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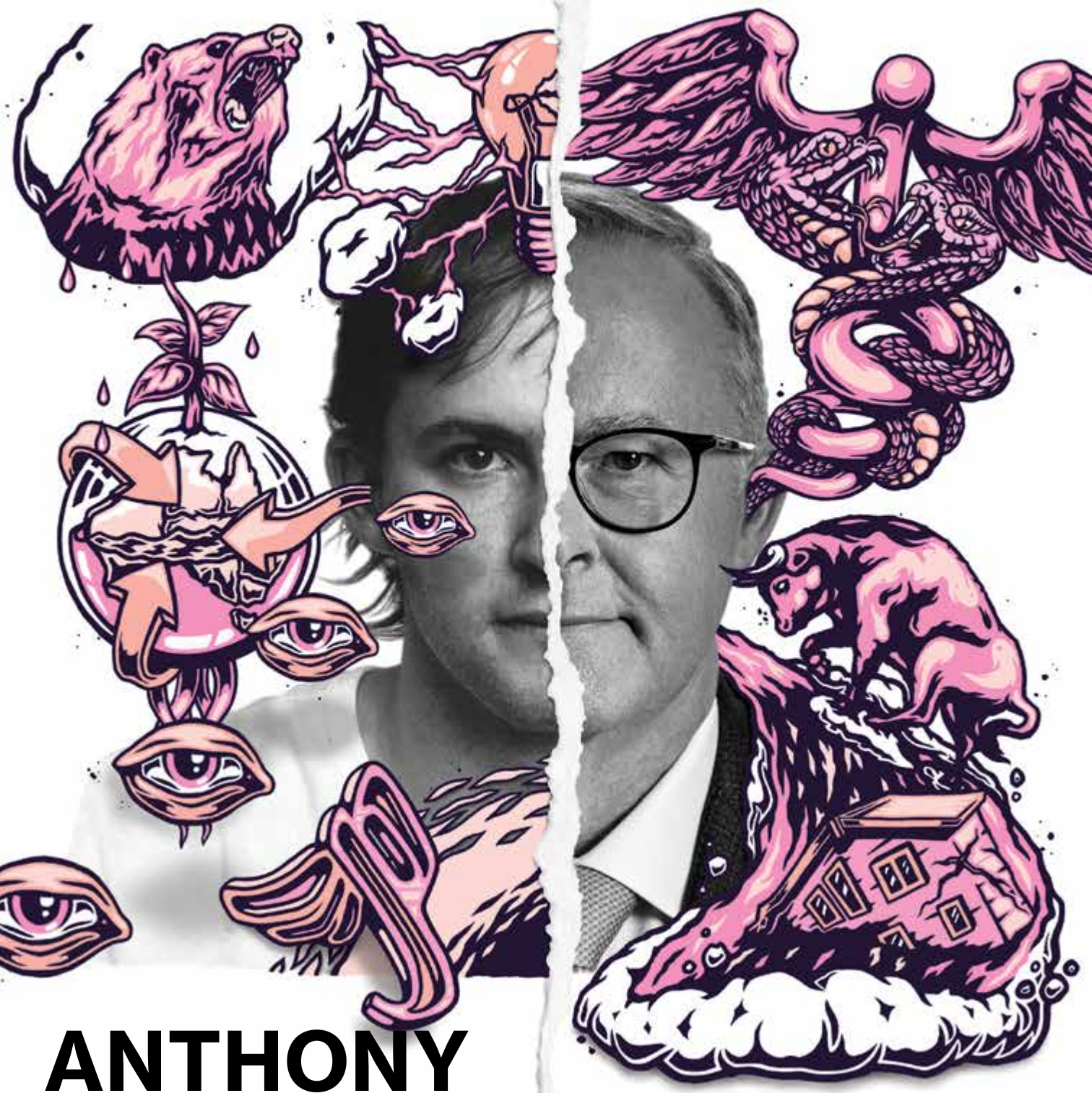

ANTHONY ALBANESE

Meredith Burgmann on the prime minister

... big data, climate change, robodebt, housing shortage, jobs, economic policy, disinformation, addiction and more...

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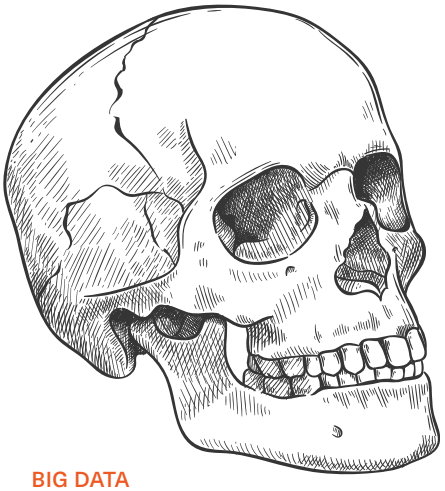
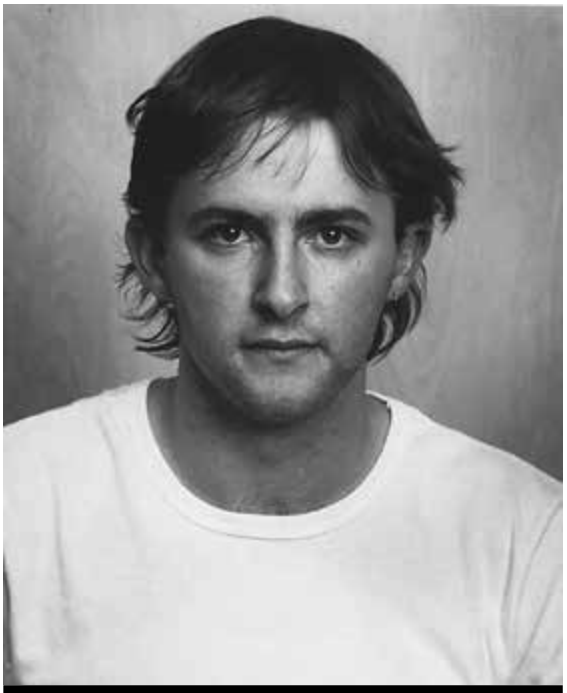




CLIMATE CHANGE

Going Circular

Reducing waste, pollution, and carbon emissions — Australia's circular economy opportunity

TERRI BUTLER

With eight billion people on the planet it has never been more important to think carefully about the way that we use our planet's resources. We cannot continue indefinitely with the old linear economy approach of take, make, waste. As is often pointed out, in a world in which there is 300 times more gold in a tonne of iPhones than there is in a tonne of gold ore, it is clear that we need to change the way resources are used.

This is easier said than done. It requires a rethink of how products, services, and business models work. And it requires decoupling economic growth from the consumption of virgin resources.

Circular economy thinking has developed in order to rise to these challenges, and to help respond to the crises we are facing together. In simple terms, 'circular economy' means:

- Designing out waste and pollution at every stage of production, use and end-of-life;
- Keeping products and materials in use at their highest possible value; and
- Regenerating natural systems (for example through water, food, organics recycling, the removal of toxic waste, or tree planting).

Scaling up circular economy in Australia means a lot of different things. It means recycling and resource recovery, of course. It also means taking a systems-thinking approach to the way that we design, manufacture, and package. It means thinking about the impact of business models on the way that products and services are used and maintained. It means considering whether there may be additional uses for byproducts of existing or developing processes. 'Circular economy' is a necessarily broad term because it is really a paradigm shift for resource use.

Reducing consumption of virgin resources and scaling up circular economy has the benefit of helping in the global effort to address both climate change and the biodiversity crisis.

Global circular economy leaders at the Ellen Macarthur Foundation say that energy efficiency and switching to renewable energy would only address 55% of global emissions, and that to reach net-zero, we also need to change the way we make and use products, materials, and food.

They say that circular economy can help address the remaining 45% of emissions that the energy transition doesn't address. For example:

- By eliminating waste and pollution, we reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the value chain;
- By circulating products and materials, we retain their embodied energy;
- By regenerating nature, we sequester carbon naturally.

PwC recently estimated that scaling up circular economy in Australia would save 165 million tonnes of CO2 per year by 2040.

Scaling up circular economy and decoupling growth from virgin resource use can also help mitigate the need for human activity that causes biodiversity loss. The biodiversity crisis affects ecosystems, water cycles, food security, and, ultimately, life on earth. An approach that reduces impacts on habitats and the natural environment more broadly is important as we face this challenge together. Australia, as a world leader in mammal extinctions, has a particular interest in, and responsibility to act on, the biodiversity crisis.

Circular economy is also an economic opportunity. In the same report, PwC estimated that going circular would generate almost $1.9 trillion in economic benefits for Australia over the next 20 years.

With all of the challenges and opportunities in mind, circular economy has emerged as a critical framework as we transition to a resource and carbon constrained future. Change is imperative.

That's why Circular Australia is on a mission to scale up the circular economy. We're an independent, not-for-profit body that is working with industry, business, researchers, government, and the community across the country to accelerate the adoption of a circular approach.

Australia is not yet well advanced in the journey to circularity, but there are promising signs.

Australia is not yet well advanced in the journey to circularity, but there are promising signs. In October we welcomed the communique from the meeting of the nation's environment ministers, which contained a significant leap forward in acknowledging the need for circularity. They agreed collectively to 'work with the private sector to design out waste and pollution, keep materials in use and foster markets to achieve a circular economy by 2030.' It is terrific to see the acknowledgement of the need for circularity implicit in the language of the communique.

Then, in November, we were excited to see the Albanese Labor Government announce the creation of the new Ministerial Advisory Group on the Circular Economy to be chaired by Professor John Thwaites AM. In announcing it, Minister Plibersek acknowledged that: 'A circular economy will create jobs while reducing greenhouse gas emissions, pollution and the amount of waste we put into landfill.'

Her colleague, Minister Husic, supported the announcement and said: 'A circular economy will ensure that we are on track to make these changes and support the energy transformation. It's a great opportunity to create manufacturing systems that are optimised to be less resource intensive, produce less waste, and have less impact on the environment.'

It is terrific to see the Ministers for Environment & Water, and for Science & Industry, working together on scaling up circular economy, and the fact that they are doing so signals that the Albanese Labor government recognises the circular opportunity in manufacturing, and in the deployment of signature policies and programs such as their National Reconstruction Fund and Future Made in Australia policy.

The new government has the opportunity to build on advances made by the states, and on the pre-election commitment to include circular economy principles in procurement policy, along with recycling and waste policy.

All governments can consider regulatory frameworks and investment opportunities that support and promote circular economy. In parallel, business, industry, academia, and households can all take action to change the way resources are used. At Circular Australia we would love to see governments working in partnership with stakeholders to develop a National Roadmap for circular economy, so that Australia can take advantage of the opportunities and benefits transitioning will bring.

We also consider it important that there be a shared understanding of how we set targets and measure progress on circularity here in Australia. That's why we recently launched a national dialogue on circular economy metrics, alongside our latest research on metrics in partnership with the Sustainable Futures Institute at University of Technology, Sydney.

We know that there is a growing appetite amongst the Australian community for fast tracking circular economy. In partnership with the Commonwealth Bank — a member of our Finance & Investment Taskforce — we recently published consumer research which showed that the rising cost of living, extreme weather events, and supply chain disruption have brought waste and consumption into sharper focus for Australians, with 85 percent of consumers concerned about the issue.

Published in Commbank's latest Consumer Insights Report, that research addressed Australia's

material use — on the most recently available data, we're the largest material user per capita in the Asia-Pacific, and the third largest in the OECD. At the same time, our economic output per kilogram of materials used (also known as material productivity) is much lower than the OECD average, and among the lowest of any OECD country. The good news is that there is plenty of upside for us in improving against these measures, and everyone can make a contribution.

Australians have an appetite to directly participate in circular economy, as can be seen from the increase in recycling and reduction of waste per capita over time. However, the largest opportunities in circular economy are arguably those that will be driven by industry, and business, supported by the right policy settings from government and the best advice from academia and experts.

Industry and business can help with the transition in multiple ways. And there are some big opportunities to demonstrate to others the practical and tangible benefits.

In my home state of Queensland, the Olympics is the main game. The President of the Organising Committee, at his recent Queensland Media Club address, spoke about innovation for the Olympics in terms of resource recovery, noting that at the Tokyo Olympics '5,000 medals were created using 100% recycled materials, including 6.21 million mobile phones, and 79,000 tons of donated electronics.' Alongside the questions of circularity in the conduct of the Games is the opportunity to incorporate circular economy practices into the projects that will be the Games' long-term legacy. This is an opportunity for every firm, government, and government-owned-corporation with an interest in the Olympics — from building infrastructure, to powering the Games, to promoting tourism, and every other aspect, to demonstrate the economic and environmental benefits of transitioning to circular economy.

There are circular economy opportunities ready to be developed in almost every imaginable area of economic activity.

Similarly, there are circular economy opportunities ready to be developed in infrastructure, energy, water utilities, construction, manufacturing, finance, healthcare, planning, agriculture, and almost every imaginable area of economic activity. Combined with growing consumer and household interest these opportunities are exciting, meaningful, and crucial. Australia is poised to take advantage of them, through the exercise of will, effort, and collaboration. Let's get to it.

Terri Butler is the Chair of Circular Australia. She was previously the member for the Queensland seat of Griffith and Labor shadow minister for the Environment. Prior to being elected to the parliament, Terri was a practicing solicitor, leading Maurice Blackburn's Queensland industrial law practice.

PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS

Enemy at the Gates

Australia's fragile biosecurity and the case for a National Centre for Disease Control

RAINA MACINTYRE

To understand the case for a National Centre for Disease Control, we must first think about what the term public health means.

Public health is the organised response to protecting the health and wellbeing of the population and is a core responsibility of government. It has three essential components: health protection, prevention and promotion.

Health protection is the use of legislation for public health, such as smoking restrictions and bans. Prevention is a large category including screening, vaccine programs, testing and surveillance. Health promotion is enabling people to increase control over their health and to improve it.

Effective disease control requires these three pillars to be organised by government, supported by legislation, leadership, lines of accountability, evidence and functional structures. It also needs to recognise the relationship betweenseparate areas of disease control r (like mosquito control, livestock and human disease, in the case of Japanese Encephalitis) and ensure that response does not become siloed.

While Australia does have a number of existing mechanisms to respond to pandemics and epidemics, a National Centre for Disease Control (CDC) will likely strengthen our health security. The debate about a national CDC is decades old, and one I remember having 30 years ago as a young public health trainee with founders of the Communicable Diseases Network of Australia (CDNA), including the late Professor Aileen Plant, Dr Robert Hall and Dr Cathy Meade.

CDNA was formed as a stop gap, voluntary measure 30 years ago to bring together States and territories and make up for the lack of a CDC. It was later formalised under the 2007 National Health Security Act as a sub-committee of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC). It has a role in information sharing and in formulating guidelines, but has no operational response capacity.

The existing mechanisms to respond to pandemics and epidemics include the CDNA and the AHPPC, both of which have representatives of states and territories, and a public health laboratory network. They also include vaccine recommendations, which are made by The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) and recommendations on implementation by the National Immunisation Committee. However, pandemic response committees which existed at the time of the 2009 influenza pandemic no longer exist, and decision making has not been transparent during the COVID pandemic.

We have a National Incident Room for information processing and decision support, but no federal operational response capacity for global or cross-

border epidemic response. On-the-ground response capability exists only in States and Territories. The National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre (NCCTRC) manages The Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT), which deploys teams of volunteers to international medical emergencies. It was established in response to the 2002 Bali Bombings, primarily as a capability in trauma and disasters. But out of necessity, together with DFAT, it has filled some of the gaps in public health response. In addition, Australia has a number of National Centres, in areas like immunisation, drug and alcohol and HIV, which fulfil surveillance and other requirements for various diseases and are part of a fragmented national landscape.

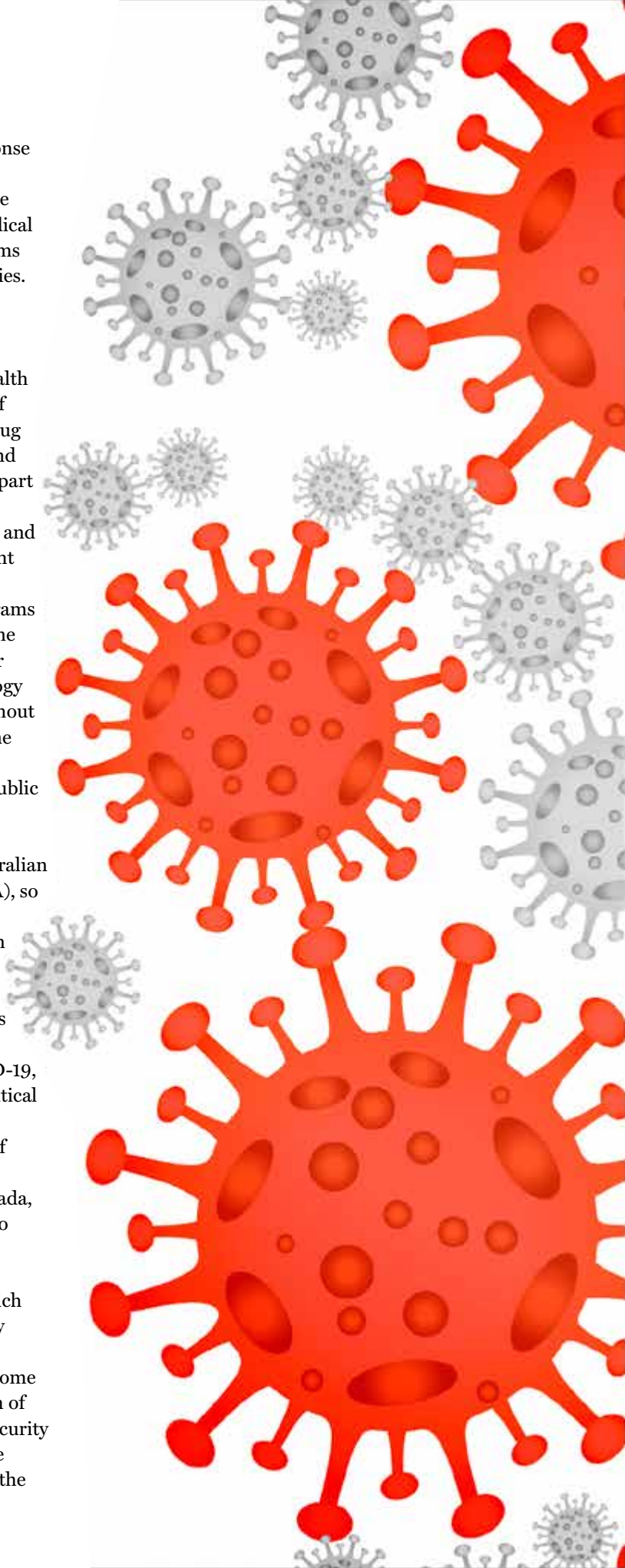
Public health workforce training, registration and operational field response should be an important part of any new CDC. In terms of public health workforce, State-based workforce training programs have gradually been eroded, with NSW having the last of such programs. Dedicated funding for our only internationally accredited Field Epidemiology Training Program at ANU was axed in 2010 without so much as a whimper, along with funding for the Public Health Education and Research Program (PHERP) that provided funding for Master of Public Health programs around the country.

Our public health workforce is not registered alongside other health workforces with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), so we do not even know how many qualified public health practitioners we can draw upon during an emergency, nor how to contact them. These are important gaps which we must address.

But a CDC in itself is not a panacea. Countries such the US, with CDCs or other centralised structures have performed poorly during COVID-19, not for lack of technical expertise but due to political interference. This must be front of mind in any national health response, and in consideration of whether to form a national CDC.

In many countries including the UK and Canada, the health of populations has taken a back seat to other agendas.

Conversely, Australia without a CDC boasts some successful responses including to HIV, which had bipartisan support and excellent community engagement. In Australia, some of the historical reasons we have not had a CDC include the tiresome old rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne, each of which has substantial capacity including high security laboratories. While parties with skin in the game jostle and push for position and advantage with the



promise of a new CDC, some advocate retaining the existing patchwork of structures and networks with more funding so that no-one's turf is threatened.

A new structure created in Canberra would be the other option, but would require substantially more investment. A hybrid approach somewhere between the two could also work, as long as centralised accountability was part of the package. One option may be networking of existing labs, but centralisation of surveillance and response capacity in Canberra.

There also needs to be an interim plan to bring together, phase out or integrate the many separate pieces that form our current capability. A CDC that covers infectious and chronic diseases, occupational and environmental health and safety, as well as climate change, would be ideal. Legislation to ensure that any new CDC is independent and protected from political interference is essential. We also need guaranteed longevity of a new CDC that outlasts the short political cycle, or it may be torn down when the government changes. Most of all, we must remember what public health is, and ensure that a new CDC meets the needs of all Australians, strives to protect health, prevent disease and empower all people.

Legislation to ensure that any new CDC is independent and protected from political interference is essential.

Falling Through the Cracks

During the 1918 pandemic, Australia used its unique island geography to keep out the pandemic for a whole year, and when it did hit the impact was less than in many other countries. The Sydney quarantine station closed its doors in 1984, and is now a tourist attraction at the hauntingly beautiful location of North Head.

There you will see the first, second and third class accommodation for passengers, giant autoclaves for passenger luggage, hospital wards and, carved into the sandstone rock, a plaque reading '*RMS Niagara, Influenza October 1918*.' You can even do ghost tours at night to glimpse souls of passengers who perished there.

Before that, we never used mass vaccination against smallpox, relying instead on quarantine of ships to keep it out of the country. Ad hoc vaccination campaigns were used in response to outbreaks.

I am recognised internationally as an expert in smallpox and have also published on monkeypox prior to the latest epidemic. My research showed the surge in cases in Nigeria since 2017 is related to waning smallpox vaccine immunity. In my research we estimated only 10% of the current Australian population has been vaccinated against smallpox, and there is virtually no immunity in the population. That may be important for us when considering the current epidemic of monkeypox, but my professional opinion about this latest outbreak has, so far, not been sought by governments within Australia — only by WHO.

During COVID-19 too, we shut the international borders and had a honeymoon period of almost two years without facing the brunt of the pandemic as other nations did. We lagged other countries in vaccination, being mostly unvaccinated when the Delta wave hit in mid-2021, triggered by a failure to mitigate risk in airport transport, and compounded by a delay and lack of diversification in vaccine procurement. Still, we bought more time than other countries, enough to boast low death rates until the Omicron wave. Many cling to the glories of 2020, boasting about low mortality while simultaneously telling us the pandemic is over.

The ABS is already showing excess mortality from COVID by May 2022, but our 2-year period of grace will not be fully reflected in excess deaths data until 2023. In the US, life expectancy dropped by a whopping 2 years by 2022. The Omicron wave in the first 6 months of 2022 alone brought over 8000 deaths, more than the 2200 or so deaths in all of 2020 and 2021. Hundreds of these were in younger adults and some were in children, and the deaths far exceed the national road toll.

In 2022 we saw supply chains affected, supermarket shelves empty, delays in essential services all due to mass workplace absence. During business-as-usual, 2-5% of workers may be off sick at any one time, but this has been around 20% at the peak of the Omicron wave. Mass cognitive dissonance is on display when people complain of chaos at airports all over the world, wondering why their luggage didn't arrive or their flight was cancelled. It's partly because workers are sick with COVID-19. But

hey, the pandemic is over, so smile and live a little while the B.A4 and 5 waves gather momentum before crashing over us.

Vaccines alone are not enough, but we have not used other layers of prevention, like ventilation, safe indoor air, masks, testing and tracing to mitigate the incidence of infection. Workplace absence, disruption to schools and households, hospitalisations and deaths are all a fraction of total case numbers. To reduce these, we must reduce transmission using a vaccine-plus strategy and ventilation. We have some antivirals, but not enough to use them on a mass scale to add another layer of mitigation. We don't have data yet, but perhaps in the future rapid use of antivirals will cut the period of isolation and mean people can return to work sooner. They may even reduce the burden of long COVID.

Yet to realise the promise of antivirals, testing is essential — they can never benefit the economy until testing is widespread, accessible and cheap or free. Use of the QR codes too, will help reduce case numbers, because contacts are the next tranche of cases. Giving people forewarning using digital tracing will help. Meanwhile, good luck if you need to access health services or call an ambulance. Or if you get Long-COVID.

I heard someone complain on social media that a Long-COVID clinic in a large hospital prescribes Tai Chi as a treatment, another example of gaslighting of patients with persisting symptoms. Long-COVID probably has a heterogeneous cause — the virus attacks the heart, the lungs, the blood vessels, the immune system and the brain, and can persist in the body long after the initial illness. Research shows that some of these effects need specialised tests and imaging to diagnose, and will not be seen on routine tests. Fatigue can be the result of brain inflammation, immune dysfunction, reduced lung function or heart failure — all of which are described as possible after COVID-19. It is likely we will face a COVID-related increase in chronic disease and disability. A quarter of employers in the UK are already reporting that long COVID has impacted their workforce.

