

## Australian Politics

H. J. MCNAMARA

IN THE SUMMER 1958 issue of MODERN AGE, Mr. McAuley has given a fairly good account of one of the most interesting facets of Australian political life, the viewpoint of the So-called Democratic, So-called Labour, So-called Party, but to present this as a general survey of the Australian political situation as he has done is as absurd as to present American politics as a conflict between the Henry George League and the Ku Klux Klan.

So harsh a judgment on what purports to be an authoritative article requires justification, but it is given immediate *prima facie* plausibility by the fact that no member of this remarkable organisation, as such, has ever been elected to the House of Representatives or any of the Legislative Assemblies.

In itself this is not conclusive, of course, for most parties build up from tiny minorities, but this odd caricature of a political party is permanently tied to its present

status by the complete inability of its members to understand how anyone could possibly disagree with them without being a "hired stooge" or a "craven vassal" of the Kremlin. If there is one assumption an aspiring politician must make it is that at least some of those who disagree with him, however abysmally ignorant they may be, may possibly be honestly mistaken and therefore amenable to persuasion. It is the failure of the more zealous members of the Communist Party to appreciate this fact, rather than any enthusiasm for Mr. Santamaria's surrogate for democracy that has kept the communist vote down to a low as a third of one per cent.

That this is the case with the "Democratic" "Labour" "Party" is obvious from the fact that not even the entire hierarchy of the Catholic Church in New South Wales\* could be sure of being above suspicion should it fail to toe the line drawn by this amateur priest from Melbourne. If the communists believed that the "Gilroy

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\*This includes Cardinal Gilroy, placed third on the list of probable successors to the late Pope in American reports.

Catholics" were "treading the same path as the 'regime Catholics' of Eastern Europe," they could thank Santamaria himself for the suggestion. Commenting on a *Sun* report of the dissension that Mr. McAuley now admits, he said that he "rejected a suggestion that a powerful section of the Roman Catholic clergy was moving to heal the split in the Labour Party by abandoning support of those men who fought in the industrial groups which the bishops supported." And "the *Sun* story implies that there are priests in this country who have set their feet on the slippery road which begins with disloyalty and ends in their complete betrayal of church and country to communism, which is the characteristic of so-called 'patriotic priests' in Iron Curtain countries.

"Those men were prepared to barter moral truth in return for a completely fictitious political influence under the communist regime.

"I am certain that such priests do not exist in Australia."

Nevertheless, when, as Mr. McAuley puts it, "the prize to be salvaged was the Cahill Government in which right-wing Catholics greatly predominated," not only did the New South Wales Hierarchy deny him support, but they showed many signs of wishing to deny his existence. I followed the controversy in the *Catholic Weekly* for months, and though I cannot say with absolute certainty that I read every reference to the matter, I can say that in the pages and pages that I read I never once saw his name. A pamphlet reprinted from the *Catholic Weekly* entitled "The Catholic Church does not seek Political Power," was distributed in all churches and contains no reference to him. I have not checked a press report that his name was omitted from the *Catholic Directory* at the time, but it is unlikely that such a report would go through without backing. It was not alleged, however that the Beria precedent was followed and purchasers instructed to paste "Santa Claus, Church attitude towards" over his name in past issues.

But reluctance to be linked with Santamaria was not confined to non-members of the "D." "L." "P." Even today its spokesmen lose no opportunity of pointing out that he is not a member of the "party," even though no one has ever said that he is a *member*. But four years ago, shortly after a Federal Labour member, in a moment of heat, accused another of "being under the influence of Santamaria" this reluctance was almost pathological.

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Recently on television I heard a top executive of General Motors say that with automation the four-hour day was nearer than we realise, but here we have Mr. McAuley setting out the view of what purports to be a Labour party saying that Labour's program has reached "virtual completion." The workers have achieved all their just claims—presumably in accordance with the position in life to which it has pleased God to call them.

It is true that the "D." "L." "P." has many demands of workers in its long list of promises that falls short only of the provision of roads which run down hill in both directions, but if we make any sort of distinction between the promises that come easily to a "party" never likely to have even one member in the House to press for their implementation and the actual practice of its leaders, we find the main force of its attack directed against the Australian Labour Party rather than its rivals.

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The cornerstone of Labour policy is the "Basic Wage," the legal minimum wage for an unskilled worker—the Labour Party's first political achievement. Unlike Mr. McAuley, Labour does not see a "completion" of its program, though it has been accused of loss of vigor in pressing it forward, but whatever gains or losses it makes there has always been complete agreement that the "minimum standard of living" is the last line of retreat.

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If Santamaria has not been successful in convincing the average Australian that his own simple solution of the problem of Church-State relations is correct, he has cast corresponding doubts on the simplicity of the problem as it is commonly understood. Between denying that his ecclesiastical armies constituted clerical intrusion into politics and affirming that criticism of him was political intrusion into church affairs, some line had to be drawn.

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And I submit that for the name of Prime Minister Menzies the name of President Eisenhower or any other democratic leader could be substituted. I have added to what Mr. McAuley says about B. A. Santamaria, but placed against a familiar background it should have been immediately obvious from the article itself that it could not possibly have been a serious study of the political situation in any country making even a pretence at being democratic.

## *The Sirens*

We did as he directed,  
Stopped our ears with wax,  
Bound him respectfully to the mast  
Then bent our willing backs

Over the oars and entered  
A fluent stretch of sea.  
The water smiled a welcome,  
The little waves kissed lightly

Our thrusting prow, and breezes  
Wantoned with our sail.  
And there They were: so young,  
Golden their hair and frail

Their bodies, dressed in light,  
Light only. They played  
With breast and thigh a music  
Sweetly enchanting: we swayed

On our benches, male, erect,  
And then we saw their mouths  
Moving like fishes feeding,  
All charming sound tuned out.

We laughed until we wept,  
Relaxed to the oars again.  
But he could hear them singing,  
Strained at his ropes in pain,

And signalled us to loose him,  
Raged as we disobeyed,  
The branching veins in his temples  
Throbbled and his lips were red

With blood as he lunged and twisted  
In his net and the hot tears flowed.  
We saw his struggle slacken,  
His eyes clear as we rowed

Thankful through rougher water  
Out of enticing range.  
We released him, and he fell  
To the deck. We thought it strange

He had not stopped his ears  
Like us. Why did he choose  
To listen and be tormented,  
Long for and yet refuse

The attractive music? Was he  
Called, not only to pain,  
But to endure all pleasures  
Before he was home again?

JOSEPH P. CLANCY