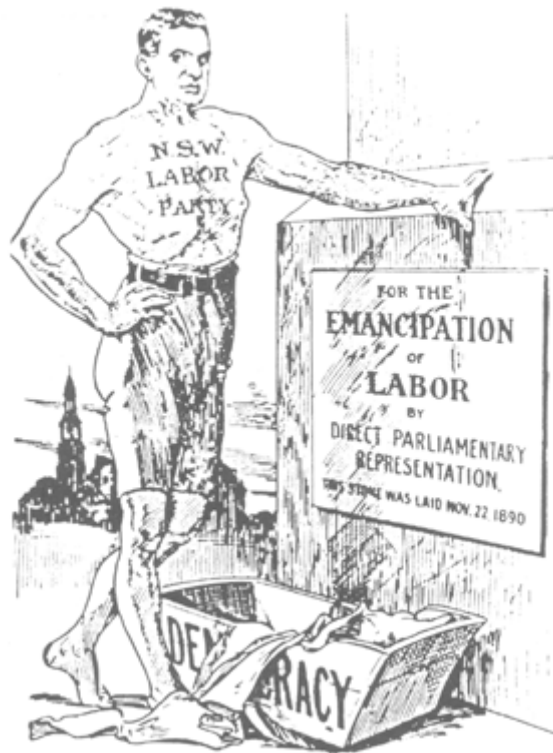


Why I am cautiously rejoining the ALP



“I want to walk like a giant on the land”
Neil Young

Peter Botsman

20th September 2013

Every citizen should be able to walk like a giant on this land. Every citizen should feel as if they have a stake in what happens, that they are a part of something and that they have a responsibility to participate, contribute and safeguard all that is good about Australia. The major political parties are closed shops and that is a very dangerous thing for our future. Any small opening must be seized upon if we are to progress.

For nearly ten years now I have been calling for the Labor Party to democratise. (See the long list of links and papers below) Its been a difficult cause to advocate. In the early 2000s I like so many others gave up and became disenchanted. From the statistics we know that thousands of Labor party members left to try to find something better. Many joined the Greens. Many have swung their support behind independent candidates. Many, like me, have just become stray political dogs.

In desperation for a party that truly reflected its members, I initially joined the Democrats. There was nothing more than a rump of the membership left. I was disappointed that after their radical experiment, with members even voting on policy decisions taken in the parliament, there seemed to be an extreme counter reaction. When I joined the only people left were professional political minders and number crunchers who wanted to control things like other party officials did. It was a tragedy for the Democrats they simply needed to moderate some of their procedures, they threw the baby out with the bath water. But that's another story, another analysis.

For those that think that all this was just plain crazy, reflect on this: Labor's primary vote was 33.6 per cent last month. Whether the Democrats, the Greens, independents or Nick Xenophon or some other constellation of power; Labor will need to either form a coalition, consult or take over the vote of this new large group of stray dogs to win office in its own right. Furthermore this rump of democracy also protects Australians from any excesses that the Liberal National Party might contemplate. So were we so wrong to leave the Labor Party? I think not. There have been some real disappointments. But the impetus for small independent, democratic candidates in the parliament will only grow stronger.

There is a big role for independents and minor parties. Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshot were a major disappointment. They simply became part of the Labor party and had a very short term objective. But the idea of independent candidates and parties remains valid and strong. Catherine McGowan's campaign against Sophie Mirabella is an indication that if you run a real campaign based on real local issues you can unseat safe candidates of either of the political parties.

The main reason I am cautiously rejoining the Labor Party is to ensure that the corruption of our polity in Australia goes no further. Since I have been out of the Labor Party I have learned some very disturbing things about Australian politics. It may well be that the Australian polity is on the verge of being taken over by strong organised crime groups who use our parties as their play things. It is necessary to ensure that our biggest parties do not

become fouled by corruption. If this happens being involved in minority parties and independents, who can hope, for the current period to control not much more than 10 per cent of the national vote, becomes an issue.

