

2013

National
Young
Labor Left
Executive

[AGITATED AND ORGANISING]

A discussion paper on reform
of NYLL and AYL.

This paper was undertaken by NYLL Convenors Alex Cassie and Adam Clarke to explore structural and cultural reform within the youth branch of the ALP. This paper is the culmination of months of drafts and consultation with state and territory Young Labor Left executives of the ACT, NSW, QLD, SA, Victoria, and WA. The paper represents consensus within this executive group on old arguments and raised unforeseen possibilities for collaboration and growth. The arguments that occurred throughout this process are testament to the passion and desire for reform within our membership. The fact that this final draft represents the consensus position of our collected national caucus executives reflects the decisive dedication of all states and territories to ensure that change occurs.

Discussion paper for National Young Labor Left

Introduction

Australian Young Labor (AYL) must develop a vision for its future. The ALP is in difficulty on many fronts, and AYL must decide what role it shall play in the years to come.

The National Young Labor Left (NYLL) faces an acute problem within the wider difficulties facing the Party. Disillusionment with an AYL system that operates against NYLL; disappointment with a Party that often does not align with the views of the Left; and years of dejection in branches dominated by the Right have left many NYLL members despairing.

At what can only be described as a time of crisis in our movement the National Young Left must overcome the disengagement of many of our peers and develop a plan to take back our Party.

This paper aims to discuss not just the immediate decisions we face, but to raise questions about our future. We must look beyond our immediate concerns and ask ourselves; what do we want to see AYL campaigning for, not just in 2013, but in 2017? What AYL can truly contribute not only to the continued survival of the Party, but to its growth and development over two, four, and eight years?

The answers to these questions will not be found in following models from overseas, revisiting past mistakes or blindly following instructions from party elders.

If we are to take back our party our plans must be owned, and therefore developed, by those who commit their youths to building a better party and a stronger community; the left-wing activists of our state and territory branches.

Part 1: An Activist National Young Labor Left

Purpose: **To be an organising force engaged in Party and community debates**
 To recruit and develop new members

Why:

It is inevitable that there will be a substantial post-election debate about the direction of the ALP and what is required to rebuild our movement. To ensure that we are heard in this environment, NYLL needs to have a nationally formulated position which our activists can argue for in all forums and at every level of the Party.

From some quarters there will be pressure to move the ALP to the right and to blame perceived 'left-wing' policy positions as having alienated 'middle Australia'. Simultaneously and contradicting this rhetoric, we will continue to lose members who are unhappy with the lack of true progressive Labor values.

Another debate to rage will be on how we organise ourselves as a movement, with the push on for direct-election and democratic engagement throughout the party, including direct-election of the leadership. Of course any attempt to alter the established balance of power within the movement will be met by fierce resistance.

It is in this context that it is imperative we establish a nationally engaged, activist Young Left that is capable of weighing in to these debates and organising our members and supporters across the country to campaign in favour of a NYLL agenda.

1.1 Membership development and recruitment

Recruitment of new, quality members is central to strength. The oft-commented on phenomenon of young people – in whose best interests a Labor government operates – voting Liberal is a cause for concern for the ALP. Rather than despairing and blaming the media, we need to take responsibility for changing peoples' minds. Minds are changed through conversation. Conversation takes longer than a media spot or a cute graphic on Facebook, but conversation remains the only true method of learning what peoples' turning points are, and helping them see that the ALP is the party for them.

Conversation leading to recruitment requires persistence, interest and care. Rather than turning in on ourselves, NYLL must form the spearhead of an effort to speak with those people we identify as future members. These identified people might be groups targeted by state NYLL caucuses, or individuals. The targets might be non-party members or unaligned members. NYLL, through the Convenors, will develop a broad strategic recruitment plan. However each individual state and territory, and indeed each individual member, must take responsibility for reaching out to their networks: be they colleagues, family, friends or classmates.

