Liberal allegiance as a badge of upward social mobility have all made their contribution to a total public image with which many Australians find it easy to identify. As circumstances change, and new needs arise, this image is adjusted by skilled public relations and advertising staff.

The D.L.P. is able to draw support from a wide social spectrum by exploiting Cold War wells of sick, negative anti-communism, and spreads its organisation through a Victorian church apparatus still heavily infiltrated and subverted by "Movement" ideologues and their National Civic Council bully boys.

By contrast with these rival organisations, the A.L.P. has remained essentially a class party, based on the votes of blue-collar industrial workers and their dependants. So long as this group constituted the largest single segment of the electorate, and so long as economic pressures encouraged them to maintain a relatively high degree of political solidarity, Labor could reasonably hope to elect governments without bothering very much about support from other groups. In these circumstances, the theoretical concept of the Party as an alliance of "workers by hand and by brain" remained theoretical; the involvement of white-collar workers as a group in the Party's affairs might or might not be welcome, but was never the object of energetic and sustained courtship.

But the blue-collar worker and his dependents each year constitute a relatively smaller part of the electorate as a whole. Moreover, even within this segment the easing of economic pressures, a general blunting of class consciousness and the leveling influence of the mass media have broken down traditional solidarity to a marked degree. In a survey of the Latrobe electorate in 1960, Creighton Burns found defections from the A.L.P. to other parties ranging as high as 40% among unskilled workers and 50% among skilled. As a basis for electoral success the blue vote is no longer adequate.

Recognition of this fact can lead to the conclusion that current social trends are against the Party, that at such a time the role of "principled opposition" is all that is available, and that any hope of a return to office must rest on the development of a crisis which the Liberal Government is unable to contain. Alternatively - and much more constructively - it can lead the Party to ask whether the process of social change which is eroding its traditional base may not at the same time be creating a new footing for it elsewhere, and whether

the time has not come to make the old ideal of an alliance between those who work with their hands and those who with their minds a political reality.

Throughout the history of the A.L.P., upward social mobility and its attendant status anxieties have interposed formidable barriers between the Party and the white-collar worker. Sons of blue-collar homes who found clerical employment all too frequently adopted conservative political affiliations as a means both of marking their rejection of the parental working-class identification and of underpinning a tenuous toe-hold on the lowest rung of the middle-class ladder. The rise of social mobility by a change of address in the early 'fifties extended a related pattern of behaviour to many whose occupations remained blue-collar in character; young workers and their wives moving to the suburbs increasingly confused the geographical shift out with a social shift up, and used a change from Labor to Liberal both as an overture to a new environment sensed to be conservative in character and as a badge of the new status thought to have been attained. Conservative political affiliations acquired for reasons of this character present a real problem for Labor. But halfway through the 'sixties it is becoming clear that important countervailing trends are beginning to operate. Automation is producing a decline in clerical and other "fringe" middle-class occupations similar to that already noted among blue workers. And a new, highly educated stratum of salaried professional workers is undergoing rapid expansion.

The administrators, scientific workers, teachers and technicians who make up this stratum are the forerunners of an army which will ultimately transform the character of the Australian work force. Secure in their middle-class identification, and equipped by their education not merely to read "The Bulletin" but to see through it, they owe no loyalty to the Liberal Party and have no particular antipathy for Labor. They are in fact a true "floating vote", inclined by occupational training and experience to adopt a "show me" attitude to the world around them, and to politics as one aspect of it. In many cases, wartime or postwar Labor measures made their careers possible. They are aware - in varying degrees - of the Galbraithian shortcomings of Australian society as the Liberals have shaped it, uneasy about the nation's role and future prospects in South-East Asia and wide open to the appeal of properly articulated democratic socialist alternatives. Far from constituting a threat to Labor, their emergence and increasing number mark the working of forces of social change which have much to offer the Party.

Decisions of the last two Federal Conferences of the A.L.P. in areas such as Education, Health, Economic Planning and the Social Utility of Science and Technology have created the nucleus of an electoral appeal to the salaried professional worker. At the State level, the Victorian Branch of the Party has wrenched around the context of educational debate from a sterile preoccupation with numbers to a sophisticated concern for purpose, content and organisation., and promises to deal in like fashion with other areas of interest to the group, including town planning and transport policy. If Labor can bring the salaried professional worker to see that present unsatisfactory conditions

in all these fields, as well as in other aspects of community well-being, are a direct and logical consequence of Liberal indifference to priorities, and U t a satisfactory rate of improvement can come only as a function of forward planning and a systematic allocation of resources within the general framework of democratic socialism, the Party will have met the intellectual requirements for a great broadening of its base.

Much more, of course, will be necessary to actually bring about this broadening and then consolidate it. A consciousness of identity in interest and in social function needs to be created between the blue-collar worker and the white, and this will involve breaking down social attitudes and work-place distinctions of very long standing. One key to this process is a much greater emphasis on industrial unionism¹, with attendant recruiting drives to see "staff" as well as "line" become members. The other is re-establishing the A.L.P. as a mass political movement actively engaging the loyalty of its supporters, offering opportunities for participation at every level to those who desire to work for its aims and, as a party itself involved at every level of community life.