What this will do to our children is still unknown, but the available research suggests it is wildly reckless to sit by nonchalantly while the adults of tomorrow are infected en-masse today, the youngest still ineligible for vaccination. The epidemics of hepatitis in children is most likely caused by COVID-19, but that too has been obfuscated and spun as anything but COVID. Now that the evidence for COVID is accruing, there is silence around it, especially in the UK, which actively denied vaccination to children and teenagers for the longest time. After all, when you take an ideological position to trivialise COVID-19 in children, there is shame and accountability in admitting it is actually worth preventing and in the same ballpark or even worse than other infections we routinely prevent in children with vaccines. We have slavish acolytes of the UK approach here, some who campaigned against vaccinating our children. Fortunately we did not go down that path, although delays in procuring paediatric vaccines meant Australian children returned to school in 2022 unvaccinated to face the peak of the first Omicron wave.

As for preparedness for monkeypox, we have known since 2017 there was cause for concern, when Nigeria began seeing unprecedented epidemics of what had been a rare infection previously. Travel imported cases have occurred in the UK, Israel and Singapore since 2018. As a smallpox expert I know there were many prompts over the last six years, if not as far back as 2001, to prepare for orthopoxviruses, but we were not as prepared as we should have been. Nor has the world ever considered the risk-benefit equation of smallpox vaccines for monkeypox.

The second generation vaccines have a serious side effect profile that would make it risky to use during the current monkeypox epidemic, but third generation vaccines can be safely used in the current outbreak. When the first cases occurred, we did not have this option, nor the new smallpox antivirals. If monkeypox becomes established in animals here, we will live with it forever.

We also missed the boat entirely with Japanese Encephalitis (JE), a serious and potentially fatal mosquito-borne virus that has never occurred on the Australian mainland until 2022. It had been described in the Torres Strait, but the main mosquito vector was absent from Australia until it was detected in the NT in 2019. What happened between then and 2022, and how did JE silently spread as far as South Australia, Victoria and NSW?

Has the mosquito also migrated south, or is it being spread through a related mosquito that carries Murray Valley Encephalitis and Ross River Fever? This national failure illustrates the fragmentation of Australia's public health response and how easily things can fall through the cracks.

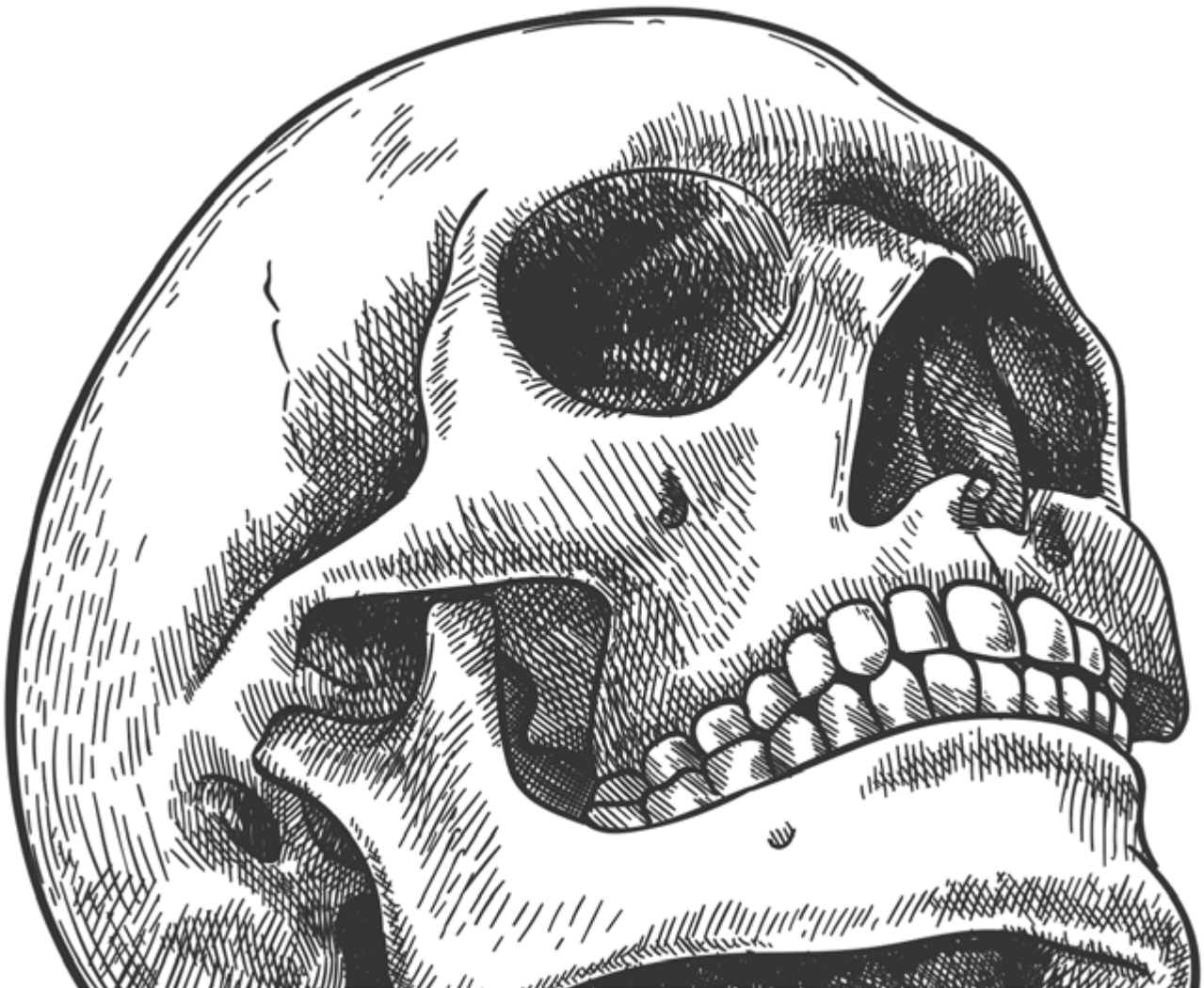
Raina MacIntyre is the Professor of Global Biosecurity within the Kirby Institute at University of New South Wales and a National Health and Medical Research Council Principal Research Fellow, who leads a research program on the prevention and control of infectious diseases. She is an expert media advisor and commentator on Australia's response to COVID-19.

BIG DATA

It's Not the Data, it's You

What is an ethical approach to data, and how do we actually start doing it?

DANIEL STONE



In the early 18th century, American scientist Samuel Morton began accumulating what would become the world's largest collection of human skulls — more than 900 at his passing. Beyond just being an odd pastime, his collection and his conclusions have powerful lessons to teach us about how to avoid drawing dangerous conclusions from data — both in his time and ours.

At the age of 21, Morton studied Medicine at the University of Edinburgh. Here he encountered George Combe, a Scottish phrenologist whose work explored the relationship between human biology and intelligence. His logic, so it went, was 'the bigger, the better'.

Back home, Morton's curiosity about the diverse biology of the world's people grew, as did his collection of their skulls. He began acquiring new and rare skulls like many people collect stamps, comic books or trading cards.

With this collection, Morton began his great study of human intelligence. Painstakingly pouring lead shot into each skull's cranial cavity and then decanting it back into measuring cylinders. He aimed to classify and rank the implied intelligence of what he defined as the five 'races' of the world: Ethiopian (or African), Native American, Caucasian, Malay, and Mongolian.

Conducting this experiment several times, with 672 skulls, he consistently came to the same conclusion — Caucasians had the biggest brain size and, therefore, the greatest intelligence, while Africans the smallest brain size and consequently the smallest intellect.

All manner of awful people embraced up these findings — imperialists, colonialists, segregationists through to a certain well known German fascist. Each using the work as scientific 'proof' to validate their world view, justifying the supremacy of white men for decades and legitimising everything from slavery to workplace discrimination.

Despite being 'proven with scientific certainty', modern researchers have found Morton's measurements to contain egregious errors. Stephen Gould argues there's evidence Morton crammed extra lead into caucasian skulls while leaving the African skulls rather lightly packed. Morton also ignored the relatively straightforward fact that bodies and brains are usually proportionate to one another, whatever their race. People with bigger bodies just have bigger brains.

More importantly, the underlying assumptions in his work have been disproven too. Brain size does not have a relationship with intelligence. There are no separate human races that constitute different biological species, and there is no difference between the intellectual capacity of one group to another. His fundamental premise — that you can classify 'races' according to innate intellect or character — is deeply flawed.

'The practice of classification that Morton used was inherently political, and his invalid assumptions about intelligence, race, and biology had far-ranging social and economic effects,' writes Dr Kate Crawford in *Atlas of AI* (2021). She warns that all classification systems are embedded in a framework of societal norms, opinions, and values. Even the supposedly hyper-rational artificial intelligence programs we use today are highly susceptible to these problems.

As we look to our future, this lesson has never been more important to learn. Leaders have long been enticed by the promise that we could transcend the mistakes and prejudices of individual decision making if only we had more data, using it to make more accurate, objective decisions, faster. It is on this promise that the fields of statistics and economics are largely based.

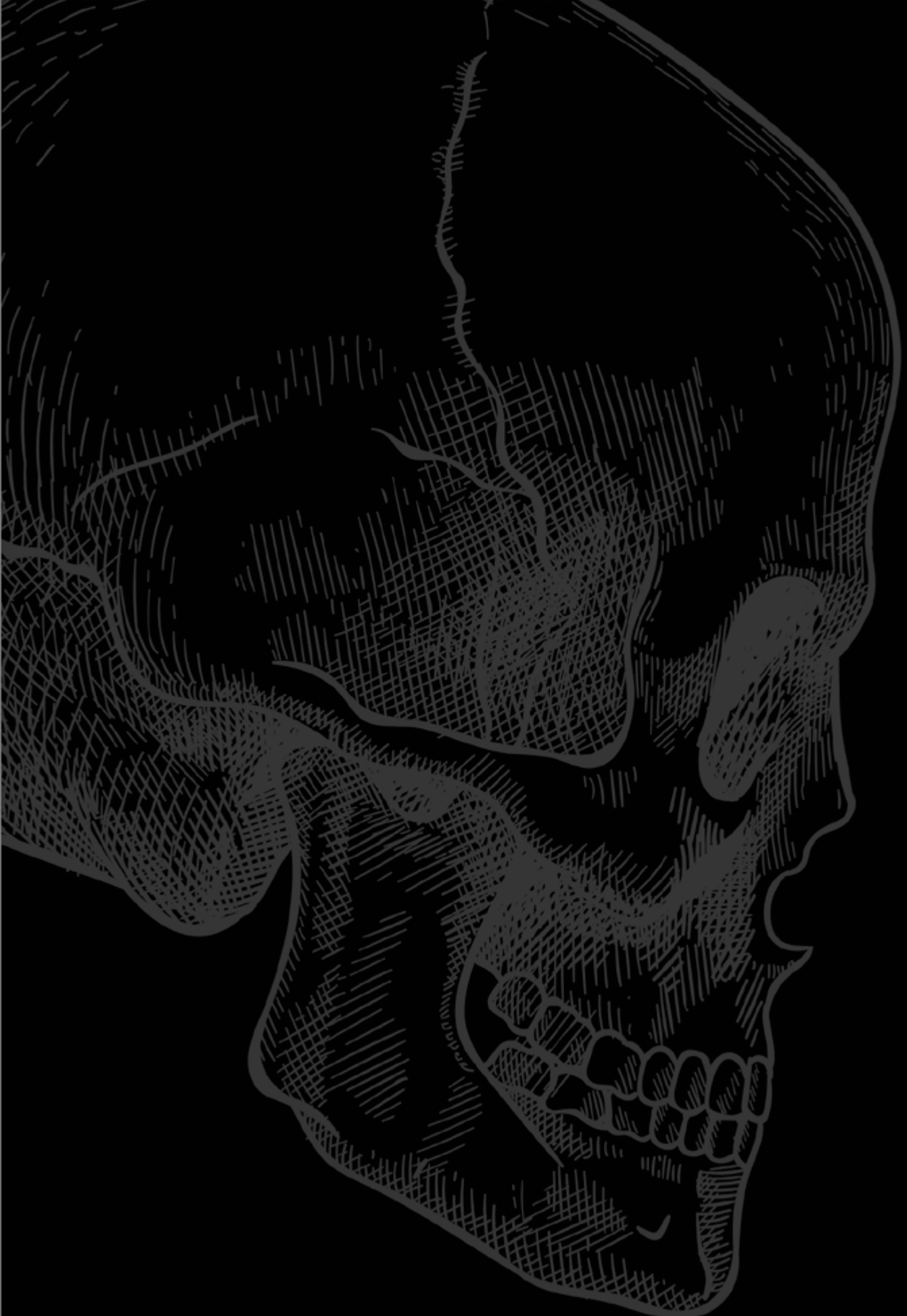
They were right to be enticed. The modern world only exists because we were able to systematise and standardise decision making. This created the fields of medicine, education, banking, and even the internet itself, lifting billions out of poverty to live longer and happier lives.

Over the last few decades, statisticians have become more ambitious. Using glossy terms like 'Artificial Intelligence', 'Machine Learning' and 'Big Data'. Yet the more ambitious their work, the more concerned the public has become, rightly asking what data is being collected, how it is being collected, how it is processed and what kind of lessons are taken from the process.

The methodology behind these approaches are more elaborate than those in the 1800s, but the underlying principles are remarkably similar. These are complex mathematical tools that help us identify patterns in a complex set of data — the signal in the noise.

Yet, they remain confusing and concerning to many due to the language we're using to describe them. 'Artificial intelligence' is not true intelligence; our machines are only 'learning' in the loosest possible sense of the word.

These very metaphors and personifications are used in an attempt to explain a machine's workings, but obscure them instead. It suggests a black box



that ingests 'raw data' and can then provide objective, independent and unfiltered answers to our most challenging social and economic questions—acting in many ways like an Old Testament God. We approach the algorithm and ask to hear our fate. Insufficient 'faith' can risk a disaster. Your refusal to engage leaves you ostracised and excluded.

What we say, write and hear about these technologies profoundly affects what we expect them to do and how we interact with them.

The truth is that every step of the data-based decision-making process is defined and created by people. It is collected, structured and stored by people. The maths underpinning the algorithm and its training is done by people, and its recommendations are then implemented by people.

Getting the best from data-based decision making and managing its risks safely are deeply human challenges. Which is great news for anyone anxious about being hunted down by a robot, but bad news for people hoping to make thoughtful public policy and management choices. The challenge is social, not technical. And there is still so much work to do.

The language and legal lines we draw now will shape the future. We must ensure governments, companies and nonprofits are beginning with a strong foundation. Just like Morton, we must challenge the biases and assumptions which underpin our thinking — and the appropriateness of the data we collect, process and analyse.

In the following passages, I'll explore what 'data' actually is and what it isn't. Who owns it? How is it useful? And how do we get the best out of it while reducing the potential risks?

First, however, what attracted people using data to make decisions in the first place? It seems like an awful lot of work to collect, store and analyse it all — and then what if you don't like the answer?

Over the last 10 years, I've had the privilege of advising cabinet ministers and executives of Australia's largest NGOs on how technology can enrich and empower their work. Time and again, I've shared data-based analysis which shows the rational next decision is x, only for that leader to instead choose to do y. Or make no changes at all.

This hesitation is especially acute when that leader's work requires a great deal of social interpretation, such as lawyers, politicians, journalists, front line doctors or the leaders of universities, social service providers or NGOs. Their work, and therefore success, often depend on human relationships rather than numbers. And there's plenty of evidence to suggest they should be cynical. There are too many examples of where data-based analysis has led us all astray. Often with disastrous consequences for decision-makers themselves.

Public opinion polls, economic forecasting, and technology often fail to help us make better decisions, leaving many feeling that 'big data' is about as reliable as astrology.

So what is causing this? Do we not have enough data? Are there errors in the data, or the equations? Sadly, to use the cliche 'The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars / But in ourselves'.

Our brains yearn for a simple world. If you stop and think, we know the world is seldom simple or straightforward. But that's precisely the problem — our brains would prefer we didn't think too much about any one decision. They've got enough going on! So they actively nudge us towards decisions that 'just feel right'. We're especially susceptible when the shortcut relates to deeper ideas like culture, politics and social values.

These elements create social norms — things we see as a fixed truth or a given but are actually entirely made up. Culture and values create deeply embedded mental shortcuts called 'heuristics'. These rule-of-thumb strategies help us quickly solve problems and make decisions without constantly stopping to think about their next course of action. Yet these shortcuts frequently cause more damage than good.

We cannot rebuild our brains, but we can humbly acknowledge their limitations and create a plan to correct for their failures.

When collecting, managing and processing data into useful information — each stage dangerously builds on a compounding series of heuristics or cognitive biases.

For example, public opinion polls are just as accurate as they were ten, twenty or thirty years ago. Looking at controversial electoral outcomes, such as the 2016 US Presidential Election, 2016 Brexit vote, or even the 2019 Australian Federal election — the polling average showed these would be extremely close elections. But still, people were shocked at the outcomes. This isn't because the data was wrong,

but rather the layers of interpretation by journalists, pundits and commentators who wanted to create a simple and easy to digest story about what was happening across the country. The more a narrative takes hold, the more self-perpetuating it becomes.

Statisticians themselves ultimately second-guess their own work, creating the effect known as 'herding'. They emphasise similarities in their findings rather than results which challenge the narrative. Layer upon layer, the story drifts away from the data in front of us.

We cannot rebuild our brains, but we can humbly acknowledge their limitations — and create a plan to correct for their failures. When thinking about what ethical data use looks like we must make sure there are strong checks and balances around the information we collect, how it is gathered, how we store it, categorise and structure it, as well as how we use and analyse it to help guide our decisions.

What is data?

Research by IBM suggests that most people don't know specifically what 'data' even is, conjuring different understandings between one person and another.

So what strictly *is* data? At its most basic, the Oxford Dictionary defines it as 'things that are known or assumed to be facts, collected and standardised for reference or analysis'. 'Data' draws from the Latin 'datum', or 'something given' — which establishes a long historical tension in the relationship between collector and analyser with the subject of that analysis.

This information typically falls into a few categories, which I define as:

- *Demographic information* which doesn't typically change (i.e. your name, birth date, gender),
- *Personal information* which remains largely consistent for long periods of time (ie. your employer, mobile number, email address, postal address),
- *Behavioural information*, which is constantly changing and evolving (i.e. what you like to buy, where you like to go, what you may have clicked on or searched for),

as well as information that is derived from these sources through analysis. Such as:

- *'interests'* which are assumptions about what you might care for or enjoy based on people with similar demographic, personal and behavioural information,
- *'networks'* which make assumptions about who and what you might like based on perceived similarities with other people you know.

It is easy, and terrifying, to imagine an unseen and unknown person flicking through your personal file. It evokes the darkest stories of authoritarian regimes; party apparatchiks and goons bursting into your home in the early hours, grilling you about your sexual proclivities, the ideological symbolism behind your brand of milk and 'why didn't you buy those trainers you looked at on *The Iconic* three days ago. You've got the money! We've seen your bank account!'.

Somewhat comfortingly, our personal data is rarely available to view like that. Rarely is it even in one place. Typically it is anonymised and used in bulk. Mixed in with the data of thousands of others to identify patterns and trends about large groups who share common characteristics, allowing organisations to answer questions like, 'Is this person more likely to prefer beach holidays or snow holidays?', or 'Is this person more likely or less likely to buy a new phone each year?'. It tells decision-makers when train stations are likely to be busiest, how quickly traffic is moving across the city or where COVID is most likely to spread next. I call this type of analysis 'Cohort Analysis'.

Commentary around topics like Cambridge Analytica conceptualise this as a mystical and unknowable force, capable of manipulating or hijacking our brains. This way of thinking attributes unexpected societal changes to 'data' in the same way our forebears attributed them to the stars. Sadly, it just isn't true.

Cohort analysis is suggestive, not determinative. It can help organisations improve the confidence and speed of their decision-making, giving adopters an edge over their competitors. It can help nudge us into choosing something that we may like to order or watch — but ultimately we need to make the call.

However, a second form of analysis is becoming widely used — one I call 'Assessment Analysis'. This approach is increasingly used by organisations who want to quickly reduce uncertainty about you as an individual by comparing you to broader patterns — pursuing the most 'desirable', while excluding others. It often perpetuates existing discrimination and structural inequalities, when you're applying for a job, a house, a home loan, or an airfare.

Over the last decade of helping organisations navigate the troubling waters of new technology policy, one troubling example of this comes to mind. Four years ago, a newly founded company approached

me with a glossy sales pitch. Promising to use technology to reduce friction and mistrust between landlords and renters, making it easier to get into a home. I decided not to take them on, for reasons which will soon be apparent, yet their business has blossomed. Through partnerships with 50,000+ real estate agents across Australia, they cover 77% of the industry (according to REIA data). If you want to rent in Australia, there's a very high chance that the real estate agent will require you to use this third party, commercial platform to apply. A platform whose owners can use the data collected in any way they please.

I experienced it first-hand last year while looking to move. In each home the property manager mandated applications be lodged via this platform, including the masses of personal identity, financial and employment information typically required. More than 100 points of individual data about each applicant are given to this company — regardless of whether you're ultimately selected. I could, if I pushed, complete a paper form at their office. But I was told that they 'tend not to lease to people who do that'.

As an ordinary person at an open house, the consequences of this are not clear. You reasonably believe you're entering into a direct relationship with the real estate agent and your primary concerns are whether you like the place, and how to charm the real estate agent to lock it down. You're incentivised to be as cooperative and easy as possible. You typically look closely at the lease itself, not the T&Cs of the platform you use to apply in the first place.

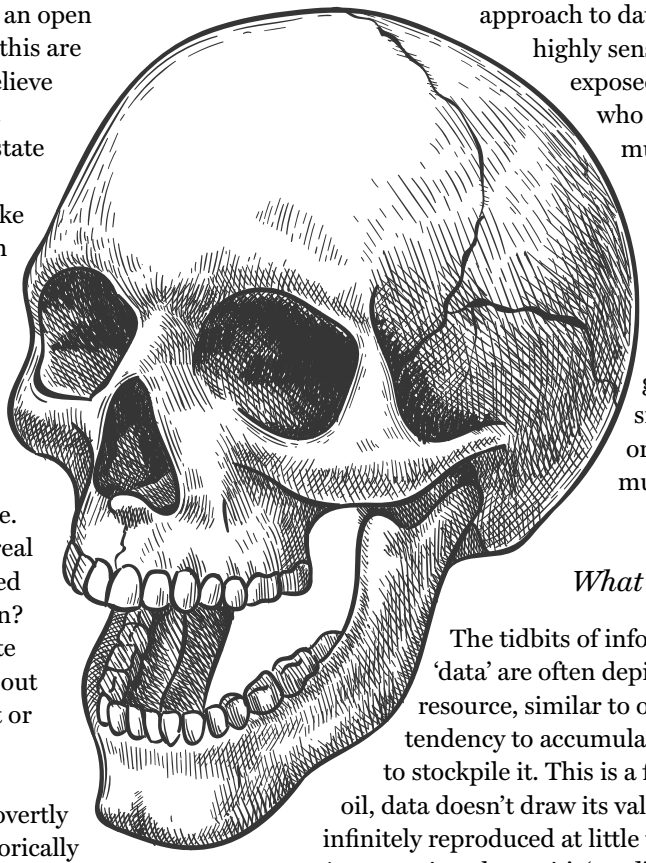
You might ask, 'Haven't real estate agents always collected a lot of personal information? And surely that's appropriate given they're trying to filter out people who might miss rent or trash the place?'.

The difference here is a commercial third party is covertly stepping into what was historically a 1-to-1, once-off relationship between you and the real estate agent. Many people don't realise their personal information is going into an enormous, highly-detailed database which will be leveraged for private profit for years to come. Nor is this third party currently bound by the robust legal regulation which applies to the few other people who have that level of personal information — such as your bank or the ATO.

Despite all of the debate about Google, Facebook, Microsoft and the rest of the big tech sector, when it comes to personal data it is these small scale hustlers about whom I am most concerned.

Whether it's the platform (i.e. app or website) you use to book gym classes or lodge rental applications, the loyalty app at your coffee shop, the site you use to check your credit score or get quotes for car insurance, there are plenty of suburban charlatans hoping to trick you into sharing information they can use to profile you and profit from it.

These actors are less interested in looking at trends across large groups, but instead patterns in smaller local and profitable subsections. These actions are likely to exacerbate, not diminish, discrimination. Their small scale makes them more likely to cut corners, store everything in one place, look at it individually, or sell it on to another actor without you knowing. Not to mention they often have a sloppier approach to data security — leaving highly sensitive information exposed to hackers (or staff) who can use it to commit much more damaging identity theft.



There's a clear and significant legal and regulatory failure here. We need new frameworks to enforce good behaviour for small and medium-sized organisations just as much as multi-nationals.

What data is useful for?

The tidbits of information that make up 'data' are often depicted as a type of natural resource, similar to oil. As a result, there is a tendency to accumulate as much as possible or to stockpile it. This is a false comparison. Unlike oil, data doesn't draw its value from scarcity, can be infinitely reproduced at little to no cost and typically *increases* in value as it's 'used'.

Having data isn't enough. Without quality analysis, much data never achieves its potential

value — creating competitive advantages or solving organisational challenges.

This analysis can be done by experienced data scientists (who are scarce and in high demand), or by algorithms (designed by experienced data scientists). Any advantage this analysis creates also has a remarkably short shelf life. To realise the value, organisations must act on their findings quickly.

