

Latte-belt luvvies put Greens in power

By Nic Cater, The Daily Telegraph. 1 April 2015

THE latte belt luvvies have cast their votes, returning three new Green MPs to the NSW parliament, two of them from the new Green heartland of Sydney's inner-west.

Seldom has the state's cultural divide been so clearly on display. The division is not between left and right, Labor and Liberal or city and country but between the eco-aware, politically correct inner-city dwellers, sea and tree changers and the rest.

The latte belt is clearly drawn on the map of Sydney. The electorates of Balmain and Newtown sit within its rim. Rockdale and Auburn, less than 10 km to the south and west, are outside.

On Saturday, nine out of 20 voters in Newtown cast their first lower house vote for the Greens. In Auburn and Rockdale, barely one in 20 did the same.

The insiders and the outsiders

The 2011 census tells us more about these two tribes, the insiders and the outsiders, whose lives and philosophy are polar opposites.

The latte belt set is better educated — on paper at least — less religious, less married and less concerned about how to pay their bills.

Four years ago the average family income in Auburn was living on about \$1160 a week. In Balmain the median family income was more than double that — \$2636 a week.

One in three Rockdale residents over 15 did not complete Year 12. Barely one in five had a university qualification. In Balmain, 44 per cent have university degrees. In Newtown, 38 per cent of adults were graduates.

A sharp difference in social attitudes

The census reveals a sharp difference in social attitudes between the conservative centre of Australian life and the progressive fringe dwellers voting Green. In Auburn 14 of 15 co-habiting couples are married. In Newtown, by contrast, one in three couples live in de-facto relationships.

In both Newtown and Balmain, 35 per cent say they have no religion. In Auburn and Rockdale, 87 per cent claim affiliation to a religion.

One way of identifying the latte belt is by occupation. An electorate or suburb where lawyers outnumber plumbers is likely not to fall within the latte zone. In the federal electorate of Sydney, which overlaps the state seats of both Balmain and Newtown, there are 15 lawyers for every plumber. In Grayndler, Anthony Albanese's seat covering much of the inner west, lawyers outnumber plumbers by more than six to one.

Balmain is full of interesting people - but few of them are Labor voters. *Source:* News Corp Australia

While Sydney and Grayndler are Labor-held seats, the Green primary vote was well above the national average in 2013 — 17 per cent for Sydney and 23 per cent for Grayndler.

Lawyers thick on the ground

It's not just lawyers thick on the ground. The reputation of journalists as a profession which leans to the progressive side of politics is reflected in where they choose to live. In the seat of Sydney, journalists outnumber plumbers seven to one. In Grayndler it is 3.5 to one.

In Fowler on the other hand, the Labor-held federal seat that takes in Cabramatta, there are 10 plumbers for every journalist. At the 2013 election, the Green vote was less than 4 per cent.

The state election shows the firming pattern of the Green vote. Green voters are not, as we once supposed, dreadlocked, hygiene-challenged whale-lovers chained to trees. They are professional, comfortably off, middle class people from the gentrified suburbs of Sydney, Melbourne and, increasingly Perth and Brisbane. They are teachers, doctors, lawyers and media professionals.

Greens voters likely paid by the government

Greens voters are far more likely to earn their living from the government purse, directly or indirectly, than from private industry.

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The risk for Labor is these people are increasingly its core voters too. Forty years ago, Labor could claim to be the party of the workers. Now it's the party of the educated middle class, the people who want to tax carbon and open doors to asylum seekers.

New Labor voters' esoteric interests

New Labor voters have little interest in keeping factories running or the wheels of industry turning. Their interest lies in crusades like plain packaged cigarettes and banning fast-food ads on TV.

Labor's challenge is to find a message that resonates both within and without the latte belt. The Greens, meanwhile, go from strength to strength, burnishing their moral presumptions and looking down on the rest of us.

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