

An ALP Programme 1977 onwards – as the medium becomes the message.
F.E. Emery Easter 77

The program of the ALP was formulated in the early twenties, fifty years ago. The lapse of time would mean little if the structure of society and the conditions of the workers had little changed.

- A. I suggest that there have been qualitative changes. I list them as follows:
- a) the prospect of a World War has all but disappeared. The individual person does not have regard himself, or herself, as forever being potential cannon fodder for the States as it sees fit. Nor his children as potential bronzed ANZACS.
 - b) The whip of unemployment and poverty has no justification in terms of technical inability to produce.
 - c) No institution and no institutional creed can be accepted as ideal-seeking. Only individuals can be ideal-seeking

The second proposition became undeniable when we saw the fantastic productivity of the WW2 period – despite the massive mobilization of people into non-productive military forces.

The first proposition became undeniable when within months of each both the USA and the USSR got thermo-nuclear weapons.

Right after this Kerouac and Ginsberg announced that the day of the third proposition had arrived. The counter culture started to unfold.

We have still had wars since 1956, we still have poverty in all lands and we still have institutions acting with the arrogance of being greater than the individuals. But the ground on which these things happen is no longer the same. The wars do not add fuel to international tensions – they are followed by more secure détentés, firmer arrangements to seal off and isolate the next of the petty wars. Poverty is no longer judged by the consumption standards of middle class westerners. China, and now India can talk of the villages as their future and western countries can seriously discuss zero economic growth and guaranteed incomes. The great institutions of science, universities, churches and political parties, even the Westminster system, are more scorned than lauded, even by their members.

This shift is so profound that even the ideals of the period of modern industrialism ring hollow. They do not resonate with the heart beats of people. They do nothing to inspire people to common endeavour.

Try ‘Liberty, Equality and Fraternity’

Try ‘Solidarity Forever’, brother.

Try the core ideals of western culture, Plenty, the Good, the Truth and the Beautiful.

Any second-hand car dealer in Sydney would fervently subscribe to the L.E.F. stuff, and the Sydney police force is very strong on the solidarity bit.

The pursuit of the western ideals over the centuries has brought us to the pretty state we have been in the twentieth century. Even Beauty has come to cost millions of dollars and is represented by a manic drunken spree with a pot of blue

paint. Science and the universities are the new guardians of the Truth, need more be said. The churches and the State are the guardians of all that is good. And good old industry looks after the Plenty thing.

- B. The above is by way of a serious comment and an outburst. My justification for the outburst is fully spelt out in *Futures We're in and In pursuit of ideals (now part of the same manuscript – ME)*. Here I wish only to make the point that those old values and ideals poorly represent what human beings are about; as if that were not reason enough to search for new ideals, they have been historically woven into institutional arrangements that are divisive and exploitative within our societies, and between ourselves and the non-western societies. Note that one of the first developments after Kerouac and Ginsberg blew the first bugle at the walls of Moloch was widespread interest in the ideals embodied in Eastern religion.

The two documents I referred to in the preceding paragraph were not written for fun, for profit or for personal advancement. They were written because I do not think we can cope with the social turbulence we have bequeathed ourselves unless we can identify the human ideals that are latent in our best acts: Latent in those acts we see that we would wish to emulate and wish others to emulate. The answers I gave there are the best answers I have come up with. They are if you wish to so put it, my biases. I will try to back-track from where I think I am at to where I think the ALP and its ancient platform is at. Two things determinedly will not overlook: -

1. every institution, every grand old political party, must discard its pretensions to be the bearer of ideals; they never were and they never could be.
2. no institution, or political party, can legitimately claim to be unconcerned with any of the human ideals pursued by its members. The Pontius Pilate act is not on, profit for profit's sake is not on, nor is any form of the numbers racket. (numbers being necessarily uni-dimensional). It must no longer be possible for universities, for instance, to claim that in the pursuit of truth, the pursuit of excellence, anything goes – defence research, destruction of the confidence of the less-abled and the purging of heretics etc.