Enduring value isn't created by having data, but by enabling humans to develop methodologies, algorithms, and code for use on *other* data.

Now I know this is beginning to sound a little bit like a sci-fi film where time bends back on itself — but stay with me.

For example, 'Artificial Intelligence' didn't beat grandmasters in chess and *Go* by being smarter. This feat was achieved by generating 'training data', i.e. learning from thousands of 'practice rounds', played 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for 365 days a year. Each move made in these practice rounds was quite stupid — but they informed a machine learning model, i.e. repeatedly teaching machines how to solve problems by example.

This is why my earlier example is particularly problematic. That company is collecting incredibly personal and rare data (very few people have your full financial history), while being both capable and motivated to analyse it. Ultimately, they do this so they and their partners can include or exclude you from future services. Merely having the data isn't the problem, it is their ability, capacity and motivation to drive action from their analysis of the data.

But who 'owns' all of this data?

Most people very reasonably see data about them as an asset that they own, thinking that companies don't have a right to 'take data from you', or that you have a 'right to ask for it back'.

Sadly, in most legal jurisdictions around the world, data cannot be 'owned' by anyone, at least in the traditional legal understanding of property. Legally recognised 'property' may be tangible (chairs, dogs and pencils) or intangible (software, creative writing, trademarks and patents). Often a significant component of intangible value is trade secrets, or as we usually call it in Australia, confidential information. Trade secrets are generally, however, not 'property'.

Despite this, the stockmarket and investors clearly see value beyond the traditional definitions of assets or property. Trade secret 'assets' have often been valued at billions of dollars. Many trade secrets derive their value through closely guarded central control: the recipe for Coke, the Google search ranking algorithm, and so on. These trade secret 'assets' may not appear in the balance sheet as assets. Their value is instead created by being closely held. By being closely held, scarcity is created and managed. This is why our tech giants and many other businesses are so resistant to disclosing exactly how their algorithms work.

Additionally, adding friction to the sharing of personal data would disrupt much of our modern world. Ordering from Amazon or watching Netflix requires a complex and often unseen data sharing ecosystem of five or more data-holding entities to deliver a service to us, from the platform such as Amazon, to the third party who is selling the goods, a warehouse/storage centre that physically holds the goods, an analytics service provider that keeps track of how many goods are in the warehouse and where they need to go, a cloud data platform which ensures this data is safe and quickly available, through to credit card or delivery service providers.

But it is clear the status quo isn't working.

The Edelman Harvard Trust Barometer shows public trust in business, government, NGOs and media are at historic lows. 61% of people don't trust that Governments understand emerging technologies enough to regulate them effectively.

But what should we do? If you lead one of these institutions, Harvard Professor Dustin Tingley offers a simple test — ask yourself 'Is this the right thing to do?' and 'Can we do better?'.

But we know that hoping leaders act in good faith isn't enough. We need to create a robust system of public accountability. Fortunately for regulators, this isn't a new discovery. By my count, more than 175 sets of ethical data principles have been developed by governments and major global institutions like the OECD in the last few years.

These are often, sadly, hobby projects by isolated government agencies. But they have some useful common themes. People who collect, store and analyse data on behalf of organisations should ensure that the data they hold on these people have a right to:

- ***Ownership***: Individuals should be able to legally own their personal information. This information is as much 'ours' as any other asset;
- ***Consent***: If an organisation asks for personal information, the organisation must ensure

people provide informed and explicitly expressed consent of what personal data moves to whom, when, and for what purpose. This must be a negotiation, not a 'take-it-or-leave-it' proposition;
- ***Transparency***: When your data is used, you or a trusted regulator must have transparent oversight of the algorithm design used to generate conclusions from that data. Organisations must also be transparent about the decisions they are using the data to make;
- ***Privacy***: Whenever an organisation is the custodian of user data, it is obligated to ensure it does not become publicly available; from the technical level (database security), the social level (ensuring strong ethical access standards with staff), or procedural level (that the data is held in a de-identified form as much as practicable);
- ***Accountability of outcomes***: Organisations must prevent situations where data analysis may adversely affect one group of people with a fixed identity characteristic over another (i.e. race, sexuality, gender). Additionally, individuals must be aware when data plays a role in any decision that impacts their lives (i.e. understanding how an algorithm may have affected a home loan application or rental application).

The Australian code also refers to broader values, expecting actors to actively ensure their tools support social equity and human, social, and environmental well-being. Ensuring fairness, reliability and safety for all Australians.

In most constituencies, these are still voluntary and in-principle codes. We need to see them backed by meaningful policy substance. This would likely include:

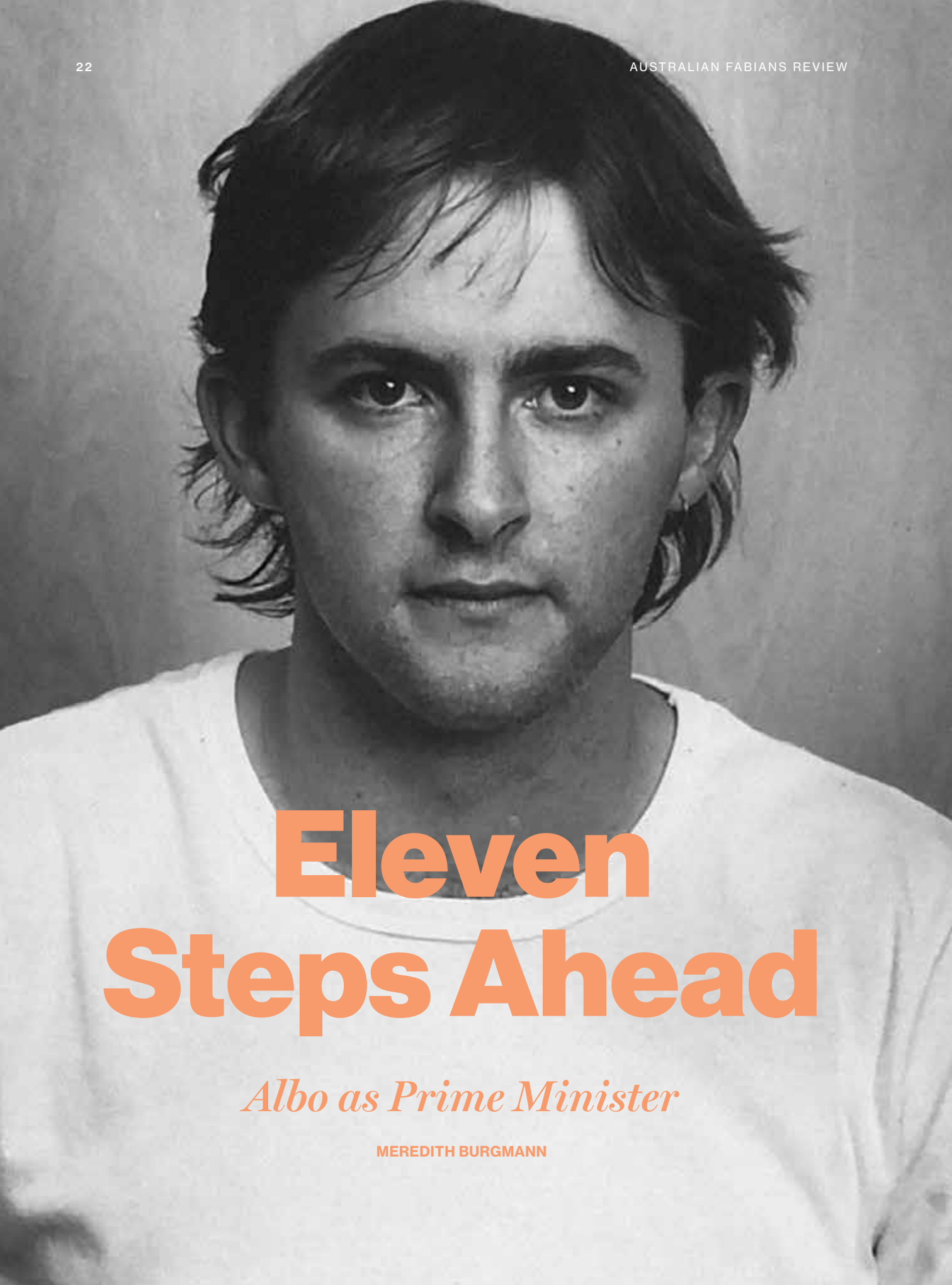
- Using legal or regulatory tools to increase the transaction costs and decrease the payoff for opportunistic behaviour. Policymakers could achieve that by improving the enforcement mechanisms for these principles, such as significant fines for poor behaviour;
- Introducing a public right to transparency about how each tool is built and operates. Removing the information asymmetry between actors, and creating a more transparent, informed and accountable discussion about these issues;
- Government and large organisations can use incentives and coercion for good behaviour such as only acquiring and using tools that meet these standards, or through an accreditation/standards process, and finally;
- Improving public literacy about these challenges and potential solutions, increasing the social expectation of good behaviour in our daily lives. This is one thing you can directly help to achieve! Share this Fabian essay with someone you know who would benefit from reading it.

As damaging as Morton's work was and how cruel his advocates were, we should draw confidence that it was challenged, reviewed and replaced. Hundreds of other researchers worked in parallel, each in dialogue and challenging each other. Only the most robust and most supported conclusions ultimately survived and flourished.

In 1853, abolitionist minister Theodore Parker delivered a sermon that offers both a challenge and reassurance. He said, 'I do not pretend to understand the moral universe. The arc is a long one. My eye reaches but little ways. I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by experience of sight. I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends toward justice.'

That bend is not a given — it requires our active, intentional engagement. But I believe we have it in us to pull this arc towards justice.

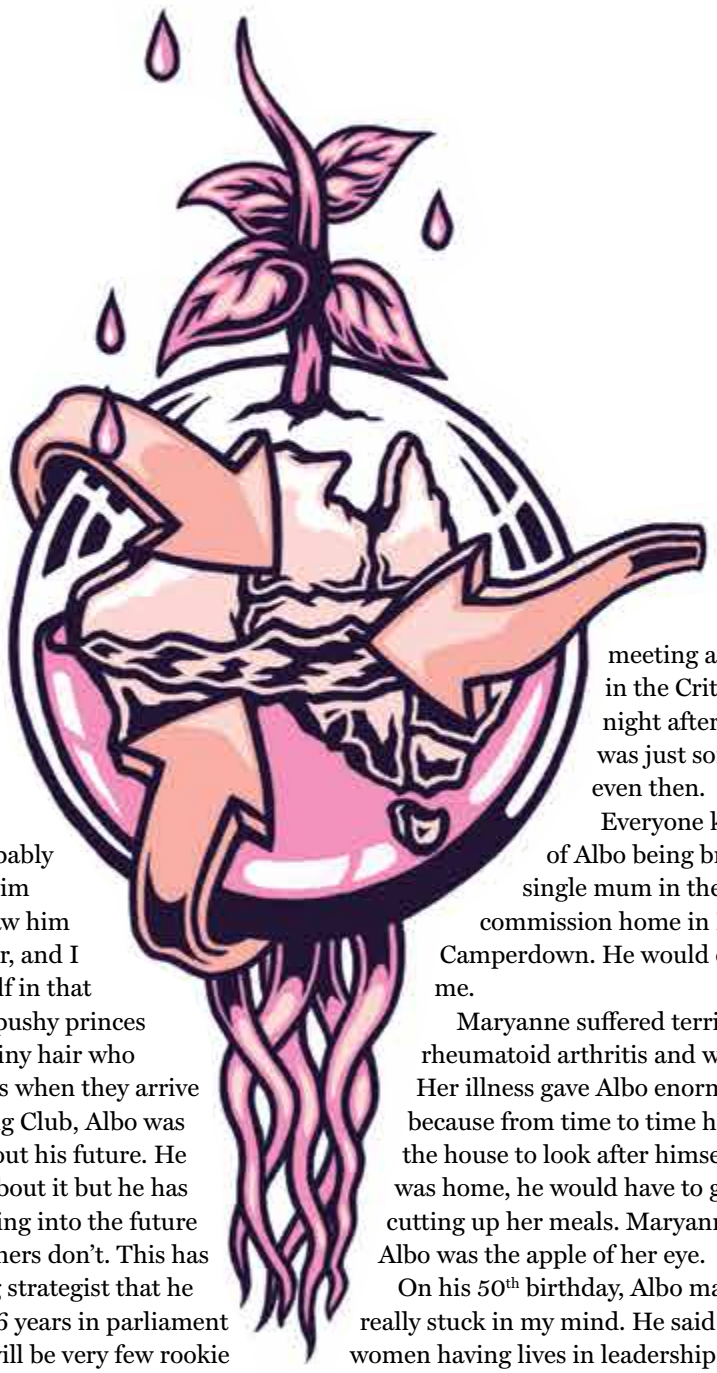
Daniel Stone is the Executive Director of strategic communications company Principle Co and has advised over a hundred of Australia's most senior policy and advocacy leaders on technology, social behaviour and communications.



Eleven Steps Ahead

Albo as Prime Minister

MEREDITH BURGMANN



I have known Albo since the eighties.

Like many of us, I still find the words 'Prime Minister Anthony Albanese' very weird. Knowing the man, it probably sounds quite strange to him too. I'm not sure I ever saw him as a future prime minister, and I don't think he saw himself in that way either. Unlike those pushy princes with perfect teeth and shiny hair who announce their intentions when they arrive at the University Debating Club, Albo was always pretty reticent about his future. He may have been reticent about it but he has always been good at looking into the future and seeing things that others don't. This has made him the interesting strategist that he is. His early career and 26 years in parliament taught him a lot. There will be very few rookie errors from Albo as prime minister.

Call me Albo, please

I met Anthony Albanese as a young student in the Criterion Hotel — the old Criterion which used to be on the corner of Sussex and Liverpool. It was where the general Left congregated from about 1970 until its demolition in 1986. Albo turned up there as a friend of my then research assistant, Jo Scard.

He introduced himself to me as 'Albo' — and insisted on me calling him that. Even then he had such joie de vivre and self-confidence that I actually remember meeting him. I doubt if I would remember meeting any other 19 year old in the Criterion on a Friday night after many beers.There was just something about him even then.

Everyone knows the story of Albo being brought up by his single mum in the little housing commission home in Bridge Road Camperdown. He would often point it out to me.

Maryanne suffered terribly from rheumatoid arthritis and was often in hospital. Her illness gave Albo enormous self-confidence because from time to time he was left alone in the house to look after himself. Even when she was home, he would have to give her care like cutting up her meals. Maryanne adored him and Albo was the apple of her eye.

On his 50th birthday, Albo made a speech that really stuck in my mind. He said that he supported women having lives in leadership, because 'women shouldn't have to be like my mother and live their lives through their sons'.

One of the things that arose out of this view of the world was his very early belief that women should be members of parliament. He was crucially important in organising women into seats from the early '90s onwards (well before quotas). He was instrumental in encouraging Janelle Saffin, Tanya Plibersek, Maggie Deahm, Linda Burney, Carmel Tebbutt, Penny Sharpe, Jo Haylen and many others to take on the role.

With me it almost amounted to bullying. I was an academic and very happy being an academic. I was president of my union, the Academics Union (now NTEU) and active in the left of the union movement — not so much the ALP.

ITA Party 1991, Chris Warren, Mark Ryan, Paul Murphy as onlookers, Meredith Burgmann and Albo as participants, Wendy Caird as Umpire. Supplied by the author.

Albo came around to see me one day, knocked on my door and said he wanted to take me out to lunch, which should have aroused my suspicions then and there. At lunch he put to me that I should go into the upper house and I said 'don't be silly — I'm an academic'. All academics ever want to do is be academics. So I sent him away.

However over that weekend I marked 200 first year essays. And by the time he came back on the Tuesday to ask if I had reconsidered, I had in fact reconsidered — and that's how my political life started. So if I ever have to nominate a mentor, I always say Albo, even though he is 16 years younger than me.

He understood the issue of getting women into Parliament so much earlier than other men. When feminist icon (and first NSW woman in Federal Parliament) Jeannette McHugh's seat of Philip was abolished in a redistribution, Albo somehow organised for her to represent the seat of Grayndler, by convincing everyone that it was the neighbouring seat. It actually wasn't 'neighbouring' but everyone was totally won over by Albo's enthusiastic advocacy.

Albo and I had terrible arguments (photo attached). Strangely they were never about women's issues. He saw me as too centred on inner city concerns, such as anti-war and anti-uranium activism, and kept hammering me about the need for the Left to broaden itself out to the western suburbs and take on issues such as housing and poverty. However we were always united in our shared belief that the unions were the basis of Labor's existence.

One of the things that everyone always remembers is how good he was at relating to the rank-and-file. Albo loved getting out and meeting the branch members. Down to earth and sociable, he was a great hit at Country Conference and mostly managed to make friends and have a beer with everybody in the entire town.

As I have been quoted as saying, 'you always knew the party had started when Albo arrived'. I realise as Party Leader he now has to project a more staid and

statesmanlike persona but I miss the old ebullient Albo.

Although he never had any self-doubt, I never heard him say that he was going to be prime minister. In fact, I never even heard him say that he was going to be in Parliament. What he once said to me was that he thought he was really well suited to doing the job that he had at the time, which was being leader of the Left in NSW and fighting the good fight in Head Office.

He has been quoted as saying that he doubted whether he wanted to be party leader, saying 'I don't have the destiny thing', and I know that's true. He did agonise about running against Bill Shorten in 2013.

I talked to him at his election night party in 2013, when we lost the election. I was trying to convince him to run and he said to me, 'I think I'm just too tired', and he did look terrible. He was exhausted because he had not only been Minister for Infrastructure, but he'd been Leader of the House in a very tight situation where it would have taken every ounce of his strategic nous to get stuff through the hung parliament.

Cautious but not timid

So what made him decide him to stand? I don't know really but I suspect it was a whole lot of people like me telling him to do so. I'm still not sure that being PM was his target. After the desperately depressing election of 2019, I'm sure he sat down and worked out exactly what went wrong and what needed to be done to get a different result. Then he set out to do it.

The ALP's Weatherill/Emerson report on the 2019 loss pinpoints the public's lack of enthusiasm for Bill Shorten, but other problems such as 'too many policies' and 'not enough persuasion' would have struck a chord with Albo's own views about having to bring the public along with you when taking big policy steps.

There has been much discussion about the way in which he streamlined policy commitments and 'removed barnacles'. However, I would like to make the important point that Albo is cautious but not timid — and there's a huge difference. He has been cautious in how he has approached defence and foreign policy matters but has certainly not been timid in his enthusiastic and very early support for the First Nations voice to Parliament. He has not been timid about his belief in climate change or the need to raise workers' wages either.

However, he does believe that you need to still be standing at the end of the day in order to get any of these policies enacted — and that's what he intends to do. He intends to still be there in three years... six years... maybe even nine years.

There has been some commentary during the last six months about decency and respect in government and Anthony actually does believe that Parliament should be a decent place. It might not always have seemed this way, but he has often managed to have relationships 'across the aisle', and when someone's in real personal difficulty, Albo was always able to forget party or factional differences and do what was needed to help them out. I know he has done so on numerous occasions.

Unlike those pushy princes with perfect teeth and shiny hair who announce their intentions when they arrive at the University Debating Club, Albo was always pretty reticent about his future.

He also has a strong sense of 'what's right' and I for one was not in the slightest bit surprised to see him turn up at the unveiling of Tony Abbot's prime ministerial portrait. He believes in Parliament and believes in democratic elections. He will treat former Prime Ministers with respect — possibly even Scott Morrison eventually.

Lone Wolf or Leader of the Pack?

When a new Prime Minister appears you always have to ask, who do they owe?

When the new PM is there as the result of a palace coup, then the answer is pretty obvious, but Albo was the only nomination for Party leader in 2019. There was no bare knuckle wrestle against an angry

foe. It has been Albo's solid support from rank-and-file members of the Labor party (mainly, but not exclusively, Left) that has been his support base, and to some extent they are really the only people that he owes.

Albo always had the capacity to make friends and cement allies in weird places.

There is no right wing machine that he will have to cater for. There are no corporations or lobby groupswaiting for their pay off. As the NSW Left Assistant Secretary, he did not take part in some of the more shady dealings that took place in Sussex Street. He was ideologically opposed to corporate largesse and too clever to get himself involved.

Katherine Murphy's contribution to the new 'Albo as PM' genre, Quarterly Essay 88 'Lone Wolf: Albanese and the New Politics', is an interesting piece, but strangely titled. I agree more with Crikey writer Chris Warren, who also knew the young Albo well: 'Anthony was not a 'Lone Wolf', rather he was creating his own pack of wolves'.

In the mid to late 1980s Albo was part of a brutal intra-Left struggle in the NSW Party. It was the carry-over from a 1970s split which had never healed. Albo built around himself in NSW a group of likeminded progressives (the 'Hard Left') who believed in union movement involvement, whereas the oppositional "Soft Left" led by Martin Ferguson were more focussed on the branches, and consequentially the winning of seats.

The first strike in this campaign was when a very young Albo won the position of Left Assistant Secretary (basically leader of the Left) from the Ferguson candidate who was considered a shoo-in. As the Left leader, he managed to outwit the Right on numerous occasions and began attracting his own support base and also managed to inspire some prominent crossovers. He would always cheerfully describe these types as 'on the transfer list'.

When he went into Parliament Albo continued to remould the Left so that eventually we ended up with a dominant National Left grouping which is often referred to, for convenience sake, as the 'Albo Left'. Sometimes these new factions cosseted by Albo involved massive realignments.

So, not a lone wolf but, as Chris Warren says, 'the leader of the pack'.

Albo always had the capacity to make friends and cement allies in weird places. In my role as a duty MLC, I would often arrive in a country town to talk to some Right wing party members only to discover they were huge Albo fans from way back. He had partied with them one night or visited their mum in a nursing home. Everyone always remembered.

Since a short stint working for Bob Carr in the 1990s, Albo has had a genuinely easy relationship with many in the Right. He is very able to temporarily cast aside political differences in order to concentrate on what needs to be done at the time. I was not surprised to see that he had recently dined privately with Business Council CEO Jennifer Westacott and BCA President Tim Reed. Possibly he was bending their ear about climate change or even IR reform. It would have been a convivial evening. He can be very entertaining and this tactic of picking off players individually will continue.

One of the reasons that Albo has been so underestimated both by his opponents and by the media is that he is genuinely daggy. He has a grating accent and until recently a pretty uncouth way of presenting himself. He was the original ocker dad turning up at headbanging concerts and enthusiastically necking a beer. He was genuine though.

The last six months have given us plenty to judge Albo as prime minister.

The government's legislative record has been robust. He knows how to carry plans through and get stuff done, which, coming after years of Coalition nothingness will be very refreshing.

He is not a policy wonk. He won't be sitting up at night going over tiny details in long submissions. The words 'programmatic specificity' will never pass his lips. He doesn't need to be a policy wonk when he has a skilled public service (which he believes in) and his own talented ministers to provide the particulars.

He also has a prodigious memory. When he was in Young Labor he knew everyone's telephone number off by heart and used to spout them out almost like a party trick, which is why I was so surprised at his 'unemployment rate' flub on the first day of campaigning. Oh well everyone has a brain fade occasionally.

He knows how to implement policy and how to get the best out of his front bench team.

He is tactically very smart. I once said to him that I was getting better and I could now think three steps ahead, and he just laughed at me and said 'yeah, but I'm eleven steps ahead'. I reckon that's probably true. He's the master of the long game. In any fight within the party he always knew how to keep the back channels open. He knew the importance of not breaking down communication.

He did love outwitting his opponents who were trying to support more conservative positions or were manoeuvring against us at a factional level. When I was in parliament he would sometimes contact me and say 'Joe Blogs from the Telegraph is going to ring you in 5 minutes and you are going to say this'. I would do so, knowing I was part of some intricate plan to get a Left objective supported or a terrible policy scrapped. It always worked.

If I was pushed to talk about what policy he was most involved with during this period it was always poverty. He talked a lot about social disadvantage. He was particularly interested in housing — the need for good public and social housing policies. This did not just arise out of his own circumstances, but from working for Tom Uren, the great Whitlam Minister for Urban and Regional Development. Albo's election policy promise of $10bn for social and affordable housing was no surprise to me.

I knew he'd been a student activist at Sydney Uni around the importance of political economy courses, which totally ties in with his whole emphasison poverty and the role of workers in a society.

We did have shocking arguments and I can remember at one stage both of us shouting at each other in tears. Which brings me to another thing that needs to be said about Albo, which is that he cries at the drop of a hat. I remember his victory party when he first got elected to Parliament in 1996. It was terrible because the Labor Party had lost the election. Albo held it together pretty well during his speech but when he started to thank his mother he burst into tears. Mind you we were all in tears that night anyway.

Albo is a fighter. He's very loyal and he doesn't mind getting into scraps. He recognises that sometimes he has to make enemies. Once he said to me, 'you know me, I don't have a second gear' and that is absolutely right. Sometimes it's to his detriment.But at least you know where you stand.

I'm showing my age, but the one thing I don't cope with is his beloved music. The Pixies and the Celibate Rifles are not my idea of fun. He once told me who his great hero in life was — not Marx or even Whitlam. His great hero in life was Kurt Cobain. Really!

