

Understanding the modern Green movement

Two articles: Nick Cater, then Greg Brown, *The Australian*, 21 November 2017

How far into the ideological fringe must Labor venture to hold a seat such as Northcote in the Victorian parliament?

Quite a bit further than Daniel Andrews has yet been bold enough to go, judging from Saturday's by-election. No one could have done more than he to support the LGBTI community, short of making membership compulsory. He has given anti-bullying bullies the run of public schools and banned religious instruction in the classroom. He has banned gas exploration, (all of it, not just fracking like those wimpy premiers in other states); he has set a 90 per cent renewable energy target; and a massive brown coal-fired power station shut down on his watch. He wants to make granny killing legal providing it's consensual, proving surely that Andrews, by progressive moral standards, is a good man.

Yet on Saturday Labor lost Northcote for the first time since 1927. It lost not by a little but by a lot. An ungrateful 45 per cent of voters put the Greens' Lidia Thorpe first. Thorpe will enter the next election with a comfortable 11 per cent buffer after preferences.

Northcote used to be a workers' suburb where Greeks and Italians bought cheap houses and concreted the front lawn. Now Northcote is the new Fitzroy North, its streets lined with sensible SUVs and the less ostentatious models in the Audi and Peugeot ranges.

It's 10 to 15 minutes from the University of Melbourne on one of those funny yellow bikes and is home to more psychologists (239) than plumbers (139). If the dripping tap drives you nuts, there's always therapy.

The Greens' primary vote on Saturday roughly matched the number of adults with a university education (45.1 per cent) and the irreligious (46.9 per cent). There are more psychiatrists than ministers of religion

Last year's census shows Northcote has the fifth highest number of same-sex couples of 88 state seats in Victoria. Seven out of 10 same-sex couples in Northcote, incidentally, are female.

More than half — 58 per cent — work in the public sector. The volume of sweat per hour of work is low. There are 10 times more teachers than truck drivers, and 20 times more university lecturers than bricklayers.

It is hardly the sort of seat Ben Chifley would have recognised as Labor heartland, if indeed he recognised it as Australia at all. The changes have been so dramatic in the past 30 years that it is testimony to Labor's adaptability that it held this seat at all.

It has lost some skin in the process, however, as it has struggled to find common ground between disparate constituencies. How does one unite blue-collar, socially conservative tradies, post-industrial professionals and the immigrant populations in unfashionable middle and outer suburbs? The task is almost impossible, particularly on the most contentious issues of the day — energy policy, transgender rights, asylum-seekers, for example — where passions are so easily inflamed.

As Labor has tried with varying degrees of success to tread a delicate middle course, its supporters have to feel less attached. When Bob Hawke won the 1987 federal election, almost

half of voters described themselves as Labor partisans in the Australian Election Study. In last year's election the ranks of Labor partisans had dwindled to less than one-third.

What complicates things is that the political class deciding Labor's future brings its own prejudices and assumptions to the table. Its members are younger, generally speaking, than the general population, and inclined to have spent more time at university than is good for the human soul.

One suspects they feel more comfortable grabbing brunch at Northcote's Red Door Corner Store ("Dukkah Eggs were delicious ... cardamom poached pear 'stunning'," we read on Trip-Advisor) than at the Moonlight Cafe in Westfield, Broadmeadows.

These cultural tensions, for which food fetishes can be a surprisingly good proxy, have spared neither mainstream party. Labor suffered first with a breakaway to the Greens on one side, and the defection of the Howard battlers on the other. As the Northcote election shows, it continues to suffer. Batman, once held by the stalwart Martin Ferguson, could fall to the Greens. Grayndler in Sydney's inner west is, by broad consent, a Labor seat for only so long as Anthony Albanese contests it.

Now those same tensions are straining the Coalition, driving wedges between partners and within parties. It has prompted the departure of the conservatively minded at one end and a smaller group at the other end who have attached themselves to the Greens.

The same-sex marriage argument, which split Coalition voters roughly 50-50, was a gift for anti-conservative commentators, for whom anyone who disagreed with change was homophobic.

The noisier commentators on what is sometimes called the alt-right misjudged the moment, too, imagining that the same-sex marriage plebiscite was to Australia what Brexit was to Britain and Donald Trump's election was to the US.

As it turned out, the result was not the popular revolt against the elite some had longed for. The Yes vote prevailed in 133 out of 150 electorates. It prevailed in seats considered conservative, such as Kevin Andrews's seat of Menzies (57 per cent Yes) and in unfashionable outer-suburban blue-collar seats, such as Forde in Queensland (60.5 per cent).

In the federal seat of Batman, where Northcote sits, 70 per cent supported same-sex marriage in the Australian Bureau of Statistics survey.

The survey confirms that they are civic-minded. Four out of five of them returned completed forms, compared with three out of five in Ireland. It debunks the confected theory of rampant homophobia and the debilitating cult of victimhood that flowed from it.

We also know Australians value freedom, with Newspoll reporting that 62 per cent of voters want guarantees for freedom of conscience, belief and religion. Parliament has a duty to honour that desire, not just because it's popular but because it's necessary.

It is an obligation every bit as strong as the mandate they assume to change the Marriage Act.

Green voters are snobs, says Labor survey

Greg Brown

About 70 per cent of Greens voters in inner Melbourne are rich, dislike unions and think suburban people are backwards, racist and bigoted, Labor has concluded based on its own research.

A six-month survey of Melbourne Greens voters has encouraged the Victorian Labor Party to give up on campaigning to most of them, arguing they do not share Labor values and are closer to the Liberals.

Labor has dubbed them “Teal Greens”, with teal being a colour blend of green and blue. The party has decided to target the 30 per cent “Red Greens” in Melbourne’s inner city who are typically university students or Millennials starting their careers.

“Red Greens” are usually renters who are more likely to come from Labor families, while “Teal Greens” own expensive inner-city homes and have parents who vote Liberal.

The qualitative research surveyed more than 50 Greens voters in inner suburbs such as Fitzroy, Brunswick and Clifton Hill, from January to June this year. Party sources said the findings showed the biggest concern of many Greens voters was the notion of living in the outer suburbs that contributed to their interest in local planning laws.

“Teal Greens” are usually highly paid professionals in two-wage households, are aged in their 30s and 40s and “look down on” people in suburbs, thinking they hold Australia back from being “tolerant” and “just”.

After the Greens’ victory in the state seat of Northcote at the weekend, Labor faces a fight to hold inner-Melbourne federal seats such as Batman, Wills and Melbourne Ports. Labor thinks the broader boundaries of the electorates will help it retain the seats as they encompass modest suburbs as well as affluent inner-city ones.

Victorian senator Kim Carr said: “The blue Greens are really the hardcore Liberal types in their attitudes, the red Greens are more sympathetic to our message. There is the homeowners and the renters big divide.

“The homeowners talk about their sense of privilege and their sense of entitlement, their wealth is the natural order of things rather than good fortune.”

Senator Carr, the federal opposition industry spokesman, said many “blue Greens” migrated into inner-city Labor seats from traditionally Liberal areas or from Sydney and Brisbane.

“These are traditionally Liberal voters that are moving into these areas. They are not Labor people,” Senator Carr said. “They claim to be progressive social values but we surveyed them and their biggest fear was actually being forced to live in Pascoe Vale and Coburg. Their real anxieties are different to what they claim them to be. Their preoccupations are essentially material conditions, not with the state of the world environment.” The “blue Greens” traded on “snob appeal” and were closed to Labor, he said.

Greens MP Adam Bandt said the claims were “fairytale” and voters were shifting because of Labor’s support for offshore processing and the Adani coalmine.

