Why the Left should pause for thought about Victoria; that damned new design.

Bully for Boofhead

Jeff Kennett must be given credit for being the most honest politician in the land. He promised Boofhead and he delivered Boofhead. The pay rise for the minister in charge of lowering everybody else's pay is just about the level of decision-making that the voters had been led to expect. So, too, more or less, is the new silver service for the Parliament House dining room.

Complaints about the new government's broken promises are risible. By the prevailing standards of political rhetoric his lies were trivial, indeed ritual. In any case, by dishonestly concealing its debts on such a massive scale, the former Labor government has given him an excellent excuse to break any promise he likes. Comparisons of Kennett with Hitler are particularly fatuous, and quite insulting to the victims of the real Hitler. Kennett was elected by a clear majority in a fair election. The Labor government was thrown out because it ran up enormous debts and did a great deal of damage to the state's economy. The statistics are sufficiently well known to need no detail here. Yet the most prominent opponent of the new regime, John Halfpenny, talks as though state budgetary problems simply do not exist and mindlessly pushes for ongoing industrial action which can only damage the state further.

It is time for the Left to stop moaning and groaning, to admit frankly that we made a mess of things, and do some solid thinking about what went wrong. What do we want to achieve in government, and how will we go about achieving it? The Labor Party can hardly offer itself to the public in future as the party of increasing debt and economic decline. Without serious thought and careful analysis the Left will simply become marginalised in the political process and, indeed, that is what it will deserve.

Among the issues to be resolved will be the following:

* How does a party with a strong power base in public sector unions deal with the need for structural change and efficiency in the public sector? A lot of progress has been achieved in this area elsewhere. In NSW the railways have been modernised gradually without forced redundancies. Sadly, the Victorian situation is now too serious for this to be possible.

* How can education, with a limited budget, improve the chances of children from disadvantaged backgrounds? There is a common perception that Victoria has spent heavily but it may even have had the opposite effect.

* How can health services be made more efficient without loss of equity?

* How can environmentalism be reconciled with social equity? Victoria under Labor had the most zealous Environmental Protection Agency in Australia, and the lowest level of investment. If we are to advocate zero growth we should do so frankly and examine the implications for social equity. The losers otherwise are likely to be those at the bottom of the social pecking order, certainly not those at the top.

An economic crisis of the proportions which we are now experiencing will entail great social change. It entails both opportunities and threats to improvement in social equity. The fatuous post-Kennett election debate ignores the critical issue of the times.

RODNEY HENDERSON, Annandale, NSW.

Not Your Type

Why have you done this to me, a reader of ALR from the first issue? ALR's November issue had a crunched up typeface which made reading hard work instead of a pleasure. Why the change from the previous typeface which was reader-friendly? If the new typeface heralds the new style of ALR that has been forecast I dread what other changes are contemplated.

JACK HUTSON, Canterbury, Vic.

We happen to like the new typeface but astute readers will notice that it has been increased in size since the November issue, to be easier on the eye.

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Ed.

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