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Most contemporary industrial societies place economic activity at the centre of their definition of human identity. One is a producer, consumer, owner or administrator. But while the mode of producing and distributing goods and services is central to the social order, no economic system is absolute. Human need, or to be more precise the need for human self-realization, is the ultimate standard by which to judge all economic arrangements. It follows that justice for the poor and the victims of all forms of exploitation must be made the starting point of a transitional economic strategy. So must the right of every citizen to share directly in economic decision making, not least at the point of production. But economic policy cannot confine its attention to national society, to human beings in isolation from their biophysical environment, or to the short term. The eradication of poverty and dehumanizing social and economic inequalities must be considered in a global context. Moreover, economic activity has to be organized in a way that respects and sustains the entire ecological system, including all forms of animal life, thereby ensuring that the richness and diversity of the natural heritage can be transmitted to future generations.

But if economic activity is to accord with chosen values, if it is to perform a number of overarching functions, it follows that major decisions — those, for example, that govern the industries to be developed, the national resources to be used, the overall level of jobs to be achieved — must form part of a plan. They must be grounded in institutions that can administer and co-ordinate policy at the macro-economic level. Such centralized planning, however, can and must be made consistent with industrial democracy and economic decentralization. The need for popular control over corporate power — based on the assumption that a mixed economy will operate at least for the duration of the transitional strategy — must be placed high on the political agenda. Such

controls may be exercised partly through democratic forms of central planning, but also and perhaps more effectively through smaller semi-autonomous units of decision making empowered to make important economic decisions.

These units may be geographically based, perhaps larger than most existing municipalities but sufficiently smaller than existing states to permit a sense of community to flourish. The numerous local battles that have raged in recent years over issues like plant closures and environmental hazards, and the hundreds of neighbourhood, tenant and other community organizations that have taken root have already prepared the ground for this initiative. Other units may be functional in character and involve a variety of worker, consumer or community-owned and controlled enterprises which could be encouraged to invest in innovative projects through the establishment of credit facilities backed by government deposits and a range of superannuation and other funds.

Other measures might include the democratization of public and private sector enterprises with management accountable to worker and consumer representatives; the establishment of public hearings with access to all available public and commercial information to advise on investment plans; a far more comprehensive and generously funded system of freedom of information; major public investment in new communications technologies specifically designed to facilitate, public information, discussion and decision. Accessible and accountable planning institutions operating largely at the macro-economic level could thus be complemented by a market mechanism which is allowed to determine detailed output structure and relative prices but with the proviso that the entities operating in the marketplace are co-operative or community-based enterprises, or alternatively private and public firms that are subject to increasing levels of worker and consumer democracy.

However, for economic activity to be truly democratic it must operate in the context of national — and where possible local — self-reliance. It cannot flourish in conditions where investment and other relevant decisions are made by external agents, that is by transnational corporations and financial institutions over which the body politic has little or no control. Hence the need to develop, and where necessary protect, Australian-owned and controlled industries that are socially useful, job-creating and environmentally sustainable. Self-reliance should not be confused with self-sufficiency. It does not preclude, trade or other international transactions. It precludes only those transactions which

quantitatively or qualitatively are likely to make the national economy vulnerable to the vagaries of the world market. It does require the institution of controls over international transactions so as to ensure that they comply at all times with national objectives and democratic procedures. A policy of economic self-reliance would, of course, need to be pursued with sensitivity to the legitimate needs of other nations, in particular of Third World countries. Here, Australia would need to develop trade, aid and investment policies which, while maintaining its own self-reliance, would also promote the self-reliant development of its neighbours.

The values and policy objectives that a new political formation will need to embody require comprehensive and systematic exposition which is beyond the scope of this essay. What has been said here is only tentative and illustrative. Two, other areas nevertheless deserve attention: the domestic political process and external relations. Any project of the kind proposed here must place high on its agenda the institutional changes and constitutional reforms needed to ensure public participation in decision making and enhancement of the rights and civil liberties of workers, Aboriginal people, ethnic communities, women and other disadvantaged sections of the community. A multi-racial Australia cannot come to fruition without national implementation of Aboriginal land rights, and acceptance of the related principle of Aboriginal self-determination, and this would necessitate a rethinking of conventional notions of sovereignty and national identity. Indeed, multi-racialism is likely to remain a euphemism so long as Australia's predominantly white society does not recognize the rich and unique contribution that Aboriginal culture can make to a more symbiotic and convivial social order. Equally important to the reshaping of Australian political culture is the integration of feminist values and insights. It is not merely a question of accepting the feminist demand for economic and political equality but of opening up the definition of everyday life. It is ultimately impossible to transform the political order while leaving intact familial, sexual and other social relationships in which the reality of oppression and compulsion is made to coexist with the illusion of freedom.

At the other end of the continuum, an alternative Australia must rest on a commitment to a revised world order, which calls into question existing structures of power and authority. In practice this will require the elaboration of an internationalist, non-aligned foreign policy supported by a non-nuclear, non-

provocative self-reliant defence policy. Here concepts of national independence and national defence will have to be married to notions of international interdependence and regional and global security. Needless to say all these concepts and the interconnections between them will require rigorous elaboration. In all of this, the purpose of policy development, whether in the domestic or international context, should not be forgotten. It is not simply to advance this or that preferred policy position but to bring about a renewal in the meaning, content, perspective and language of Australian politics.

To establish the desired list of values is one thing, to mould them into a viable political project quite another. One may well ask: What is to be the nature of this political formation? Is it, for example, to function as a political party? The answer here is both yes and no. To the extent that it seeks to bring about a re-alignment of political forces it will undoubtedly wish to enter the electoral arena (about which much later), and to that extent at least it may qualify as a political party. On the other hand, precisely because of its all-embracing agenda, it will wish to differentiate itself from other parties in terms of both policy and process. Indeed, it is questionable whether in the age of electoralist politics the party label may not obscure more than it clarifies. It may for this reason be preferable to refer to this project as a political movement in order to emphasize the grass-roots approach to mass politics. Ideally, what one is looking for is a term that captures the sense of both party and movement.