LOCAL ORGANISATION

Between 1961 and 1965, A. L. P. membership in Victoria fell away from nearly fifteen thousand to between seven and eight thousand²; at the same time, many of these who continued to take out membership tickets ceased to attend Branch meetings or to play any part in Labor's affairs. The reaction of the Party to those developments was revealing; membership figures were made a closely guarded secret and the decline in Branch activity was attributed to prosperity - or television. Yet if these were the culprits, other parties clearly had answers to them. D.L.P. membership soared past 13,000³ and rank and file activity in the Liberal Party - however hollow - took on impressive proportions.

The need to rationalise a collapse of membership encompassing more or less equally numbers and morale has introduced into discussion at the administrative and executive levels of the Party two highly significant questions - whether sufficient interest or enthusiasm exists at a grass-roots level to constitute a "demand" for local Branches, and whether modern electioneering techniques leave room for a contribution from local electoral

¹ See Jack Grey's Fabian pamphlet "Have Australia's Unions a Future?"

² Sydney Morning Herald, 13/7/65. It is only fair to add that the State Secretary has challenged these figures. But even by his own accounts 'There was a decline each year between 1955 and 1960. Membership rose slightly in 1961 and 1962, was steady in 1963, fell in 1964, while for 1965 the membership returns to head office are already in excess of those for the year 1964.'

³ Ibid

activity.

Both these questions need to be answered with a resounding “No”. It is not local organisation as such which is obsolete, but a Branch structure which the Party has failed to keep up to date with the demands generated by rapid social change. And the contribution carefully planned local campaigning can make to overall electoral strategy is if anything more significant than ever.

Radical initiative, the urge for reform and willingness to make sacrifices of time and money for community betterment, are not extinct in Australian society. On the contrary, organisations embodying these qualities have never been more numerous, or attracted greater support. In the Consumers’ Association, the Immigration Reform Group, Freedom to Read, Community Aid Abroad, the State School Committees’ Association and many more, dedicated people are working out their commitment to private, limited visions of a better world. Potentially, these people are Labor activists, but fifteen years of frustration at the hands of Liberal Governments, together with Labor’s characteristic - although by no means invariable - lack of interest in the things which they consider important, have accustomed them to looking past the parties to ad hoc organisations for the solutions to their problems.

This need not be, for in any realistic estimate their causes — education, racial equality, individual liberties and the rest — are part and parcel of the democratic socialist philosophy, issues inextricably involved in Labor’s own vision of a good society. Moreover, one cannot have much to do with the broad spectrum of ad hoc reform movements without coming to appreciate that many of the people involved in them, in spite of the rebuffs and disappointments, still feel a sort of hopeful identification with the A.L.P. Given even a little reassurance that the Party shares their commitment to what one political scientist has dubbed “the new radicalism” and made to feel that the local organisation has a place for them, they would gladly commit themselves to Labor, and their leavening effect on the present membership would bring the Party new vigour and vitality.

But getting involved in the A.L.P. at present is not an easy matter. For every person who actually locates a Branch and sits out the two meetings he is required to attend before a membership ticket can be issued, dozens must give up. Why this should be so could hardly be better expressed than in the following extract from a report on the organisation of the British Labor Party:

“A new member joins the Party. Suppose he is also a newcomer to politics, with little knowledge of socialism or the details of party policy. He has joined the Labor Party because he is attracted by the ideas of fairness, justice and equality.

Shortly (if he is lucky) he is invited to a meeting, probably in a private house or in a gloomy school or church room. There may be eight or twelve people present. There will be minutes, correspondence, reports of officers, reports of councilors, reports of delegates to other bodies, and all the usual “business” into some of which (the usual chores) the new

member may at once be roped; he will probably find, what he is asked to do strange or humdrum. There may possibly be a speaker afterwards, talking on some random subject, followed, by an ill-informed discussion. He may go for months without hearing anything authoritative about the Party' s problems and actions; for years without ever discussing socialism. He will encounter little which will either educate him into a full understanding of what the Party stands for, or what it is doing; and little indeed which will inspire him⁴

Unfortunately, there is nothing in this account that will be tan familiar to L.L.P. members.

The simple fact is that conventional Branch organisation has been outstripped by the rising level of education and sophistication both of its traditional blue-collar membership and of the white-collar workers the Party should be seeking to attract. The Branch is too small a unit to be likely to produce the level of discussion needed to hold the interest of members already reasonably well informed and articulate. Its procedures mix administrative business with what passes for political education in a manner which bores both those whose major interest is organisation and those who join mainly to exchange ideas with fellow socialists. And, lacking the planning and support which a centrally administered program of political education should provide, its activities in this vital area tend to be without direction, purpose or imagination. To put the matter mildly, the wonder is not that Branches as at present constituted have lost something like half their members over the pant five years, but rather that they have survived at all.