Meredith Burgmann AM is a former president of the New South Wales Legislative Council.

HOUSING

Tackling a Wicked Problem

Australia's Housing Crisis

EMMA DAWSON

Owning one's own home has long been understood as the Great Australian Dream.

From the early days of federation, working and middle-class Australians were far more likely to own the home in which they live than were their counterparts in Britain or the USA. In the years after World War II, home ownership began to be regarded as a key measure of security and success for ordinary Australians, as policy makers made housing security and affordability a core element of the post-war reconstruction.

To this day, an assumption of home ownership among the majority of Australian families underpins the Australian social contract: wages, social security payments and the retirement income system all rely, to a greater or lesser extent, on widespread home ownership.

Yet, in 2022, secure housing in Australia is increasingly out of reach for a growing proportion of the population — arguably more so than in any comparable country. In fact, Australia is now behind the United Kingdom when it comes to outright home-ownership, and has fallen behind the US for owner-occupied mortgaged households. The proportion of households living in a home they own outright or with a mortgage in Australia is a full 13% below the OECD average, and falling.

The difficulty of accessing the Australian housing market today is the subject of much political and public discussion. Yet the national debate about declining affordability for first home buyers too often obscures the larger issue of a lack of housing security throughout all segments of the Australian populace: for example, it is not widely understood that, on average across the life course, renters spend a larger proportion of their income on housing than do homeowners.

Similarly, recent public debate that positions home ownership primarily as a generational divide ignores the significant disparities in wealth and housing security within generations. That is, while the popular narrative holds that 'baby boomers' are cashed-up home owners with multiple investment properties, and are locking younger generations out of home-ownership, the evidence shows that one in four older Australians lives in permanent income poverty, and that this is primarily due to the fact that they do not own their own home and must pay private rental costs.

What is true, and should be of utmost concern to policy makers, is that the proportion of Australians

who will never own a home is increasing, with dire consequences for Australia's future prosperity and social cohesion. Younger generations are entering the home-ownership market later than ever, if at all. The long-term impact of this trend is already apparent: the proportion of homeowners aged 55–64 years still owing money on mortgages has tripled from 14% to 47% in the last 25 years.

In a poll conducted in mid-2021, two thirds of Australians responded that they thought home ownership was now out of reach for young people. At the same time, many economists were arguing that mortgage affordability was better than ever before, and that first time buyers just needed to grasp the opportunity of low interest rates to get on to the property gravy-train.

With interest rates now on a steep incline, this blithe advice looks even more callous, but even when money was virtually free to borrow, such an analysis failed to recognise both the lifetime cost of servicing a mortgage as a proportion of income, and the increasingly prohibitive price of entering the market with a secure deposit of 20 percent of purchase price. When the increases in housing costs are outstripping people's ability to save by several thousand dollars each month, it is becoming impossible for young people to enter the market without assistance from 'the bank of mum and dad'. This has significant consequences for intergenerational inequality and social mobility.

In the recent federal election, neither major party wanted to talk much about housing affordability and the impact of successive government policies on the ability of ordinary working people to afford a secure and safe home. In the last week of the campaign the Coalition finally buckled to extremists in its ranks and announced an ill-conceived and widely criticised plan to allow first home-buyers to dip, once again, into their superannuation to build a deposit. Again, the policy was so poorly designed it would have benefitted only those already wealthy enough to have significant superannuation balances and matched savings outside those retirement income accounts.

Labor's policies, notably its social housing fund and shared equity model for first home buyers, were more thoughtful and clearly targeted at those most in need, while the Greens took a policy to the election of building 'a million affordable homes' — although exactly where these would be built is unclear, given their party's tendency to oppose medium density housing builds in the inner suburbs of capital cities in which they sit on local councils.

What none of our political leaders wanted to talk about was the demand-side policies that have driven house prices in Australia to among the least affordable in the developed world. They have done so by displacing the right to a home from the centre of policy-making in favour of creating a speculative investment market for those already in possession of capital.

After Labor's scarring loss at the 2019 election, the party decided to jettison its years-long commitment to reducing those tax concessions, a regrettable decision that has arguably left the new Labor Government little room to move on what is now an economic and social crisis. Despite the political calculation that led to such a timid policy capitulation, the fact is, government decisions to tax wages from working people much more heavily than unearned incomes from rising property prices, and concessions granted to existing property owners, have, over the last 25 years, fuelled an exceptional and damaging explosion in property prices. Until recently, this was concentrated in Australia's capital cities, but the impact of COVID-19 and the ensuing changes in workplace practice, asset prices and lifestyle have seen the escalation of housing prices extend to our regional cities and towns.

In the recent federal election, neither major party wanted to talk much about housing affordability.

At the same time as government policies have excessively stimulated property prices, those same policy makers have failed to implement housing models alternative to private ownership that could provide security for tenants. Current public policy recognises only private ownership as the pathway to housing security; indeed, leading economists and policy advisers will defend soaring property prices on the basis that they increase household wealth and therefore the security of the population. This argument ignores the distributional effects of tax incentives that are concentrating property wealth, and therefore that model of economic security, in ever fewer hands.

The argument that property wealth can be seen as a productive asset because it provides security

Put simply, housing costs and lack of availability have now reached a crisis point for too many Australians, while housing has become a lucrative financial resource for increasingly fewer others.

to the owner-occupier is spurious. In fact, housing as an investment offers a static return and, more fundamentally, housing security need not rest on ownership: the provision of secure and affordable homes for tenants, both in the private rental market and through public and community housing, is a source of housing security in many comparable OECD nations.

The unsustainable growth in house prices has enormous ramifications for Australia's prosperity, social cohesion, security and sustainable growth. The opportunity costs for investment in more productive and innovative assets are enormous, as is the restriction on social mobility imposed on too many of our citizens due to the lack of a secure home.

Current prejudices in government policy are hampering civil society efforts to reverse this damaging trajectory. There is an open hostility on the Right side of politics to social housing — both public housing provided by state authorities, and community housing provided by not-for-profits. But there is also a failure on both sides to understand the interactions of affordable build-to-rent and rent-to-buy developments with the rest of the market. These appear to be based on a determination to protect the property values of existing home-owners and investors at the expense of those experiencing housing insecurity.

Since the election in May, the rental crisis in Australia's regional cities has spread to the capitals, and there is now a severe shortage of affordable rental properties across the country — not just for those traditionally locked out, such as people on income support, but for an increasing number of low and middle income families, including those of key workers such as nurses, teachers and care workers.

Put simply, housing costs and lack of availability have now reached a crisis point for too many Australians, while housing has become a lucrative financial resource for increasingly fewer others.

In order to reset our public conversation around housing affordability, it is necessary to reclaim the idea of housing from the extreme financialisation that has positioned it almost entirely as a financial asset to one that understands the role of a home in a secure, enjoyable and prosperous life.

If we are to end the situation in which housing is a means of building wealth for the few, rather than providing a secure home for all, we could start by recognising the following key principles.

Shelter is a fundamental human right. Access to a secure, affordable, accessible and decent home should be the first principle underpinning any policy related to housing in a wealthy country such as Australia.

Access to good quality, secure housing is well known to play a significant role in determining health and wellbeing — both physical and mental. A lack of housing in the right place, of the right quality or available for secure tenure periods, has corrosive effects on individuals and families.

High house prices and rents increase household debt, reduce spending capacity, and increase risk throughout the financial system.

Beyond individual impacts, social cohesion is detrimentally affected by property price distortions, which increase wealth inequality between and within generations.

Hot local property markets can lead to low and middle-income workers, including essential workers, unable to live close to their place of work, producing inefficient labour market outcomes.

Money held in the housing market does very little to stimulate our flagging economy, which has been in a period of low and, in some years, even negative, productivity investments.

Anthony Albanese visits the council housing block that he grew up in. Source: Facebook

Australia is not unique in facing a housing affordability crisis — around the world many countries are seeing the cost of rent and home ownership increase dramatically, with many of the same drivers and consequences. But this situation is not inevitable: several other countries have chosen deliberate policy paths to reduce the social and economic problems produced by spiralling housing costs.

So, while housing affordability is not only an Australian problem, Australia is facing a unique set of challenges, and will require a unique set of policy solutions. With a new federal government at least willing to face the problem of housing insecurity outside the owner-class, we may have some hope that in future years a suite of measures to provide more housing at the lower end of the market will relieve some pressure on renters and those previously locked out of home ownership. In order to reverse the extreme financialisation of the housing market, though, much more will be needed than the fairly modest programs Labor took to the 2022 election.

There are solutions to Australia's housing crisis. They aren't simple, and they aren't, no matter how much conservative economists protest, just about creating more supply. The tax settings that encourage Australians with means to park their money in property and push up the price of land well beyond the value of its natural utility are damaging our social cohesion, destroying social mobility and holding back our economic prosperity.

The measures needed to fix our broken housing 'market' will take time and political courage, and the necessary solutions will not be realised until policy makers accept the evidence that is staring them in the face: evidence of where we have gone wrong, who is suffering the consequences, and what will work to ensure that all Australians have access to a secure, safe and comfortable home.

Emma Dawson is Executive Director of Per Capita. This is an edited extract of Per Capita's recent report Housing Affordability in Australia: tackling a wicked problem, produced in partnership with the V&F Housing Enterprise Foundation. The report can be found at www.percapita.org.au

MEDIA DIVERSITY

Easy as ABC?

90 Years of the Australian Broadcasting Commission

JOSEPH GERSH

At a dinner to mark the 90th Anniversary of the establishment of the ABC on August 5th 2022, the Prime Minister, the Hon Anthony Albanese reaffirmed the commitment of the Labor party to ABC's editorial independence. He recommitted his Government to funding the ABC for five years, effectively taking it out of the electoral cycle, reiterating Labor's commitment to ending the previous government's three-year indexation pause.

As part of the Australian government's soft power initiatives to counter China's growing influence in the Indo Pacific, the PM also committed to providing additional funds for ABC broadcasting in the region.

He outlined Labor's guiding principle:

> 'Confidence in our democratic system is underpinned by strong public organisations contributing accurate information and well informed, carefully reasoned analysis.'

And took aim at ABC's critics:

> 'We've all heard the mantras about the ABC as a haven of inner-city elites, repeated with straight faces by critics based … in our inner cities.'

The passage of the government's 43% emissions reduction target legislation earlier in that August week was regarded by many as ending the 'climate wars'.

So, does this recommitment of the Labor government's policy and reaffirmation of ABC independence and funding presage the end of 'the culture wars', at least insofar as the ABC is concerned?

I hope so. But I fear not.

This is a timely backdrop to Zann Maxwell's invitation to contribute an opinion piece to the Fabians Review, and the reason I accepted it.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide a personal perspective of my time on the ABC Board, to respond to some of the critics (and the criticisms) of its work and to confirm my belief, to quote the title of ABC Managing Director, David Anderson's recent book, that 'now more than ever', Australia needs to support and value its public broadcaster, the ABC.

I joined the ABC Board in 2018 at a time of great turmoil; not that I knew it then. It is not the first time in my corporate career that the employment of a Managing Director has ended and that of the Chairman has followed suit. But it is the first time in my career that (apart from being litigated in the courts) my personal involvement has been the subject of a Four Corners investigation and a Senate sub-committee inquiry, to which I was summoned to explain my actions.

The reason, of course, is that the ABC operates in the full public glare and in a febrile environment where every step taken by the Board is scrutinised and commented on by supporters and detractors alike.

The subject matter of that particular controversy was, of course, alleged political interference. The concern being that the independence of the ABC had been threatened by the actions of the Government of the day and the then Chairman. I gave evidence to the

Senate sub-committee inquiry in open forum and on camera.

The ABC of course judiciously guards its independence, and the ABC Board is charged by legislation to maintain both the independence and the integrity of the ABC.

And just as the ABC Board is independent of government interference, so editorial decisions are expected to be made by the Editor in Chief (the Managing Director), ABC's journalists, editors and producers, free from interference from the Board.

The Board exercises its authority and discharges its duties by approving editorial policies and ensuring that those editorial policies are adhered to and by commissioning both internal and external reviews including regular reviews of the ABC's complaints procedures.

The ABC is regularly accused of bias of one kind or another and the criticism sometimes levelled against the ABC is that it can be defensive when dealing with complaints. Indeed, the former complaints procedure, it is said, enables the ABC to 'mark its own homework', rather than be subject to external scrutiny.

To address this issue, in late 2021 the ABC commissioned a comprehensive independent review of its complaints handling procedures undertaken by former Commonwealth and NSW Ombudsman, Professor John McMillan and veteran journalist, Jim Carroll. In May 2022, the ABC accepted all of the recommendations of the McMillan/Carroll review, and, as a consequence, an Ombudsman (Fiona Cameron) was appointed, who will report directly to the board.

Coalition Senator Andrew Bragg, who had previously initiated a separate independent inquiry into the ABC and SBS complaints procedure by the Senate's Environment and Communication Committee in November 2021, came out in support of the appointment of the Ombudsman, describing it as 'a good decision'.

The ABC operates in the full public glare and in a febrile environment.

In a statement to the Senate (3 August) Senator Bragg said: 'Having followed through the process of having a review, which the ABC commissioned into complaints handling, the ABC has now decided it will appoint an ombudsman … I welcome the decision.'

He, of course, cautioned: '…we will be able to probe the success, transparency and governance of the ombudsman over future Senate estimate rounds…'

A change of tone, nonetheless.

Of course, perception and reality are not the same thing.

Maurice Newman (a former ABC Chairman) and others have described the ABC as a 'workers run collective.'

A more nuanced version of this criticism is that, ensconced in Ultimo, the ABC tends to focus on the preoccupations of 'the inner-city elites'; a criticism mocked by the PM in his 90th birthday remarks.

For this reason and many others, the ABC's Five-Year Plan to move up to 70% of ABC's content makers out of Ultimo marks a recognition of the geographic and demographic reality of Australia. A reality not lost on an organisation that has over 60 locations and bureaus; a cogent answer to the perception that the ABC is the captive of 'inner city elites'. The more recently announced move of the news team and others to Paramatta, closer to the geographic heart of Sydney is a significant step in the realisation of the decentralisation plan.

The proposition advanced by some of the most egregious and persistent of the ABC's critics, namely that the ABC should be 'cancelled', sold, privatised or transformed into a subscription service (all of which amount to the same thing) continues to be prosecuted.

In fairness, this line of thought has never been the policy of the Coalition (despite a few resolutions of State Liberal party conferences to that effect). In the last Budget, the previous federal government committed to the reintroduction of indexation. Throughout all of the controversies during its term, the previous Government maintained a professional relationship and engagement with the ABC, seemingly understanding the importance of the public broadcaster's role in modern Australia.

Those who propose an existential 'solution' to the ABC 'threat', of course, fail to recognise the contribution of the ABC to rural and regional Australia, to emergency broadcasting, to children's programming, to arts and culture, to Australian drama and comedy, to music. In fact, some of the great supporters are elected members from rural and regional Australia where the ABC's contribution is well recognised. This has been enhanced by the ABC earmarking the payments recently negotiated with the social media giants towards vastly expanded

regional news. Yet the 'existential solution' continues to be advanced.

A variation on this theme, prescribed by certain think tanks, journalists and commentators, is to limit the ABC to areas (such as emergency broadcasting or children's programming) which are perceived as not competing with the interests of commercial media. This argument is often advanced under the rubric of 'market failure' i.e. the ABC's role should be confined to areas in which the market has demonstrably failed to provide what is perceived to be in the public interest. This argument fails to understand, appreciate or value what public broadcasting does in its own right, especially to raise the bar in the contested space of news and current affairs.

As I've written elsewhere, it is unbecoming, to say the least, for journalists and commentators, in the guise of reporting on or opining about the public broadcaster, to conflate their ideological position with their perception of the commercial interests of their publisher. In the case of News Limited, Mr Murdoch is more than capable of taking care of his financial interests and that of his shareholders without such 'assistance'.

And what of the charge of ABC bias or, more accurately, the question of whether the ABC conforms with its obligation to be accurate and impartial?

To deal with bias, of course, it is necessary to declare my own. I generally align myself with liberal democratic values (centre right); perhaps a different perspective than the social democratic views of many of this journal's readers. Specifically, whilst socially progressive, I prefer a market based economic approach (call me an economic conservative or free market liberal), and I believe that the democratic West should be robust in the defence of its values.

I'm on the record saying that the ABC should encourage more conservative voices. The more the ABC opens itself up to a diversity of views, the more likely it is to fully discharge its statutory obligations of accuracy and impartiality.

I'm also on record (SMH October 24,2021) as having accepted the criticism that the ABC's 'vibe' is more left than right (a criticism also made of the BBC). But bias is in the eye of the beholder; I've witnessed the range of views of members of the public after I've written an article or commented on radio, ranging from those who perceive me to be a raging 'progressive' (apparently an insult), to an apologist for the previous government.

Whilst the ABC does not always get it right, the constant repetition of the allegation that the ABC is a 'conservative free zone' is not borne out by the facts. Instead of encouraging greater centre-right participation in the ABC dialogue and acknowledging the ongoing efforts of the ABC to balance the composition of panels and encourage alternative viewpoints, the repetition of this oversimplification is, in fact, counterproductive.

For example, a headline in *The Australian* (11 August) asserted in relation to the Uluru Statement referendum response: '(a)s far as the ABC is concerned only one voice will be heard'. It failed to acknowledge, for example, the contrary view expressed by, say, Jacinta Nampijinpa Price in the *Q&A* programme broadcast from the Garma Festival devoted to the subject and aired in the days following the PM's announcement endorsing and adopting The Voice.

Despite having her views extensively aired, Jacinta Nampijinpa Price made a similar allegation at the National Party's federal council meeting, shortly thereafter, predicting that 'the ABC will only put a one-sided view on this' (the Referendum), thus creating a new form of bias, perhaps to be known as 'anticipatory bias'. I sometimes feel that it is not the ABC in reality, but the ABC as a metaphor that critics so often have in their sights.

As an individual member of a Board which itself has diverse opinions there are serious obligations imposed on each board member limiting the means by which we can (or indeed should) influence outcomes. In our deliberations, we leave our personal political convictions at the Boardroom door, and try to provide professional guidance and governance, but more importantly aim to promote the interests and advance the cause of the ABC.

This makes the suggestion that ABC Directors start with the right intentions but are 'schmoozed by' management (or become captive to the culture) so inappropriate. In that world, the ABC Directors are mere ciphers. Yiddish is my first language, so I'm as susceptible as any to being 'schmoozed', but I think that condescending description is not only insulting, but once again inaccurate.

This concept stems from a wholly misconceived notion that, having been appointed by a government of one persuasion or another, the duty of the directors is to prosecute the agenda of that government. I have had occasion to defend Ita Buttrose from calls that she should be sacked, pretty much for that reason. Former ABC Directors are often quoted as calling for the ABC Board to be sacked or new and onerous Director's duties and sanctions be imposed which does beg the question to those former Directors: if the problem is so serious and the solution so obvious, why didn't you fix it during your term of office?

Family in their living room listening to a radio broadcast, New South Wales, about 1930. Source: National Museum Australia

I do not judge the ABC through the prism of whether it conforms with my political worldview. Nor, in fairness, is the ABC a monolithic institution propounding a 'house view'.

As the child of holocaust survivors, I understand the cost of the breakdown of democracy, tolerance, and liberal values. Well before we lived in a post truth world, there was Goebbels. There are issues bigger than the controversies of the day that should guide our thinking about the nature of society and community. Holding our leadership to account and consolidating trust in our values and our institutions are key to this. We can never allow the trust the community has in 'our' ABC to be eroded.

For that reason, to me diversity and inclusion and support groups such as ABC Pride are not 'woke' afterthoughts but clear imperatives if we are to reflect modern Australia.

The ABC is criticised for its celebration of our First Nation. To me it is a moral imperative.

And whereas views differ about the economic consequences and hence the pace and nature of our response to climate change, the ABC's determined effort to deal with the issue comprehensively is something of which we can be proud.

I don't agree with everything at the ABC. There are things about the ABC's coverage of the Middle East conflict, for example which trouble me.

But I'm steadfast in my belief that the ABC is one of the bedrock institutions of our democracy and polity.

The current change of atmosphere provides some 'clear air' and with that, opportunity for the ABC to deal with the real challenges it faces; challenges affecting public broadcasters and indeed media organisations everywhere. Such is the pace of change and innovation, that there may be as much change in the next decade of the ABC century as there was for much of the first ninety years.

The threats come not only from streaming services, but threats to truth itself, enhanced by artificial intelligence and cyber malevolence on a scale not hitherto contemplated.

What management has to try to navigate is two competing streams at the same time- sticking to the ABC's core mission and strengths on the one hand and adapting to change at a rapid rate on the other.

As Ita Buttrose said in her 90th birthday speech-

'We will need to increase the range of ideas, interests and experiences available to all Australians and strengthen Australia's democratic values of open mindedness and tolerance by explaining and protecting diversity'.

It's in the interests of every Australian that the ABC succeeds in this endeavour.

Joseph Gersh AM is Executive Chairman of Gersh Investment Partners Limited and a Director of the ABC. He was formerly Deputy Chairman of the Australia Council for the Arts. The views expressed are his own.

ESSAY

Keeping them Nervous

After 30 years of Ernie Awards and ten years since Julia Gillard's Misogyny Speech, have things finally changed?

YVETTE ANDREWS

It's hard to believe, but October 2022 was the 10th anniversary of Julia Gillard's famous misogyny speech. The speech grabbed worldwide attention, as our first female prime minister called out the persistent sexism she faced in Federal Parliament, particularly from the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott.

To mark the anniversary, Gillard has compiled an account of the impact of the speech in a book called *'Not Now, Not Ever'.*

The year 2022 is also a milestone for the Annual Ernie Awards for Sexist Remarks. After three decades of 'keeping them nervous', the Ernies have come to an end. The 30th and final Ernie Awards ceremony, attended by 320 rowdy feminists, took place in August.

It's now time to hand over to our younger, social media-savvy sisters who are taking on the patriarchy with memes and caustic tweets. These women are eagle-eyed and relentless. A sexist stuff-up will spread through social media networks almost instantaneously.

The misogyny speech and Annual Ernie Awards are uniquely Australian responses to public sexism. They tell an important story about the determination of Australian women to stamp out misogyny.

The Ernies women have not just focussed their sights on politicians. Demeaning judges, prejudiced priests, chauvinist sporting commentators and even macho chefs have all felt our wrath.

To understand just how bad things were, it is worth exploring the sexist comments we collected from federal MPs and political commentators, particularly those directed towards Julia Gillard.

Let's look at how things have changed over these years and consider whether there is now hope for a less sexist future.

The Ernie Awards began in 1993 with a bunch of women celebrating the retirement of Ernie Ecob as Secretary of the Australian Workers Union. He was a notorious misogynist who women unionists had been battling for many years. It seemed appropriate to award 'a sheep rampant on a plinth' as the first Gold Ernie for the year's most sexist remark (the AWU was once the Shearers' Union).

Back in the 1990s, exposing public sexism involved studiously saving up snippets from newspapers to be revealed at the annual awards. Many quotes were found in stories deep inside the papers by our scarce but intrepid female journalists.

In the early years of the Ernies, the winners were dominated by union officials and the judiciary. But by 1997, attention shifted to the new prime minister.

John Howard immediately gave the directive that the term 'Chairperson' would not be used in any papers that came across the prime minister's desk. His 1950s attitudes enraged the Ernies women.

Howard's sustained sexism, along with that of other regular nominees, Alan Jones and Piers Akerman, led to the introduction in 1998 of a new Ernies category for 'Repeat Offender'. John Howard won it three times, but that was nothing on Tony Abbott who received the Ernies 'Repeat offender' award eleven times, followed by Mark Latham with four such gongs.

John Howard eventually won the Gold Ernie in 2001 for declaring there was 'no appropriate woman' for governor general.

The misogyny speech and Annual Ernie Awards are uniquely Australian responses to public sexism.

This type of excuse had already been called out in 1997 when Labor Minister for the Olympics, Michael Knight, won the Gold Ernie for saying there were no women on the SOCOG Board because 'appointments were made on merit not sex'.

Howard ignored our public shaming, but one of his senators was keen to engage. After winning the Political Ernie in 2006, Senator Bill Heffernan rang organiser Meredith Burgmann to say he was delighted with the award. He went on to justify his slag against Julia Gillard that she was 'deliberately barren' by explaining that he was an old farmer and knew about 'heifers and bulls and rams and ewes.'

This style of attack on Gillard was a sign of things to come.

Tony Abbott was making himself known to the Ernies crowd as early as 2002 when he won the Political Ernie for this: 'A bad boss is a little bit like a bad father or a bad husband — notwithstanding all his faults you find he tends to do more good than harm'. He had also declared that making paid maternity leave compulsory would be 'over this government's dead body'.

Like Howard, Abbott offered a healthy dose of 1950s values. 'What the housewives of Australia need to understand as they do the ironing … ' he proclaimed in 2010, a year he received a record eight Ernie nominations.

The swearing-in of Australia's first woman prime minister brought out his true colours.

Abbott won the Political Ernie in 2011 for standing in front of 'Ditch the Witch' and 'Bob Brown's Bitch' placards at a Canberra rally.

