running on empty

is Andrew Scott's verdict on the 'modernisation' of the British and Australian labour parties.

Since their birth, both parties have exchanged ideas and personalities. After the British Labour Party's fourth electoral defeat, future prime minister Tony Blair and his chancellor Gordon Brown came to Australia, to see what they could learn from their political colleagues' 'success'.

Now with Blair firmly in office, it is the Australian party's turn to look for guidance. Too often, these exchanges have meant learning the wrong lessons.

The result is two labour parties low on essential ideological fuel, with their sense of purpose, core support and clarity of policy in a needy state. This has been reflected in the parties' performance in office, and in electoral backlash after periods of government. It is time to reassess both parties' uncritical attachment to 'modernisation'.

Scott offers a unique and lucid analysis of the changing ideas and functions of the world's two great labour parties — placing Tony Blair's 'New Labour' into a historical context, and challenging conventional assumptions about the future of the Blair government in Britain, and the Australian Labor Party.

"This dexterous political comparison reveals a persistent rhythm. Two venerable parties, Australian Labor and British Labour, draw on each other's experience to rejuvenate themselves when they languish, but in doing so risk exhausting the very energies that sustain them. Andrew Scott's trenchant argument deserves wide consideration".

Stuart Macintyre, Professor of History, University of Melbourne

Andrew Scott is an Australian researcher specialising in the labour movement. He has a PhD from Monash University, has studied extensively in Britain and has published widely on political issues. Andrew lives in Melbourne, Australia and is a leading contributor to the debates about labour and the left's future.