The Party can do bettor than this.

The locality Branches should be abolished, and replaced by Units covering greater areas. In the city, state electorates would be suitable Units. For country areas, distance might dictate several Party Units each based on a large town. The aim should be a participating membership sufficiently large both to sustain morale and to provide a stimulating setting for political education and discussion.

Political education should be seen as -the main function of the new Party Units; if this is properly carried out there will be no difficulty in meeting the requirements for other Party activity. Units should meet regularly for sessions devoted to a planned programme of widening political horizons and deepening political understanding. Providing this programme and utilising in it all the methods of communication and instruction which can contribute to making education a vivid and lasting experience, must be the responsibility of the central Party apparatus which should see this aspect of its activity as one of prime importance. Unit meetings should be held in pleasant settings and at times when members will feel inclined to linger afterwards for refreshments and informal contact.

⁴ “Socialist Commentary”, October, 1965. Page vi.

Each Party Unit should elect an administrative committee, responsible for the conduct of its organisational business. Members who offer themselves for this committee will do so in the knowledge that they will be able to get on with the job free from the inhibitions and limitations posed by competition from other Branch activities under the old system, and will accordingly perform the better. Converse other members will know that regular reports from the administrative committee will keep them in touch with the organisational side of things, but that organisation will not periodically eat up the whole of their meeting time.

Where the Party Unit is based on a state electorate, a separate State Electorate Council will become superfluous, and its functions and rights will pass to the Unit' a administrative committee. Municipal, Federal and Legislative Province Campaign Committees will continue to be elected as before, but will meet only as often as required to carry out their organisational duties.

New, state-wide associations of A.L.P. members in occupations and professions organised by groups not affiliated to the A.L.P. should be set up and linked with the Party.

Both members of those associations and members of trade unions affiliated with the Party in the traditional manner, should be encouraged to play active parts in their Party Units. Satisfactory participation in the proceedings of a Party Unit should be a prerequisite to participation in Annual Conference or the holding of Central Executive office.

Training courses should be established in secretarial duties and the chairing of meetings, leading to the awarding of certificates of competence. The certificate of competence should be a prerequisite for election to relevant Party offices.

If these changes are made, they should result in Unit meetings sufficiently interesting and sufficiently well conducted to attract the sort of people the A.L.P. needs for members. Moreover, members attracted in this way, and receiving regular, systematic political education, will be well equipped and eager to discharge both the functions of a local Unit not yet touched upon - recruiting, prime generation of policy, scrutiny of the conduct of the central Party apparatus - and the functions of precinct organisation outlined in the next section.

LOCAL ELECTORAL WORK

The idea that electioneering may some day become wholly a matter of centrally directed operations through press, radio and television, is a product of wishful thinking on the part of those who would like to get rid of the Party Branches and make the A.L.P. wholly and solely the property of a few trade unions.

Significantly, neither of the American political parties, each beyond all comparison wealthier than any Australian party, has thought wholly

centralized campaigns worth a trial. In fact, many political organisations in economically developed countries seem to be coming to the conclusion that a direct, person-to-person approach in campaigning has been rendered more valuable, not less, by the frenetic and all-pervading television activity of commercial interests.⁵ It is time Labor took account of the trend.

But undertaking effective local campaigns requires an organizational structure much more sophisticated than that currently in use in the A.L.P. With a few honourable exceptions, of which Yarra is the best known, A.L.P. local electoral machinery is remote from the grassroots of campaigning. By and large, the Party's State Electorate Councils and Federal Electorate Assemblies are in the position of leaders thrust up from the ranks of a citizen army passing out orders of whose merit they are unsure to troops whose capacity and willingness to obey they have good reason to doubt. Since there is seldom any provision for systematic reporting back of success or failure, campaigns end as they begin - in the dark.

A first step away from chaos should be to break up metropolitan state electorates into areas each incorporating about five hundred houses - for want of better, the A term "precinct" can be used to designate such areas. Each precinct should constitute a unit of campaign planning, with a Precinct Chairman in charge of its development. Precinct Chairmen should be experienced, committed Party workers. Since there are fewer of this breed available now than for a very long time, the initial area of operations in each electorate will be limited to a handful of Precincts, but it is important that the quality of the operation should be maintained at a high level from the outset, and that Precinct Chairmen should have dedicated and idealistic views of what is expected of them. For these reasons, unseasoned members should not be given the job.

The first duty of a Precinct Chairman should be to survey his area and draw up a Precinct Register indicating political affiliations of residents Street by street. Given this basic information, he should endeavour to separate committed A.L.P. supporters from nominal ones and, again, those of the committed from whom some degree of active assistance may be hoped, and from those who are simply Labor voters. He should then begin feeding the groups he has identified with material prepared for their members by the central Party apparatus, cultivating the acquaintance of potential Labor activists, developing a list of donors to Party funds, and generally cultivating the extent and quality of Labor support in the Precinct. In addition, he should keep lists of residents of the Precinct likely to require postal votes or a car to the booth; of young people about to come of voting age; and of New Australians awaiting naturalisation.

