

ALP has realised it must change if it wants to win

MacDonnell MLA, Neil Bell, did not succeed in his challenge to opposition leader, Terry Smith.

In the final event, Bell did not have the numbers.

The clear possibility of a challenge arose from Smith's low electoral stocks.

Labor has put a on brave public face, but the picture is quite different privately. Party strategists recognise that unless the ALP changes tactics it is headed for another drubbing at the next election, whenever it is called by the CLP Government.

As part of this recognition a group was formed in the middle of December to map out a three-year plan that will take the party into the next historical phase and, hopefully, government.

The group is made out of three left wingers, ALP president, Col Dyer, socialist left convener, Margaret Gillespie, and unionist, Peter Tullgren; two centre left representatives, lawyer, Ken Parish and Nightcliff branch member, Glenn King; and two centre unity (right wing) reps, lawyers John Reeves and Peter McNab.

The group is, in effect, the much talked about committee to advise Smith on leadership issues.

THERE are two significant things about it.

Firstly, the absence of the best manipulator in the Labor Party, Senator Bob Collins, as well as centre left aparatchik and power broker, Denis Bree.

Secondly, the willingness of the left wing to consider strategies to actually win an election.

Both indicate a considerable shift in the ALP's philosophy.

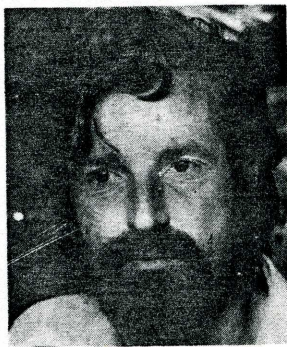
It is clear strongman Collins is distancing himself from too-close factional allegiances.

He remains arguably the most popular politician in the Territory and he will use his popular appeal to influence the ALP machine when it suits him.

But, unless something catastrophic emerges, Collins will stay out of the grubby in-fighting that distinguishes the inner councils of Labor.

Bree is said to have engineered last August's shock coup d'etat against the right wing of the party.

The August 1 conference saw a massive defection of the centre left to the socialist left. Word in the party is that the defection was carefully put together by Senator Peter Cook, ably helped by former Palmerston Labor candidate, Tony Henry, and Bree. It is difficult to obtain hard evidence for this, but it is undeniable that without centre left help the socialist left could not have



□ Opposition leader, Terry Smith. □ His would-be challenger, Neil Bell.

NT AFFAIRS

FRANK ALCORTA



mustered the numbers for its convincing victory.

Bree, a member of Labor's powerful National Executive, has nevertheless been excluded from the select Territory group looking at new directions. His place has been taken by Ken Parish, a lawyer with a keen intellect and a firm grasp of fundamentals.

All indications are that Parish, like fellow right wing lawyer, John Reeves, is not so much

interested in vacuous philosophical discussions as he is in winning.

The other factor, the left's willingness to participate in discussions leading to policy changes, is fascinating.

What it means is an emerging realisation on the part of all factions in the ALP that the party has to change if it wants to win. And winning suddenly appears as attractive to the left as it has always been to the right.

Do not, however, expect earth-shattering moves overnight. Rather, what will happen is a slow drift towards pragmatism and common sense.

Surely this is welcome news for all Territorians, not just for Labor supporters.

Substantial policies for growth and sound economic management are what is needed in a party aspiring to govern.

From all available evidence, ALP strategists, after months of hibernation, are coming out of their winter into the sunlight. Not before time.

ALL is not as simple as has been made out in the recent purchase of equity by the giant French company, Cogema, in Energy Resources of Australia, Ranger uranium operators.

Reports from Paris and Washington dating back to November 18, last year (*Nuclear Fuel* — a biweekly report from the editors of Nu-

cleonics Week) suggest that Saarberg Interuranium Australia Pty Ltd, a subsidiary of the West German firm Saarberg-Interplan Uran, intended to sell off one-third of its ERA interests to Cogema.

Apparently Saarberg has clients for about two-thirds of its ERA clients.

It would desperately like to bring the floor price down so it can sell the rest, about 250 000 lb. of annual production.

The Australian Government's mandated floor price is \$30.00 per lb.

ERA's equity holders, the West Germans, Japanese and Swedes, who between them account for about 75 per cent of Ranger's total production, signed the deal before the market collapsed.

Uranium prices are going up slowly, but they are still below the Australian floor price.

Hence Saarberg's willingness to divest itself of at least part of its equity.

Cogema, a multi-billion dollar company with interests in more than 40 per cent of the 406 nuclear reactors operated by 26 countries around the globe, has obviously looked at the future and has decided the extra price is worth it as long as it can assure supplies in the years to come.

The important issue here, however, is not the sale of equity in Australian uranium from one European company to another.

The issue is whether ERA has a new contract or not.

The clear answer is that it has not. What will happen is that 240 000 lbs of uranium that Saarberg had trouble selling, will now be bought by Cogema.

So much for triumphal statements.