

Australia Dossier by Allen Douglas

Unions are being decimated

And they have the leadership of the Australian Labor Party and the Australian Council of Trade Unions to thank for it.

Over the last several years, the nation's once-proud trade unions have suffered a savage assault. In 1997-98 alone, one-quarter of the top 20 unions each lost more than 10,000 members—huge numbers by Australian standards, where, even after a series of amalgamations beginning in the 1980s, most of the biggest unions total no more than 100,000 members.

In part, this carnage was wrought by the “usual suspects”: by a fanatically anti-labor government dominated by the free-trade Mont Pelerin Society, which came to power under Liberal Prime Minister John Howard in March 1996, and by the world's largest raw materials company, the British Crown-controlled Rio Tinto, which helped elect that government. Rio Tinto secretly authored most of the legislative and other assaults by the government, including the notorious Workplace Relations Act in 1997, which all but outlawed the right to strike, and which the International Labor Organization denounced as a violation of civilized society.

However, the groundwork for all this was laid in the 1980s by the trade unions' own party, the Australian Labor Party (ALP), in conjunction with a handful of top figures in the umbrella union body, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). And now, things are poised to get worse, as the ALP prepares to formally adopt the “Third Way” anti-labor policies of Her Majesty's Privy Councillor, British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

In 1983, the ALP took power under Prime Minister Bob Hawke. Together with Treasurer Paul Keating, Hawke floated the Australian dollar,

deregulated the financial system, dropped tariffs, privatized state-sector industries, sold off the national bank, and, in general, utterly ripped up the protectionist, national banking policies cherished by the ALP since its founding.

Though a former ACTU president, Hawke was always close to the “big end of town”—the heads of major corporations, such as trucking magnate Sir Peter Abeles; Zionist leader Isi Leibler; and media multi-billionaire Kerry Packer. Meanwhile, Hawke protégé Bill Kelty replaced him as ACTU boss, and, like Hawke, functioned as a puppet for the multinationals, even being appointed to the board of the country's central bank, the Reserve Bank. Trade union membership plummeted from 45% of the workforce in 1986, to 28% at present (and only 21% in the private sector).

While Hawke and Kelty pretended to be pro-labor, Keating, who replaced Hawke as Prime Minister in 1991, was a bit more candid. As Keating once told his good friend Lord Alistair McAlpine, the treasurer of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party for 15 years, “I am going to tear the trade unions apart, tear them up.”

Since leaving office, Hawke, now a millionaire “corporate consultant,” has also been more forthright about his sympathies. Asked by ABC Radio on July 16, 1997 what he thought about labor's resistance to Howard's industrial relations “reforms” which were decimating the unions, Hawke counselled labor to accept the changes: “I think it's bloody stupid if the unions and the ALP say March 1996 [when the Liberal/National Coalition won

control of government] didn't happen.” As for bankers' boy Kelty, he told the Melbourne *Age* newspaper on Nov. 28, 1998 that he had *purposefully* gutted the once-mighty ACTU. “Of course the ACTU has less power and authority than it had. Of course it does. But who argued for that? Which organization argued most strongly to have less influence? Us.”

In March 1996, the nation rebelled against the devastation wrought by the Hawke-Keating free trade policies, by voting in Howard and his Liberal Party/National Party coalition. Stung by a huge electoral defeat, and by union threats to disaffiliate from the ALP, ALP parliamentary leader Kim Beazley, a former cabinet minister in the Hawke-Keating era, took a step back from the worst of their free trade policies. Now, however, Beazley's ALP is about to renew its anti-union crusade under the rubric of “Modern Labor,” the downunder version of Blair's savage anti-union policies.

Shortly after the 1996 electoral defeat, Beazley called for a sweeping, three-year review of all the ALP's policies, “top to bottom.” Although Beazley has claimed he is not pushing Blair's “Third Way,” but merely what he calls “Modern Labor,” the two figures whose ideas he has helped push to the fore as part of a policy debate within the ALP, shadow Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner and Member of Parliament Mark Latham, are raving Blair clones who have each written books trumpeting the “end of the Industrial Age,” the necessity for the ALP to embrace the “globalist information society,” and the need to overhaul the party's structures to reflect this New Age. Or, as New South Wales Premier Bob Carr (Labor) recently put it, “We've got to get rid of the old culture of the Labor Party,” foreshadowing a Blair-style purge of the unions' traditional dominance of the ALP.