All this amounts to a fairly formidable assignment but just how onerous will

⁵ For an example, see the description of the function of the Young Republicans of California in P.11. White's "The Making of the President, 1964". Pages 118—120 and 126.

depend upon the thoroughness with which the Precinct Chairman attacks his work in the early stages. One of the prime aims of any Chairman will be to develop into Precinct helpers as many as possible of the potential activist group of Labor supporters. Once this has been achieved, the Chairman himself will be left with more time to think about the problem of winning over fringe supporters of other parties, further developing Precinct helpers to the state of Party membership, and other second stage challenges.

One of the gains from Precinct organisation will be that Labor voters moving from inner to outer suburbs need, no longer be left with the irrational feeling that they have come to live in conservative territory. An early visit from the Precinct Chairman or one of his helpers will often avert an "other-directed" decision to change political affiliation, while "fringe" Liberals and D.L.P. supporters, relieved of their loneliness in unfamiliar surroundings by a friendly call and an invitation for a cup of tea from the Precinct Chairman or his wife, may subsequently be detached for Labor.

A further gain will be precision in the direction of propaganda to specific groups, rather than on the present "shot-gun" basis of sending the same material to everyone in the hope that it will be appropriate to some. Precision of approach under conditions of Precinct organisation will make it feasible for the central apparatus to divert larger portions of its budget to the study, preparation and quality of printed matter for letterbox and doorstep distribution. The "bad old days" when ill-conceived, wretchedly designed hand-outs, semi-legibly printed on the worst grades of newsprint, rotted in hundreds of letterboxes for every one which was taken and read, will be truly relegated to the past.

This raises broader questions of support from the central apparatus for Precinct organizations. Clearly, the Precinct Chairman is the Party's principal agent in the field, but it is too much to ask that he should prepare his material as well as distribute it, and indeed such a function is one for an expert team in which the motivation research worker, the psychologist, the designer and the copywriter collaborate closely to create a product of maximum effectiveness.

Again, the morale of Precinct Chairmen and the vigour and enthusiasm they bring to their work will be among the Party's greatest assets. It will be worth the Party's while to spend time and ingenuity developing them. A periodical specifically slanted to Precinct Chairmen, detailing successes achieved, new approaches tried out, ideas gained from overseas sources and the like, may seem a feasible enterprise, while regular conferences to which all Chairmen can be invited will clearly be required.

VOTES FROM WOMEN

Statistically, women are the conservative sex. Labor recognises that getting

an adequate share of their vote poses a special problem, and calls for a distinctive approach. This recognition is expressed in its maintenance of a separate, semi-independent organisational structure - the Women' a Central Organising Committee. Unfortunately, having established this base for operations, the Party seems to wash its hands of the problem. Exactly what the Committee is expected to do, and how it should set about doing it, are matters apparently far from clear even to those holding its key offices. As a result, the activities which the Committee in fact carries on are unlikely to fulfill the Party's original, hope by winning it significant additional support within this large, diverse and preoccupied community group.

In discussing organising specially directed at women it is important to appreciate that only some women are involved. Political principle and organisational efficiency alike dictate that independent working women single or with grown-up families, should be approached on the same basis as men and regarded as simply a part of the overall challenge facing Units, Precincts and the Party' a Trade Union Liaison Officer. But the great majority of housewives, whose interests are circumscribed by the domestic routine and whose timetables are governed by the demands of their children, exist behind barriers so effective against conventional political approaches that special measures are required. It is with this group that the Women's Central Organising Committee should be primarily concerned - and has so far largely failed to make contact.

Instead, the Committee has become the catering department of the A.L.P., with useful sidelines as a canvassing group for elections, a source of recommendations on issues of policy considered especially relevant to women and a pressure group for the selection of women candidates for winnable seats. This is a great pity, not only because the real purpose of the operation is virtually ignored, but because some of the most capable members of the A.L.P. are in fact members of the W.C.O.C., and under its present terms of reference conspicuously under-utilise their talents. The Vietnam Rally/Folk Concert which recently attracted seven thousand young people to the Myer Music Bowl was largely organised by a member of the W.C.O.C.C. which also includes several municipal councillors noted for outstanding contributions to local government. All in all, the human resources of the Committee are such that it would be well able to begin its proper function once given the appropriate directives.

As has already been indicated, this function should be to bring as many housewives as possible into contact with Labor ideas and -especially in the outer suburbs, where so many equate "Labor" with "Communist" and "Communist" with indefinable menace - with Labor people. The means adopted should be completely flexible, although here again it is worth emphasising the need to get away from meetings weighed down with Minutes, Correspondence, Apologies, and all the rest of the paraphernalia, and to keep political education and organisation apart from one another. Indeed, the object should be not to set up a separate network of women' a groups parallel with

the Party Units but to create attitudes sympathetic towards the Party among the greatest possible number of women, and encourage the most receptive to join their local units.

