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Judging Julia

By **Geoff Robinson** - posted Friday, 16 July 2010

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Julia Gillard may be the most insubstantial leader of a major Australian political party since Andrew Peacock. She is a person created by circumstances. She incarnates the accommodation of Australian social democracy with the contemporary social movements of globalised capitalism, feminism, secularism and multiculturalism. Julia Gillard is a female professional politician; irreligious and representative of an electorate where one in five speak a language other than English at home. This is the face of the new Australia.

Modern Labor combines these allegiances with a residual but surprisingly persistent connection to a much weakened trade union movement. Modern Labor MPs are middle-class professionals, of whom many are female, and who have pursued their profession since their late teens, in this they are largely representative of the upper rungs of the contemporary Australian workforce.

Labor MPs are more representative of their electorate than ever before. Gillard began her political career in the old patriarchal Labor party and her original outsider status has led many well to her left, from questioning ex-Communists in the 1980s to soft Green voters today, to see her as the repository of their hopes. Thirty years ago Don Aitkin predicted that the entry of women to paid employment would underpin Labor's electoral revival and his prediction has been realised. Gillard symbolises this transformation.