I would also urge others to come back to Labor in order to scarify and preserve the biggest progressive force in Australia from any further criminal contamination. I am sick of hearing Labor politicians talk about the glorified Labor past – but it is true that there are many dimensions of Australian life that owe everything to the fact that Labor was a force for working people and were a direct and historic response to the barbaric industrial situations in the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Western world of the 18th, 19th and early 20th century. Labor was determined to build a society where no mother or children or injured worker would ever starve or want for the minimum benefits. It did that by working for direct parliamentary representation of workers. Labor has spent 100 years perfecting the art of parliamentary discipline through its elaborate caucus and party conference process. I think the zenith of this was the Hawke-Keating years where we were all a bit scared to stray too far from the party line. The radical experiment with democracy that began with the election of the first Labor parliamentary representatives in the world ossified and turned inward.

Nothing in politics is immune from corruption. As we know from *Power Without Glory* onwards Labor has never been immune from criminal influences. But now there are new evil forces at work in the world. A small country like Australia must preserve its heart lands and its honest organisations. The only thing that will stop the corruption of our polity is a mass democratic group of committed people who have the power of one vote of equal value and who have a strong concept of the fidelity and the common good. Labor could claim this ground in the twenty first century – even if they never command a majority of the primary vote in their own right again. In my view honesty is everything.

A rank and file ballot for the Labor leader gives us a chance to continue the experiment of parliamentary representation that began in the 1890s. It brings new accountability, discipline and honest practices. Of course the vote for leader, if it remains just that, is not enough on its own to ensure that Labor becomes an honest force within our society. There has to be wholesale reform of all of the party's administrative structures. Administrative power brokers should not be allowed to stand for parliamentary representation for at least six years after they leave office. The way officials are elected and the way policy is developed through conference also needs radical change. It is urgent that these changes are made.

Organised crime in Australia has moved from a situation where certain families and individuals with a group of thugs and police informants controlled individual politicians and asked them for favours to a situation where organised international groups now have the capacity to infiltrate and take over whole sections of political parties. The undemocratic Labor Party in the contemporary period was a prime target for organised crime I believe. I

am not talking about Eddie Obeid or Ian Mac Donald in NSW. I knew Mac Donald well. I never regarded him as a criminal only as an ambitious individual who knew the ALP rules and factional system intimately. If this led MacDonald to corrupt behaviour then that is the great lesson. Obeid I just didn't know but my considered view is that these individuals are simply the tip of the old iceberg, scape goats to stop us looking any deeper. Given the secretive and insular way that power worked in the Labor party I believe there was far more corruption than we will ever know about completely. If all this is not a warning to the rest of us then what is? The Labor Party has to look far more closely at its internal structures and decision making processes if it really wants to understand the propensity for corruption in its midst. The whole insular nature of ALP politics made it a target for influence by not only criminals but also vested corporate and commercial interests. Even if it never wins power again, the internal discipline and parochial Catholic leadership is too big a price to pay. The principle of honesty and integrity in public office and politics is something that needs to be fought for and it goes to the detail of political parties and how they operate. Above all there needs to be a squeaky, clean, politics free administrative structure.

Stephen Conroy's infamous Foxtel interview with Graham Richardson last week was an eye opener. Many people could be forgiven for being somewhat affectionate towards the outrageous, aggrieved, nonsense of these two stalwarts of the Labor Right. Labor people have seen it all before. The noise emanates from those who have controlled the party for so long. Across the catcalls in the Sydney Town Hall it was a bit of a game done with a wink and a nod. It was all a big pantomime of power. In this context, Richo and Conroy are not without their talents. But, of course, it does matter. Any group that relies on the closed caucus vote, the closed administrative structures of the party, the tendency for those who have won administrative office to move into the parliament, undemocratic union representation and an undemocratic union based vote is a corrosive and destructive force. I hope that both Conroy and Richo come to the view that their faction needs to lift its game and become accountable to a much larger group of people in the form of the rank and file of the Labor Party. It will be good for them as well as everybody else.

These affectionate right wing renegades can no longer be allowed an uncritical eye. In 2013 the Labor party nearly reached the point of absolute destruction because it looked too inwardly and too selfishly at what was wrong. I have documented the fact that the resistance to party democracy dates back to Whitlam and the failure to follow the great Cyril Wyndham's proposals to open up the party to its membership in the 1960s. Every piecemeal change since then has been grudging and the party has become rotten in its core as a result.