Precinct Chairmen should be asked to identify Labor-minded women who would be willing to make their homes available and act as nuclei for small, friendly, neighbourhood coffee groups, which would hold their meetings to suit the convenience of those expected to participate. Such groups would need no formal structure, and carry on no formal "business but it would be a function of the W.C.O.C. - in consultation with the Political Education Division of the Party's central apparatus - to provide them with suitable speakers, film programmes and other activities designed to heighten their awareness of political issues and current events and to develop attitudes favourable to the A.L.P.

On a more ambitious level, the W.C.O.C. should organise one-day conferences at the electorate level, on themes of special interest to women and with speakers drawn not only from the narrowly political sphere but from experts on the subjects under discussion. The hunger of many housebound women for intellectual stimulus of this sort has often been demonstrated, and if babysitting facilities are provided a very satisfactory response should be obtained.

Finally, there should be regular central conferences of women members of the A.L.P. to discuss issues raised at the neighbourhood and electorate gatherings and consider Party policy and publicity in the light of the views expressed by non-members at these gatherings. Members of the Propaganda and Publicity Division should sit in on these conferences, which may be expected to provide invaluable information on the way in which the housewife sees political issues and how the Party can best put its story across to her.

THE CENTRAL APPARATUS

Measured against the complex business of running a great modern political party, the central apparatus of the A.L.P. in Victoria is inadequate to the point of irrelevance. And this is not due to financial stringency alone. The administrative concept under which two of the three "career" officials the Party can afford are used as peripatetic organisers, is out of touch with the times. Given the amount of work crying out to be done and the sheer impossibility of getting it done with the resources available, lavish expenditure of traveling time for organising tours is an extravagance which the Party simply cannot support. Moreover, thinking about senior Party administrators as "organisers" lets the elected officers responsible for running the Party between conferences avoid facing up to the fact that Party administration has become something totally different in kind from "organising" in the trade union sense, and calls for quite distinct sorts of staff and professional training.

Broadly speaking, the activities of the central apparatus of any political party fall into three areas - research and political education, propaganda and publicity, and organisation. In all three, current A.L.P. performance leaves room for marked improvement. A start towards achieving such improvement should be made by dividing the apparatus into three divisions, and putting a career official in charge of each with the General Secretary exercising overall control in addition to his divisional responsibility. Assuming continuing shortage of funds, it would be a major function of each divisional head to recruit voluntary staff and organise their services to the Party' a maximum advantage. Properly done, this could take the A.L.P. a long way to wards parity with parties and organisations able to sustain payrolls many times larger than its own.

A. Research and. Political Education Division

Research and political education are activities barely touched upon by the existing central apparatus of the A.L.P., their existence so tenuous that they barely qualify even as the "Cinderellas" of the system. Yet Labor Parties in other countries take this area of their activity very seriously indeed. In 1964 the British Labor Party had a total of fifteen full time staff working in research and associated fields. The Norwegian Labor Party supports no less than three Labor Colleges, each offering four three-month residential training courses a year; taking a Labor College course is prerequisite to the holding of any Party office, and the students' expenses while on course are met by the Party. The German Social Democratic Party spends £840,000 per annum on political education, including two one-week schools for speakers, ten one-week schools for Young Socialists, and between fifty and sixty weekend schools in its twenty-one Party districts. The S,D.P. also has a nine months training course for Party organisers half devoted to theoretical instruction and half to practical work; runs conferences for various occupational and professional groups within the party, and prepares and distributes a large variety of educational publications on the nature and implications of the Party philosophy and programme.⁶

Political education as a function of the central apparatus of the A.L.P. should aim first at providing a purposeful, efficient and imaginative programme of instruction and indoctrination for every Party Unit in the state. The content of this programme should be selected to deepen the Unit member's understanding of his politics and raise the extent and quality of his commitment to the Party and its programme. Its presentation should employ the most appropriate aids to communication, taking into account the rapid pace of technological innovation in this field. The result should be a feature of Party life which elicits a positive response from members, the loss of which would be sharply felt if it were suddenly withdrawn, and quality of which is such that supporters of the Party will seek membership for the privilege of taking part in it.

⁶ "Socialist Commentary", October 1965. Pages xxvii - xxx.

The flow of information in political education should not be all one way. At appropriate points, the programme should call on Units and their members to discuss and research into local manifestations of state-wide or national problems such as education, transport, unemployment or the effects of drought, and the returns from such work can be collated into central reports for publication.

In addition to its work for the Units, the Political education programme should provide specialist courses for various areas of Party work (chairmanship and secretarial duties are only the most obvious needs), more advanced treatments of topics touched on in the Unit work for members with special interests, and training in public speaking. As a base for this activity the Party should approach the Trades Hall Council with an offer to take over the existing Labor College. If this is declined, the Party must establish its own college.

Turning to Research, it is quite basic that the A.L.P. should have at its command the services of people capable of carrying on long-term research at a thoroughly professional level. The purpose of such research is to provide those responsible for policy making at the political level with a choice of thoroughly explored options in each area of the Party's programme. In the light of the Party's responsibilities as alternative government of the nation, no less thorough approach can be justified.

