

Blue Labour: Lessons for Australia

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Maurice Glasman, the founder of Blue Labour, would perhaps see some irony in having his ideas discussed in a Fabian Society forum. He is certainly hostile to the statism associated with English Fabianism in its classical era. Glasman also rejects much of the vocabulary of British, North American and Australasian proponents of 'Third Way' thinking since the 1990s. The very last thing a patient wants to be told by her doctor is that the disease is 'progressive', he jokes, picking up one of their favourite words.¹ British Labour, he claims, has been masquerading as a liberal party for too long. It should stand – in the finest traditions of R.H. Tawney and G.D.H Cole – for radicalism and democracy.² The Webbs, H.G. Wells and Bernard Shaw are conspicuously absent here.

The aim of this paper will be to outline the major features of Blue Labour thinking. It will then provide a critique intended to account for the problems experienced by Blue Labour during the British Summer of 2011. Finally, it will explore possible implications of this essentially British story for the labour and social democratic politics in Australia.

So who is Maurice Glasman, and what is Blue Labour? Since he came to national prominence in Britain in 2011, he has been acclaimed as a man of deep compassion and formidable intellect, or more simply as a breath of fresh air in a Westminster

¹ Frank Bongiorno, 'A Dawning Realisation', *Inside Story*, 23 June 2010, <http://inside.org.au/a-dawning-realisation/>, also published as 'Britain wakes to another new dawn', *Canberra Times*, 26 June 2010, Forum, pp. 8-9.

² Maurice Glasman, *Blue Labour and Australian Labor*, Seminar, King's College London, 29 June 2011.

desperately needing it.³ Yet his ideas have also been vilified as anti-immigrant, sexist and reactionary. Peter Mandelson, Defender of the New Labour Faith, condemned Blue Labour language as ‘populist, anti-immigrant, Europhobic’ and hostile to globalisation.⁴ Laurie Penny, in the *Independent*, saw in its ‘founding principles ... a frightening rhetoric of benevolent sexism and xenophobia’.⁵

Yet following the British Labour Party’s failure at the 2010 general election, Blue Labour emerged as the liveliest intellectual strand within the post-Blairite party. A politics academic at London Metropolitan University, Glasman gained the attention of some powerful figures in the dying Labour government as a community activist campaigning for a London living wage through an organisation called UK Citizens. He wrote a speech delivered by Gordon Brown at a large London public meeting, an occasion that turned out to be one of the very few triumphs in that campaign for the Labour leader.⁶

Combining elements of the German social market and co-determination (or industrial democracy),⁷ the British co-operative tradition, and a rather old-fashioned English patriotism, Blue Labour – at least as articulated by Glasman – subsequently managed to gain the attention of both Miliband brothers at a time when, along with three other candidates, they were contesting the leadership of the Labour Party. The Milibands and a handful of other thoughtful members of the parliamentary party saw Blue Labour as one possible way forward for a party feeling ideologically unmoored by a decade of Blairite ‘modernisation’. After Ed Miliband won that contest, he elevated Glasman to the peerage and therefore to a seat in the House of Lords. Amid growing media attention, Blue Labour was soon being described in the press as ‘Westminster’s most vogueish intellectual tendency’.⁸

When Glasman opens his mouth, many of the kinds of people who attend Fabian events tend to shift uncomfortably in their seats. David Goodhart, formerly editor of *Prospect*, believes that both Blue Labour and its Conservative Party-supporting alter

³ Andrew Rawnsley, ‘In Praise of Unconventional Men Whose Mad Ideas Make Us Think’, *Observer*, 31 July 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jul/31/andrew-rawnsley-steve-hilton-maurice-glasman>.

⁴ Peter Mandelson, ‘An Effective State, Not a Big State: Forging a National Strategy’, in Robert Philpot (ed.), *The Purple Book: A Progressive Future for Labour*, Biteback Publishing, London, 2011, p. 37.

⁵ Laurie Penny, ‘Why Seek Power If You Have To Turn On Your Own To Get It?’, *Independent*, 22 July 2011, p. 7.

