Easson’s Future Not So Bright

Michael Easson’s aspirations for national leadership of the Right within the ACTU have received a sharp blow. Worse, his totalitarian grip on the NSW Labor Council, of which he is secretary, may soon be broken by the appointment of a left fulltime officer. This is part of the fallout from the leaking of a Labor Council strategy document last November. (See “Shooting the Messenger”, p. 4)

The document hit the headlines because of its frank estimation that Labor was likely to lose the federal election.

But rather than targeting the leaking of the document, the Left professed itself shocked at its own heresies and called for its own sacking - essentially for having Bad Ideas. So what did the document actually say? Among its more interesting points:

- The push for union amalgamations may damage the acceptance of unionism by workers. It says “There is contrary evidence to suggest that smaller unions with tailored services have maximised their recruiting potential”.

- The Accord has backfired on its proponents. It has cut real unit labor costs but this has reduced pressure on employers to invest in technology. Without constantly rising wage costs, it implies, there is no incentive to update labour-saving machinery.

- Membership participation and identification with unions has declined because so much of the traditional activity of unions (presumably wage fights) has been centralised in the hands of the ACTU.

Each of these propositions is at least worth debating but, rather, the union Left has focussed on the document’s cutting assessment of the NSW parliamentary ALP and the federal ALP.

The monolithic culture of Labor politics in Australia decrees that heretical views cannot be voiced publicly and hence cannot be debated.

Liquor Shake-up

Moves are afoot to put a well-deserved bomb under the Liquor Trades Union led by John (The Silent Senator) Morris.

A move last November to replace federal secretary Michael Boland with Tasmanian secretary Nick Sherry fell apart when Sherry grabbed for the red leather in the shape of a Senate seat.

The parachute to be offered to Boland was a seat on the Industrial Relations Commission. But Boland is still LTU federal secretary and the ACTU’s nominees to the IRC turned out to be Greg Harrison and Victorian state MP Jim Simmonds.

The LTU shake-up-that-wasn’t also involved installing Linda Rubinstein, the Victorian assistant secretary, as the federal assistant secretary. However, the Victorian LTU branch leadership has its own problems, after a strong challenge from a left rank-and-file group which captured the presidency. But if the Sherry-Rubinstein deal fell through, the campaign to revive the LTU continues, with support from Bill Kelty, among others.

At present the union is a mess.

In WA it concluded a deal with McDonalds which actually cut junior workers’ wages. In Queensland two officials were convicted of electoral fraud and the inquiry by Marshall Cook QC will attempt to rake over any remaining muck. In NSW a Federal Court inquiry is pending into the 1988 ballot after anti-Morris forces appealed against the result. At the ACTU, the LTU is seen as the key union in the tourism and service industry.

For many women and young workers in the clubs and hotels, the LTU is their first taste of unionism, and it’s often a sour one. Too often, membership is compulsory, dues are automatically deducted from wages and dead-head officials, duchessed by the bosses, are never around when you want them.

Giant Stirs

Something may be stirring in the heart of that sleeping giant of trade unionism, the AWU. Last December, federal secretary Errol Hodder came within 229 votes of being tossed by a reform group in a ballot which saw 21,000 votes cast. Hodder cannot be happy that his new federal president is rival Bill Ludwyck - though Ludwyck is no leftist.

NSW AWU secretary Ernie Ecob was also nearly ditched. And while the SA branch, traditional bastion of the Left, was lost, the Victorian branch was won by a reform group. The amalgamation with the grouper-infested Ironworkers Association now looks shaky.

A New ‘international’?

The latest line in proletarian internationalism is to be found in a new booklet What Happened in Beijing, published by the, until recently, Moscow-line Socialist Party of Australia.

The booklet reprints copiously from official Chinese sources to ‘prove’ that virtually no-one actually died in Beijing last June - aside from the heroic martyrs of the PLA, of course.

Also included is a precis of the article in the September Independent Monthly which first pointed out that most of the deaths in June occurred, not in Tiananmen Square, but on the western side of Beijing. Except that, in the SPA’s account of the article only the first part of the argument survives - leaving no mention of any deaths anywhere in Beijing.

Sloppy editing? Hardly. The purpose of the booklet becomes clearer from the introduction where homage is given to the roles of the CPC and the Chinese government in June “in the spirit of working class international solidarity”. What price a new ‘International’ formed from the hard-line remnants of the communist world - China, Albania, North Korea, and the surviving stalinist sects, including, it seems, the SPA.