At the next level, the Party requires the services of people who are able to carry on the limited, day to day fact required for the briefing of Party spokesmen and decision-makers and to answer questions from the public on the nature, justification and implications of policy.

Fortunately, in recruiting teams to carry out research, the gathering of information and the planning and preparation of programmes of political education, the divisional head should have little difficulty. Despite periodic rebuffs from Party members senior enough to know better, teachers and academics are two groups in the community which have maintained a high level of support for Labor. Given an opportunity, many would be glad to give this support practical form.

B. Propaganda and Publicity Division

Under current arrangements, propaganda is prepared jointly or separately by the General Secretary, the Publicity Committee and the Party's advertising agency. In form it ranges from the Party paper "Fact" through weekly columns in two Melbourne dailies, radio programmes publications on policy, public meetings and rallies, and printed material for electioneering, to some limited excursions into television. In addition, there is printed matter produced independently by the Party's various campaign committees and by politically inclined trade unions. Predictably in the case of the independent ventures, and rather surprisingly in the case of those centrally prepared or commissioned, the overall impression is of lack of inspiration in conception, lack of competence in design and lack of finish in production.

This situation arises from failure to bring adequate professional muscle to bear, and from the half-truth that quantity can make amends for quality. The Party's meagre resources are stretched to provide a flood of varied material, only seldom achieving mediocrity and usually a good deal less. Intelligently applied, they might provide adequate quantities of a very few carefully thought out and effective items. Where enterprises with motorcars or soap to market spend millions of pounds to secure year-round services from tens of expert advisers and technicians the A.L.P. utilises its advertising agency only at election times, and then, if the results are any indication, not to best advantage.

Accepting the proposed overall reorganisation of the central apparatus, it will be important that the career officer appointed to the Propaganda and Publicity Division be someone with the knowledge of market survey technique, the background in media work, the general discrimination and the flair for public relations necessary on the one hand to distinguish good publicity work from bad, and on the other to have a reasonable chance of getting the Party's story across through as many unpaid avenues as possible. Moreover, he will need the strength of character to pull the Party's conception of publicity out of the rut in which it stuck some time prior to 1940 and get it moving along lines more suited to the sixties. To take one example, the present practice of blanketing the entire electorate with one leaflet or pamphlet is expensive and demonstrably ineffective. The possibilities of precinct organisation for selective distribution geared to political affiliations has already been discussed and will necessarily present the new Divisional Head. with a formidable problem. The process can be taken still another step further with campaigning geared to identifiable occupational groups within the community, national minorities, etc. Again, turning to television, it is not enough simply to recognise that a new medium has arrived and then pour money into it; an organisation which really wants to succeed will interest itself seriously and on a continuing basis in how its particular aims can best be presented and how the people it must put before the public can be trained for this process to best advantage. Apart from some of the 1961 Federal election programmes, A.L.P. television has been deficient in evidence of such interest.

Voluntary assistance for the Propaganda and Publicity Division should be no great problem since journalism, public relations and advertising, like education, are fields in which support for Labor is still relatively strong. Subject to it being established that the Party is "on the level" and prepared to treat advice seriously, a high calibre team could be assembled with ease.

C. Organising Division

The Organising Division of the central Party apparatus should be under the direct control of the State Secretary; its responsibilities should be to see that effect is given to decisions of the Central Executive, to service and co-ordinate the work of the various organs of the Party - Precincts, Units Women's, Young Labor, Policy Committees, etc. - and to raise funds. At election times, it should undertake the overall co-ordination of the Party campaign.

Just what sort of volunteer assistance the State Secretary might seek in implementing these functions must depend upon his own interests, capabilities and personality, but two possibilities should be singled out as of particular importance: a Fund Raising Officer and a Trade Union Liaison Officer.

On the matter of finance, the report on the British Labour Party is worth quoting again:

“... Weakness is our excessively conservative, not to say niggardly, attitude towards finance. True, the Labour Party grew up as a working class Party, and at a time when workers find little enough to spare; a few pennies a month was probably as much as they were able to give to any cause. But today, when the value of money has completely changed, when earnings have increased beyond recognition, when hundreds of millions are being spent every year on gambling, on drinks and on smokes, we still think in terms of the same few pennies. The British Labour Party member falls behind - almost fantastically behind - what socialists in other, not necessarily richer, countries are prepared to give for their political parties. The result is that we live always on a shoe we work in drab, off-putting surroundings we exploit our staff; we waste our time and energies on antiquated methods of propaganda and electioneering and on money-raising activities which too often bring in the poorest of results.”⁷

Again there is nothing in the passage that any member of the A.L.P. will find unfamiliar.

The attack on this problem should begin with implementation of a more realistic policy on membership subscriptions. The present rate of 10/- should be retained for pensioners and students, but members earning normal incomes should be expected to pay a subscription of at least £5. This is accepted practice in the D.L.P. and it is open to question whether say member of the A.L.P. who regards it as excessive is sufficiently serious about his commitment to the Party to be worth keeping on the books.