⁶ The best account of Glasman’s rise to prominence is Rowenna Davis, *Tangled Up In Blue: Blue Labour and the Struggle for Labour’s Soul*, Ruskin Publishing, London, 2011. For Brown’s speech, see Mehdi Hasan and James Macintyre, Ed: *The Milibands and the Making of a Labour Leader*, Biteback Publishing, London, 2011, pp. 165-6 and Davis, *Tangled Up in Blue*, ch. 2.

⁷ Maurice Glasman and Duncan Weldon, ‘German Lessons for Miliband’s Growth Agenda’, *Financial Times*, 3 August 2011, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/06af9e04-be1b-11e0-bee9-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1sSx1wVqu>.

⁸ Amol Rajan, ‘True Colours?’, *Independent*, Viewspaper, 6 June 2011, p. 12.

ego, Red Toryism, signal the end of a liberal ascendancy in British politics.⁹ Where New Labour embraced globalisation, celebrating the mobility of capital and labour as the means to freedom and prosperity, Blue Labour decries globalisation's tendency to treat people as commodities. To the 'driving rhythms', neophilia and spin of New Labour, Blue Labour counterposes a love of the familiar, a resistance to change for the sake of change, and a quest for the authenticity found in popular culture and tradition. Where New Labour saw in the financial sector an opportunity to fund ambitious social policy without having to increase taxes or contemplate the redistribution of wealth from the haves to the have-nots, Blue Labour condemns grasping banks and government policy that has encouraged reckless behaviour and domination of the economy by the City of London.¹⁰

In Glasman's hands, Blue Labour's guiding principle is that people and nature were not produced to be sold, and so should not be treated as commodities. A democratic politics must resist capitalism's tendency to treat them in this way. In this view, Glasman is influenced by the Hungarian philosopher and economist Karl Polanyi, on whose ideas Glasman drew in *Unnecessary Suffering: Managing Market Utopia* (1996), a book based on the doctoral thesis he completed at the European University Institute in Florence. It made a case for the kind of social market developed in West Germany after the Second World War, one in which democratic organisations and institutions – many of them devoted to developing and maintaining vocational skills – prevented a domination by either state or market. The social market aimed to avoid the excesses of both *laissez-faire* and collectivist state planning. Glasman contrasted the West German social market with what he called 'market utopianism', in which equilibrium can supposedly be achieved without the intervention of voluntary organisations or a democratic state. He calls his own vision the 'virtue economy', a truly skilled and productive society to be contrasted with a 'virtual economy' dominated by banks.¹¹

Critics sometimes accuse Glasman of nostalgia – by which they seem to mean a nostalgia about British working-class life – but *Unnecessary Suffering* has very little at all to say about Britain; it is mainly concerned with West Germany and Poland. Glasman did, however, point out that it was the policy of a British Labour government in its occupation zone after the war that helped facilitate the West German social market, in contrast with the more freewheeling approach of the United States. Here, there is a quiet claim for the social market as a legacy of British Labour thought rather than an exotic phenomenon, although many British officials

⁹ David Goodhart, 'The Next Big Thing? Blue Labour and Red Tory: The Age of Post-Liberalism', *Prospect*, October 2011, p. 16.

¹⁰ Frank Bongiorno, 'British Labour's Blues', *Inside Story*, August 2011, pp. 5-6, also published 26 July 2011 at <http://inside.org.au/british-labour%E2%80%99s-blues/>.

¹¹ Maurice Glasman, *Unnecessary Suffering: Managing Market Utopia*, Verso, London and New York, 1996, pp. xi, 5-6, 14, 20-4; Glasman, *Blue Labour and Australian Labor*.

in postwar Germany actually favoured central planning.¹² But Glasman's argument concerning the potential application of the German social market to Britain today runs up against the problem that the dispersal of economic and political power and consensus politics that characterise modern Germany are to a great extent a product of a particular modern history that the United Kingdom has happily not had to endure.¹³ Glasman's criticisms of immigration – controversial as they were in Britain – would have been incendiary in Germany.