In WA and Tasmania where the YLL caucuses have grown, it is through openness and a willingness to discuss the issues with all-comers. This can be achieved through having

events open to all interested people, or social events where it is demonstrated that we are not party hacks, but rather just young interested - and interesting - people. State caucuses should be encouraged to develop recruitment targets and develop strategies within the NYLL broad plan. These strategies should be shared through Convenor-level discussions, with accompanying analysis of results and development of ideas over time as we grow and face new challenges.

Leading to the Federal election we should naturally be having conversations with as many people as possible about why the ALP is the party for them. However following the election, we will also have a dual task of recruiting people appalled by a potential Liberal government, and preventing people potentially appalled by the campaign from leaving. This paper proposes that in order to assist in this task, we should hold a NYLL congress shortly after the election.

1.2 NYLL congress

A NYLL Congress should be held every two years with intervening time spent on developing NYLL policy based on discussion and contributions between state caucuses. This document should be presented for endorsement at the congress and contain strategic goals, policy priorities, and immediate action plans.

In the first instance, a NYLL congress held just after the election should have as its sole purpose the motivation of NYLL members. This paper proposes that it be held over a weekend in a city other than Canberra to limit costs, with suggested activities drawn from the following:

- *Practical skills:* e.g. recruiting; organising; campaigning on social media; how to argue economic policy with a Young Lib commerce major; how to count a ballot; public speaking.
- *Policy discussions:* e.g. education reform; industrial relations for young workers; civil rights under a 'law and order agenda'.
- *Current issues:* e.g. seminars from each state to discuss current issues in their state; hot topics in the media; senior party politics and how we fit in.
- *Party debate:* e.g. strengthening the understanding of YLL members of the larger party reform and platform debates and working towards a NYLL contribution to those debates in the lead up to the ALP National Conference.

From this congress a peak organising group should be drawn to address senior members of the Left in the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party. This will enable them to hear directly from NYLL in an official capacity and will aim to facilitate further positive outcomes for engagement by Young Left members within the Party.

After the inaugural congress - which due to necessity will be organised by state and national convenors - one way of potentially organising logistical requirements for the Congress would be Left AYL National Conference delegates to act as a Steering Committee to organise a NYLL congress. The pre-AYL conference caucus could be used to plan and strategise NYLL activities rather than mindlessly rolling through the irrelevant AYL policy book. This would

also enable some continued form of participation at AYL, but with delegates coming away feeling as though something constructive had come from their time.

Logistical requirements

- *Funding for logistics/travel*

A NYLL congress could incur significant cost. In order to spread the cost evenly between jurisdictions and lessen the overall burden, funding should be arranged via the National Left. If agreed to the National Left would have the capacity to organise funding sources through affiliated trade unions and State Left branches.

Funding for individual travel costs could be sought through sponsorship from Left MPs and unions on a state and territory basis.

- *Venue*

It should be the requirement of the Left in the host State to source a venue. Necessary funding should however fall on the National Left.

- *Who goes*

Attendance should be open to all party members in the Left under the age of 27 at the very least. Consideration should be given to allowing non-aligned party members, as well as progressive non-Party members, the opportunity to attend.

- *Chairing and secretarial duties*

The easiest way to organise chairing and secretarial responsibilities, at least initially, would be for the obligation to fall on the NYLL Co-Conveners and Coordinator with duties to be delegated to State Conveners.

- *Voting*

It is not expected that there be any need for voting to take place.

1.3 National membership survey

A NYLL national membership survey should be conducted after the federal election. The survey could be conducted online. This would require a consolidation of records of membership – a useful step in itself.

This survey would aim to engage and activate membership, and include those who couldn't make it to a NYLL congress. It would aid NYLL leadership in developing a progressive national identity, and to assist in targeted recruitment and preservation of membership.

Questions should also seek views on topics that will be important in the context of the work of the National Policy Forum (NPF) in the lead up to the January 2015 National Conference. The NPF is likely to carry forward a big debate on the values and objectives in our National Platform and how we practically deliver on these. It is important to actively engage all arms of the Left in this debate on our very identity as a Party.