Along with the increase in membership subscriptions, a new category of Associate should be introduced. Associates should not be entitled to participate in the affairs of the Party, but would simply express their affiliation with it by accepting an Associate's Ticket and paying a subscription of, say, 10/- Such a scheme would lend itself to implementation through the Precinct system of organisation, and a target of ten Associates for every full member could be adopted.

These changes in themselves, together with the contributions of the Trade Union Movement at current levels, will still leave the A.L.P. short of funds. The Organising Division of the central apparatus should therefore include a Fund

⁷ “Socialist Commentary”, October 1965. Page xxxi.

Raising Officer responsible for studying various means of supplementing the Party a income, from the traditional "slush fund" to the variety of competitions and other activities used by Branches to finance local campaigns, standardising procedures for maximum effect and conducting a campaign to see that those procedures best suited for local use are adopted throughout the Party and given energetic support.

While the A.L.P. has good reason to be grateful to the Trade Union Movement for its financial support, it should not be content with the extent to which unions encourage their members to take out Party membership or participate in political activity. There are unions affiliated to the Party and entitled to representation at its Annual Conference who have difficulty finding enough A.L.P. members within their ranks to make up a full delegation. Again, pledges of assistance given the Party by unions at election time are small enough as promises, but smaller still when it comes to performance.

This situation should improve if there is better contact between the rank and file of union members and the A.L.P. A Trade Union Liaison Officer should be appointed with responsibility for campaigning through the unions for greater participation by their members in the political aspect of the work of the labour movement. Such an officer would draft press releases on the plans of the Party and difficulties confronting it for trade union journals, visit offices and meetings to enlist closer co-operation with the Party, and generally seek to encourage an association expressive of the community of interest between industrial and political organisation.

Another aspect of the work of the Organising Division should be servicing the Policy Committees. When these Committees were first set up, they were under the supervision of the Standing Policy Committee which kept in close touch with their proceedings, saw that satisfactory rates of progress were maintained and made recommendations to the Party's Executive Officers on membership and other organizational matters. Since this committee was wound up, the individual Policy Committees have had to fend for themselves as best they can, and their members can be forgiven if they are beginning to feel that the Party does not put any very high value on their work.

This is a highly unsatisfactory state of affairs. Although the procedure laid down for the selection of initial membership did not give in all cases strong or well-balanced Committees, and although the operational framework and membership of the Standing Policy Committee did not make for ease or efficiency in its conduct of business, significant progress was made - and to some extent continues to be made. To repair the damage which has been done and improve the overall functioning of the programme, the Standing Policy Committee should be re-established with a membership sufficiently illustrious to demonstrate that policy is a matter which the Party takes very seriously indeed. This Committee need not meet very often, but should have a secretary delegated sufficient discretionary powers to make him in effect Co-ordinator of Policy Committees. In particular, he should be authorised to scrutinise the membership of the Committees and make recommendations for

the removal of members who are not pulling their weight, and the filling of vacancies with suitably qualified replacements hand-picked from the whole membership of the Party. In cases where it is known that sympathetically inclined people outside the Party can make significant contributions to the work of particular Committees, it should be his responsibility to devise ways of enabling them to participate. Finally, he should act as liaison officer with the Research and political Education Division, indicating the requirements of the Committees in terms of the re-search services previously indicated to be necessary to provide the ranges of thoroughly explored options on which decisions of policy should be based.

REPRESENTATION

At the 1965 Victorian Conference of the A.L.P., some seven thousand Branch members, grouped under State Electorate Councils, were represented by sixty-two delegates; trade unions affiliated with the Party sent three hundred and thirty six delegates. In both cases the basis of representation was the same - a delegate for up to five hundred members, another for from five hundred to one thousand members and extras at the rate of one for each additional thousand members or part thereof - but where the Branches received representation on the basis of committed, financial members of the Party, the unions received it on their industrial membership, and sent delegates for Liberal, D.L.P. and Communist members and supporters in their ranks just as if they were A.L.P. members. Some unions actually had difficulty finding enough A.L.P. members to man their delegations. The anomalous situation therefore existed of the actual members of the Party being entitled to little more than a sixth of the delegates to its supreme governing body and being in a minority to delegates in fact representative of members and supporters of other political parties.⁸

When it came to electing the Central Executive, the great majority of trade union delegates to the Conference cast their votes in accord with an "Official Ticket". This ticket had in theory been prepared prior to the conference at a meeting to which twenty-eight unions each sent a representative. In fact its antecedents went back further still, to a meeting at which only thirteen of the representatives were present. The decisions of this meeting were reached consistently by narrow majorities, but were subsequently imposed upon the twenty-eight, and ultimately steam-rolled through the Conference by disciplined vote of Union delegations, in some cases policed by compulsory exchange of completed ballot papers within delegations.