The great old Labor pick and shovel man Tommy Uren told me once that Anthony Albanese would be Prime Minister. I think he said so in his book **Straight Left**. Tommy was very good at finding talented people and preserving his legacy. I didn't think much of Tom's judgement at the time. I associated Anthony with the student political economy group from University of Sydney and Young Labor. I also didn't like the straight jacket of the hard left

faction which Albo was most closely associated with. The hard left was as undemocratic as the Right. In fact they were its mirror image. In this regard it is interesting to note the symptomatic association of Ian Mac Donald with the hard left and Eddie Obeid with the hard right. The eyes of the membership could not be upon them because both factions were so guarded and closed.

But there was something about Albanese that Tommy understood that I didn't. The student politician's childhood in the Camperdown flats on Parramatta Rd with his beloved single mother gave Albo a knowledge of life and a passion about injustice that was above and beyond all his peers. He has surprised me.

Kevin Rudd, for all his faults, has created a little glimmer of light by immediately implementing the rank and file ballot for leader and in through the crack Albo has flown. Rudd may well be remembered for this than for any other thing. It was a wise and wonderful thing for Albo to stand for the leadership and to bring about a rank and file ballot within the Labor Party. It just may be that it is the beginning of something good and worthwhile – a new social democratic era for the Labor Party. But again Albo himself needs, like the Right, to embrace a new level of democracy. I suspect he just might have it in him. For so long Albo and people like John Faulkner have had to wage war in a context where they knew 9 out of 10 times they would lose a debate whether they won a debate on its merits or not. Continuing democratisation of the Labor Party would mean that this gerry mander of ideas could hopefully never happen again.

Democracy is messy, yes Stephen Conroy get used to it. With this let us hope that Bill Shorten can too surprise us. He needs to realise that the sinecures, that the AWU faction of the Labor Party have enjoyed over many decades, are at a dead end now. Thank you Kevin Rudd for this one small step that Julie Gillard would never have taken. If Shorten wants to earn the Labor Party leadership then he needs to get out beyond the closed little corridors of power within the increasingly unrepresentative trade union movement and the factional bulldogs of Labor and make a case for his leadership.

My analysis is that, regardless of who is leader, Labor may never ever again win an election in its own right. The effect of the lack of innovation and democracy in Labor over the past decades has led to the formation of the Greens and a community independent political movement that will only get stronger. That is the end analysis of the fall in Labor's primary vote to 33 per cent. This is not something that has happened in just this last election. Rod Cameron's scathing view of the Labor campaign was correct but what Cameron has to understand is that 'you cant hide when you are crippled inside' as Labor was during the 2013 election. There were too many contradictions and too many bitter and twisted people to hope for anything more than the result we got. As I have written I think it was astonishing that Labor held on to more than 50 seats in the Federal parliament.

Politics can no longer be a life-long commitment to one political party. Labor has to earn its members. My resumption of a Labor membership that had at one point lasted for over twenty years is certainly not iron clad. I like so many others will move again if we have to. The Canberra effect is still profound. It is very easy to exist in a cocoon of politics that is remote from the real world. It is very easy to exist in an inner city cocoon of politics where every one agrees with everyone else – well apparently.

My sympathy is still with the independents and people who have found that they must leave the major parties to create a message to Canberra. These people make up the critical 12-15 per cent of the national vote that would give Labor a majority in Canberra. It is possible to move back and forward in one's allegiance. If Labor does not truly democratise then there will always be alternatives. But for now let us try to preserve, strengthen and democratise the biggest progressive force in the country the Australian Labor Party.

God bless Cathy McGowan! Not because she may displace Sophie Mirabella, but because she has shown in one campaign what is wrong with the national media, what is wrong with the national political parties and what is wrong with the process of political representation in Australia. The lessons her campaign provides for sitting members and for us all are profound and she has made an incredibly strong mark on the nation's politics. After McGowan it cannot be business as usual for any of the political parties.