Tony Abbott led the way and the conservative press piled on. From repeated remarks about being 'deliberately barren', to Alan Jones offering to throw her out to sea in a chaff bag, Julia Gillard faced a barrage of sexist insults during her three years as prime minister.

Opinion writer, Janet Albrechtsen, won an Elaine (for Remark Least Helpful to the Sisterhood) for this: 'While lack of humour infects both sides of politics, the Labor girls in particular need to loosen their pigtails. In Canberra today, there are far too few Fred Dalys and far too many Tanya Pliberseks'.

Some comments were incredibly hurtful. Alan Jones accused Gillard of causing her father to die of shame, just days after he passed away.

And who could forget Mal Brough who hosted a Liberal Party fundraising dinner with a menu that featured 'Julia Gillard Kentucky Fried Quail — Small Breasts, Huge Thighs and a Big Red Box'.

In October 2012, faced with a no confidence motion moved by Abbott against the Speaker of the House for sending lurid text messages, Gillard responded to Abbott's hypocrisy: 'I will not be lectured on sexism and misogyny by this man. I will not. This government will not be lectured on sexism and misogyny by this man. Not now, not ever.'

Gillard explains that the speech grew from the 'frustration that sexism and misogyny could still be so bad in the twenty-first century. The toll of not pointing it out.'

The misogyny speech, as it became known, was celebrated on TikTok and watched by White House staff. 'Not Now, Not Ever' became a rallying cry for women.

It really got under the conservatives' skin. Even John Howard felt the need to re-enter the fray with 'I think [the misogyny speech] is the worst possible way of promoting a greater involvement by women in public life.'

The Ernies women were totally exasperated by the sexist state of affairs in Federal Parliament. Horrible things being said about women MPs was nothing new. The Ernies had documented Liberal backbencher Don Randall accusing Cheryl Kernot as having 'the morals of an alley cat on heat' back in the 90s. But it was deeply depressing that the rear-guard action from chauvinist dinosaurs towards Australia's first woman prime minister was so vitriolic.

Women across the country are tackling public misogyny in different ways, building on the early efforts of the Ernies.

Women turned up in fancy dress to the Ernie's dinner as 'the Handbag Hit Squad', proudly appropriating the slur levelled at women ministers who had opposed Abbott's misogyny. Liberal MP Kelly O'Dwyer won the Elaine for coining the phrase.

Other women turned up representing 'Destroy the Joint', a social media movement who describe themselves as being 'for people who are sick of the sexism dished out to women in Australia, whether they be our first female Prime Minister or any other woman.' This group formed in response to Alan Jones accusing women of destroying the joint.

Over the next 10 years, exasperation turned to anger.

The MFW Facebook group arose when then Minister for Immigration, Peter Dutton, called journalist Samantha Maiden a 'mad fucking witch'. The group has run a merciless campaign targeting companies who advertise on shows with sexist hosts and commentators. MFW have contributed to Sam Newman, Alan Jones and Pauline Hanson losing their spots on the airwaves.

Women across the country are tackling public misogyny in different ways, building on the early efforts of the Ernies. Sexist remarks are no longer conveniently hidden away.

Abbott was ousted by Malcolm Turnbull as Prime Minister in 2015 and then in 2019 by his own electorate, who voted in Zali Steggall. Little did we know that Abbott's sexist sledging would be replaced by something equally damaging — Scott Morrison's bewildering lack of self-awareness.

We were all stunned when Morrison needed to consult his wife to understand that the alleged rape of a young woman at Parliament House needed a serious and immediate response. He explained: 'Jenny and I spoke last night and she said to me you have to think about this as a father first. What would you want if it were our girls? ... Jenny has a way of clarifying things.'

Photos supplied by the author

His verbal gymnastics became downright annoying. 'We want to see women rise. But we don't want to see women rise only on the basis of others doing worse.' Did he mean goblins and elves? Or was he just referring to men?

He proudly patronised the women protesters 'Marching4Justice', declaring 'not far from here, such marches, even now, are being met with bullets, but not here in this country'.

By the end of the Morrison Government, the rallying cry of women had become 'Enough is Enough'.

In the 2022 election, women made their feelings clear. We'd had enough of Morrison's inaction in response to rape allegations and constant outbreaks of unacceptable behaviour in Parliament.

The women of Australia carried their anger from protest marches in 2021 to the ballot box. According to The Australia Institute exit poll, support for the Coalition among women was 30%, seven percentage points less than men. Research shows that the Coalition's treatment of women was seen as one of their biggest weaknesses.

So have things finally changed for the better?

The record number of women in Anthony Albanese's cabinet is certainly a promising sign of change. Their leadership in this government is already clear from Penny Wong's instant impact on relations in the Pacific to Linda Burney's leadership on the Statement from the Heart.

The 2022 Parliament is the most diverse in our history. The number of women in the House of Representatives has jumped from 45 to 58. It is a very different place from when Julia Gillard was prime minister.

Whether the Coalition has changed is still up for debate. Already Shadow Treasurer, Angus Taylor, has referred to Deputy Speaker Sharon Claydon as Mr Speaker a dozen times, even after she asked him to stop.

But there is definitely a new feeling of optimism.

There are many more women in a position to effectively call out misogyny than there were in 1993. There are more women journalists in the Canberra Press Gallery and throughout the media, particularly reporting on current affairs and sport.

More men are speaking up too. These days, the Good Ernie (for Men Behaving Better) is very competitive.

Social media is reshaping the conversation. A tweet from Grace Tame can cut through just about anything.

We may not have completely dismantled the patriarchy, but we would like to think that the Annual Ernie Awards and our diligent newspaper clippings collections will have a lasting impact. And we certainly hope that the next woman prime minister of Australia does not need to make another misogyny speech.

Yvette Andrews is a co-host of the Annual Ernie Awards. She wrote 'The Ernies Book - 1000 Terrible Things Australian Men Have Said About Women' with Meredith Burgmann.

ESSAY

How Close We Came

The Horse-Hair Thread Holding the Sword of Disinformation Above Our Democracy

ED COPER

It's 11pm on May 21, 2022 at the Fullerton Hotel in Sydney. A group of concerned advisers are gathered backstage, speaking in hushed tones and gesticulating widely. Finally, Yaron Finkelstein furtively slips a piece of paper into the Prime Minister's hand as he takes the stage to address an increasingly deflated crowd.

'My friends, I know it has been a very disappointing night. But we are hearing very concerning reports about all sorts of irregularities at polling places around the country…'

This simple hypothetical phrase, a simple suggestion by one of our political elites, is all that stands between our healthy functioning democracy and a descent into American-style partisan hysteria and division, and ultimately violence. We should be thankful it didn't happen in our most recent Federal Election, but we should be under no illusions as to how close we came.

The 2022 election saw the mass importation of foreign disinformation — not from rival geopolitical actors trying to subvert and disrupt, but from domestic copycats borrowing from a playbook they saw and wished to emulate.

This next example is not hypothetical: at a polling booth near Port Macquarie an unknown group of people collected their ballot papers off the AEC officials, then proceeded to walk straight out with them rather than casting them. They then produced a number of fake ballot papers they had photocopied, piled them with the legitimate ones on top, took a photo of them near a bin and then sent it to Sydney radio station 2GB. 2GB tweeted the image to their 40,000 followers with the caption 'This is odd.' (2GB promptly deleted the tweet when contacted by the AEC).

And so begin threads that when unpicked by partisan media and cynical politicians could unravel our democracy all the way to Canberra.

It is just one of many examples of election fraud disinformation from our recent electoral cycle. While we usually like to observe and mock these types of movements from afar, we seem wilfully blind to them when they are under our noses.

The road a harmful conspiracy theory travels from the fringes to the mainstream is littered with breadcrumbs left by opportunistic political elites, and signposts erected by partisan news outlets. It is offered an express lane via social media echo chambers designed to promote the extreme and the emotional.

Unless we fully understand how the new ecosystems of political disinformation function, we may sleepwalk into this crisis next time — we are not immune to the same outcomes seen elsewhere, like on January 6 in Washington DC. We were simply lucky this time.

The Canvass of Disinformation

Disinformation is increasingly widespread but still poorly understood. There is an undue focus on state actors and tech platforms, thanks largely to high profile examples of Russian interference in US elections, and the lazy casting of tech megalomaniacs as the uber villain in this story. This has obscured the forces we should be concerned about: networks of bad-faith actors who weaponise social media to spread harmful narratives, divide us, and profit from both.

Many also conflate any political disagreement with disinformation. Saying 'my opponent will defund the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ABC if elected' if your opponent has made no such policy announcement is not on the same plane of indiscretion as you creating thousands of fake Twitter bots and programming them to share doctored policy documents every time someone tweets 'we love our ABC'. Disinformation is about the deliberate campaigns that happen far from our public view, that are aimed at creating and coordinating entirely false realities.

Disinformation is a very disturbing symptom of a much deeper malaise: the breakdown of our traditional information ecosystem, and in its place the rise of a new information disorder that encourages falsehoods and disadvantages facts.

The extinction event for traditional news which followed the arrival of the internet in the 1990s exposed an inconvenient fact: factual information doesn't sell. It didn't remove our need to be informed, however, it just meant the places we got our information migrated onto platforms wholly unsuitable to host them: social media. Our new sources of information paid no heed to truth or balance, and we didn't ask of them the same quid pro quo we asked of traditional news companies in exchange for the power they had over our society: tight regulation.

Rarely have we been so deeply embedded in echo chambers that are completely cut off from any unifying reference points of common information.

As a result, when society is challenged by a new circumstance (like we have had to do during this pandemic) we look to the things that have got us through previous crises: trust in our institutions of government and science to give us the plan we can compliantly follow to safety.

Instead we find the cupboard of trust bare, just when we need it. People embrace explanations that defy reason, and then lob casuistic pot shots at their peers before retreating into tribal fortresses.

It is an incredibly harmful and destructive force. And governments must be serious about addressing it with adequate policy responses and public education campaigns. But what if the government is the one doing the disinforming? This is the recipe for a complete breakdown in the norms and conventions that keep us wrapped safe in a stable democracy.

Participatory Disinformation

Unpacking the forces that led to the January 6th attempted coup in the United States, Kate Starbird from the University of Washington's Center for an Informed Public coined the concept of 'participatory disinformation'. It explained the symbiosis between the behaviour of political elites and their supporters.

In essence, it is a self-reinforcing loop between the two, an unbroken chain of disinformation that feeds upon itself until it explodes into real world violence:

'During the lead-up to — and for several months after — the 2020 election, political elites [elected political leaders, political pundits and partisan media outlets] repeatedly spread the message of a rigged election. This set an expectation of voter fraud and became a 'frame' through which events were interpreted... With their perspective on the world shaped by this frame, the online 'crowds' generated false/misleading stories of voter fraud, echoing & reinforcing the frame... Political elites then echo the false/misleading stories back to their audiences, reinforcing the frame, and building a sense of collective grievance. Shared grievance is a powerful political force. It can activate people to vote — and to take other political action in the world. Audiences echo and reiterate this growing sense of grievance. Violent language and calls to action increase.'

You will recognise most of the elements as already present in Australian politics. The frame of electoral fraud was present on social media and messaging apps like Telegram throughout the election, as were the online crowds that spread it. We have the abetting partisan media. We even had the elected politicians embracing these narratives and crowds.

The example of the Port Macquarie ballots mentioned above was ably assisted by a complicit conservative media (no doubt why 2GB was chosen by

the fraudsters as their intended target). Not only did they tweet the hoax without question, adding their own inciting caption, it reinforced an existing frame the station was pushing: that the AEC and voting procedures in Australia could not be trusted, and that there was widespread voter fraud.

Another disinformation frame pushed throughout the election — the false claim that the AEC was using Dominion voting machines to count the votes electronically (this was one of the main conspiracies in the 2020 US election) — was pushed by Rod Culleton, former One Nation Senator and failed 2022 senate candidate for the Great Australian Party. The same Party also claimed on their Facebook page the election of the Albanese government was invalid because the new Prime Minister had sworn allegiance to the Queen of Australia, not the Queen of the United Kingdom.

Former LNP member and failed 2022 One Nation senate candidate George Christensen launched a petition for an audit of the election and the introduction of live streaming at all booths. Clive Palmer accused the AEC staff of taking ballot papers home with them. Other UAP and One Nation candidates pushed a widespread disinformation campaign to bring a statutory declaration to the ballot box and take a video of your vote to prevent it being 'erased'.

One stark difference between the American example and our recent experience stands out: none of these elected officials were at our political apex, they all inhabit the fringe.

It means, however, that we came worryingly close to that happening — especially with the recent Pentecostal behaviour of our now ex-Prime Minister emerging: 'We trust in [God]. We don't trust in governments. We don't trust in the United Nations, thank goodness,' said Mr Morrison in the concluding notes of a sermon he delivered at a church on July 17. Not to mention his subterfuge surrounding the Sri Lankan boat arrival on election day, that he may be significantly more in the embrace of conspiracy theorists than he let on while in office.

All the signs are there: it begins with dog whistles that our mainstream media will miss, but are breadcrumbs left for those who know what to look for.

Breadcrumbs

It was one of the big 'unknowns' heading into this election: that rump of the electorate, that new eclectic tribe that bedfellowed new-aged hippie with far-right Nazi, who had divorced itself from mainstream consensus on lockdowns, vaccines and mandates — would they find a new political home, become a new political constituency?

Our most urgent task is to prevent the legitimisation of political discourse that cues conspiratorial thinking.

The Victorian anti-lockdown protests and the convoys to Canberra jarred many Australians into a concern where these trends would lead if left unchecked.

On the surface, these protests were about certain specific grievances: from anti-vaxxers wanting an end to mandates, to so-called 'sovereign citizens' wanting a complete overhaul of modern legal systems — and everything in between. They united under the broad banner of 'freedom'.

But they are the real-world manifestation of the coordinated online efforts to harvest outrage and discontent. In the US, it was these same forces that manifested into the 'Stop the Steal' election fraud narrative and the violent attempted overthrow of the incoming government.

The opportunistic political actor is an essential step on that pathway, as described in the 'participatory disinformation' framework.

In Australia, we have seen the way this operates: not overt statements in support of fringe conspiracies, but in 'breadcrumbs' left for keen internet sleuths to — wink wink, nudge nudge — divine what our leaders are actually saying in coded language meant for them alone.

And here, unfortunately, we do have examples at our apex, most notably from our most recent ex-Prime Minister and what appeared to the fringes to be a coded message celebrated by QAnon, whose wide-ranging conspiracy centres on a plot run by elite paedophiles who harvest the blood of abused children.

The wording of his apology to victims following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse contained the phrase 'ritual abuse' — a term adopted by QAnon in their Satanic conspiracy, but not described as such in the Royal

Commission report, nor in the twenty-page briefing advising Morrison on which terms to use in his apology. His friend and leading QAnon proponent triumphantly texted another follower hours before the apology: 'I think Scott is going to do it!'

Morrison's Victorian colleague, the Liberal shadow Treasurer Louise Staley, likewise attempted to court the conspiracy fringes with some breadcrumbs of her own, after Premier Dan Andrews fell down a set of stairs. She issued a bizarre press release with a laundry list of questions that on their own made no sense, but to online disinformation groups were the legitimisation of their wacky conspiracy theories linking Andrews to QAnon plots.

This example should give us all supreme cause for concern. This was one of the first times it crossed over into the political mainstream, in a way it has within the Trump ecosystem in the US. In Staley, Australia found their political disinformation collaborator; our own Trump-like 'elite cue' to complete the participatory disinformation loop.

We know that there are forces at work in Australia to emulate the Trump 'MAGAphone' ecosystem at every level — the media, online networks and in our political campaign machinery. We know that Scott Morrison and senior members of his government were quick to embrace many elements of Trump's MAGA movement, and slow to reject Trump's efforts to cling to power after being electorally defeated.

We know that in our 2022 federal election, online networks and our conservative media imported specific election fraud disinformation to undermine our trust in the results.

Had Scott Morrison decided on election night to present the room at the Fullerton Hotel with the image of ballots in Port Macquarie, or some other crumb, he would have found fertile ground laid — if not for the complete violent overthrow of our incoming Labor government, then for the cleaving of an entire section of society who embraced it from our mainstream reality of legitimate government.

As many as half of every Republican voter in America currently lives in that fiction. It is making progress on any issue near impossible. It is part of the fabric of the same ecosystem that has delivered a conservative gerrymandering of the entire structure of power that, even with the Presidency, the House and the Senate, the Democrats cannot prevent the wholesale destruction of everything they stand for — including a woman's bodily autonomy.

The Fabians have always been guardians against rapid and disruptive change, and the defenders of progressive reform within our existing institutional foundations. It should therefore be of supreme concern to all Fabians to arrest the forces of disinformation at work in Australia and the conditions which will allow them to erode trust in those foundations.

We should not be celebrating the fact we saw the peaceful transition of power in Australia this time, because it reinforces a narrative that we are somehow different from America and therefore immune to the forces that disrupt it. We are not.

Our brains track no different physiology to American brains. Our social media algorithms neither. Our need to form social connections with those who share our values is the evolutionary desire that disinformation hijacks. We are in no way above that impulse.

Instead, we cannot allow our luck to dim our vigilance.

To repair the cracks that disinformation exploits, our current Labor government needs solutions that are both short and long term: a new regulatory framework for the companies on whose turf these narratives propagate; a new safeguarding of the healthy media ecosystem (like the ABC) who can fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the last one; a new education curriculum that imbues young Australian minds with the digital literacy skills to inhabit a new information ecosystem.

And our most urgent task is to prevent the legitimisation of political discourse that cues conspiratorial thinking. We know from the research that if we call out disinformation, warn about its harm, and impair the credibility of those who spread it, we can inoculate our population against its effects.

Donald Trump gave us many things, but his lasting gift to our society was the political weaponisation of organised lying. We cannot let it escape our attention that underneath the surface, Australia is rife with his model of harmful coordinated disinformation. To focus on those who are caught in its sway is to ignore those who led them there — their journey began thousands of miles away in a campaign for US president, but their destination is depressingly clear: political violence. If we are to prevent that, we need to first appreciate how close we came this time.

Ed Coper is a political communications expert and the author of *Facts and Other Lies: Welcome to the Disinformation Age* (Allen & Unwin). He was a pioneer of digital campaign techniques, and has advised ALP campaigns through four federal elections. He founded the New York-based Center for Impact Communications and the Sydney-based communications agency Populares, which engineered the recent 'teal wave' of independent victories.

ESSAY

MMT, but Not a Jobs Guarantee

DANIEL GERRARD

In the first two editions of the Fabians Review, we have had articles about Modern Monetary Theory and a Jobs Guarantee (JG). Firstly, from our ACT Convenor Lachlan McCall, and then academic Steven Hail. They contain a similar, sound, and consistent development of ideas.

A society where everyone is able to fully contribute, and share in rewards is central to our concept of equality.

As Fabians, full employment should be an issue close to our hearts, and at the forefront of our thinking. A society where everyone is able to fully contribute, and share in rewards is central to our concept of equality.

Having read the work of Lachlan and Steven, and on Lachlan's recommendation read Stephanie Kelton's *The Deficit Myth*, I've become very sympathetic to the way they think about money.

The third edition of the Fabians Review includes an article by Ben Picton, in which he accurately describes the Quantitative Easing policy of the US Federal Reserve after 2008's financial crisis as being related to the argument that Modern Monetary Theory makes. Unfortunately, after making the argument well for some pages, when he goes to the punchline, the relationship with inflation, he transitions from serious commentary to name-calling. His insight appears to be that increasing the money supply can cause inflation — a point central to the argument that advocates of modern monetary theory propose — that adjusting the money supply is a good tool for economic management, and not one that should be left to corporate bankers.

Whilst I do have strong sympathies for the way McCall, Kelton and Hail describe the function of money in society, I am increasingly skeptical of what

they propose to do with their insight — the Jobs Guarantee. Whilst I agree that ensuring everyone can get a job is important, and that the government has the key role in doing so, I do not agree that an understanding of the money supply naturally leads to a Jobs Guarantee, or that a Jobs Guarantee is a good way to alleviate unemployment.

The problem with the Jobs Guarantee is twofold. First, because of what is often touted as a feature — that it is an automatic stabiliser of the economy. Second, for what it does to the labour market. This is not a matter of the proponents of these ideas having badwill, or those policies being poorly intentioned, but of needing to create policies for how they will be implemented, rather than how they should be implemented.

This naivety is not great or unusual. In 1945 Prime Minister Curtin and Treasurer Chifley inserted into law what is now the Charter of the Reserve Bank, responsibility for: (a) the stability of the currency of Australia; (b) the maintenance of full employment; and, (c) the economic prosperity and welfare of the people of Australia. Since then, those words, and that purpose of monetary policy, has survived the ravages of such Prime Ministers as Menzies, Howard and Abbott, and such Treasurers as McMahon, Howard, and Costello. And yet, considering the policy implemented, rather than the policy stated, it may as well have been deleted in the 1970s.

At first informally, and then aloud, and eventually formally, the policy of the Reserve Bank of Australia is now to protect the value of the currency against inflation. Rather than protect the welfare of all of the people, or ensure there is plentiful employment, the policy implemented by the bank, with near universal support in Parliament and the intelligentsia, is to protect the value of private savings against devaluation by inflation. What was a 2-3% target set under Keating, and formalised by Costello, has informally been lowered to far nearer zero. Rampant inflation can cause great hardship and difficulty… a problem last known in Australia when Leonid Brezhnev was reaching out for a meeting with Ronald Reagan, and caused then, and in the 1970s more by oil shocks and middle eastern wars than monetary policy.

The justification for managing monetary policy for the benefit of the holders of private savings, rather than the legally mandated purpose of benefiting the people, is frequently discussed, and well expressed by Lachlan, Steven, Stephanie, and many others. The Non-Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment (NAIRU) suggests the rather circular logic that there must be a rate of unemployment high enough to prevent inflation in order to prevent the unemployment that would be caused by inflation. But there are far more complex and less easy to ridicule versions produced by the finest economists that money can buy. All of them however, find a way to take the legislated purpose of monetary policy — stability, jobs, and welfare — and pervert it into ensuring that those who hoard money can live at the expense of those who must work to earn it.

The history of this process of erosion and perversion of the legislated purpose of monetary policy, set by those who had experienced two world wars and a great depression, is a cautionary tale for automatic stabilizers in an economy. Automatic stabilisers have administrators, in this case the Treasurers of Australia and Reserve Bank Boards, and those administrators are informed both by their own will, class and social connections, and by the fashions of economists and other thinkers. While Curtin and Chifley had the will, and Menzies kept it going, even by the time of Whitlam, the stated purpose had been lost.

When democratic governments legislate purposes, they delegate their delivery, and remove them from democratic contestability.

These cautionary tales of the perversion of policy intent are not alone, and can be seen in many areas. These include the transition of state aid to Catholic schools building the class-based private schooling system in Australia, the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, and of the United States' Military Industrial Complex. When democratic governments legislate purposes, they delegate their delivery, and remove them from democratic contestability. When important social issues such as

unemployment are removed from the democratic contest, they are removed from democratic accountability as well, which often leads to an erosion of the right that was sought to be established.

