

Labor's Class of '98

GARY JOHNS

More than a quarter of the Federal ALP Caucus are new members. What does this mean for the alternative government?

THE October 1998 election delivered 29 new recruits to Labor's 95-member Caucus. Is it a new guard or the old one in new clothes? Of the 29, eighteen captured seats from the Coalition. These are the people who are cheered loudest in the party room at the commencement of the new Parliament. After all, government is only won by taking seats from the other side. Four of these were returnees: Horne (Paterson, NSW) Sciacca and Swan (Bowman and Lillee, Queensland) and Snowdon (NT).

Some of the freshers already have form: Cheryl Kernot (Dickson, Queensland) of course courtesy of some late postal votes from holidaying teachers; David Cox (Kingston, SA) a Gordon Bilney protégé and veteran adviser to Labor, especially Ralph Willis; Graham Edwards (Cowan, WA) Vietnam veteran and former State minister; and Kevin Rudd (Griffith, Queensland) former senior diplomat and confidante of Wayne Goss. Kernot has shot straight to the front bench, and Rudd to the chair of the Caucus National Security and Trade Committee—a position for which he is eminently suited. Rudd understands the game, his opening line in his first speech to the Parliament reads: 'Politics is about power ...' He acknowledged the support of Swan, Sciacca and Senator John Hogg—all AWU—despite the fact that he is Labor Unity. It was just a simple matter of geography. He relied on preselection numbers in Ben Humphrey's old base and the best way to acquire them was to join the faction!

The real interest lies with the remainder, those who replaced retired Labor members. More muted cheers in Caucus for this lot, but these will be the stayers, holding seats that survived the Keating rout of 1996. Except, that is, for trade union official Bernie Rippoll in Oxley—Pauline Hanson's abandoned seat, but unlikely to be let loose from Labor's clutches in the foreseeable future ...

Of the eleven safe seats, including two new Senators from Queensland who take up their seats next July, ten were held by men. No fewer than seven of the replacements are women. This is a remarkable

change. One was even selected under a party rule which weighted her vote by 20 per cent. Kelly Hoare, daughter of Bob Brown (Labor's, not the Green), won preselection by 1.2 votes! The eleven retirees were senior members of Caucus, fully eight had served as ministers and three of these were Cabinet ministers: Peter Baldwin, Peter Morris and Ralph Willis.

Factionally, the ground has continued to shift under the independents, who are barely hanging on. Barry Jones's replacement is Julia Gillard (Left) and Peter Morris's, Jill Hall (Left). Nevertheless, Kelly Hoare remains staunchly independent and Cheryl Kernot claims to be independent—though her ideological home is with the Left, who tried very hard to find her a 'real' seat in NSW. In fact the last Labor incumbent for Dickson was Michael Lavarch (AWU) and Cheryl has an AWU minder on her staff. The remainder are factional replacements, Michael Danby for Clyde Holding (Right), Craig Emerson for David Beddall (AWU), Julia Irwin for Ted Grace (Right), Tanya Plibersek for Peter Baldwin (Left), Bernie Ripoll for Les Scott (AWU) and Nicola Roxon for Ralph Willis (Right). The gender may change but the faction does not!

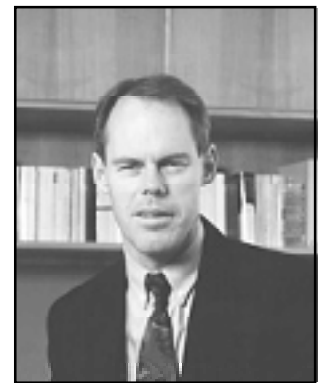
In the Senate, Joe Ludwig—heir to the Bill Ludwig AWU throne—replaces Mal Colston (it now becomes clear why Colston was allowed to warm the seat for so long!), and Jan McLucas replaces Margaret Reynolds (Left).

The same generally holds true for those who won seats from the Coalition.

Roxon's (Gellibrand) party background is impeccable. She was an industrial lawyer with Maurice Blackburn & Co., the firm in which John Button was a senior partner, the famous Maurice Blackburn who modified the party's socialist objective in 1921. Prior to that she was an industrial officer with the National Union of Workers (the old Storeman and Packers, more affectionately known as the 'stackers and wackers') the former leader of which was Simon Crean. Roxon is a strong advocate of greater access to the legal system, but makes the mistake of many lawyers—equating access to the law with justice.

Just across the electoral boundary lies a new colleague, Julia Gillard in Lalor, another industrial lawyer, this time on the left of the party, a follower of Martin Ferguson and devotee of Joan Kirner. She is joined by Tanya Plibersek, a Senator George Campbell staffer, who spent most of her first speech saying she was sorry to the Eora Aboriginal people on whose 'stolen land' Sydney is built, and for good measure the 'Stolen Generation.' Another left-winger is Jill Hall (Shortland), backed by the CFMEU and the Maritime Union, whose preselection numbers were so strong she was unopposed. She has been quick off the mark and chairs the Caucus committee on Government Service Delivery. Finally, Julia Irwin, a 32-year veteran of the Party, who worked for members Dick Klugman and Ross Free as well as her predecessor Ted Grace, is a fan of the last of the 'Labor Mates', Laurie Brereton and Leo McLeay.

Queensland Labor was not so adventurous, the only woman apart from McLucas was Kirsten Livermore, another left lawyer, in Keith Wright's old seat of Capricornia. The newcomer very quick off the mark is Dr Craig Emerson, former tax specialist in the Commonwealth Treasury, staffer to Hawke and head of Environment under Goss. He chairs the Caucus Living Standards and Development Committee, again a strong appointment. He is close to Bill Ludwig and will catch up with, if not overtake, his more senior Queensland rivals Sciacca and Swan pretty quickly.



Gary Johns is a Senior Fellow with the IPA.

IPA

REVIEW