Above all McGowan's message for Canberra is to go beyond the generalised understanding that predominates from the well educated public service elites and drill down into local issues. What you will find there will confound the simplistic formulae of justice and injustice. Whether it be National Broadband, whether it be the National Disability Scheme or whether it be Gonski, or the coalition's policies,. Cathy Mc Gowan has shown us all that life is messy and not formulaic. It requires active, living, democratic participation if we are to succeed as a nation and society into the future.

Democracy and Labor: A Selection of Articles

The Astonishing Election

How well did **Labor** and Kevin Rudd do in the 2013 Australian Commonwealth government election? I am astonished that the Federal **Labor** Party still has over 50 seats in the Federal Parliament. ... or a Canberra staffer knows that the back lash against **Labor** has been building for over two years. When Julia Gillard initially called ...

pbotsman - 2013-09-08 06:38

Sussex Street Empire

EDDIE OBEID AND IAN MAC DONALD WERE PAR FOR THE COURSE IN the NSW **Labor** Party of the 2000s. They are evolutionary figures indicative of the lack of democracy and accountability within **Labor** culture. With opportunity after opportunity for internal reform ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 15:09

Document 7

I found "**Document 7**" in the archived papers of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) Federal ... files: 1967_rules.pdf **Document 7** **Document 7** Commentary \$0.00 SKU: ...

pbotsman - 2013-04-03 16:04

Democracy: An Interview with Cyril S. Wyndham

... Secretary of the Victorian branch of the Australian **Labor** Party (1961-63) and the first full time General Secretary of the Federal branch of the Australian **Labor** Party (1963-69) is one of the great unsung heroes of Australian **Labor**. I ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 16:59

De-Toxing NSW Labor

... detailed task of reforming the NSW Branch of the Australian **Labor** Party. In the accompanying 55,000 word rule re-write "Australian **Labor** Rules Reconstructed" and Commentary the entire body of rules of the ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-28 19:52

Who better than Joe Scimone to check your credentials comrade?

... one of the most important "machine" committees of the NSW **Labor** Party. This is the Committee that determines the eligibility of members to vote in the selection of **Labor** parliamentary representatives. Who better than Joe Scimone ...

pbotsman - 2013-04-04 10:50

Democracy: Whitlam's Forgotten and Forbidden Legacy 1960-1972

... relevant electorate, to elect all local, State and Federal **Labor** political representatives. (6) Nationally uniform rank and file ... State Upper House and Federal Senate representatives of the **Labor** Party. (7) Members of the ALP with one year's tenure should be able to ...

pbotsman - 2013-04-04 16:26

Red Dog for Prime Minister

... is that they will get worse and things will get worse for **Labor**. If things stay the same there will be a monumental and most undeserved ... also be a very unhealthy state of affairs. In NSW the **Labor** party was decimated in the last election. Rarely has there been an ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 15:53

Malleable Hatred

Labor party hatred is a wonderfully malleable thing. If you talked to any Canberra press gallery journalist or any **Labor** politician they will tell you how much everyone hates Kevin Rudd. They ... to 29 per cent and in August it was 23 per cent. The pro **Labor** Essential Report finds that the current two party preferred vote would ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 16:00

Coke & Pepsi

"Job-loss growth" - the new phenomena which **Labor** State governments do not seem to comprehend or address. Even Workers On-Line says the NSW Liberal and **Labor** Party are like Coke and Pepsi. The **Labor** Movement e-journal grudgingly ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 08:41

What does the ALP need in a leader now?

... and generations of supporters have passed through the **Labor** party's grasp. The hard-heads of the **Labor** party will be thinking that, after the Latham experience, all that is ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 09:24

2020 Vision and Walking Around Blind

... Jimmy Martin a member of the Sneedville branch of the NSW **Labor** Party has dedicated this little ditty to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. He is ... and hear his haunting song. Jimmy joined the **Labor** Party in 1933. He has always stuck to his principles. He says: "I place ...

pbotsman - 2013-04-04 10:44

Temperature Rising

... by now for some passion, some blood and some aggression from **Labor Labor** are gone for all money because instead of showing leadership in tough ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 15:44

Document 7

... "Document 7" in the archived papers of the Australian **Labor** Party (ALP) Federal Secretariat (MS 4985 National Library of Australia). ... – the first full time Secretary of the Federal Australian **Labor** Party in Canberra. Who was he? As time has gone by I have come to think ...