Baron Glasman's often spicy rhetoric against state welfare makes him sound like a right-winger and it earns him the ire of sections of the left. But his equally fierce condemnation of market utopianism and financial capital leads to criticism from those in the Labour Party who still identify in some manner with the New Labour project. While seemingly conservative in its defence of traditional culture and its emphasis on nation, community, faith and family, Blue Labour also stressed its radical credentials through opposition to capitalist commodification and state managerialism.

Glasman condemns tyrannies of the market and the state, and his politics are underpinned by a vivid, if sometimes questionable, reading of British labour and political history. The labour movement of the late nineteenth century, he argues, was guided by a bottom-up politics of democratic community organising, mutuality, cooperation and voluntary endeavour. The critical turning point in modern British history – and a wrong turn, in Glasman's view – was the victory of the Attlee Government in 1945. It pursued a top-down statism, an approach that encouraged passivity and dependence rather than a democratic and active citizenship in which members of the community would look out for one another and work together to better themselves. The Blair and Brown governments were not so much a betrayal of a noble and cherished Beveridge-Attlee-Bevan tradition of support for state intervention in the cause of social justice, as an unwelcome continuation of an elitist and abstract politics, this time founded on a combination of centrally-driven government policies and targets and an exaggerated faith in markets. For Glasman, as for Phillip Blond of Red Tory fame, market utopianism and state authoritarianism are not so much opposites as bedfellows. A centralised state and an overbearing market have in common their tendency to subordinate voluntary endeavour, community organisation and mutuality. Glasman therefore advocates grassroots organisation and community-building that would return the labour movement to the democratic values, practices and institutions of its origins.¹⁴

¹² Glasman, *Unnecessary Suffering*, pp. 61, 64; A.J. Nicholls, *Freedom With Responsibility: The Social Market Economy in Germany, 1918-1963*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994.

¹³ Stefan Auer, 'Europe's Declining Social Model: A Cautionary Tale for Australia', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 2011, p. 411.

¹⁴ His views are expounded at some length in Maurice Glasman, 'Labour as a Radical Tradition', in Maurice Glasman, Jonathan Rutherford, Marc Stears and Stuart White (eds), *The Labour Tradition and*

Blue Labour hit a number of rocks during the last British summer, most of them the result of Glasman's public activities and profile. After the announcement of his elevation to a peerage late in 2010, Glasman attracted considerable media coverage. Unsurprisingly, journalists were interested in how a chain-smoking, middle-ranking academic living with his wife and four children in a two bedroom flat above a shop had come to be Baron Glasman, of Stoke Newington and of Stamford Hill in the London Borough of Hackney.¹⁵ He was reputed to have exercised considerable influence over a Miliband, but no one seemed quite sure if it was David, the favourite in the Labour leadership context, or Ed, the eventual winner. Or was it both? It was Ed who appointed Glasman to the House of Lords but it was David who had most closely aligned himself with UK Citizens and therefore, by implication, with Glasman himself. And it was David who, in line with the ideas of UK Citizens and Glasman, had committed himself at the beginning of his leadership campaign to the training of thousands of grassroots community organisers.¹⁶ It was also David for whom Glasman wrote an important and well received speech during the campaign, much as Glasman had done previously for Brown.¹⁷ He was getting good at this, it seemed. Perhaps Glasman's peerage was a conciliatory gesture by Ed to David and David's supporters? Yet Glasman was soon being spoken about by fascinated journalists as Ed's guru, and Ed did nothing to dispel the impression. Nor did Glasman himself, who seemed to enjoy this unexpected limelight.

There was more to Blue Labour than Glasman. A series of seminars in London and Oxford in late 2010 and early 2011 brought Glasman together with Marc Stears, an Oxford philosopher and former university friend of Ed Miliband; Jonathan Rutherford, a cultural studies academic from Middlesex University; and Jon Cruddas, the Labour member for Dagenham and Rainham. David Miliband also attended, and so – after the first of the seminars – did some Ed Miliband staffers. Left-leaning academics and Labour politicians used these seminars to work through a number of issues and ideas that seemed especially pressing in the wake of Labour's defeat at the May 2010 election. The resulting e-book, *The Labour Tradition and the Politics of Paradox*, was not an explicitly Blue Labour document but it quickly came to be seen as its manifesto. This perception was itself a cause of some tension

the Politics of Paradox, The Oxford London Seminars 2010-11, Oxford and London, 2011, pp. 14-56, http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/soundings/Labour_tradition_and_the_politics_of_paradox.pdf.

