

# Has the ALP shifted too much for the Liberal Party?

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**Let's be blunt:** at the state level, it seems like the Liberal Party is achieving little more than self-destruction. Why is this so?

The answer can be found in the Australian Labor Party. The ALP has completely transformed itself.

Certainly, the Labor Party constitution still maintains socialism as its objective. The constitution says Labor is 'a democratic socialist party, which 'has the objective of the democratic socialisation of industry, production, distribution and exchange to the extent necessary to eliminate exploitation.'

But these words have become historically anachronistic and empty; no longer followed as an active principle.

The ALP has dumped socialism and now seems to be a pro-business, pro-market political machine. It receives more funding from the business community than from the unions.

There are individuals in the Liberal Party who are intellectual matches for the best of the ALP. They mostly function at the federal level. At the state level, intellectual thought is confused.

At the core of Liberal confusion is a lack of recognition about these ideological changes inside the ALP. If the change is pointed out the reaction is aggressive denial.

The reality however is that the ALP presents itself as the very thing the Liberal Party aspires to be; economic managers with a pro-free market bias matched by a social conscience.

Further, at the state levels the ALP is demonstrating itself to be significantly more competent as free market managers than the alternate on offer from the Liberals. It's too early to judge the federal situation.

This powerful performance by the ALP confuses the Liberals. Unable to explain and frustrated by ALP success, the Liberals have

turned inward devouring themselves.

The Liberal Party has always been a healthy dynamic of tensions between different views. Today there are royalists, pro-republicans, conservatives, neo-liberals, nationalists, internationalists, bleeding-heart soft lefties, hard religious rightists, mild anarchists and strong government interventionists to name just a few.

To the extent factionalism exists it floats around issues and personalities. From a policy perspective, individuals cross from one side to the other depending on the issues of the day.

What has always united the Liberal Party is a belief in saving Australia from socialism. This means stopping the ALP and its union backers from being in government. This has been the 60-plus year binding glue that has given Liberals their success.

It's easy to bond when you know what to oppose. But fear of ALP and union socialism is now a Liberal myth, one made irrelevant by the changed ALP.

The first Liberal reaction to these changes has been denial. So sacred is the socialist-fear myth that party operatives cannot accept, or even conceive of, a changed ALP. The common refrain is 'just you wait; they (the ALP) will return to form.' And in the waiting the Liberals have been losing badly. Denial has been political death.

The second reaction has been self-destruction. Without the binding glue of socialist fear the disparate views and tensions have wildly split.

Unable to analyse the cause of their problems the Liberals have so far proven incapable of identifying solutions.

If the ALP has changed and accepted core principles to which Liberals subscribe how do Liberals define a difference?

The solution, if there is one, lies in a close and honest analysis of the new ALP, done without preconceptions of the past. Then a focus on and reassessment of principles of good government.

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**What next?**