

Comment by Michael C H Jones

Bob Carr is the last of that nefarious right-wing catholic cabal that sat around Paul Keating at NSW ALP Youth Council in the early to mid 1960s. Only Paul and youngsters Graham Richardson and Bob Carr are still in the game with Bob of course getting the foreign minister gig if not the girl, Julia. 'Danger Man' Laurie Brereton and Masters of Laws left leader Frank Walker are long gone, as is 'leaping' Leo McLeay who saved Paul on a number of occasions from motor car impediments.

The next 18 months if it lasts will be the swansong. A remarkable group, even if like me you would not have a bar of them philosophically, will end their dance upon the Australian political stage. There was of course as with most political careers a lot of luck as well as talent. For example Paul, the man Bob had a photo session with the day after being appointed Foreign Minister - there they were in the Sydney Morning Herald, or was it the Australian, with their partners at the L'Arte cafe chewing the fat on the weighty issues of global conflict. Like Bob who had Nick Greiner as his opponent, Paul was very lucky in his career; from car accidents and girl friends in 1969, holding the megaphone for Gough in 1975, appointment as Shadow Treasurer by Bill in 1982, four electoral victories by another Bob during the 1980s and a brilliant campaign by John in 1993. Indeed if Paul's adherence to the philosophy of Jack had been taken too seriously then Bob's hero Bill's more practical politics may have stopped him right from the start.

I watched them all around 1964/65 from memory and then disappeared from the young kids to the grown up kids on the NSW Left Wing Steering Committee - Arthur and Ray, Jack and John and Jack, Stan and Peter and so on. As usual I was not a very good politician. Particularly when I told Arthur publicly in 1968 "you can't count" when he reported Jim Cairns would beat Gough Whitlam for the Federal ALP leadership. There are alternative traditions in the Australian Labor Party. The 'labourists', mainly ex-trade union officials get most of the rewards, but there has always been an intellectual element on the Right - in NSW the Keatings and Carrs especially. They have known where their bread was buttered and the ways in which you protect and promote careers and remuneration packages that until later years they could never earn in the private sector. Lets be very honest they were much better at it than the left of the party, many of whom were neo-marxist rather than communist but played their tactics all wrong. Philosophically the New Left of the 1960s - the Students for a Democratic Society and others - lost all the battles but well and truly won the war over the last 40 years. It is had to think of any issue in which we have not been victorious and even Bob and Paul sprout our slogans today. My old sparring mate Sir Frank would be appalled down there wherever he is shoveling the coal. Lionel would be laughing up there uproariously.

Which brings me to Papua New Guinea. What was a professional clear thinking master of political spin like Bob Carr attempting when he went onto his 50 year mate Graham Richardson's programme? Was it simply lifting the ratings? Or making an early publicity mark? Perhaps quickening the rise again or demise again of 1967 Pangu Party founder Sir Michael Somare? Then again it could have been about consistency and democracy - could Australia treat PNG any differently to Fiji in terms of delayed or postponed elections? Maybe there were greater strategic considerations for our region be it called Australasia or Oceania in Bob's mind? There is a profound constitutional problem in PNG which can only be settled by an early election. To have a second regional country suspended from the Commonwealth would look like very poor management not only to the UK but to the 'leader of the pack' the USA. China would not be above meddling either.

The matter is serious and that is what Bob was trying to say despite his mea culpa.

But the Australian media and their poorly read scribes jumped on him very quickly. A trend that will

continue to Australia's disservice.

Perhaps Bob ought to do a Keating, think outside the square and paint the big picture. Lets have a genuine regional approach to all the problems in the South West Pacific especially in Economic Relations. Billy Hughes formulated in the early 1920s the Australian Monroe Doctrine. We should take it further and to a logical conclusion with a Pax Australasia citizenship. Make all the peoples of the South West Pacific Australian citizens and extend the CER with New Zealand in its entirety to all the Pacific nations as far as Samoa and the Cook Islands. The regional centers of Australia need the workers and they need the money. Include education and health, tourism and entertainment. Let them have whatever restrictions they want on wholesale migration by Australians to their islands but let them come to the mainland whenever they want subject to the usual criminal checks - we don't want any boat people !

You think this policy proposal is absurd? Well no more absurd and far more practical for Australia than letting in Chinese workers. This way the problems and potential threats in our region can be anticipated and dealt with expeditiously. And Bob Carr the longest servicing Premier in NSW history, the province/state that Barry O'Farrell is going to take back to No 1, is the right man for the job. What a legacy to leave Australia over the next 18 months - Julia will be over the moon and sage Keating will be very proud.