1.4 YLL link-ups

Communication is central to the correct application of any reform. This paper recommends that link-ups (phone or Skype) at a minimum of every two months of state and territory YLL convenors be a mandated requirement for satisfactory completion of the role. The role of Coordinator is already in place to organise this. Through greater communication between states and territories, YLL can strengthen the cohesion of the Left, cooperate on reform, and contribute to each state and territories' development.

Part 2: An Australian Young Labor we can be proud of

Purpose: Reform AYL conference and the national structure of AYL to transform us into a relevant and respected participant in national political debate and an institution that attracts and retains new members.

Why:

The urgent need for reform of Australian Young Labor is understood by those who want the Party to remain a relevant, developing and progressive force. NYLL considers reform a priority on which we should focus our efforts.

The barriers to serious reform have been present for many years and present a serious challenge that must be met by serious proposals.

There is an ingrained factional and cultural system that will be difficult to break by using the existing structures to negotiate reform proposals.

The most effective and honourable way to advance AYL reform is by considering our own unified set of proposals as a National Young Left with the view to expanding them the wider AYL. Part 1 of this paper has already outlined the initial plans of NYLL.

The best way to negotiate new structures is to stand on a position of strength. Developing a coherent framework of planned, manageable and purposeful reform is the first step to this restructuring. Without proposals of our own, the debate remains purely theoretical. With proposals of our own, we offer strong alternatives.

In developing our own position, the National Young Left can aspire to broaden the debate and bring it to the attention of the broader movement just as the National Young Left should aspire to influence the direction of the Party generally.

2.1 AYL Reform recommendations

- *Introduce One Member One Vote (OMOV)*

The 52 delegates that elect the Australian Young Labor Executive and office-bearers are a small proportion of Young Labor members. It is far from representative, accountable and democratic. It is no wonder that AYL is inactive outside of AYL National Conference.

AYL needs to be accountable as the representative unit for young people within the party and this can only happen through the adoption of OMOV. Due to Australia's geographic size, models based on members attending an AGM would disadvantage many who simply cannot afford to attend. Thus all members under the age of 27 should have a vote for Young Labor office bearers through a postal vote or online voting like the ballot for the National Policy Forum. This reform could first be enacted within the Young Left –

demonstrating the practicalities of a ballot and engaging Left members simultaneously. There is precedence for this. Tasmanian Young Labor elects its officebearers through a yearly postal ballot – see **Appendix: Case Example - Tasmania** for examples of the benefits of this system.

The office-bearers elected in such a way would have a greater legitimacy in the party. These reforms would encourage a culture of positive and open campaigning within the party on

Case Example - Queensland

Over a period of about a month, concluding in May 2013, Queensland Young Labor conducted their first election by postal ballot (of office-bearers, committees, AYL delegates and YL delegates to state conference). Compared to a stand-up ballot participation of QYL members in the vote increased. There was also a greater engagement of QYL members due to candidates campaigning amongst unaligned, and previously disenfranchised regional members. At this ballot, the Left had its best result in many years – increasing from its usual result of just above 25% of the vote in the last two years, to 36% of the vote. In addition to invigorating the membership, additional recruitment opportunities are created when reaching out to previously disengaged Young Labor members. The greatest outlay was the cost of stamps. Time and effort was spent in campaigning however it is the consideration of QYLL that those who want an office bearing position should be willing and able to make an effort; and that the benefits far outweigh the costs.

(For further examples of the effects of postal ballots, see Appendix: Case Example – Tasmania).

ideas. There would be a double gain: both in transparency and engagement.

- Reform AYL National Conference

AYL Conferences are a farce where resolutions are passed and then forgotten with no further action. Debates take place for hours on ‘joke motions’ and yet Education Policy is consistently passed *en bloc* without consideration. We need to invest in young members as they are the future of the party. We should look to alternative models where maximum participation by young members is sought and young members gain more than witness political theatrics.

An annual weekend where there is proper engagement from the party leadership should be considered where young members from across the country are encouraged to attend. In New Zealand, the Labour Party leader attends and spends time at their annual summer camp to engage with young members of the party. There should be sessions covering the broad social democratic spectrum with expert participation on issues of policy, and more engagement by the senior leadership of the party beyond a speech to AYL Conference. Practical training in organisation and recruitment should occur, alongside challenging discussion that stretch us beyond our normal perceptions.