The second problem with a legislated Jobs Guarantee is how it affects the labour market. Its stated goal of eliminating involuntary unemployment is laudable. The critique its advocates provide of the economic policy idea that some unemployment is a natural and good thing, often called the Non Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment (NAIRU),, is correct. Saying that 'some people must be unemployed, otherwise inflation will make more people unemployed' is a shocking idea

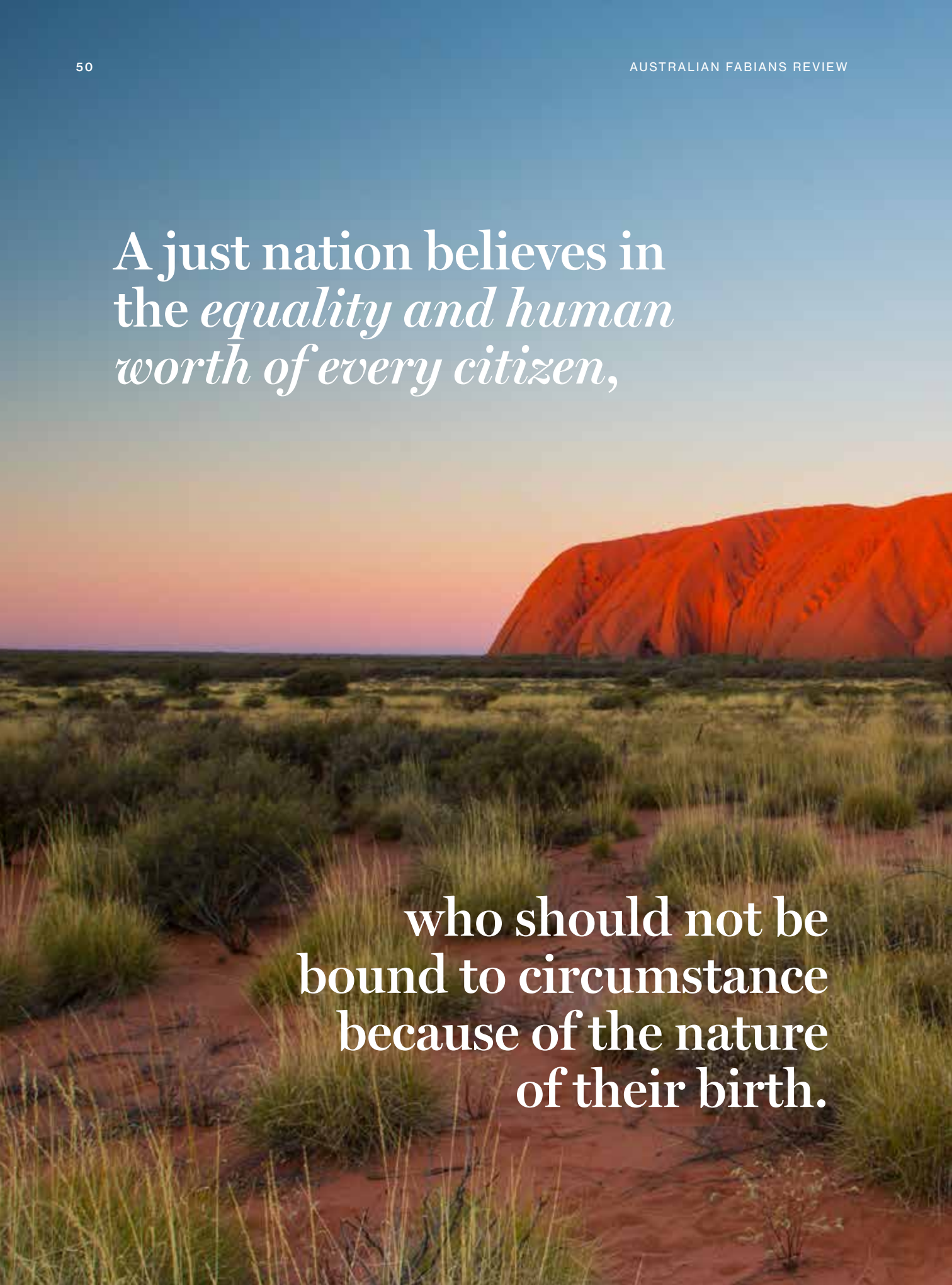
The issue with the Jobs Guarantee is that it deals with a different problem than the one our economy is actually experiencing, and potentially makes that problem worse. Whilst involuntary unemployment, and all of its horrific consequences, does exist in our economy, the scourge of underemployment, with much the same consequence, is far more widespread. Underemployment exists in two forms, those who cannot find enough hours of work, and those who cannot obtain secure enough employment to receive income security. Those who suffer income insecurity frequently have higher living expenses due to their inability to plan, or invest in quality products or housing, but also cannot borrow at reasonable rates. Where they can obtain credit, it is a debilitating, rather than liberating experience.

Where Jobs Guarantee proponents argue that adding an employment floor will see workers shift away from insecure work to the more secure JG, we need to be realistic aboutthe likely pay rate of such a scheme. They will face the choice of a few hours of better paid work, or the stability of the JG, rotating, or not, between one and the other, living a life just as disrupted as the underemployed do now, and with just as little ability to plan and invest in the basics of life like reliable transport and housing.

A further key question immediately arises. What work are the JG participants likely to be doing?. Here there is a dilemma. If it is work that is not otherwise being done, and therefore not considered necessary, this risks deskilling workers, as well as stigmatising them. Alternatively, if it is skilled work, then it will be a labour force created, at a cheaper rate than the people currently doing that work. Basic administrative work, and labouring jobs such as cleaning are often proposed for the JG. There are people doing those jobs now, and in the medium term it is likely public service executives would be tempted to use JG workers to do some of those tasks. The same people currently suffering underemployment in these industries would likely be tempted by the higher security, if lower waged, JG role doing the same work. The jobs guarantee therefore will likely drive a transition from the current problem of insecure work, to a new one, creating a permanent underclass of JG workers: Workers with a fundamentally different relationship with the labour market, fewer rights, and fewer options. The one thing that casuals have in Australia today, mobility, would be stripped from them.

So, whilst Modern Monetary Theory does suggest a valuable insight into how money works for a country with fiat currency (like Australia), the concept of a Jobs Guarantee, often promoted as a natural extension of that idea, is not desirable. The key feature suggested, that of an automatic stabilizer, is a worse option than traditional stimulus programs. Yes, traditional stimulus in times of unemployment, can be wasteful. Infrastructure programs, whether they be steel and concrete, or education and services, can be poorly targeted, but moving their delivery further from democratic accountability will change the culture of government for the worse, and create a permanent underclass.

Daniel Gerrard is the convenor of the ACT Fabians.



A just nation believes in the *equality and human worth of every citizen,*

who should not be bound to circumstance because of the nature of their birth.

ESSAY

Transforming Australia's Constitution

A First Nations Voice and a Republic

JESSE J. FLEAY

A Burden of Crisis and Torment

In 2017, I left Uluru elected as a youth delegate on the working group tasked with carrying the Statement from the Heart forward. I have many positive memories at Uluru. Sitting by the poolside one night, singing songs with delegates from every State and Territory. Because there's always a guitar at a proper Aboriginal get-together. I also remember some sage and useful words from a Queensland delegate who became a friend of mine, that would come to shape my approach to constitutional transformation over the next six years.

Queensland Uluru delegate Joann Schmider, a Mamu woman who grew up in Mt Isa, urged me and younger generations to keep the momentum alive, for as long as it would take to get the Uluru Statement passed. I was warned that there would be times when holding true to my principles would afford me criticism and consequence.

I had six years to reflect after Uluru until now. Reform in society is always met with a degree of hostility, because people often have a natural aversion to change. They need to be convinced of it by strong leaders, with conviction. Our audience is therefore not the supporters of reform, but the ones who remain apprehensive, or unaware of what is proposed.

The institutions of Australia's government have evolved over time, and our democratic value is strong among nations. However, there are still arbitrary limits on the freedom of Australians to determine our government, and restrictions on the power of our voices in that government.

As of 2022, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has pledged full support for two referendums which would resolve this injustice.

The First Nations Voice to Parliament resolves this injustice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and an Australian Republic resolves this for the nation as a whole. I have been involved with shaping both of these.

My PhD thesis proposes a civic model for an Australian Republic, to ensure more freedom and choice among Australians, through removing arbitrary and interfering institutions, such as the Crown.

This civic system sits well with a new First Nations Voice to Parliament. Australians will elect their head of state directly, and that President will have full executive power, as a first among equals. A simple, yet effective means to give power to Australians in their own lives. Australians need no monarchy or aristocracy in a fair, equal society.

The absence of any project of this nature up until now is a painful reminder of the lack of courage and conviction among elite institutions to render Australian matters more important than postcolonial loyalties to the Crown of the United Kingdom. Yet supporting both of these constitutionally transformative proposals is the obligation of any Australian with the moral fortitude to defend human equality, freedom, and justice.

A just nation believes in the equality and human worth of every citizen, who should not be bound to circumstance because of the nature of their birth. A just nation would seek to address the immense suffering of First Nations Australians, simply because they have no freedom or choice to determine legislation or policies that match their demands. I refer to this tragedy in my thesis, as a 'Burden of Crisis and Torment'. It is a burden all Australians share, because in a just and equal society, the burdens of one become the burdens of us all.

Like so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Joann has actively lived this truth for over 50 years. First, as an Aboriginal schoolteacher on Queensland's Palm Island, and later as a voice within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). ATSIC was dismantled by former Prime Minister John Howard, without any consultation from First Nations Australians. A poignant reminder of why we, as First Nations Australians, demand a constitutionally enshrined voice to determine our own outcomes, to prevent things like ATSIC being carelessly established, and then swept away.

Under Minister Ken Wyatt, and Prime Minister Scott Morrison, there was a voice co-design process, initiated as a distraction from the Uluru Statement. Despite this, the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have stood by the Statement, and now Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has made it a mandate of the new Labor government to deliver it in full.

The reason a constitutional Voice to Parliament is so important, is that it finally removes the strikingly unjust outcomes for Australia's First People from the racism and unscrupulous games of all post-federation governments. The Voice does this, because of its constitutional nature, which is supreme law, not to be altered or deviated from. Any deviation from constitutional law makes a government liable to the judicial scrutiny of the High Court. After at least a century of injustice, simply voting 'yes' and agreeing that First Nations Australians are at the table for all decisions affecting their lives, is the least an Australian can do.

We can look at the dire legislation which enforced the removal of Aboriginal children from parents, and the legislation of recent governments, intended to do right by First Nations Australians. Many First Nations Australians feel that they are still being coerced into making decisions which governments have already pre-determined for them. Without a constitutional voice, there can be no meaningful co-design process.

In my 8 years of research in Aboriginal communities, especially in remote Western and Central Australia, Queensland and the Torres Strait, I have spoken to many community members who talk about their own programs, developed by local leadership, which the Commonwealth refuses to fund. Why? Because some senior bureaucrats have devised and funded yet another big policy.

This Crown Does Not Suit Us

Although we have inherited the idea of parliamentary democracy from the UK, our system is quite different. We have a written constitution. Our upper house consists of elected senators, instead of aristocrats with peerages. The Australian model for democracy outshines the anachronisms of the UK's system, and reflects the grit and honesty of Australian culture.

Australia is a merit-based society, with an Indigenous culture that demands honour and respect. If we are to progress, we require a constitution that enshrines and protects what matters to us, as contemporary Australians

The late Queen Elizabeth II was truly a remarkable woman. However, leadership, personal qualities, and fitness for office cannot be inherited. With a United Kingdom facing Scottish and Welsh independence, and former colonies like Australia seeking constitutional reform, will His Majesty King Charles III prove as popular a monarch? Will the system last under his reign?

For Australians, the monarchy is nothing but a celebrity family, fawned over by breakfast programs like Seven Sunrise, to keep a sanitised perception of Australia alive. The UK wanted nothing to do with our musicians at the Queen's jubilee. The UK also ignored our anniversary of the Mabo decision. In 2022, before his ascent to the throne, the then Prince of Wales addressed the entire Commonwealth from Rwanda, with a clear message to member states:

> "Each member's constitutional arrangement, as republic or monarchy, is purely a matter for each member country to decide."

Australia's leading monarchist, David Flint, rather aggressively accused Albanese of undermining the constitution and playing with fire before he was elected. Flint cautioned Albanese before his election to the prime ministership:

> "How can an Albanese government fulfil its constitutional mandate to maintain the Constitution if it directs the whole panoply of modern government, to undermine a fundamental and ancient constitutional institution offering leadership above politics, the Australian Crown?"

His Majesty clearly values Australian's right to reform their constitution, whereas Flint claims that the constitution is something to be maintained, as if there are no parameters to remould the constitution nearer to the heart's desire. The monarchy may be an 'ancient' institution, but it is only a recent import to a nation boasting a 60,000 year old Indigenous history.

Monarchists like Flint remain silent and ignorant about our 60,000-year-old traditional societies and their ancient enduring customs. There has always been a double standard for First Nations Australians and their cultural traditions, as opposed to those of the UK. This is best demonstrated by the way they were excluded from the Constitution and the Census in 1901, when Australia formed a Federation of former self-governing colonies, remaining under the Crown.

But the High Court ruled that first Australians never ceded their sovereignty, even with the lies of Terra Nullius and the Doctrine of Discovery. If anything is comfortably above politics in Australia, it is not the Crown, but our highest legal institutions.

The Monarchy has endured phases of change and is rapidly evolving. If the Crown can evolve to meet modern challenges, why can not a people evolve so that it neither needs nor wants a monarchy?

In all of human history, how many people got to boast the freedom to choose for themselves a system of government, peacefully and with the spirit of equality and justice at the top of the agenda?

The institutions of Australia's government have evolved over time. More than half a century of progress and reform has led to this moment in Australian history, and the responsibility is ours – let's get it right.

Jesse J. Fleay is a Research Associate with the School of Education at Curtin University. He is passionate about driving social change for the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Source: National Archives of Australia

ESSAY

Contemporary Relevance, Comrade!

Whitlam for a New Generation

CHARLIE JOYCE

'Throughout my public life, I have tried to apply an overarching principle and a unifying theme to my work. It can be stated in two words: contemporary relevance'

— Gough Whitlam, 2002

December last year marked fifty years since the 1972 election victory of Gough Whitlam's Labor Party. It is a milestone which warrants reflection, particularly for those of the younger generations for whom the Whitlam government is merely the subject of increasingly distant and intangible stories. To our great regret, today's Australia bears little resemblance to that of the Whitlamist vision. The country of education inequity, housing insecurity, punitive welfare, decimated public services, and hollowed out institutions of national culture bears little resemblance to an Australia which 'liberated the talents and uplifted the horizons' of its people. It is thus a worthwhile opportunity to reflect on the Whitlam legacy: as a nation, as a movement of the Left, and particularly also as a new generation seeking reform today.

This anniversary has also been given greater relevance following the 2022 federal election. The victory of Anthony Albanese's Labor Party bears several similarities to that of Whitlam's nearly 50 years prior. Both ended extended periods of conservative Coalition rule, finally putting to rest tired and damaging governments. Both men came to power with substantial mandates for change. Both were immediately faced with a multitude of overlapping crises both domestic and international; social, political, and economic. Both began their governments with momentum, seeking to make up for lost decades in opposition. Indeed, in many ways it appears that Albanese has consciously sought to channel the Whitlam legacy.

However, these similarities should not be stretched too far. Where Gough thundered into power with an elaborate and comprehensive program for reform, Albanese's victory came with a stagnant Labor primary vote and a small-target policy platform. Moreover, the present Labor government aspires to a slower and more deliberative mode of governance than that pursued by the combative and zealous

Whitlam. Perhaps it is warranted; the Australian population has certainly reacted strongly to the antagonistic and careless politics of the Morrison regime. Nevertheless, it may be an inadequate response to the intersecting and escalating social, ecological, political, and economic crises which we face — and which younger generations seem set to face in perpetuity.

It is therefore important to take this opportunity to reconsider the Whitlam era: a task which is both complex and contradictory. The Whitlam Government represents an exemplary case of radical reform, bursting through Menzian stagnation to usher in a modern welfare state with a bold, reformed national identity. The construction of a universal health insurance system, the establishment of free tertiary education, the passing of the *Racial Discrimination Act*, and the abolition of conscription are only samples of its legendary social reform agenda which fundamentally reshaped the country.

Attempts to write a hagiography of this era must confront the fact that Whitlam's Government devolved into crisis and dysfunction.

However, attempts to write a hagiography of this era must confront the fact that Whitlam's Government devolved into crisis and dysfunction, and was ultimately subject to a constitutional coup and a subsequent landslide democratic rejection. Moreover, the comparison of the Whitlam reform agenda with the recent platforms of democratic socialist insurgent movements around the globe, such as the candidacy of Bernie Sanders, the Labour Party of Jeremy Corbyn, and other such opponents of neoliberalism, obscures the nascent economic rationalism pursued by the government following the 1975 ALP Conference at the Terrigal Hotel. It also disguises the ways in which the professionalisation and managerialism of Whitlam's reformist style prefigure the largely unchallenged technocratic neoliberalism that has dominated Australian politics for decades; a mode of governance which has produced an increasingly alienated government, stagnating living standards, and long declines in popular trust in politics. These factors certainly cannot be blamed on or credited to the Whitlam Government, but it is problematic to altogether disentangle them from its legacy.

Despite this, there are fundamental points of difference which separate the Whitlam Government from any major Australian political projects that have come since. Never again have we experienced such an ambitious and transformative reformism underpinned by steadfast values of humanist universalism.

Furthermore, never since has any political project of the Left inspired such animosity from entrenched structures of power as to provoke its overthrow, via obscure constitutional means or otherwise. Indeed, there are legitimate reasons why the Whitlam legacy looms over contemporary Australian politics, growing more relevant with the passing years. For a generation raised in a political context of policy triangulation and liberal technocracy, increasingly unable to reckon with the challenges of post-GFC stagnation, climate emergency, and health system breakdown, the bold Whitlam reformist vision appears equally attractive and impossible.

For these reasons, it is important today to reassess the Whitlam era,to acknowledge that, in both its shining example and deep contradictions, within that legacy resides the strongest tradition of modern Australian radical reform. It is essential to seize this tradition and give it contemporary relevance. The Whitlam Government reshaped Australian society; perhaps, it can be reshaped once more.

The Whitlam Era: Winning Power and Using Power

How should a new generation relate to the Whitlam legacy? What is this inherited tradition of radical reform? It is these questions we seek to answer in our forthcoming essay collection *Contemporary Relevance: Whitlam for a New Generation*. In advance of these answers, it is important to understand the events of the Whitlam era; in particular, the rise and fall of this most reforming of Australian governments.

It was 1967 when Gough Whitlam ascended to the leadership of the Australian Labor Party. He inherited a party suffering nearly two decades of consecutive electoral defeats to the dominant conservative Liberal Party-led coalition. The legacy of the 1955 ALP split loomed large, particularly in Victoria and Queensland,

Source: National Archives of Australia

where preferences from Democratic Labor Party voters upheld many Liberal Party seats, a bulwark against electoral defeats for the Menzies government. The effect of this was most apparent in Victorian state politics, where the weakened Labor Party responded to its electoral marginalisation by recommitting itself as the political wing of the trade union movement. It embraced its status as a sectional party of the industrial working class. While this afforded the Victorian labour movement a certain stability, it was a stability based on electoral marginalisation. This acceptance of marginality fundamentally conflicted with the parliamentary, constitutional, and reformist faith of the middle-class Whitlam.

There was also the matter of policy. Through this era, the ALP had remained committed to the model of democratic socialist reform pursued by the 1940s Curtin and Chifley Governments: principally, of nationalisation and state ownership. Despite Curtin and Chifley's failures in implementing much of this program, the party did not reckon with the constitutional limits to achieving these ends and the reluctance of the Australian public to embrace constitutional reform. The fact that this public opposition was largely reflective of a conservative ruling class hostile to challenges to their power did not diminish the reality of this public sentiment. Indeed, it made it even harder to shift.

Whitlam was no constitutional conservative. On the contrary, he reflected in 1957 that the Australian constitutional framework 'enshrines Liberal policy and bans Labor policy'. Moreover, he detailed in 1961 that the experience of campaigning for Curtin's ultimately failed 1944 constitutional changes left him resolved to do 'all [he] could to modernise the Australian constitution'. Nevertheless, Whitlam was a pragmatist. He argued that the public reluctance to endorse constitutional change must result in a recalibration of ALP policies towards the construction of a democratic socialism within the present constitutional framework. Anything less would be a concession that reformism in Australia was impossible, which Whitlam would not permit.

In the 1960s, Australia was undergoing profound transformations. The long post-war economic boom and Keynesian policy consensus had led to a massive expansion of the middle class, who rushed from the urban centres, the regions, and post-war Europe to make their newly comfortable lives in the rapidly growing suburbs. This expanding middle class and the corresponding baby boom led to a transformation in social relations and traditions. Higher education expanded to fill the growing demand for complex labour in the increasingly technical economy, and universities became hotbeds of transformative youth social experimentation and radicalism. Reflecting the social optimism of the time, movements for change and justice burst from this generational milieu, demanding peace, equal rights for women, an end to racial discrimination, and national liberation for decolonising countries. The trade union movement in Australia also embraced this radicalism, with half a million workers striking across the country in 1969 demanding an end to draconian anti-worker laws. This profound optimism, radicalism, and momentum of the rising baby-boomer generation shocked Australia out of its Menzian conservatism. It heralded the possibility of a radically different society.

It was in this context that Gough Whitlam ascended to leadership of the ALP. Labor

'modernisers' such as Whitlam, Lance Barnard, Clyde Cameron, and Don Dunstan saw in this growing social radicalism the potential to enact the Party's vision of egalitarian reform. These modernisers also recognised a sharp disconnect between these processes of social transformation and the Labor Party's electoral stagnation. For this reason, Whitlam embarked on a program of party reform and policy revision to streamline the path to power.

Most notably, this involved a controversial federal intervention into the Victorian branch of the ALP. This intervention transferred power from ossified Victorian party bureaucratic structures, dominated by industrial union officials who opposed the Whitlam leadership, to parliamentary and democratic branch structures. It also involved a revision of Labor Party policy, particularly with regards to health and education. Recognising that the Constitution prohibited nationalisation of health and education without 'just' compensation, policy emphasis in these areas shifted to an outcome-oriented egalitarianism. The policy of state-run healthcare shifted to one of state provision of health insurance: the origins of contemporary Medicare. More controversially, the policy of support for state-run public education shifted to a needs-based funding for the entire education sector, including independent and Catholic schools. Though anathema for hard-line socialists in the ALP, this policy shift was a shrewd and politically necessary step that attracted support from the constituencies serviced by non-government schools, including Catholics and the middle class. These policy shifts, prompted by political necessity and constitutional clarity, reflect the commitment to contemporary relevance pursued by the Whitlam leadership.

The political substance of Whitlamism through this period is often obscured by criticism from Left and Right, subsequent political changes, and linguistic shifts. It is possible to view Whitlam, the middle-class party 'moderniser', as a precursor to the modernisers of the 1980s and 90s in Australia, New Zealand, and Britain, who shifted their labour parties away from socialist roots towards a 'Third Way': a progressive-inclined technocratic accommodation of the global neoliberal transformation. Such a view is often advanced by Third Way adherents seeking to claim the Whitlamite tradition, as well as by their critics on the Left. Nevertheless, where these Third Way modernisers eschewed universalism in favour of marketisation and means-testing, Whitlam remained committed to universal social programs. The Hawke Government's transformation of the policy of free tertiary education into the income-contingent loans of the HECS system is indicative of this shift. Moreover, where Third Way social democracy pursued longevity in government, the Whitlam government accepted that reform may often be electorally detrimental. Whitlam sought power, but only as a means for reform and social progress.

While Whitlam was always a stalwart of the Right of the Labor Party, it is deceptive to portray him as opposed to socialism. Whitlam certainly shifted his party away from a steadfast commitment to the socialist shibboleth of public ownership. However, he did so out of commitment to leading a 'broadly based socialist and radical party' which could construct a majoritarian electoral coalition for change and then rapidly implement a reform agenda. Political and constitutional circumstances significantly constrained the models of reform the ALP could pursue; Whitlam responded accordingly. To do otherwise would have been to continue the marginalisation of the Labor Party which had occurred over the previous two decades. Whitlam was also the last leader of the ALP to publicly describe himself as a socialist. His apparent moderation may have prefigured changes to come, but there is a marked distinction between the pragmatic reformism of Gough Whitlam and the seeming abandonment of socialist principles by subsequent Labor leaders.

Ultimately, Whitlam's approach can be summarised — as he often did — as 'contemporary relevance'. He sought to develop the political relevance of the ALP, shifting the party's priorities to suit the concerns and aspirations of the Australian people. To be clear, contemporary relevance would always come first, but only as a means to the end of winning power and enacting reform. This lesson in pragmatism motivated by deep principle should be a model for those seeking reform today.

Unravelling: The Dismissal and After

The Whitlam Government's time in power was infamously brief. A constitutional coup engineered by a Governor General acting outside his remit transferred power from the democratically elected Labor government to the minority Liberal Party in response to an escalating series of crises and a perceived parliamentary deadlock. However, the shock and awe generated by this undemocratic dismissal was followed by a resounding democratic rejection of the Whitlam Government in the 1975 election. This final undoing at the 1975 election

represented the end of a transformative, if turbulent, period in Australian political history. Although the circumstances were not in its favour, it is difficult to argue that the Whitlam Government was not destined for defeat.

However, this should not provoke a determinism that the Whitlam reformist project was doomed from the beginning. Indeed, such a determinism is advanced by Right- and Left wing critics of Whitlam. The former have argued that Labor's radical reform agenda was always doomed, given the 'irresponsibility' and 'dishonour' associated with the Loans Affair, the Cairns-Morosi embarrassment, and the rising economic woes of 1974. They have argued that such governmental conduct vindicates the system of constitutional monarchy — the Governor General merely acted prudently to restrain the dysfunction of the government. The latter — Left wing critics of Whitlam — posit that Australian capitalism and its entrenched power structures could never entertain such a reforming project. Indeed, persistent discussion of the roles of ASIO, the CIA, and the British monarchy in the dismissal reflect this belief that Whitlam would always fail in the face of entrenched international and domestic opposition.

The implication of both narratives is the impossibility of substantial reformist politics in Australia. While such fatalism has its own attraction, it cannot be seriously entertained. To do so is to diminish the real achievements of both the Whitlam era, as well as prior and subsequent democratic victories in Australia. Instead, we must seriously analyse the real ways in which the Whitlam project came undone, seeking to learn from these failures just as we learn from their victories.

What is true however, is that the crisis of the 1970s which unmade the Whitlam Government also created the conditions for the failures of social democratic politics in subsequent decades, in both Australia and in comparable countries. The breakdown of the Keynesian consensus through the 1973 Oil Shock and subsequent inflationary crisis created an existential challenge for the model of collaborationist welfare state social democracy pursued through the post-war era. The global neoliberal turn ended inflation and stagnating profits by breaking the back of wages, and the attempt by the Hawke-Keating Government to negotiate this transformation while maintaining the conditions and power of Australian workers came undone through the subsequent fragmentation and decline of organised labour.

