

Considering the issues when casting your vote

THE Boston tea party, which kick-started what the Americans call the War of Independence (we Brits call it the American Revolution – after all, it was a simple tax riot wasn't it?) was part of the “no taxation without representation” movement.

As a permanent resident of Australia I am indeed taxed without representation. While I am not tempted to pour my tea (or to be more precise for those who know me, a delicate Earl Grey), into Port Phillip Bay in outraged protest at the denial of my franchise, I am faced with the question of who to vote for. The question comes up quite a lot, whether it is in UK elections or indeed Australian elections, for which my vote is denied (not wishing to labour the point ...) – after all, I am a British citizen, an Australian permanent resident, a school principal, a Jewish educator and a history teacher.

Asking Siri (the iPhone digital assistant) this question – she is after all the source of so much useful information – takes you to websites where questions are asked about social, economic and political issues, after which your views are plotted against a left-right scale and allocated to a political party. The answers, though, are often confusing. While one's loyalties may be with a particular political party, an actual analysis of their policies with a cross-referencing to one's own views can throw up some conundrums. The lifelong Labor voter may discover that as a result of his taxation aversion and social conservatism in his middle age, his ideological home is really the Liberal Party. Or a longstanding Liberal may discover that her views on asylum seekers or social inequality

School of thought

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may align her political heart closer to Labor or the Greens than she might like to admit.

For Jews, and the Jewish community as a whole, we face an added complication with regards to Israel. Earlier this year we discovered, for example, that the NSW Labor International Relations Policy Committee had received 39 resolutions concerning Israel and the Palestinians, compared with 17 dealing with other international issues. Iran, Saudi Arabia and other hotspots of bigotry, discrimination and violence were completely ignored. Now don't get me wrong – Israel is not beyond reproach, and criticism may be legitimate. But if criticism is only levelled at Israel then we are talking anti-Semitism.

The UK's Labour Party is undergoing a similar, but more extreme malaise. An MP has been suspended from the party for anti-Semitic Facebook posts, the former London mayor was also suspended for introducing claims of Hitler's Zionism, a Labour council leader (and incredibly its “equalities lead” on a body of 32 London councils) called Israel a “terrorist state” and compared it to ISIS, and the Labour leader himself questioned why an anti-Semitic mural should be removed. Indeed, over 50 members have been suspended in recent months. On the one hand, it is heartening that finally a stand is being taken. On the other hand, it is disheartening that there is a problem in

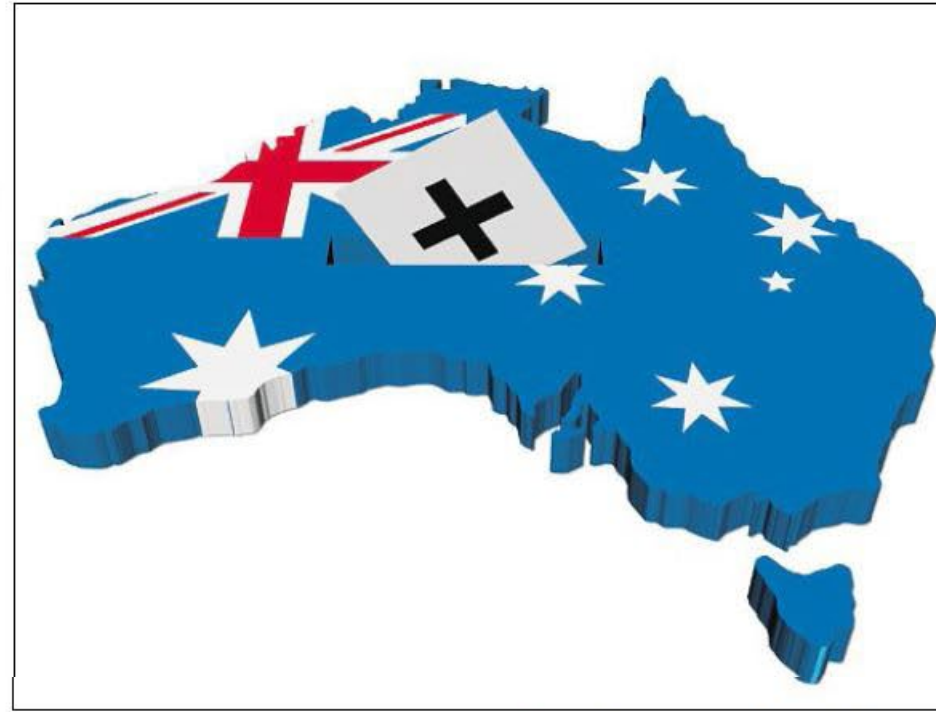


Photo: Fintastique/Dreamstime.com

the first place in, of all places, the Labour Party, a pioneer of the anti-racist movement.

The reality is that the left does not just have a problem – it has a big problem. It claims the hearts of the socially conscious and it claims to be the voice for the downtrodden. The Labour movements in countless Western countries were co-built by Jews. Even our own Bob Carr, a former Australian foreign minister, has denounced Israel's “fabrications and bribes” and, ignoring Jerusalem's Jewish roots and realities, claims that “Judaising and eliminating the Arab character of this great Arab city is a shocking thing to take place”.

The left's obsession with Israel, and its blinkers when it comes to anti-Semitism, risk making it increasingly unelectable in the eyes of reasonable people. This is something the Labor party should be mindful of and the Greens especially so. The Greens can-

didate for Melbourne Ports, Stephanie Hodgins-May is a case in point, when last week she withdrew from a “politically active” Zionism Victoria event while her colleague Adam Bandt demonstrated his willingness to attend an event hosted by the BDS-supporting pro-Palestinian APAN.

The real issue is that there is an incredulity in the left that the home of the anti-racist movement may itself be racist when it comes to Israel and Jews. What is said about Jews and Israel could never be said about other faiths or skin colours. The “salon anti-Semitism” that has become a fashion in Europe risks becoming mainstream. Fortunately, Australia's left does not suffer the same institutionalised issues that the left in Europe suffers, but there are warning signs and we should be mindful.

So, at the end of it all, who to vote for? If the left is increasingly delegitimising Israel and its right to exist,

singling it out for criticism disproportionately and confusing Jews with “Zios” (as a Labour councillor has done in the UK) should we abandon it?

I argue a resolute “no”. While the Greens may be straying into the more extremist leftist territory and should be outed and treated accordingly, if you are on the moderate left, then vote left and use your strong voice to promote reasonableness, tolerance, inclusion and anti-racism within your party. If you are on the right, vote right and combat the minority of extreme voices in your party, or those allied to it. Allowing the racists, who themselves may identify as anti-racists, to take over the parties that you identify with is to cede ground and retreat. Those in the community who are active in politics are to be applauded for sticking to their political guns, be they from the left or the right. They are to be commended for advocating from within each of their parties for fairness and balance.

Unlike Australia, Britain does not have compulsory voting. It may be that some members of our antipodean community would like to throw in the towel and not vote for anyone. But we are privileged to live in a vibrant democracy and compulsory voting, despite its flaws, requires each of you (alas, not me) to be an active participant in the democratic process. During election time, now is the time to join the democratic process, take a balanced view on who to vote for, and stand up for what is just.

It's not time to throw our tea into the Tasman Sea just yet.

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