¹⁵ Julian Coman and Toby Helm, 'The Peer Who Is Plotting Ed Miliband's New Strategy From His Flat Above A Shop', *Observer*, Interview, 16 January 2011, p. 32.

¹⁶ Davis, *Tangled Up in Blue*, ch. 3.

¹⁷ David Miliband, Keir Hardie Lecture, Mountain Ash, Cynon Valley, 9 July 2010, <http://davidmiliband.net/speech/keir-hardie-lecture-2010/>

among those who attended the seminars, as not all wished to be identified with Blue Labour. Some came to believe that nuances recognised by all or most present at the seminar – for instance, those concerning the appropriate balance of state and voluntary action – were less evident in the e-book than in oral discussion.¹⁸

The most serious rift came in July 2011, when Glasman gave an interview for a Fabian publication suggesting that immigration to Britain ought to be stopped. These comments of course featured prominently in the right-wing press. Glasman had already, just a few months before, controversially accused the previous Labour government of lying to voters about immigration and had called for dialogue with those sympathising with the racist English Defence League. July, however, was the last straw, and several of Glasman's allies dissociated themselves from both Glasman and the Blue Labour project. The disaffected included critical supporters in Westminster, such as Cruddas, and in the left intelligentsia, such as Stears and Rutherford. Cruddas had run some vigorous anti-racist campaigns and felt especially aggrieved at the turn of events. Blue Labour had never attracted much involvement from Labour politicians so this rift was a most unfortunate development.¹⁹

This mishap – if that's the word for it – arose from two prominent features of Blue Labour: its increasing identification with Glasman himself, and its English nationalism.

Firstly, Glasman was in most respects a political novice. It was his unpolitician-like qualities that helped attract so much media attention in the first place – he neither looked nor sounded like a resident of the Westminster village. Yet what had initially seemed to be a virtue was soon exposed as a weakness. Glasman was a remarkably frank speaker, including with journalists. By the summer of 2011, Blue Labour and Glasman were an accident waiting to happen.

Second, the privileging of the national over the international, the familiar over the strange, and the parochial over the cosmopolitan, combined to create a Blue Labour blind spot. There was arguably validity in Glasman's claim that the Labour Party in

¹⁸ Davis, *Tangled Up in Blue*, ch. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, ch. 5; Rosa Prince, 'Labour Lied To Public About Immigration, Says Ed Miliband Aide Lord Glasman', *Telegraph*, 16 April 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/8455072/Labour-lied-to-public-about-immigration-says-Ed-Miliband-aide-Lord-Glasman.html>; Mary Riddell and Tom Whitehead, 'Immigration Should Be Frozen, Says Miliband Adviser', *Telegraph*, 18 July 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/8643584/Immigration-should-be-frozen-says-Miliband-adviser.html>; Mary Riddell, 'Labour's Anti-Immigration Guru', *Telegraph*, 18 July 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/maryriddell/8644334/Labours-anti-immigration-guru.html>.

government had paid too little attention to many traditional working-class voters' concerns about the effects on employment and housing opportunities of migration to Britain. And there was some justification for his view that Gillian Duffy, whom Gordon Brown had dismissed as a 'bigoted woman' (only to have his comments broadcast across the world because he'd left his microphone on), revealed a larger failure on the part of Labour's elite to engage with its supporters' concerns. Yet anyone listening to Glasman might well have imagined that mutuality stopped at Dover. Unquestionably, this was not Glasman's attitude, but he had done little in the interview to qualify his harsh criticisms of immigration policy. Unlike the Blairites, Glasman had nothing to say about Britain's international responsibilities. In this, he was swimming with a powerful tide, since Tony Blair's sense of Britain's international responsibility yielded the unpopular Iraq war. Nonetheless, the Blair Government also increased Britain's international aid budget. I've heard Glasman speak in defence of democratic trade unionism in China, but his vision isn't really even *British*, so much as *English*.²⁰