- C. Where is the ALP at, in terms of moving into the future (not just the next election or two)?

1. (Excuse the jargon but some new phrases have been found necessary in order to grasp the broad sweep of the changes that confront us)

I think a special style has emerged with governments like those of Wilson, Whitlam, Trudeau Palme and Dunstan. They have been sucked into the world of the 'new utopians' – the many – degreed experts who with their computers, data-bases mathematical models and theorems lay claim to solving problems of optimum resource allocation and the like. They are sophisticated solutions for a 'disturbed-reactive' world

that is no longer with us. They are destructive in the turbulent world we are now in because they set off processes we do not understand and they throw so much weight behind 'the planned changes' that we have difficulty in re-directing them even when it is obvious they are going adrift e.g. freeways. Slum clearance, tertiary education. This approach may win friends in universities because that is their variation on the numbers racket. Who needs friend like that? It will not win many friends amongst those on the receiving end of such planning. My concern is that within such 'planning models' there are no parameters called ideals.

2. The other side of the ALP's adoration of the expert (who is not, of course, the prince) is its general put down of the ordinary individual. The programs flaunted by the ALP, for which we are supposed to vote, too frequently convey the message that we are slobs. That our earnings should be taken off of us so that wise decisions about our education, health care, retirement etc can be made for us by bureaucratic systems working to expertly designed plans.

This sounds like heresy, I know. But I do not think the ideal of nurturance is the same ideal as 'christian charity'. I do not think the concept of the Welfare State has much to do with the ideal of nurturance. People grow on nurturance, they shrivel on charity; eat out their dignity and their soul. Base lines for existence are needed and there is no way that we should tolerate the hell on earth of the skid-rows that every major US city has in order to preach its brand of Christianity. However, the concept of the Welfare State reaches into the pocket of every working person. They are all getting a message about their meaninglessness, not a message from the Good Samaritan. Would it not be better if they got a message from the ALP that their dignity and personal growth was our social gold-mine? Impractical? No.

I doubt if the ALP has ever discussed the dignity due to the working person, let alone base any policy on the achievement of such dignity. Wage justice, fair day's work for a fair days pay, shorter working time, anti-victimisation, yes. These matters do not protect a persons dignity, at best they minimise his or her exposure to being put down. There is no point in pretending that nationalization has anything to do with the issue, a foreman in a State Brickyard is still a bloody foreman, and the same goes for the manager.

Dignity and personal growth are possible for any man-jack who walks into a job. The conditions needed to ensure this are under managerial control. The achievement of these conditions just about always enable the organization to provide better products of services at less cost. So where is the hang up?

I think management and the ALP are in collusion on this hang up. They both proceed from the unspoken assumption that the ordinary person is a slob; that they do not need freedom, they need help; that they need to be looked after a dedicated band of degreed parliamentarians, with loyal civil servants.

The addiction to centralised planning and to the notions of the Welfare States almost inevitably lead labour to over-govern when in office.

3. As a last point I would observe that the ALP is overly devoted to parliamentarianism from the branch level to Canberra. This pretty well ensures a lack of contact with the people and inattention to their needs. Vote-catching programs are pulled out of the hat; they are not raised by the people because they have no way of raising them.

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truths in the ALP that I almost gave up in despair. There is just one glimmer of hope. It is the concept of 'participatory democracy'. Many of the older ALP supporters would still recall G.D.H Cole's writings on this; many of the younger supporters would have heard the rumblings in the counter-culture; the industrial wing know (nut?) is a matter to be taken seriously.

There are three features that appealed to Cole and currently have wide appeal:

- a. it restores the whole individual to the centre of the stage and reduces the institutions to functional associations.
- b. It creates a continuous learning process for the people to understand what they need to govern themselves about and how to do so. This is a little different to doing Civics at school and later listening to a few campaign speeches.
- c. It is a process which will generally draw people together to find ways of achieving joint ends; not line them up into opposing camps around ill-defined issues.