Today's economic environment of low unionisation and casualised work presents a major barrier to organised working class politics and undermines the potential of a Whitlam-style coalition between the organised working class and a socially conscious middle class. Indeed, the 'Brahmin Left' dynamic famously described by Thomas Piketty, where the Left is primarily constituted by people of middle income and high education, arguably has its roots in the baby boomer middle class radicalism that Whitlam championed. The victory of the Albanese Labor Party, and moreover of many global Left-of-centre parties since the beginning of the pandemic, present interesting cases in the much theorised decline of social democracy. Nevertheless, the weakness in the 2022 ALP primary vote demonstrates the fragility of its victory and reflects the existential challenges to social democracy.

The Path Forward — Whitlam for a New Generation

The challenges faced by any reformist project today are innumerable, in Australia and elsewhere. For young people, a failure to confront and overcome these challenges will mean a failure to act on the existential crises that define our time. Yet despite these challenges, hope remains.

Regardless of the fragmentation of pre-neoliberal organised political life, politics is not dead. The social movements of the past decade, including Occupy, School Strike for Climate, and Black Lives Matter show that people remain willing to mobilise against injustice and for a better world. Despite their failure to positively transform conditions for the better, these movements have de-legitimised the present order. It remains to be seen whether a new generation can transfigure this reactive mobilisation into an organised and protagonistic coalition for radical reform.

If we decide to embark on this course, the legacy of the great Australian reforming government of Gough Whitlam will have more *contemporary relevance* than ever. It will be essential to seize this radical tradition of motivated pragmatism, majoritarian coalition building, and zealous reform. It is our greatest inheritance. We need it to build a better country and a better world.

Charlie Joyce is a contributing co-editor of the forthcoming *Contemporary Relevance: Whitlam for a New Generation*, a forthcoming collection of essays by young Australians reflecting on the relevance of the Whitlam government today. This article was written in intellectual collaboration with *Contemporary Relevance* co-editors Swapnik Sanagavarapu and Henri Vickers.

RESEARCH

Uncertain Futures

The centre-left's electoral fortunes continue to wax and wane.

ROB MANWARING

Arguably the highpoint for the centre-left, at least across Europe, was the early 1990s. At that point, 12 of the 15 then EC member states were led by the left. However, since the heyday of the third way governments (New Labour in the UK, the Schröder government in Germany), the 2000s were hard times for many of the family of socialist, social democratic and labour parties.

The nadir for the centre-left was the case of 'pasokification' in Greece. Triggered by the EU sovereign debt crisis, it led to the eventual destruction of the centre-left PASOK party in 2015-2016. The electoral fortunes are not much better in other parts of Europe, for example, there are ongoing trials for the mainstream centre left parties in the Netherlands and France. At the 2022 Dutch election, the once mighty PvDA were humbled to just 7.85% of the vote. In France, since the ignominious end of the Hollande Presidency in 2017, the Parti Socialiste (PS) has failed to reach the second round of the Presidential elections for the past two election cycles. At the 2022 election, it was striking how the far right Éric Zemmour scored more in the first round (7.07%) to the PS's preferred candidate Anne Hidalgo, who managed an excruciatingly low of 1.75%. We might add other lows to this picture, not least the failures of British Labour which has now lost 4 straight elections since 2010.[1]

However, this gloomy picture is not uniform, and in more recent years, there has been something of a comeback for the centre-left in several countries. First, the remarkable progress of António Costa's left government in Portugal — a coalition so unwieldy, it was once derisively written off as the 'contraption'. Yet, Costa has turned into a serial winner and, remarkably, now governs without the need of coalition partners. Likewise, Pedro Sánchez's PSOE has held office in Spain since 2018, and despite recent turbulence — notably two elections in 2019 — the PSOE governs in coalition with the left populist Podemos. Closer to home, the rise of Jacinda Arden in New Zealand is striking, too. Ardern won with a surprise coalition in 2017, but then, even more unusually, given New Zealand's proportional electoral system, it has governed in its own right since 2020. In Scandinavia, until the Swedish election this year, the centre-left was in office across the region, with notable victories including the case of Norway, where the Labor party ended the long running centre-right government of 'Iron' Erna Solberg. Finally, of course, we observe the Albanese government emerging from the near-decade long electoral wilderness after its narrow victory in 2022; and Olof Scholz's win over Angela Merkel in Germany.

1 With colleagues, we mapped out the state of the left in an edited volume Manwaring and Kennedy (2017) *Why the Left Loses*, Polity Press.

Electoral Decline and Renewal

There is a vigorous and contested debate about the various factors that are shaping the electoral fortunes of the left. Obviously, in some cases, specific issues play out — for example, the unexpected rise of Jeremy Corbyn in the UK. Some scholars point to structural factors in the economy, and the changing class system as a key culprit. Extensive research by Benedetto, Hix and Mastrorocco argues that the key factor in the rise *and fall* of the centre-left was the growth, but then ultimate decline in industrial workers, and their shift in support away from the centre-left parties. In effect, the decline of traditional forms of manufacturing has undermined the electoral base for the labour and social democratic parties.

Benedetto and colleagues then argue that the resurgence in the fortunes of the left coincided with two main related factors a shift to the centre ground, and critically, a wooing of the professional middle classes, particularly in the public sector. The logic of these changes is that the left vote is unlikely to recover unless the left can offset the declining support of the industrial classes. Empirically, this might be a generally correct rendering of the left's electoral history, but it might not actually tell us enough about the factors explaining the decline.

A second, arguably more critical set of arguments, suggest that the problems are less about demand-side changes in sociology, and more about supply-side issues in how the centre-left present at elections. In this reading, the centre-left are largely architects of their own demise. Here, the culprit is the third way turn of the parties (a good example of this view is Christoph Arndt's excellent 2013 book '*The electoral consequences of third way welfare state reforms*'). A delayed side effect, not detected as strongly at first, was the chronic desertion of working-class voters. This manifested itself generally in two ways, either a significant increase in abstention from elections (e.g., the UK), and/or dissatisfied left voters flocking to radical right or left competitors (e.g., the rise of the Sweden Democrats). Some research suggests a lagged effect, that for a while the left were winning elections, but off a smaller electoral base.

What appears to be driving the desertion is, for critics, the centre-left's embrace of neo-liberal settings, especially around reforms to welfare policy. Controversial issues like raising the retirement age are contentious in that many traditional centre-left supporters see this as a betrayal of the centre-left failing to defend key social protections.

Can the centre-left recover? Again, there is a rancorous debate about this. The socialist left will argue that the parties need to reclaim their radical roots and re-socialise the social democratic project. Corbyn in the UK, Benoit Hamon in France might be outliers of this tradition. Moderates and social liberals seek to shift the parties back to a third way, centrist agenda, especially to reclaim policy issues and identities like patriotism (Keir Starmer is here perhaps emblematic of this approach). Or adopting hard line positions on issues like immigration, such as the Danish social democrats call to create 'anti-ghetto' legislation at 2022 election. Moreover, it can be hard to transfer one winning formula to another country, for example, the rise of António Costa's PS was fuelled by its response to the austerity agenda imposed by the Troika and was initially a unique 4-way coalition with the left parties, including the Communists. In a recent article, Abou-Chadi and Wagner argue that the left can offset the loss of working-class voters if they adopt more 'investment-oriented policy positions', also take up liberal social views (and can neuter opposition from any influential, but oppositional trade unions).

The key factor in the rise *and fall* of the centre-left was the growth, but then ultimate decline in industrial workers.

What is clear is that the centre-left is caught up in four quite distinct dilemmas.

First, in general, mainstream parties are in decline across many advanced industrial societies. Party systems are much more fragmented. A classic example of this is the current 'Vivaldi' six-party coalition in Belgium (four seasons to reflect the four main traditions — Christian democrat, green, socialist and liberal). Centre-left parties in general are just a smaller part of the electoral landscape.

Second, there is a more generalised crisis of liberal democracy, with a corrosive decline in trust and confidence — particularly directed at politicians and

political parties. The rise of the radical right and populist parties seen as both symptom and case.

Third, we might add that there is a case of value-shift occurring, with new cleavages opening up between the material and post-material groups. Thomas Piketty puts this as a divide between the Brahmin Left and the Merchant Right. Writers such as Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris see a silent revolution of value-shift occurring, with an attendant counter revolution of cultural backlash taking place.

We can add a fourth, potentially horrific dilemma — the inevitable crisis brought on by global climate breakdown. At the heart of this is essentially an existential challenge to the economic industrial growth model which lies at the heart of the socialist parties that were created in the late 1800s/early 1900s.

Each of these dilemmas poses specific difficulties for the centre-left, although none are insurmountable.

Mapping the Left

If we are to understand how the left might renew and revive, it is critical we better understand where they are now, and what they stand for. In an act of political cartography, I attempted to map out more thoroughly the state of the centre left in my (2021) book, *'The Politics of Social Democracy'*. What was notable is that since the third way era, there was a clear lack of understanding and documenting of how the family of centre-left parties had positioned themselves. Using a range of sources, but heavily drawing upon the Manifesto Research on Political Representation (MP), I sought to map out and understand the changing policy profile of the centre left.[2] So where are the centre-left parties now?

First, the parties are shifting leftwards. One metric — the RILE index — is used to gauge how left or right wing a political party is using a suite of indicators in their policy manifestos.[3] Using the MP database, we can track the changing left/right positions of the centre left (against their main right-wing competitor) — see figure 1.

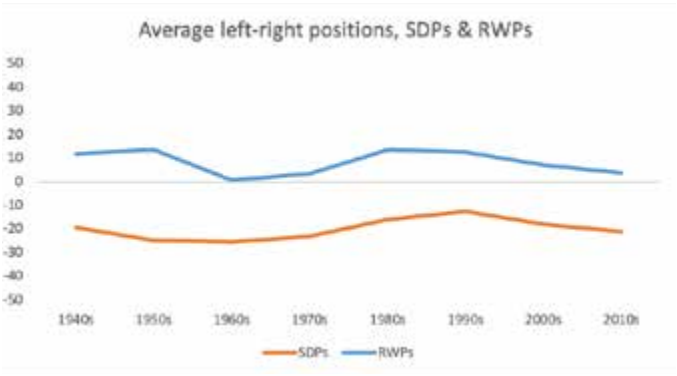
As we might expect, the left parties are more left than their right competitors over time. We can also see how they track closely, as the parties shift left or right, then both tend to do so, and they tend to remain at the same ideological distance between each other.

What's the broad story here? In sum, in the 1950s and 1960s the parties were strongly left wing, they shifted to the centre in the 1990s and 2000s, and then *crucially, have become more left wing over time.*

The parties are not quite as left wing as they were in the 1960s, but they are generally not too far off. It is useful to note how the right has also been tracking left for some time — perhaps reflecting the Inglehart/Norris thesis of value change. In policy terms we can see how, for example, it was centre-right governments in Germany and Australia that introduced legislation for same sex marriage, not the left. So, on this aggregate index, the left parties are qualitatively different from their third way heyday selves. One simplistic, and misleading, assertion is that for them to re-win office they just need to return to this agenda.

But if the parties are now more 'left', what's clear is that it is *not the same kind of left* as they were in the 1960s or the era of the golden age of social democracy. In Figure 2, a somewhat busy figure, we can begin to unpick the different policy preferences of the centre-left parties. This figure is based on MP manifesto data and shows the extent to which the parties preference certain economic policies and agendas. The main ones are preferences for economic growth, Keynesian demand management, protectionism, economic planning, market regulation, and 'anti-growth'/ sustainable economic measures.

Figure 1: Average Left-Right Positions (SDPS and RWPs) – 1940s–2010s



2 The MP database is the longest running database in political science. It maps and codes the manifestos of parties at each relevant election. The codebooks and underpinning data are all available at https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/.

3 The RILE index is comprised of a suite of coded items in the database, and generally, they link to common themes like support for equality/inequality, support for the welfare state and so on.

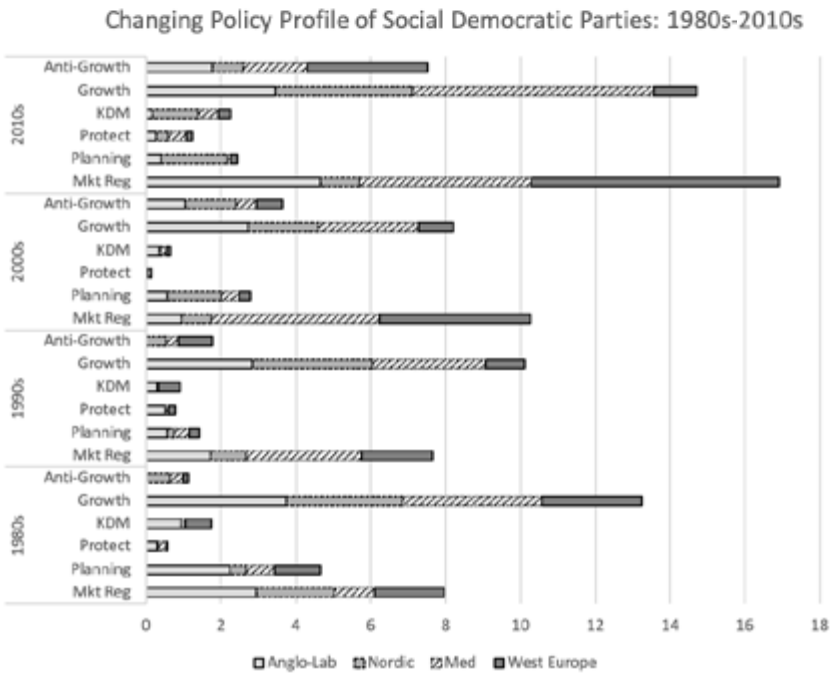


Figure 2: Changing Policy Profile of Social Democratic Parties: 1980s-2010s

What are some of the main trends and observations?

First, protectionism and Keynesianism are generally not a significant feature of how the parties set out their manifesto agendas, across the four decades. This isn't to say they have not used them at key points, responding to the GFC for example, but rather that it's a relatively small part of the economic policies they seek to campaign on.

Second, as we might expect, there are regional variations. This isn't surprising, but there are interesting sub-stories here, not least how planning has returned to Nordic social democracy. This also tells us an intuitive but neglected story — there are many ways to work towards a social democratic polity.

Yet, there is one compelling new story here — the left is increasingly adopting 'anti-growth' strategies. In the 1980s, say — the highpoint of Thatcherism and Reaganomics, this was a very small part of their agenda. Climate breakdown and the emergence of green parties has steadily forced the centre-left to reconcile and rebalance its economic mission. Yet, this new focus on 'anti-growth' still remains by and large a small part of their overall economic agenda, and the traditional growth strategies still dominate.

This then lies at the heart of the current struggle for social democracy — and the race against time; how quickly the parties can recalibrate their economic agendas in a way that (1) does not alienate their working class and industrial base and (2) actually meets the targets set out by the scientists if we are to hold global warming to at least 1.5°C. As pointed out by many writers, this is a 'fiendishly' difficult process. While the left has seemingly talked up the 'Green New Deal' for example, the ongoing concern is that it still locks the parties into an older model of economic growth. Building more EVs won't get us there, but it might be part of a complex anti-growth model which reduces carbon emissions. Most acutely, it won't be just the future of the family of centre-left parties which suffers if this economic policy renewal does not take place.

Rob Manwaring is an Associate Professor at Flinders University, South Australia.

SOCIAL POLICY

Destigmatising Addiction and Committing to Change

Addiction is a nuanced issue made even more complex by damaging myths and stigma.

STEVE MICHELSON

Growing up in country Victoria had its benefits. Our small town of Milawa was generally safe and there were endless dirt roads to ride a BMX on.

My parents were small business owners who worked long hours, so I looked forward to weekends fishing with Dad, and trips to the "big smoke" of Albury to watch a movie with Mum. But like most families, ours had its challenges.

My parents arrived in Australia as young graduates who fell in love at university, but they grew apart over time. They fought incessantly, and while I don't recall physical violence, it sometimes felt close. To cope, I grew up faster than any kid should have to, trying to hold it all together especially after Dad moved out.

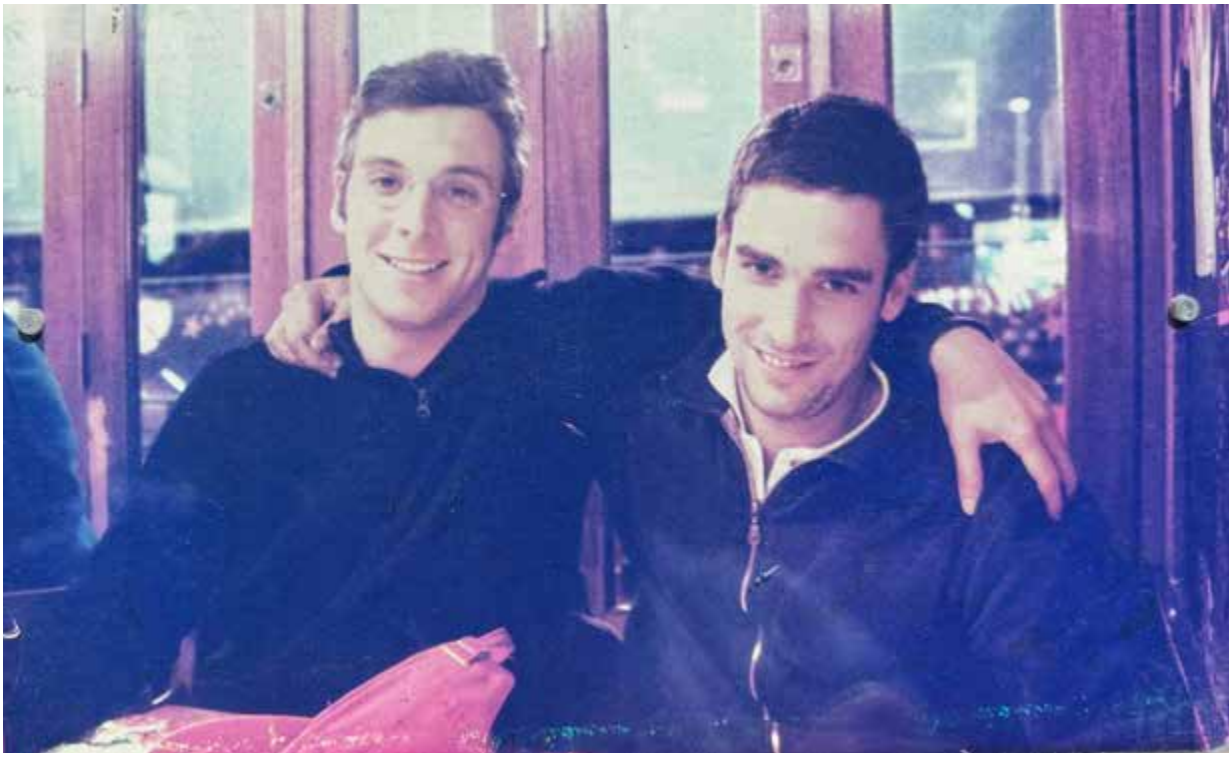
My older brother, David, numbed his pain by experimenting with drugs and alcohol. He experienced addiction as a teenager and has lived with the consequences ever since.

My parents found it extremely difficult to discuss what David was going through, to seek help for him, or to seek help even for themselves.

They grew up in a world where addiction was seen to be a weakness and so they struggled with feelings of shame and embarrassment. In Australia, we are conditioned to believe that addiction is a 'moral failing' or a 'choice' and too often those with a lived experience of addiction are shrouded in shame.

For David, this stigma led to isolation and acted as a barrier to accessing help.

I remember driving him to a late-night GP clinic and demanding he go inside to get treatment. If he didn't, I told him I would drive away, and we would never speak again. Looking back, this was



The Michelson brothers in earlier, happier, times. Supplied by the author.

not the right approach, but it demonstrates just how desperate things were. Without society's judgement, I believe that my brother would have accessed quality care sooner and for longer, and that he would've been seen for more than his experience with addiction.

David is a former athlete, a budding astrologist, a fast car enthusiast, an amazing uncle to my two kids, and one of the smartest people I know.

But because of stigma and delayed treatment, addiction has affected the quality of his life, and ours, forever.

My story is a variation of one that is too common in households and communities across Australia. People from all walks of life turn to drugs and alcohol to help dull the pain caused by heartbreak, trauma, or ill health. And unfortunately, too many of these people experience shame as a result.

As I saw in my own family, this stigma is a huge obstacle that stops people from sharing their experiences and accessing help.

David could have experienced addiction to exercise, video games, or legal substances such as tobacco or alcohol, which still have stigma, but to a lesser degree. Instead, he experienced addiction to drugs and endured the full extent of society's judgement.

It is incredibly important that we tackle these negative perceptions so that people struggling with addiction seek earlier intervention which could lead a healthier and happier life, free of shame. As with all society progression, for example LBGTQIA+ rights and domestic violence, change is created only by taking a stance, raising awareness, and debating policy solutions.

Tackling addiction in society

I am proud to have established a firm that specialises in providing strategic communications support to achieve positive social impact. We know how to challenge and change negative public narratives, and recently supported a leading Australian addiction research and education centre, called Turning Point, in running a national campaign to help change the stigma around addiction.

Because of this campaign experience, and my personal experience, I know that eliminating addiction stigma is a responsibility that all of society needs to share.

From the alcohol and other drug sector, to policymakers, the media, sporting organisations, corporates, and individual citizens, we all must do our part to destigmatise addiction and approach it as a health condition, not a 'choice'.

AOD sector

Australia is fortunate to have an AOD sector that provides treatment services to those experiencing addiction, and services that address related issues such as housing, education, and financial disadvantage.

For decades, they have had the great challenge and responsibility of confronting the issue of addiction and stigma and trying to achieve better health outcomes. While the sector has received government funding, they've largely shouldered this without mainstream political support from our decision makers.

The campaign work that we recently did with Turning Point, called Rethink Addiction, can be used as a case study for how organisations within the AOD sector can work together to achieve real change in this space.

We aimed to establish addiction as a national political priority, achieve a more balanced policy and funding approach, and develop a national roadmap for change in order to successfully shift the way Australians experiencing addiction are supported and seen in society.

Together with Turning Point, we gained the support of over 70 partners from a variety of sectors, engaged with decision makers at the state and federal level, and convened a brains trust of key leaders in the AOD sector.

This resulted in vocal support and funding commitments, garnered the support of key Victorian political offices, and secured significant financial support from then-Minister Greg Hunt.

With this funding, Turning Point was able to host sell-out virtual and live events, including a National Convention in Canberra which brought 260 people and organisations from across the campaign together.

So, what did we learn from this experience with Turning Point?

First, that it's vital for the AOD sector to agree upon and work together towards a shared goal, to increase the chances of lasting and impactful change. Rethink Addiction's success was largely due to cohesion.

Second, policymakers play a key role in driving change, and have a responsibility to reduce stigma in society. This is especially true for Labor policymakers, given the party's values and history of reform.

The experience of the Andrews Government after it chose to open Victoria's first Medically Supervised Injecting Room (MSIR) in North Richmond is prescient here.

As Andrews and co quickly discovered, bold policy will be met with mudslinging. Nonetheless, it's incumbent on Labor to be courageous and to do what is right, not what is easy.

Against this backdrop, and to help change this status quo, Federal Labor can and must do what the party does best by campaigning for progressive social change.

There are a few forms this could take, but the most effective approach would be to create policy, supported by a political strategy, that treats addiction as health issue, not as an issue of personal responsibility.

For illegal drug use, such policy would involve amending the law so that people who use drugs are not considered criminals.

For legal addictions like drinking and gambling, a public health approach to policy could focus on prevention, reduction, and community awareness.

Annastacia Palaszczuk's recent leadership in these policy areas in Queensland goes to show how times have changed, and that bold reform is possible.

There is plenty of evidence to show that punitive policies contribute to addiction stigma, whereas policies that take a medical view lessen society's judgement and encourage people to seek help.

The latter approach would unlock enormous social benefit by uplifting people who experience addiction, and it would also unlock enormous and society-wide economic benefits.

KPMG's recent report, *Understanding the cost of addiction in Australia*, found that in 2021, the impact of productivity and associated losses to the nation's economy due to addiction amounted to $80 billion.

The media

The media also has a huge role to play in shifting conversation related to addiction. According to AOD Media Watch, poor reporting by media organisations perpetuates stigma and contributes to impulsive and inadequate policy responses that fail to consider scientific evidence.

For these reasons, the Australian Press Council suggests several guidelines for news organisations to follow when reporting on drug-related issues.

They include responsibly reporting on public debate about addiction, refraining from exaggerating the harmful effects of drugs, avoiding detailed accounts of drug consumption, and highlighting the parts of a story that discuss preventive measures against addiction.

These guidelines serve as a strong foundation in theory, but they are too often ignored by media organisations that rely on fear and drama to tell and sell stories about addiction.

Journalists must improve their reporting on addiction by including important context, by basing their stories on the best scientific evidence, and by using language that is unbiased and neutral. In so doing, they can help to dispel harmful addiction myths and the stigma that harms so many people.

Sporting organisations

Australians love sports of all kinds. This fact is reflected in the huge number of people who engage with sport each year. According to the Confederation of Australian Sport (CAS), 14 million Australians each year play sport themselves, attend sporting events, and watch sport on TV.

This means that sporting organisations and athletes can make a profound social impact. There's no shortage of recent examples.