A Conference that is closer to these examples where we have a conference session but also political education with seminars and panels on important policy debates and community campaigns from a social democratic perspective would be far more valuable and develop both the campaigning and critical thinking skills needed for the party into the future.

Most importantly, this organising event should be open to as many members as who can attend.

- *Have self-defined caucuses for autonomous equalities officebearers*

Young Labor should have autonomous elections for equalities officebearers. Autonomous elections recognise that groups within the community face particular disadvantages and that a representative to advocate their views is needed. UK Young Labor elects their Women's, Disabilities, Black and Minority Ethnic and LGBTIQ OB's by self-defined autonomous caucus of conference delegates. A similar system should be considered.

This paper also notes that Young Labor tends to be dominated by the issues that affect university students. This is far from representative considering Young Labor covers ALP members under 27. While those at the older end tend to be more involved and better represented within the party, our youngest members often are not. London Young Labor has an Under 19s officer to represent the issues and concerns of younger members of Young Labor who may not have a vote in elections. This should be considered.

Recognising the discouraging effects of discrimination and anti-social behaviour on the participation of minority groups and young people in AYL, NYLL believes the conference should adopt a charter of expected behaviour to be adhered to in at all official events. This should be developed to address language and other potential harassing behaviours. In particular it should articulate the right of all participants not to partake in the drinking culture that is endemic in some aspects of AYL.

- *Ensure transparent rules*

Under the ALP National Constitution "Australian Young Labor shall function in accordance with the rules that may be approved from time to time by the National Executive and subject to its control and jurisdiction."

It is almost impossible to publicly obtain the rules for AYL. For the sake of transparency and accountability, the rules for AYL should be incorporated into the ALP National Constitution and Rules as an appendix for all to see.

- *Give greater independence to Young Labor*

It is highly concerning that Young Labor is often the most conservative party unit, often seen as far more "right-wing" than the ALP. A Young Labor that openly campaigns on progressive issues that young people cares about will encourage people to join the ALP. Young Labor should have the freedom to speak out and publicly advocate policies different the party position that young people support.

At the 2011 AYL Conference, motions supportive of gay marriage, a humane policy on refugees and abolishing youth wages were passed with cross-factional support. Young Labor should be able to publicly advocate on these issues and not allow any other party to have a monopoly on progressive issues.

- *Consistent eligibility to vote in AYL*

In each state and territory, the eligibility to vote in AYL differs. In some states it is OMOV at their Conference; others have delegate-based voting; one branch has a conference that is half union delegations; another has no automatic membership and requires you to separately join Young Labor. There needs to be greater consistency with the adoption of automatic membership and OMOV across all state and territory Young Labor branches.

Conclusions

The role of the National Young Labor Left is currently undefined. We must take the opportunity now to position ourselves as a nationally coordinated and well organised group with agreed-upon positions on reform and policy. In order to do this the key recommendations are held in Part 1 of this paper: the immediate commencement of planning for a NYLL congress; the commencement of AYL reforms; the consolidation of regular meetings of state and territory Convenors; and recruitment initiatives across all states and territories.

We commend this paper for discussion and consideration by all YLL caucus members in all states and territories.

Appendix: Case Example - Tasmania

Adam Clarke

Postal ballots for Party positions - Tasmania

Tasmania has had a practice of conducting postal ballots for party office bearer positions and pre-selections for many years now.

Ballots are conducted using compulsory preferential voting with the single transferable vote used in proportional ballots. Affirmative action rules also apply for proportional ballots.

Local Government elections in Tasmania are also conducted entirely by postal ballot.

The practice of using postal ballots has helped to foster a culture of member engagement that has required candidates for public office and positions in the organisational wing of the party to engage with the membership and contest ideas of policy, campaign strategies and membership activities.

It should also be noted that Tasmania has the highest ALP membership to population ratio of all branches other than the ACT.

