Class-war chatter proves a bit rich coming from Labor

**STRATEGY**

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JULIA Gillard’s post-budget adoption of class-war rhetoric is looking increasingly like a risky political strategy — not least because the impressive property holdings of several former and current Labor luminaries suggest that many within the ALP are a world away from the party’s traditional support base.

The Prime Minister sparked a furious debate this week when she attacked Tony Abbott for living on Sydney’s well-to-do north shore and being out of touch with “real families”.

Yesterday, Ms Gillard ramped up her us-and-them line, saying “we (Labor) make absolutely no apology for saying we are here to serve low- and middle-income Australians and Mr Abbott is here to serve the rich”.

But many within the ALP, including former prime ministers Bob Hawke and Paul Keating, seem to feel more at home in suburbs that Ms Gillard reckons are Labor-free zones.

Mr Hawke’s pile in Northbridge, on Sydney’s north shore, is thought to be worth close to $5 million. The median house value in that suburb is $1.55m.

According to RP Data, Mr Keating, who famously grew up in the blue-collar heartland of Bankstown in Sydney’s west, owns three properties across Sydney, including a mansion in Woollahra (median house value of $967,000) thought to be worth about $7m, and a house in inner-city Potts Point (median house value of $1.04m) worth about $4m.

Foreign Minister Bob Carr owns a multi-million-dollar house in the eastern Sydney beachside suburb of Maroubra, where the average house sells for $1.1m.

Follow frontbencher Peter Garrett lives in a $1m terrace in nearby Randwick, where the median house value is $1.5m. That abode acts as a comfortable second home to the sprawling country estate he owns in Mittagong, in NSW’s southern highlands.

In contrast — as The Australian reported yesterday — the federal Opposition Leader has a large mortgage on his modest home in the northern Sydney suburb of Forestville, where the average house price is $836,000. There is concern within Labor that Ms Gillard’s class-war strategy is alienating the so-called “aspirationals” — the working middle class the party should be wooing.

But, according to University of Sydney political scientist Rodney Smith, Labor often reverts to such rhetoric when in deep trouble. “It’s about saving the base — not just in an electoral sense, but in terms of your own party,” Dr Smith said.

He said an element of class rhetoric was not unusual for Labor. “One reason is to sharpen the differences between Labor and the opposition,” he said.

Dr Smith compared Ms Gillard’s remarks to that of former NSW premier Kristina Keneally, who warned during the state election campaign last year that “the old, the sick and the vulnerable” would be left exposed under a Coalition government, along with at-risk children.

University of Western Sydney political scientist and social commentator David Burchell said Ms Gillard’s remarks were consistent with a budget with a “boomer boy” element and smacked of Mr Keating’s classic ploy of “throwing the switch to vaudeville”.

“That style of politics has been wielded by Labor for the longest time,” Dr Burchell told The Australian. “When all else fails, this is something Labor governments have resorted to.

“It’s an aspect of the budget that is an attempt to lessen the scale of electoral disaster. When it suited him, Keating was able to flick between centrist economic reform to playing a kind of Aussie populist class-politics card.

“The trick for Gillard is not to let that get out of hand. The danger is that you start legitimising a different kind of politics altogether that plays to the Greens and undermines Labor’scredibility.”

**ADDITIONAL REPORTING:**  
**ANTHONY KLAN**

‘It’s about saving the base — not just in an electoral sense, but in terms of your own party’

**RODNEY SMITH**  
**UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**
LABOR LUMINARIES AND THEIR LUXURIOUS HOMES

PAUL KEATING
- Suburb: Woollahra, NSW
- Bought in 1994 for $22m
- Now worth: $7.7m
- Woollahra median house value: $967,500

BOB HAWKE
- Suburb: Northbridge, NSW
- Coastal frontage above Middle Harbour
- Bought in 1991 for $1,231,000
- Now worth: $4,5m
- Northbridge median house price: $1,5m

EVIE WRAN
- Suburb: Woollahra
- Bought in 1997 for $600,000
- Now worth: $37m
- Woollahra median house value: $967,500

PETER GARRETT
- Suburb: Randwick, NSW
- Bought in 2010 for $932,500
- Now worth: $960,000
- Randwick median house price: $1,5m

BOB CARR
- Suburb: Maroubra, NSW
- Bought in 1980 for $173,000
- Now worth: $1,6m
- Maroubra median house price: $1m

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House price estimates have been calculated based on city-wide or state-wide average house prices over the past three decades.

Source: RP Data