Yet, despite many predictions over the summer, neither Glasman nor Blue Labour went away. Why? Firstly, Glasman apologised profusely. Secondly, Ed Miliband didn't abandon him, or his ideas. On the contrary, the Labour leader's speech at the party's annual conference in September 2011 continued his identification with key New Labour ideas. He acknowledged the flaws in Labour's immigration policy, condemned the predatory behaviour of the banks, extolled productive industry and vocational training, criticised the commodification of human beings, and advocated including employees on boards determining top pay. All of this would have been music to Glasman's ears.²¹ Miliband's speech underlined something that had been missed by many commentators in July when they predicted the end of Glasman and Blue Labour: the party leadership arguably *needs* Blue Labour. At a time when the Conservative-led coalition government's cuts are tearing at whatever fabric remains of British society – and when Labour itself has largely endorsed the need for massive cuts – the opposition requires a way of differentiating itself from both the Conservatives and New Labour. It will not again – or any time soon – have the Blairite and Brownite option of using the revenue generated by a bloated financial sector to fund old-style social democratic spending. And there is in any case a declining faith in the capacity of a centralised state to deliver good policy. Active governments, it is argued, are still needed, but their role should be to create capabilities among self-directed citizens. In this context, Glasman's message about the potential of a relational politics to create locally-based community solutions to

²⁰ Glasman, *Blue Labour and Australian Labor*.

²¹ 'Labour Party Conference: Ed Miliband's Speech in Full', *Telegraph*, 27 September 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/ed-miliband/8791870/Labour-Party-Conference-Ed-Milibands-speech-in-full.html>.

major problems is deeply attractive to a Labour leadership looking for a viable program to take to the next election and, eventually, into government.

The Purple Book, released by the think tank *Progress*, is an attempt to up-date New Labour for a post-Blair, post-Brown party. In parts, it is a response to Blue Labour. It is more defensive about Labour's achievements in government than Blue Labour, more enamoured of the market, and less hostile to globalisation. But it shares Blue Labour's stress on the traditions of cooperation and mutualism, and it is critical of top-down, state-driven attempts to create social justice.²² Key Blue Labour ideas are, in this sense, closer to conventional post-May 2010 Labour thinking than, say, Red Toryism to the Conservative mainstream. It is this point that does most to account for Glasman's influence as well as Blue Labour's survival as a set of ideas, if not as an attractive political brand.

Does Blue Labour have any relevance to Australia? That there has been considerable mutual borrowing between British and Australian labour movements – including New Labour's indebtedness on several fronts to the Hawke and Keating governments – would offer strong precedents for thinking in these terms once again.²³ The left is experiencing a sense of crisis internationally, so it seems reasonable to think in terms of transnational solutions.

But there are also grounds for scepticism about a Blue Labour translation from Britain to Australia. Blue Labour is in many respects a specifically British – or English – answer to British problems. It is the product of the decline and fall of a long-serving Labour government. It is a response to the efforts of Phillip Blond and David Cameron, among others, to claim aspects of the communitarian tradition for the Conservative side of politics.²⁴ Blue Labour was also part of an effort to redefine Labour's philosophy in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, which had much more serious consequences for Britain than Australia. It was moved by the (correct) belief that New Labour had been deeply complicit in the disasters that the banks' behaviour wrought on the country.

There are other reasons for caution. The Australian political class seems considerably less disillusioned than its British counterpart with centralised state authority, and less enthusiastic about the capacity for renewal at the local level. Commentators on

²² Philpot (ed.), *Purple Book*.

²³ Andrew Scott, *Running on Empty: 'Modernising' the British and Australian Labour Parties*, Pluto Press, Annandale (NSW), 2000; David O'Reilly, *The New Progressive Dilemma: Australia and Tony Blair's Legacy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007.