pbotsman - 2013-04-03 16:04

The latest outrage from NSW Labor

... that the voters of NSW, the last rusted-on supporters of the **Labor** Party in NSW and the labour movement of NSW have to calculate in the run up to the next election is: should **Labor** candidates be completely disregarded, and consciously ranked last, on ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 17:09

The Labor Millionaires Club and What Happens Next in NSW

... Jemma and Treasurer Costa's open defiance of the NSW **Labor** Conference goes far beyond the relative autonomy of the Parliamentary ... effectively use the support, machinery and platform of the **Labor** Party to become elected but then defy the democratic and organic ...

pbotsman - 2013-04-04 10:34

Labor's Navel

Labor's internal politics seems to subsume all at times. Bob Carr ... supporters of Simon Crean. Another stand off occurs between **Labor's** Montagues and Capulets. There's always logic there in **Labor's** day-to-day tussles if you can find it, or if you have an interest. ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 08:29

Maxine McKew interviews Peter Botsman on the Labor leadership, 2005

... is change the captain fails to recognise that, in fact, the **Labor** Party's a bit like the Titanic: it has hit a rock; it's leaking; the boat ... people want. People want to be able to participate in the **Labor** Party and know that their voices count. They want to be able to actually ...

pbotsman - 2013-04-04 15:49

Keating's Past is Not NSW Labor's Future

... Bernie Riordan, John Robertson and the officers of the NSW **Labor** Party for the fact that Iemma and Costa could not win a simple argument ... lost as close to unanimously as could ever be at a State **Labor** conference. It seems Keating, Iemma, Costa, Carr and Unsworth want to ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-28 19:41

The Possibility of National Labor Governance

A Rudd Federal **Labor** government working with State **Labor** governments could re-vitalise our national institutions. ... all probabilities it now seems Kevin Rudd's Federal **Labor** Party will win government in 2007. I believe the people made their ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-28 20:22

Saint Anna: Last of the Labor Dinosaurs

... space that Clem Jones and Jm Soorley had occupied for **Labor**. \$0.99 SKU: Saint Anna: Last of the **Labor** Dinosaurs List price: \$0.00 ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 15:43

Empty Rightousness – the Real Problem of Modern Labor

... view. The problem was never Kevin. The problem is the modern **Labor** Party with its empty heart and gut. \$1.10 SKU: Empty ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 17:18

Queensland Labor's Woeful Foster Care & Family Support Record

... unacceptable. \$1.10 SKU: Queensland **Labor's** Woeful Foster Care & Family Support Record List price: ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 09:07

Thinking Beyond Labor

... number of us it is impossible to go back to support the **Labor** Party - let alone vote for it. Many within the hierarchy believe that we ... tell you why. \$1.10 SKU: Thinking Beyond **Labor** List price: \$0.00 ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 17:00

Reviving Labor Conference

... Australians, and if national conference is warrant respect, **Labor** must allow the direct election of leaders, delegates and national ... forward. \$0.00 SKU: Reviving **Labor** Conference List price: \$0.00 ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 09:02

Requiem for a True Labor Man

... no laurels, no boring, stagnant, stinking epitaphs at **Labor** dinners. No children. Nothing meant more than the simple ... \$0.00 SKU: Requiem for a True **Labor** Man List price: \$0.00 ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 15:37

New Generation?

... the new generation Is the new generation of **Labor** just about shuffling the deckchairs or is it about a new generation of ideas? 809 words \$1.10 SKU: **Labor**'s New Generation? List price: \$0.00 ...

...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 08:21

Overcoming the Politics of Disappointment

... politics. Above all he must show he is above the sniping of **Labor** insiders and open up **Labor** to greater democracy and a wider gene pool. You have to hand ...

pbotsman - 2013-06-26 20:28

Australia's Changing Political Universe

... and through them a majority of Australians. Perhaps **Labor** as well as Liberals made tactical mistakes but the debate had been going ... Shergold. But we all forgot, in the Liberal Party, as in the **Labor** Party, the majority, nor even science, counts for anything much. The ...

pbotsman - 2013-03-29 17:26