It is difficult to envisage anything more demoralising for members of an organisation than the knowledge that the machinery of internal democracy is rigged against them that they can neither elect office-bearers or themselves be

⁸ The A.L.P.'s own estimate is that only 55% of trade unionists vote Labor ("Age" 20/1/66)

elected as office-bearers except on sufferance and that their power to influence the conduct of the organisation is in fact illusory. Yet this is the position of all A.L.P. members at present - and the demoralisation, which has halved membership over a five year period and blanketed the enthusiasm of the vast majority of those who hang on with cynicism and despair, is clearly visible to any except those who refuse to look.

If the essential basis of trust between the industrial and political elements of the Party is to be restored; if there is to be sympathetic understanding of one another's problems and a proper appreciation of the A.L.P. as a partnership between industrial and political interests, involving obligations and conferring rights on each, changes must take place. At the very least, the basis of Conference representation should be altered so that unions and S.E.C.s become entitled to a second delegate once their membership passes one hundred; but a better system would be direct Branch (i.e. Unit) representation subject to tests of corporate membership and activity during the preceding year. At the same time, the Central Executive should become a federal structure representative of the various groups within the Party and elected by them; its twenty-four ordinary members might be made up of fourteen union representatives, three from metropolitan S.E.C.s, three from country S.E.C.s, one from the W.C.O.C., one from the Y.L.A. and one each from the State Parliamentary Labor Party and the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party, while one Vice-President could be an S.E.C. delegate and the other a union delegate.

OBSTACLES TO CHANGE

While to face the sort of problems which have been discussed in this pamphlet and seek solutions to them should be the most important single qualification for Executive office in the A.L.P. Failing a clear lead in this direction, the least the Party can accept from those entrusted with its management is readiness to encourage, consider and implement suggestions from rank and file members.

Unfortunately, it is not clear that such willingness exists, or even that gains once made can be maintained. When the Scoresby Committee of Inquiry into Representation and Decision Making in the LL.P. attempted to gain information in support of its proposals from Branches and S.E.Cs., it triggered reflexes of panic and repression at the top of the Party. The forward-looking decision of the 1964 Conference which gave S.E.C. Conference delegates the right to elect three representatives to the Central Executive was killed before it had even had a trial. Actions of this character constitute disturbing evidence of a desire to impose unquestioning conformity on the Party, and this at a time when original and constructive thought and initiatives are needed more urgently than ever before in its history.

More than this, they are indicative of the attitude of distrust towards Branches and their members which has grown up in certain trade union circles influential within the A.L.P. There is no point in mincing words about this attitude. It was spelled out quite clearly by Mr. Bill Brown in a letter he wrote to Conference delegates prior to the 1965 Conference. Referring to the decision to deprive the S.E.C. delegates of the right to elect their own representatives to the Executive, Mr. Brown wrote "It is the policy of the Executive that these representatives be elected by the whole conference SO AS TO ENSURE THAT THE WILL OF CONFERENCE AND ITS ADHERENCE TO THE PRESENT SOCIALIST CRITERIA WILL BE MAINTAINED." In other words, the loyalty of S.E.C. delegates to "the present socialist criteria" is suspect, and the only way to see that "reliable" S.E.C. "representatives" are elected to the Executive is to have it done by a ballot in which those to be "represented" are out-voted five to one by delegates from the "trustworthy" section of the Party.

Those who think along these lines no doubt sincerely believe that complete trade union domination is the only way to maintain the socialist character of the A.L.P., but the consequences of putting this belief into practice have been organisational decay and electoral disaster for the Party.

The lesson of the years since 1955 is clear. An Executive consisting solely of trade union officials and those who hold their places on trade union sufferance is an Executive unequal to the demands of running a great modern political party, and to the challenge of winning over to socialism an electorate increasingly white-collar and educated in character.

And it is not hard to see why this should be so. The energies of dedicated Labor union leaders are so taken up with defeating the challenge of the Santamaria forces in their organisations that they have little left over to spare for the A.L.P. As a result, they are able to do little more with the Party than keep the machinery and a skeleton Branch structure intact. Again, all their experience has been gained in organising an industrial working class no longer in itself large enough or sufficiently united to elect governments. Creating the necessary additional electoral following among social groups of a very different character involves an appreciation of new problems and a flexibility in accepting new approaches and techniques which given the pressures under which the dedicated union official works, can be achieved only rarely.

REACTIONS

Cynics and those obsessed with Santamaria or the Press will rate what I have written futile. Others will agree with the substance of my proposals, but object to their appearance in print. Against these views I set lay own - there is nothing wrong with the A.L.P. which cannot be cured by a hard, honest scrutiny of Party organisation, followed up with ruthless action to correct the faults which this scrutiny reveals. But so long as information on the state of

the Party is suppressed, intra-Party communication discouraged, and a climate of opinion in which honest criticism can be stigmatised as disloyalty prevails, entrenched inertia and indifference will preserve things as they are. For change to begin, ordinary members of the Party must become aware of what is wrong, and of what can be done about it.

Can this happen too soon?