²⁴ Phillip Blond, 'Rise of the Red Tories', *Prospect*, 28 February 2009, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2009/02/riseoftheredtories/>

Australian political culture have since the late nineteenth century drawn attention to the strength of a practical, utilitarian attitude to state intervention. Australians, through both their history and recent experience, have good reason to retain a stronger faith in the capacity of government to produce effective and just policy outcomes.²⁵ The veteran Australian Fabian Race Mathews's advocacy of cooperatives in the Australian context has run up against this problem.²⁶

Other Blue Labour ideas might have stronger Australian applications. The effort to reclaim patriotism for the left by authors such as David McKnight, Nick Dyrenfurth and Tim Soutphommasane finds its echo, to some extent, in Glasman's English patriotism.²⁷ Meanwhile, Glasman himself has identified the strength of Catholic social thought in the history of the Australian Labor Party as a point of connection with Blue Labour's stress on the role faith communities in the rebuilding of civil society.²⁸ Glasman's emphasis on faith communities also comes out of his own Jewish religious background, and is consistent with his hostility to a politics of liberal rationalism divorced from human relations and emotions.

Here, I would agree with Glasman that there are points of connection with Australia, even if it is the Liberal Party's connections with the churches that have received the most attention in Australian political commentary in recent years.²⁹ Nonetheless, Catholic social thought helped mobilise support for Labor in the early years of the party, giving the bishops a premise with which to argue to their congregations that the party was acceptably reformist rather than an unacceptable continental-style socialist party.³⁰ While never free of sectarianism, the labour movement was a place where Catholics and Protestants could cooperate for common goals. And although it was divisive in the 1940s and 1950s, when it came to be identified with Bob Santamaria and 'The Movement', Catholic social thought has often worked for the

²⁵ Albert Métin, *Socialism Without Doctrine*, translated by Russel Ward, Alternative Publishing Co-operative, Chippendale (NSW), 1977 [1901]; W.K. Hancock, *Australia*, Jacaranda, Brisbane, 1964 [1930]; Hugh Collins, 'Political Ideology in Australia: The Distinctiveness of a Benthamite Society', *Daedalus*, Vol. 114, No. 1, Winter 1985, pp. 147-69.

²⁶ Race Mathews, *Jobs of Our Own: Building a Stake-holder Society: Alternatives to the Market and the State*, Pluto Press, Sydney and London, 1999.

²⁷ David McKnight, *Beyond Left and Right: New Politics and the Culture Wars*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest (NSW), 2005, pp. 257-8; Tim Soutphommasane, *Reclaiming Patriotism: National Building for Australian Progressives*, Cambridge university Press, Cambridge, 2009; Nick Dyrenfurth, *Heroes and Villains: The Rise and Fall of the Early Australian Labor Party*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2011.

²⁸ Glasman, *Blue Labour and Australian Labor*.

²⁹ Marion Maddox, *God Under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest (NSW), 2005; Amanda Lohrey, *Voting for Jesus: Christianity and Politics in Australia*, *Quarterly Essay*, Issue 22, 2006.

³⁰ Patrick Ford, *Cardinal Moran and the ALP: A Study in the Encounter Between Moran and Socialism, 1890-1907, Its Effects Upon the Australian Labor Party, the Foundation of Catholic Social Thought and Action in Modern Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1966.

left in recent years, providing secularists and Catholics with a social justice platform on which to cooperate around issues such as union rights, Indigenous reconciliation and refugees. The effect has been to bring back to Labor some of the children of those who abandoned it for the conservative parties in the 1950s.³¹

Blue Labour's stress on community organising might also have resonance within the Australian Labor Party at a time when it is still considering the national review undertaken by Steve Bracks, John Faulkner and Bob Carr. Citing the example already offered by Ed Miliband and the British Labor Party, the review called for the revitalisation of the party below. Like Blue Labour, it envisaged a Labor Party enlivened by 'a community-organising model' that would seek to 'empower and equip members to work in their local communities on campaigns, to build stronger community connections and to recruit members'.³² But whereas these ideas have received support and commitment from major figures in the British Labour Party, including the leader, Julia Gillard has shown very little interest in the rebuilding of the party below. In the wake of the ALP's 2011 national conference, the prospects for grassroots renewal seem very bleak indeed.

