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From the Editor

MIKE NAHAN

ELECTION LESSONS

The 2004 Federal Election has proven to be a godsend, not just for its result, but for the lessons being learnt.

The Coalition's surprise victory in the Senate, starting 1 July 2005, removes the main impediment to reform and increased prosperity. It provides the Howard Government with the opportunity to forge a long overdue programme of reform, not only in the economic sphere, but in the cultural arena as well.

This is both an opportunity and a challenge, not just for the Government, but for the many groups and people interested in advancing Australia. In truth, we have used the recalcitrant Senate as an excuse to shirk the hard and often unpopular task of advancing change. To aid this challenge, the IPA will be publishing a primer for reform in the New Year.

The case for reform was also boosted by the message from aspirational voters. They voted in mass for Howard because he promised most clearly to advance their goals—that is, getting wealthier, getting their children into good schools and enjoying the good life. They also correctly identified that recent improvements to their lives were in no small part due to past economic reform and that additional change was necessary to advance further. At least sections of the Labor Party have got this message; let's hope that they win the debate there.

The case for reform also received a large boost with the bursting of the Green balloon. The Greens had a great expectation of becoming the third force in Australian politics. They failed. Although their vote rose across the country, it did so by just less than 2 percentage points to 7.1 per cent, much less than the double-digit figure expected. They lost their only House



of Reps seat. They did gain two Senate seats, but the Coalition, which was the 'least green' of the major parties, picked up four additional Senate seats. Importantly, Green preferences did not help Labor win in any mainland seat.

The reasons for the failure of the Greens were three-fold.

First, they were exposed for what they are—a radical left-wing party. In order to become the third force, they had to release policies on issues other than the environment. They did so and they were exposed as extremist, in both economic and social areas. Second, the main parties had captured much of the green agenda and in so doing captured the real appeal of the Greens. Third, the Greens' stand on Tasmanian forests was correctly seen as uncompromising, with the intent of locking up the forest despite the impact on local communities and jobs.

The Green's failure in 2004 is reverberating throughout the community. It has removed their destructive force in the Senate. It will strengthen the resolve of many rural communities to resist environmental fundamentalism. And importantly, it will give the Government the resolve to reform the charities laws and prevent environmental groups from being fronts for political parties.

The election has also rendered the intellectual Left shattered and isolated. Howard's victory was more important than any other in a long line of defeats for it. Indeed, the Left has been on the losing end of every major issue over the last 15 years—economic rationalism, reconciliation, refugees, the US Alliance, the republic, public provisioning, media policy, multiculturalism, labour markets, welfare, etc. This election exposed the growing chasms in values, aspirations and cultural identity between the intellectual Left elites and the working class. The elites worked hard against Howard, portraying him as an immoral political ogre and as standing against everything that they hold dear. In contrast, the working class voted for Howard in increased numbers, expressly because he shared their values and aspirations. The brighter minds in the Labor Party now realize that they must go back to their roots in the working class and steer away from the elites. This will be a difficult task for them, as the elites have come to dominate the Party. Nonetheless, it does mean that the undue influence that they have over public values and policies should wane.

Of course this Left elite will not fade away quietly. Indeed, as outlined in 'Democracy's Trojan Horse' by John Fonte (pages 3–6, this issue), the Left has already established a new avenue for influence through the NGO movement—so-called participatory democracy—where chutzpah, organization, emotion and an articulate voice rule, rather than numbers of votes and open debate.

The urgent need to defend liberal democracy and national sovereignty is shaping up to be the next big agenda in coming years.

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