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AUSTRALIAN BOOK REVIEW.

By DON DUNSTAN.

The Federal election, 1969, has been called a watershed by Gough Whitlam. The reasons he gave for this, however, at the Press dinner in Canberra are only part of the reason for thinking that this is correct. After the 1969 elections, the Labor Party cannot again easily be described as "the Party of depression protest", the Party which can only gain office through the disaffection of a voting population from the present Government because of economic problems. For so long it was assumed that the Labor Party could never gain office except when in Ben Chifley's phrase "the hip pocket nerve was jangling." The Labor Party had at the 1969 elections, an enormous swing to it of dimensions which the psephologists had said was just not on only weeks before the election, and this in circumstances where there is little unemployment and society is reasonably affluent.

What is only just beginning to filter through to public commentators is that the Labor Party is the Party of planning, that it can present attractive answers to contemporary problems and do so in terms which find accord amongst a great deal of the Australian population. Again, the Labor Party can much less now be represented as composed of retired Trades Union officials with limited education. This has always been a myth, but the candidates now thrown up in so large measure by the Labor Party are candidates who in many cases have tertiary education and who are young, vigorous and articulate.

The propaganda organs of the Liberal and Country Parties have assiduously represented Labor as being the Party of the ill-educated. But under the Labor Party's present leadership, the shadow cabinet ministers of the calibre of Jim Cairns, Frank Crean, Rex Patterson, with new recruits to the Parliament like Bill Morrison, Moss Cass, Joe Berinson, Chris Hurford and Richie Gun, with the return to Parliament of Alan Fraser and Les Johnson, the Liberals' old story becomes completely incredible. This is not to say the Labor Party does not have a fair sprinkling of people with experience and proven capacity from the Trades Union movement. It does. But it represents a cross-section with adequate lines of communication to the bases of the Labor Party's power and public support and with considerable talent and experience at its disposal.

The contrast between the capacity of members of the Labor Party in ability and drive and the rump of the Liberal Party, which now has included in its Cabinet the Mushroom Club members, is stark indeed. The most remarkable thing about the whole exercise in the recent shuffling for the Prime Ministership was not merely that the Liberal Party was tearing itself apart but that there was such an appalling dearth of talent.

There is every reason to believe that the present Federal Government will not last its full term and that the new team in the Labor Party will have the opportunity of presenting its answers for the 1970's.

18-11-69.