The Glasman show has some faint echoes of Australia's Latham interlude. Like Glasman, Mark Latham celebrated the value and authenticity of popular culture and the traditional values of the working class, and he professed a robust nationalism designed to appeal to ordinary Australians. Like Glasman, he went out of his way to unsettle the pieties of a left-leaning Labor-voting intelligentsia, with his views on refugees, social responsibility and mutual obligation in welfare. And like Glasman, he did all this while, in reality, being part of the intelligentsia himself. Still, I am reminded of Margaret Simon's reflections on Latham, before the 2004 election, in her *Quarterly Essay*:

Mark Latham makes me nervous. In my writing and journalistic life, my friends and I are among those who have grown a carapace, multiple chips on the shoulder and habits of caution from being denigrated as 'chattering classes' and the 'elite'. During the Howard years this denigration has robbed us of some of our undoubted comfort, but we have had the

³¹ The case of Stan and Steve Bracks is instructive. Stan was a Laborite and Catholic who transferred his allegiance to the Democratic Labor Party after the 1950s split. His son, Steve, became Labor premier of Victoria in 1999. See Paul Strangio, 'Closing the Split? Before and After Federal Intervention in the Victorian ALP', in Brian Costar, Peter Love and Paul Strangio (eds), *The Great Labor Schism: A Retrospective*, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, 2005, p. 358.

³² Steve Bracks, John Faulkner and Bob Carr, *2010 National Review: Report to the ALP National Executive*, p. 15, <http://www.alp.org.au/getattachment/3cf99afc-d393-4be3-b33c-7afbd6235ccc/review2010/>.

ultimate consolation: the sense of our own righteousness. I think Mark Latham is unlikely to leave that sense intact.³³

Maurice Glasman has been playing a similar role among the progressive intelligentsia in Britain and, like the Latham interlude, it is not yet clear whether it will all end in tears. Blue Labour's July Days certainly exposed some of the dangers.

While Blue Labour could not yet be said to have generated a large number of original public policy ideas, it is grappling with big questions about how a party of the left might respond creatively to the problems being thrown up in modern, post-crash, post-New Labour Britain. Australia's greater affluence, lower unemployment and stronger social cohesion might undercut the sense that Blue Labour has lessons for Australia. Yet Glasman's critique of the banks' dominance of the British economy surely has its Australian parallel in the mining sector. As Paul Cleary has so convincingly argued, the explosive growth of mining is starving other parts of the economy of skilled labour and especially investment. It is damaging farmland and water sources, undermining the environment, and dividing Aboriginal communities. And it is not hard to imagine what Glasman would think of the effects of the widespread use of Fly In Fly Out workers on community development and family life.³⁴

Mining is also undermining democracy – the industry's leaders have every reason to be proud of the clout they have exercised in resisting efforts to tax them fairly, and few doubt that their campaign against the Rudd Government played a major role in his downfall. That a small group of immensely wealthy individuals should be capable of exercising such power raises questions as profound for Australian democracy as the City of London's sway over Westminster and Whitehall does for Britain. But the activities of the miners are arguably more damaging because they are being permitted to plunder a finite resource that belongs to everyone. In sum, Glasman's emphasis on community building, local democracy and a balanced economy in which skilled people actually make things could provide some of the materials for a much-needed social democratic critique of the Australian mining industry.

Finally, Blue Labour's critique of both markets and the state might offer something else Australian social democracy desperately needs: the basis for a new way of thinking about our own past. And the era that now seems to exercise the most disabling influence over our sense of the future's possibilities is not the 1890s, nor the 1940s, nor even the Whitlam era – it is the 1980s. The eighties have a mesmerising influence over both Australian social democrats, and over other

³³ Margaret Simons, *Latham's World: The New Politics of the Outsiders*, *Quarterly Essay*, Issue 15, 2004, pp. 4-5.