There is the practical aspect:

Participative forms can be introduced piecemeal and initially at the local levels where people are most knowledgeable and confident.

The aim should be to introduce participatory forms into all local governments and into all work-places and schools. It would be up to people themselves to introduce such forms into their voluntary organizations. As a further move participatory forms should be developed for the regional councils proposed by the Australian Assistance Plan and the Industry Councils proposed by the Jackson Committee. (e.g. my proposals for the White paper).

Later on, ways could be considered to extend the principle to State and Federal levels of government.

Drawing people into the processes of governing themselves in all aspects of their lives would be a cultural revolution very much greater than gaining compulsory education or gaining the vote. It would, incidentally, be the end of the party system.

An ALP policy in the arts should not duck these issues.

Beauty is an ideal that it must be seen to be high in the list of concerns of the ALP. But it must be the beauty that shows through in every way we arrange our physical and social affairs – not National Art Galleries and Opera Houses and not NCDS's show case. I think the ALP should be associated with the emergence of some beauty in the inner and western suburbs, and our country towns. To create conditions where it is easier for our artistic talents to achieve excellence is great; to set up institutional arrangements to pursue excellence is a negation of democratic purposes.

The over-riding task is, I think, to enlighten our people to the fact that they can help bring beauty into their lives. To rid them of the deadening feeling that beauty is only for the rich and the leisure class.

FURTHER NOTES ON COMMUNICATION

Our study on television is not the last word (see "A Choice of futures" herein). It does however adequately evidence that TV is not a suitable medium for educational purposes. It is a great way of alerting people to a new product, a new idea. It has to be followed up in print and radio if people are to be given an understanding of what the new

product is, or the new idea. If the ALP is going to lead the Australian people toward ideals they feel but cannot express then it would seem that TV should be used with great caution.

NATIONALIZATION AND TRUSTEESHIP

I suggest that the watershed between corporate irresponsibility (public and private) and responsibility is in enforcing the rule that property rights never do more than give privileges of prior access to resources that remain social resources, and hence the privileges remain dependent upon the care, conservation and development of these resources to standards the society would wish.

Three issues

Communication

If the communication task was to get the notion of participative democracy across to the membership I can think of no better way than trying to change the branch rules to this form. The continuity and stability could probably be achieved by restricting the officer positions to those who had served at committee level.

The public campaign would probably need to stress 'bringing people into government' versus taking government legislated goodies to the people; extending real equality to all of those who are effectively second-class citizens.

In any case the communication problem would be essentially different to trying to convince people that they need more Cwlth scholarships for the bright kids or national superannuation. How on earth would they know what those goodies would cost them? How could they trust the expert assessments mobilised by each side? The latter type of communications makes the parties the victims of our version of Madison Ave.

The Arts end of society

Until the mid-fifties it seemed that industrial society was the death of the folk arts and crafts. Only a few dedicated and awfully serious people kept recording our traditions.

Since the mid-fifties there has been a tremendous burgeoning of arts created by the people for the people. Tin Pan Ally has had to buy into the acts, not sell them. I guess this development happened without the awareness of some of our older and very serious Labour Ministers.

I think we need to ask just who is being improved by a night at the opera (the Marx Bros?) Chamber music with Musica Viva? Perhaps these events lead their spectators to create a heightened cultural atmosphere in our foundries, employment offices and our schools? Perhaps, in a general way, it just humanises them? Like it did for the German culture?

To bring the Art Council into existence Coombes and Battersby went into collusion with elitist groups. These groups still govern the Boards of the Council. They have little sympathy with money being diverted to Community Arts Councils.

If social democracy is to have a unique appeal to the people it must be in the dignity it bestows on them through participative democracy. I have seen how this works in the workplace so it is no longer just a theory.

Given this opportunity people will start to shape the concrete programs they need for their welfare.