Leaving aside the question of designation, it may be useful to define the project in terms of its principal functions. The first function is *education*. The objective here is to develop the awareness of the movement and of the wider community, to articulate and disseminate a coherent analysis of the present national/ international situation and to offer a compelling vision of the future, at all times highlighting the connection between issues and between values and institutions. This is a dynamic process that must be grounded in an ongoing programme of study, action and reflection involving groups organized on the basis of neighbour--hood, workplace and a variety of social settings.

The second function is *policy development*. It is not enough to sketch policy directions in broad outline. A process of research and consultation is needed to arrive at a set of policies and transitional strategies which are understandable, yet comprehensive and internally coherent. This process is never-ending for it is

always capable of refinement and must in any case respond to rapidly changing domestic and external circumstances.

The third function is *community building*. Put quite simply it involves the fostering of communal ties at the local, regional and national levels. This may be done by supporting, and where necessary initiating, local citizen actions, co-operative ventures or mass campaigns whose defining characteristic is resistance of a kind that instils hope and a sense of empowerment. However small or large, the purpose of each initiative is to establish networks of people, skills and ideas which alone can reinvigorate the ties that bind civil society and neutralize the atomizing impact of technocratic rule.

The fourth function is *celebration of life*. This refers to the cultural dimension which must be integral to the entire project. Through painting, literature, music, drama, dance and other forms of artistic activity this dimension expresses the value and beauty of life and therefore calls into question all life-threatening institutions, conventions and technologies.

The fifth function is *political intervention*. In a sense all the preceding functions involve a measure of political intervention. But here the reference is to formal political institutions (e.g. parliaments, municipal councils, courts, government departments, police and military forces). While there can be no illusions as to the capacity of the state to support, let alone initiate, the pro-gramme of radical change advocated here, use must be made of all the opportunities provided by the state apparatus (e.g. elections, inquiries, court cases, consultative mechanisms) to expose the vulnerability and irrationality of the status quo and to present a coherent but attractive alternative.

What, then, of electoral strategies? Clearly, they have a part to play, although it should not be automatically assumed that they necessarily involve the fielding of one's own candidates. That is certainly an option. But electoral intervention may simply involve support, or opposition to, any number of candidates who may be running as independents or representatives of other political parties. Whatever the particular form of intervention, the fact is that elections, especially at federal level, are occasions which concentrate the public mind. For many they are the only occasions which elicit a conscious political response. They are therefore a unique opportunity to present the contrast between what is and what might be. Election campaigns can be used to delineate the clash of opposing interests and values, to shape the terms of political

debate. The intention here must be to break down the facade of consensus and stability, to delegitimize the technocratic/corporatist management of economic and political life, to create a new stream of political consciousness.

Participation in federal elections, however, may carry an element of risk. National parties presenting national programmes and contesting the right to form, national government may convey the impression that the state and its institutions, notably Parliament and Cabinet, are in effective control of the nation's affairs. It is necessary therefore when appearing on the federal electoral stage to expose the realities of power, but also to integrate electoral campaigns into a much more encompassing and ongoing political strategy that takes full account of the potentiality of local, regional and international arenas of struggle.

Quite apart from their educative value, election campaigns can be used as levers for the redirection of public resources. They need not be confined to the national arena; indeed they might be most profitably conducted at the local level. Much can be learnt in this regard from the approach of the Greater London Council in the period immediately preceding its abolition in March 1986. Here was a local authority able to make imaginative use of public funds to redress imbalances in the availability of services and amenities between rich and poor areas. Even more significant was the financial assistance extended to the voluntary sector, that vast network of community organizations that service children, the elderly, the disabled, single parents, the homeless, blacks, ethnic communities and a host of other organizations including artists, entertainers, peace organizations and Third World solidarity groups. Here was an innovative strategy whereby the state — in this case the local state — was made to resource groups and individuals seeking to satisfy basic needs, to give expression to a new sense of identity, to create a new culture.

Such a strategy, by placing the state at the service of civil society, can seize the political initiative from the Right. It can take the high moral ground on issues of individual freedom and democracy and at the same time recapture something of the original emancipatory socialist impulse. In the process it can begin to reach and identify a great many constituencies — not only the socially and economically deprived but the many groups of people whose skills, cultural traditions and creative energies have long been stifled and ignored. To the extent that it is integrated into the totality of the movement's educational, cultural and political

activities, electoral intervention can become a useful instrument for defining a new agenda and constructing a new and diverse political coalition. The diversity may be a source of periodic tensions and divisions. It will be the function of the project to probe these differences and encourage a process of dialogue that respects the legitimate interests of each group. It will not be a question of imposing a compromise from above but of creatively using tensions to facilitate a process of critical discovery whereby the victims of repression begin to participate in the pedagogy of their collective emancipation.

The political realignment envisaged here cannot be defined exclusively in organizational terms. It is both an objective and a process which must be subject to periodic review and negotiation. The obstacles to its realization cannot be underestimated nor can the ferocity of the reaction that will inevitably follow the first signs of expanding and successful activism. The rebuilding of a political culture has to be measured in decades, not months or even years. The project is certainly not for those who are after instant victories. Yet for all the imponderables, we may be on the verge of a new consciousness, we may be living in an age when old ideas are collapsing but new ones have barely taken shape. That is why we need a new praxis that transcends old political categories, that releases new energies and enthusiasm, that begins, however dimly, to experience in the present the joy of the future.