³⁴ Paul Cleary, *Too Much Luck: The Mining Boom and Australia's Future*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2011.

members of the political class looking for weapons with which to beat the inferior leaders and governments that followed Hawke and Keating.³⁵ The eighties have now achieved a legendary status as a golden era of reform, one in which Labor saved Australia from itself by opening up the country to the outside world, freeing up markets, and yet doing so in a way that used the state to protect working the most vulnerable.³⁶

The elitist, top-down and undemocratic character of this legend could hardly be clearer. It is a celebration by the political class of its own wisdom and achievements in the face of popular ignorance. It not infrequently involves an implicit or explicit denigration of Australia's pre-1983 history, and it attaches little value to traditional popular culture and belief, or to local democracy. Its image is of a people who were acted on, rather than of citizens looking out for one another, creating a common life together, exercising autonomy and making choices. It was rather like the old view of the doctor-patient relationship – the doctors, or political class, dispensed medicine that the people, or patients, needed for their own good. Democracy is reduced to the holding of an election every three years, fought over an ever more limited terrain. After all, the necessity of 'reform' meant that there was previous little to argue over.³⁷

However economically wise it might have been to float the dollar and reduce tariffs, the effects of Hawke and Keating Labor's revolution from above are still being felt in the restricted horizons of social democrats. Its celebration of markets amounted to an abandonment of something that has been desperately needed in the world bequeathed by the Global Financial Crisis – a 'moral critique of capitalism'³⁸ – while its political elitism has produced an attenuated democracy and citizenship, one that paved the way for the even more drastic centralisation of power that occurred under John Howard and Kevin Rudd. This has also given rise to what I would see as a flawed diagnosis of Labor's ills: a readiness to see the social democracy's current crisis as primarily one of poor leadership.³⁹

³⁵ Troy Bramston, *Looking for the Light on the Hill: Modern Labor's Challenges*, Scribe, Melbourne, 2011.

³⁶ George Megalogenis, *The Australian Moment: How We Were Made For These Times*, Penguin, Camberwell (Vic.), 2012.

³⁷ The classic statement is Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty: The Story of the 1980s*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards (NSW), 1992.

³⁸ Neal Blewett, 'Lectures and Chutzpah in Lieu of Keating's Memoirs', *Australian Book Review*, February 2012, available at <https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/february-2012/742-lectures-and-chutzpah-in-lieu-of-keatings-memoirs>.

³⁹ Frank Bongiorno, 'Why Does Labor Exist?', *Inside Story*, No. 7, December 2011, pp. 20-1, also published at <http://inside.org.au/why-does-labor-exist/>. And see Dennis Glover, 'Hawke-Keating Era Saw Labor Begin to Lose Its Way', *Australian*, 15 February 2012, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/hawke-keating-era-saw-labor-begin-to-lose-its-way/story-e6frgd0x-1226271151267> and Ian Marsh, 'Fixing the Economy, Destroying the Polity: Australia since 1983', 13 October 2011, Centre for the Study of Australian politics, Australian

But there was another Labor eighties, one that is rarely mentioned by those who celebrate the Hawke-Keating legend. When the AIDS crisis hit Australia, there were strong pressures for government to turn exclusively to doctors and bureaucrats for advice on a strategy for dealing with the tragedy. Amid community panic, there were also public calls for the isolation of those with the disease, or at risk of contracting it. Yet stimulated by campaigns on the part of the gay movement and the astute judgment of health minister Neal Blewett, the government drew the gay community itself into the process of devising policy and disseminating advice. The government established structures that allowed for participation of this kind, often in the face of criticism from doctors and bureaucrats, who claimed that policy had been hijacked by a homosexual clique. Homosexuals were assumed to be capable of making responsible choices if provided with accurate information. Public information campaigns targeted the areas where gay men lived and socialised. The gay community itself would become the basis for instilling a sense of mutual responsibility among people in the cause of saving their own lives. The result was that AIDS was brought under control, and Australia came to be seen as a model for other countries to follow.⁴⁰

Here was Glasman's democracy and mutualism at work. Those who believe the Hawke era was an heroic period of reform could do worse than look to AIDS as their model for the future rather than the decision of a handful of politicians and public servants to float the dollar in December 1983.

National University, <http://socpol.anu.edu.au/centre-study-australian-politics/essays/fixing-economy-destroying-polity>.

⁴⁰ Paul Sendziuk, *Learning to Trust: Australian Responses to AIDS*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2003.