Activity test for eligibility to participate in ballots

The party activity test is uniform across all balloted positions and is determined by a combination of current financial membership of at least 6 months and attendance at two local (or Central Policy) branch meetings in the previous 12 months.

Party President and Vice-Presidents

As part of reforms passed at the 2011 State Conference and in line with the Faulkner/Bracks/Carr Review, direct election from the membership has been introduced for the positions of Party President and three Vice-Presidents. Importantly all four of these positions carry full voting rights on the Administrative Committee, unlike the directly elected National President or Vice-Presidents.

National Conference delegate elections

Another reform arising from both the National Review and the 2011 State Conference will see 50% of Tasmania's National Conference delegates for the next ALP National Conference elected in a single postal ballot of all eligible party members. The remaining 50% will be elected by State Conference delegates.

State Conference delegate elections

Delegates to State Conference are elected annually in April by postal ballot of the membership within a federal electorate. Apportionment of delegates between electorates is based on the number of members within an electorate. In the most recent elections the electorate of Denison was apportioned 27 delegates; therefore the quota for election was 3.5% of the vote.

Outcome for Left: The Left holds between 70-80% of State Conference delegate positions.

State Parliamentary Party Leader:

The 2012 State Conference agreed to change the rules to allow for the direct election of the Parliamentary Party Leader. This would be done by an electoral college that would consist of three components, each weighted at 1/3 of the total ballot. The three components will be the Parliamentary Labor Party, the rank-and-file membership, and the financial membership of affiliated trade unions. In total over 25,000 Tasmanians will be eligible to vote in the selection of a future leader of the Labor Party.

Recent elections

National President Ballot 2011

Tasmania had by far the highest rate of return for ballots in the 2011 National President election. This is likely due both to members being used to the postal ballot process as well as factional organisers being well established in engaging with members to ensure ballots are returned.

Outcome for Left: The Left won the National Presidency and the Junior Vice-President's spot. The Right won the Senior VP position.

Party President and Vice-Presidents May 2012

In May 2012 the inaugural ballot was held for the election of the Party President and three Vice-Presidents.

As there were four positions to be elected the quota for election was 20% of the total returned vote. The first candidate to be declared elected would assume the position of President.

Members returned their ballots at a rate of 90% of all eligible voters.

Outcome for Left: The Left won the President's position and the first two Vice-Presidents positions. The Right won the final Vice-President position.

Casual Senate Vacancy June 2012

A month later, in June 2012 a postal ballot of all eligible members was held to fill a casual Senate vacancy that had arisen.

There was an 83% turnout rate for that ballot.

Outcome for Left: The Left candidate won 89% of the vote from 581 returned ballots.

Annual Young Labor elections May 2013

Elections for the Young Labor executive as well as Young Labor State Conference delegates are held every year in April. Three positions were contested in this year's elections.

There was an 89% turnout for the elections amongst the Young Labor membership.

Outcome for Left: The Left won the President's position with 91% of the vote.

OMOV direct election is good for the Left:

The Left always does better when enfranchisement of members is expanded.

Nationally the evidence is that the Left does better when every member gets a vote (a limited activity test is reasonable) and every member's vote is equal.

For example, every direct-election ballot that has taken place in NSW has seen the Left beat the Right comfortably. This has been recently evidenced in elections for the NSW Policy Forum and the National Policy Forum.

People don't join the Labor Party to be right-wing or even moderate. Most people join political parties because they actually have partisan values and beliefs. The evidence is that non-aligned party members much prefer to support progressive (Left) candidates over endorsed Right candidates.

Despite talk of a need for greater recruitment and organisation by the Left (still a worthy goal), it must be understood and recognised that the reason for the Left's minority status nationally is actually entrenched in the rules and organisation of the Labor party; the fact that too often members do not have a say and when they do their voices are not equal.

The truth is that there is a reason that so many Left figures place immense importance on the question of Direct Election, over and above anything else; it is the single reform that would alter the balance of power in the Party and from which all other change would flow. That is also why it is the most bitterly resisted.