According to a report by *Clearinghouse for spor*t (the information and knowledge sharing platform for Australian sport), sport has already championed positive change by bridging the cultural, gender, abilities, and generation gaps within society.

How clubs and leagues deal with drug use within their playing cohorts will play a role in changing the associated stigma. For an example, we only need to look at the way Collingwood Football Club men's captain Darcy Moore responded when a video of his teammate, Jack Ginnivan, using drugs became public.

In a statement, Moore said that while Ginnivan had made a mistake, "he was not interested in shaming him going forward". Instead, Moore said that "we want to support him", a small sentiment that would create a ripple effect if it were to be repeated by other clubs and sporting leaders.

Corporate Australia

Corporate Australia also has a responsibility to chip in to create change. This could be achieved via support for not-for-profit organisations related to addiction and could take the form of monetary donations or volunteer work. Not only would this help to show the company's commitment to social impact, but it would directly benefit the cause.

Corporates could also implement policies within their organisation that cater for employees who are experiencing addiction, for example, by implementing a well-informed substance abuse policy and an addiction education policy.

Individual citizens

Most importantly, individuals have the power to help reduce stigma and bring about change. For example, we can offer compassionate support and display kindness to those experiencing addiction, use 'person-first' language that focuses on the individual and not what they are experiencing, research addiction and how it works, speak up when we witness someone being mistreated because of their condition, and recognise that treatment does work and can help people to overcome addiction and live a happy and fulfilling life.

Committing to change

Addiction is a very nuanced issue that has been made even more complex by damaging myths and stigma. It is time to change the way that we approach addiction, and it is crucial that Labor commits to making this happen. Addiction has a huge effect on individuals and their families, and we must strive to provide better support for those experiencing the condition, as well as better support for their loved ones.

By doing so, we can work towards achieving a strong and accepting society that welcomes all people equally, and it may just mean that in years to come someone's brother, father or friend experiencing addiction is not hindered by stigma in the same way that my family was. It's time for Federal Labor to make tackling the issue of addiction a national policy priority.

Steve Michelson is Mordialloc ALP branch vice president and founder and director of strategic communications firm Michelson Alexander.

FEATURE

From the Jobs and Skills Summit to a More Equitable and Sustainable Australia?

FRANK STILWELL

The Albanese government's Jobs and Skills summit was a welcome initiative, providing an opportunity for discussion of political economic issues. Although tough questions about fiscal and monetary policy were not on the agenda, holding the summit was a signal of the new government's openness to a participatory approach to policy development, echoing the 'national economic summit' with which the Hawke government began its long period in office in the 1980s.

The task now is to widen and deepen the program for economic reform, addressing fundamental questions about the nature of the economic system, whether it serves social needs and operates within environmental constraints. Looked at in this way, questions of equity and sustainability should be at the forefront of future discussions, supplementing narrower concerns about productivity. A paradigm shift is entailed, setting failed orthodoxies aside and addressing questions about the nature of economic

power and the creation of a more people- and nature-centred approach to material wellbeing.

A problem-saturated situation

Current wage stagnation and cost of living stresses are necessary starting points for considering what needs to be done, as the participants at the Jobs and Skills summit acknowledged. The existing economic arrangements are not well serving the interests and needs of most Australian people. While the official unemployment rate is low, so too is job security, with many workers dependent on casual employment or needing more hours of work than they can get. The share of labour in the national income, relative to the owners of capital, has plunged to an all-time low. Decades of rising house prices have made it ever more difficult for many people to put a roof over their heads, whether as renters or prospective home buyers.

The same tendencies have resulted in great windfall gains for big property owners who hold substantial assets in the form of business enterprises, real estate, shares and other financial securities. Wealth inequality has continued to grow, making it harder to achieve any aspiration to social equity or fairness — however that is defined. Meanwhile, major environmental stresses result from the ongoing heavy emphasis on resource extraction as a primary economic sector.

The Australian economy's reliance on the mining industry — with its 'dig-it-up, ship-it-out, flog-it-off' character- is the most distinctive aspect of the overall sectoral imbalance. There is also strong over-dependence on industries having either a 'knock-down-and-rebuild' or 'coupon-clipping' character.

We are over-dependent on economic activities that accentuate economic inequality, insecurity and instability, while compounding concerns about ecological sustainability.

The construction industry flourishes from urban demolition and rebuilding projects that impair the quality of everyday life in our cities, causing recurrent noise, disruption, dirt and distress for urban dwellers. The finance sector comprises banks and other financial institutions that prosper from 'financialisation' processes that bolster their own 'bottom lines' while rendering most people yet more powerless and perplexed.

Without these three industry sectors — mining, construction, and finance — the overall economic conditions in Australia would be substantially more dire. However, with them, we are over-dependent on economic activities that accentuate economic inequality, insecurity and instability, while compounding concerns about ecological sustainability.

Does Australia have the political economic capacity for a major re-set? The COVID period has made everything more difficult, not only for health but also for household finances, tempered only by the massive income transfers made by the Federal government to keep the nation out of recession. Faced with the legacy of debt and deficits inherited from the Morrison government, how should the Albanese government respond? Is it a time for more caution or for bold initiatives?

Analysing the causal factors

Understanding the factors underlying the current conditions and problems is a precondition for finding effective solutions. While these factors are many and varied, saying 'it's complicated' won't get us very far. Systematic political economic analysis must underpin assessment of what could be done to effect change.

Three levels of analysis can be helpful to this process — focussing on the general character of the capitalist economy, its specific political economic features in the modern era, and the nation-specific possibilities for reform through public policies. Framing political economic analysis in this way sits well in the Fabian tradition, being based on the view that careful consideration of the roots of socio-economic problems, combined with strong commitment to achieving worthy goals through effective governmental action, can create ultimately transformative social improvement.

The universal characteristic of capitalism is the pursuit of profit, not production for the direct satisfaction of human needs. Private sector economic activities flourish only when the prospects for profit are buoyant. This is the source of both capitalism's dynamism as an engine of economic growth and its problems as a system based on the exploitation of labour and nature, creating huge socio-economic inequalities and multiple environmental stresses.

Capitalism, as a dynamic system, has also evolved institutional features that make it different now from when Marx and Engels, for example, analysed it. These temporal changes, somewhat paradoxically, both intensify its systemic tendencies and open more possibilities for progress in dealing with the social and environmental problems. The dominant capitalist institutions are now huge multinational corporations, using their vast resources and 'global reach' to increase their economic power relative to workers, consumers and governments. It is this power asymmetry between capital and labour, exacerbated by the relative weakness of trade unions in recent years, that most evidently lies behind labour's declining share in the national income. Yet, possibilities for more broadly-based and inclusive political economic progress have also expanded because the extension of democratic processes has given state institutions greater power to set the 'rules of the game' within which capitalist enterprises operate.

It is in this context that the politics of neoliberalism have been so important in reshaping the role that governments play in the economic drama. Neoliberalism's dominant influence during the last four decades has been to provide an ideological cloak for capitalist interests pursuing high rates of profit and faster rates of capital accumulation with little regard to broader societal concerns. Governmental policies of privatisation, deregulation, trade liberalisation, and less progressive taxation have facilitated this process. They have created greater opportunities for profit-making and wealth concentration, thereby unleashing the processes responsible for increasing inequality and environmental stress.

Yet, these outcomes are far from inexorable. The development of neoliberalism as a vehicle for expanding the power and wealth of capital relative to labour was itself the outcome of a power struggle and political choices. Further struggles and alternative choices can take economic policy in a different direction.

The substantial variation between national economies is evidence of the potential for diversity within capitalism. Neoliberal tendencies have been most pervasive among nations within the Anglo-American sphere, including Australia. In European nations, especially the Nordic countries, the stronger traditions of social democratic politics have sustained public policies that emphasise broader social concerns, aspirations and goals, thereby tempering the basic capitalist tendencies. Hence the question — could this be a moment for seeking some sort of 'Nordic turn' with Australian characteristics?

Towards a solution-focused approach

Could the new ALP Federal government develop and implement policies to substantially ameliorate the economic, social and environmental problems that have arisen during the neoliberal era? Could it restructure economic arrangements to get more equitable and sustainable outcomes? It is the failure to do so that has been such an obvious hallmark of recent decades in Australia, most particularly during the recent 'lost decade' when the conservative Coalition government's policy vacuum was so evident. Time to change track now, moving on from the Jobs and Skills summit to the broader task of creating a more equitable and sustainable economy?

As ever, optimism of the will must be tempered by pessimism of the intellect. Even with a coherent and comprehensive program of reform, the possibility of policies being knocked off-course by global and regional security concerns is ever-present. Moreover,

the parliamentary and legislative paths to reform are inherently problematic; and policy formulation is not necessarily followed by effective implementation. The institutional impediments are much more than 'grit in the wheels': powerful political economic forces are at stake, having the potential to de-rail even relatively minor changes that are regarded as threatening to vested interests.

Powerful political economic forces are at stake, having the potential to de-rail even relatively minor changes that are regarded as threatening to vested interests.

Yet there is currently both substantial opportunity and need for beginning a new political economic reform agenda. The government could, for example, develop proposals for linking the vast pool of workers' savings held by superannuation funds into a national investment scheme to drive transformation to a more secure and sustainable economy. A distinctively Australian 'labour green deal' (a label which adapts the US-centric term 'Green New Deal' to the local context) could facilitate a planned transition in industry and employment from 'sunset' to 'sunrise' industries, based on the development of 'green jobs', using 'circular economy' principles and the nation's abundant renewable energy resources. The education and skills formation policies discussed at the recent summit would then necessarily have a key role in the planned industry transitions. So too would a strong commitment to redistributive policies that would make a 'labour green deal' into a broader program for 'just transition'.

While none of this would fully satisfy the advocates of 'degrowth' or 'steady state economy', it could go a long way towards decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation. Of course, sceptics on the other political flank may argue that the huge fiscal challenge facing the nation means that 'fiscal consolidation' must precede any substantial public funding of a transitional program for structural economic change. But acceding to that argument would take us back to the discredited budget fetishism and austerity programs of the neoliberal era. Moreover, it would almost certainly undermine the political support and momentum that is needed for a progressive reform agenda.

As proponents of Modern Monetary Theory point out — and as post-Keynesian economists have been saying for decades — national governments have the capacity to engage in extensive deficit spending when the prevailing conditions require it. Now, in the wake of the COVID crisis when many other countries are also learning to live with similar situations, it would be folly to try to rein in the debt and deficits too quickly.

Some aspects of fiscal policy reform are important though. Particularly strong cases exist for the Albanese government to press on with requiring multinational corporations to pay more tax; and to abandon — or at least radically modify — the third stage of Morrison government's legislated income tax cuts because of their untimely and patently regressive character. Both these progressive policy positions would signal that fiscal reform is integral to providing improved social services — including child-care and elderly care — that meet crucial social needs.

Monetary policy also needs a long overdue re-examination, coupled with the announced review of how the Reserve Bank of Australia functions. Relying on interest rate policy as the main instrument to control the level of economic activity is neither effective nor adequate. Indeed, it can have perverse effects, as evident with the RBA's switch to a policy of lifting official interest rates, ostensibly to deal with surging inflation. This policy does not directly address the causes of the inflationary stresses that arise from supply restrictions rather than excessive aggregate demand in the economy. Its main effects are to intensify the stresses of servicing mortgage-debt, while benefitting wealthier people who have surplus capital on which they can now get more interest income.

Separate policies are needed to deal effectively with the chronic problem of housing unaffordability, rather than compounding them by using the heavy, blunt instrument of monetary policy. The housing market problems have resulted from allowing and encouraging the use of land and housing for wealth accumulation while subordinating the social goal of 'decent, affordable housing for all'. The resulting growth of an 'asset economy' based on rising land and housing prices has intensified distributional inequalities intergenerationally. It is a problem that cannot be

resolved without economic policies that target the sources of unearned wealth — certainly not by the Reserve Bank jabbing on the monetary policy brake.

These examples are indicative of the need for fundamental thinking about socio-economic problems and policy priorities. The standard approach to fiscal and monetary policies cannot suffice. The imperatives now are to set out a national recovery and reinvestment plan, focussed on redirection of investment, restructuring employment, reducing inequality, and creating both economically and ecologically sustainable outcomes.

Processes of change

Developing a comprehensive economic policy program may appear a tall order. However, getting started on the process would be a signal of a purposeful government looking to at least two terms in office to carry through on the full development of the commitments and policy changes. The associated paradigm shift needs to be based in political *practices* as well as policy development.

Importantly, developing a program such as 'labour green deal' could open opportunities for engagement with First Nations peoples, drawing on Indigenous knowledge about sustainability and involving multiple Indigenous voices in developing the principles and policies for a just transition. The process of developing a 'labour green deal' could also include decentralised regional forums that identify local needs and draw on local capacities. Certainly, rural and regional Australia should not be left out of a process that would otherwise tend to have a metropolitan-centric character.

Developing more cooperation between the labour movement, business and government was a well-orchestrated feature of the recent Jobs and Skills summit, having strong echoes of The Accord process that flowed through the Hawke-Keating years of government. This time, however, the challenges facing the nation also require an inclusive approach to the environmental movement and community groups. Developing cooperative relations with Greens and Teal independents is essential for this process, notwithstanding the usual tendency for ALP parliamentarians to treat such 'party outsiders' as electoral competitors and personal irritants.

Sustained efforts will be necessary to build a culture of partnership, while respecting differences of emphasis. Adroitly handled, it could provide the basis for a progressive reorientation of Australian governance that consigns agents of reactionary politics to the Opposition benches indefinitely.

Onward...

Holding a Jobs and Skills Summit can be seen as a tentative first step toward developing an alternative economic strategy. It showed the new government's commitment to broadening the range of voices that get a hearing; and created stimulus for wider public debate at a crucial time. Whether broader progressive outcomes are achieved depends on how effectively state power is used in relation to the more deeply embedded power structures of corporate capitalism. To achieve progressive change, pushing against the interests, inclinations and constraints of the latter, requires ongoing political judgments.

No one should pretend that it is easy to achieve fairness and sustainability in a capitalist economy. We necessarily begin in the here and now, seeking to deal with existing political economic structures, including those vested interests opposed to any such transformation. Perhaps the main political lesson is that, even with 'adults in charge' in Canberra after a sadly wasted decade, activists will need to redouble their efforts to press for the deeper changes that Fabians, evolutionary socialists and social democrats have long espoused.

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BOOK REVIEW

Escaping Thucydides Trap

A review of 'The Avoidable War' by Kevin Rudd.

MICHAEL BUCKLAND

The pages of Australian newspapers are littered with opinions and editorials on the rise of China. What does it mean for Australia and the world? A noticeable hardening of views against an assertive China has occurred.

As a dual Australian-United States citizen, I've always followed US politics. This is unremarkable in Australia where informed opinions on Trump are more common than on most state Premiers.

We follow the highs and lows of US politics and are often critical of what we see. Whether we lament major misadventures in Iraq or just the proliferation of children dressed as ghosts and gargoyles on October 31 each year.

Yet for all the criticism we level against United States policy misadventures, Australians feel more comfortable in a world with US leadership. It's not just formal agreements like ANZUS and AUKUS. It's the rules-based international order and culture we understand (from language to sport to politics).

The same understanding of China is missing. In his book, The Avoidable War, Australia's former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd presents us with a tool to gain an understanding of the China relationship that is so critical to Australia's future. Since publication, our author has been appointed ambassador to the United States. His analysis is no longer just that from a sideline, albeit well-informed, observer but a current and future actor in geopolitics.

The Avoidable War grapples with the familiar question of how to manage the rise of China, but with a unique historical understanding based on Rudd's personal experience and a genuine effort to craft a practical policy response.

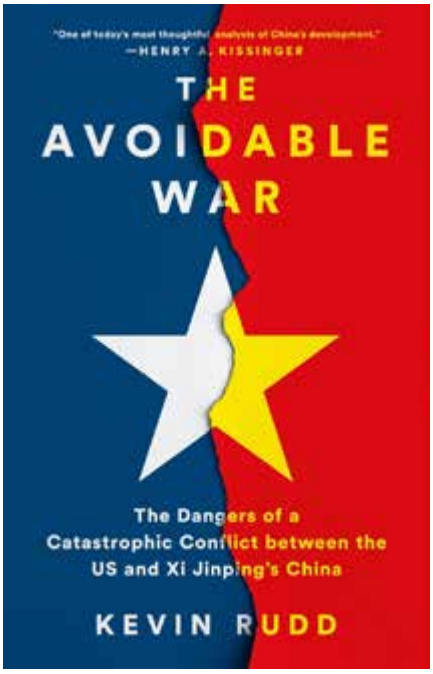
He starts with tracking the history of Chinese-US diplomatic engagements and describing the frameworks used by policymakers in Washington and Beijing. In accepting that Xi Jinping is occupying the dominant role in CCP politics, the bulk of the book is devoted to describing his ten concentric circles of strategic objectives. What is driving Xi's decisions?

The reader becomes privy to what feels like the insider discussions. It feels like an invitation to genuinely grapple with complex strategic challenges.

The central strategic challenge is encapsulated in two theoretical frameworks. For three decades now, many Australian and US leaders have promoted economic engagement with China. Economic reform, and the growth of the Chinese middle class, would slowly lead to political reform. Or so said policymakers.

In most cases the patience for this policy is at an end. The effort itself has led to feelings of resentment, with those in Washington feeling like the well-meaning economic engagement has not been reciprocated and instead, exploited.

In Beijing, the hope for political reforms becomes evidence that Washington never cared about the economic aspirations in China. Instead, the US was simply using its economic power to drive a political agenda. The result is a steady breakdown in trust and engagement.



For many now, the Thucydides Trap (describing a tendency of conflict between a rising power and an existing power) describes the China-US rivalry following the end of three decades of engagement.

The Thucydides Trap is often cited as presenting the theoretical case for an inevitable war. Rudd reminds us that the war is not the only outcome of strategic competition.

Rudd does not feel that war is inevitable. He recommends a framework be developed for Managed Strategic Competition. Not denying a rivalry, his hope is that a framework based on that developed between the US and USSR during the Cuban Missile Crisis will give both capitals the tools necessary to compete without the disaster of armed conflict. Or at least, reduce the likelihood of accidental escalation.

Much of Rudd's analysis rests in realpolitik. But his effort to present a practical solution requires some optimism. He does not for a moment present the framework for Managed Strategic Competition as foolproof. But institutions, processes and frameworks in geopolitics can shape outcomes. In fact, the current rules-based order we are intent on preserving is reliant on us accepting that institutions and frameworks have real impacts on state actors.

The Avoidable War is accessible and not presented as academic literature. Knowing that conflict with China will impact all of us, it is incumbent on us to form our own understanding. Bringing thoughtful academic analysis to a wider audience is a rich tradition in the United States and Rudd delivers in this tradition.

For Australians who are well versed in our former Prime Minister's Chinese credentials, having worked in diplomatic postings across China for years and as a keen student of Chinese language and culture, the references to his past come across as redundant. But for the US audience that needs to hear his analysis, it's a reminder of why they should listen.

You can't escape the role of Kevin Rudd himself in the events he describes, often bringing anecdotes from meetings or decisions. But the manifestation of his experience is most obvious in the constant efforts to draw practical lessons from his analysis.

For instance, more than once we are politely chided for spending far less time trying to understand Chinese politics, than Chinese leaders try to understand the politics of the US and Australia. Indeed, the lack of effort from 'Western' observers in trying to understand the drivers of CCP policymaking has become an engrained feature of the China relationship itself.

It is not just the fault of Washington policymakers. During the Obama administration, the CCP has reassured the US that the artificial islands in the South China sea were not for military purposes. When US intelligence found garrisons and military aircraft using the islands it broke trust. Without trust, observers choose to root analysis in observed actions, rather than greater understanding, when both are necessary.

It is rare to be given an insight into the analysis, considerations, and objective of an active participant in geopolitics. With Kevin Rudd's appointment to the post of Australian Ambassador to the United States, we have just that. With his mission in mind, the book takes on a more active tone, one that tells us more about the agenda to come.

In making his argument for Managed Strategic Competition, Rudd doesn't pass moral judgements. He attempts to find a policy that the US and China can adopt, in both their interests. But at no point does he deny that he has moral complaints with China. He has voiced them.

Australia will continue to have strategic and moral policy disputes with China. It may still result in armed conflict that will impact us all.

As Australia and the US navigate a new era of international politics, we must understand the challenges that face us. In this way, Rudd's analysis is a public service. In a democracy, an informed populace will help select leaders who can best navigate the policy challenges ahead.

Michael Buckland is CEO of public policy research organisation, The McKell Institute.

MEMOIR

Perfect Storm

The Personal Fallout of the Robodebt Scandal

AMANDA MCLEOD

Prior to the 2022 federal election I was too scared to admit how I was going to vote.

I couldn't post my political affiliation on social media. I couldn't tell anyone my intentions. I couldn't engage in debate and I couldn't persuade anyone to vote like me. I certainly couldn't say I was going to vote Labor.

I was traumatised by countless run-ins with Services Australia's automated bureaucracy. I was simply too scared to expose myself, in case my situation was 'reviewed', again.

During the 2022 election campaign Labor promised to shake up the social welfare system. It would hold a Royal Commission into the Robodebt scandal and scrap the Indue Cashless Debit Card.

When it came to Robodebt the Morrison Government 'consistently denied, obstructed and covered-up [its origins] and refused to take responsibility', as the Guardian reported in Nov 2020. The Labor-supported class action resulted in an $18 billion settlement. In promising to establish a Royal Commission, Labor called for the 'need to learn the truth of Robodebt's origins so that something like this can never again be perpetrated by an Australian Government against its citizens'. Driven by a social justice agenda, Labor called Robodebt 'illegal and immoral' and said that the policy 'caused serious harm to many Australian families — who have reported that this contributed to stress, anxiety, financial destitution and even suicide'.

I hoped that things would change on 21 May 2022. I breathed a sigh of relief; Labor's election promised much.

My Story

If 2020 and 2021 were bad years, for me at least, 2019 was worse.

It was the perfect storm. I was overworked as a sessional academic. I was a single mum and I had been in and out of the workforce for years due to a serious mental illness. I was supplementing my Disability Support Pension (DSP) with sessional work, desperately trying to use my education to its full. I did everything I could to work. The casualisationof academia meant I was overworked, unsupported and underappreciated. And, I was becoming increasingly unwell.

Then, on 8 August 2019, came my initial Centrelink debt notice. All $19,575.81 of it. I was given less than a month to pay the balance which included a 10 per cent interest penalty. My world collapsed. How could I pay more than $650 a day when my pension was less than $500 per week?

How could this have happened? While working at a regional university on and off since 2016 I had carefully declared my income every fortnight. I kept meticulous records. How was this even possible?

I had carefully declared my income every fortnight. I kept meticulous records. How was this even possible?

Services Australia's 'income averaging' system meant that my pay was spread over the entire tax year rather than the period in which I had worked. As Gordon Legal explained: 'Robodebts are calculated by Centrelink applying averaged Australian Taxation Office (ATO) PAYG income data across either part or all of the fortnights in which the recipient received payments and treating those averaged amounts as the recipient's actual earnings in the relevant debt period'. In my case when I did work, I worked semester by semester rather than a weekly set number of hours over a full year. But to an automated system my fortnightly pension looked like an overpayment.

The automation did not take into consideration my particular circumstances. The same thing happened to hundreds of thousand of others receiving Newstart, Austudy, Abstudy, Youth Allowance, Carer Payment, Sickness or Widows Allowance, Parenting Payment or, like me, the DSP, all got caught up in the scandal.

The reframing of what it meant to be worthy of support, was no better expressed when it came to my own experience of Robodebt and the neoliberal agenda of the LNP. I had tried and tried to work so many times that I lost count. At times, I was significantly unwell, at others, I traversed a complicated path in order to stay in good health. For me, things could change day by day. Disability Support pensions are notoriously difficult to get and are increasingly so. I qualified for a DSP when I was seriously unwell during a time when Labor held power. It has given me a level of protection that I could not have done without. But things changed with the election of the LNP and with the introduction of Robodebt. Life became more complicated and those receiving social welfare payments became the target of a neoliberalist agenda in 'new and improved' ways.

As someone with a serious mood disorder, the whole event was completely destabilising. Put simply, my symptoms were triggered and my world collapsed. I knew of no way around the system that offered me a way out. I was unaware of the experiences of others until the media began its assault on the scheme. Dealing with Centrelink made everything worse.

For me, navigating Centrelink's complaints system was confusing and frustrating. Wait times for its Disability, Sickness and Carers phone line blew out. Every time I called, I was met with the same message, that Centrelink was experiencing higher than normal demands on its services. Some calls simply remained unanswered. Contradictory information and advice made the entire process distressing and debilitating. Centrelink's processes made me feel helpless, hopeless and desperate. The whole system had been deliberately designed to dissuade and deflect and place blame on the recipient.

Robodebt

Federal governments of both persuasions have long sought to determine the eligibility of social welfare payments through the use of data matching to assess overpayments.

Prior to the introduction of the automated 'Income Compliance Program' in July 2016, overpayments were manually checked and assessed by using ATO data with reported income.

The Turnbull Government oversaw the implementation of the new plan, with Scott Morrison playing a starring role, formulating the recovery method: 'As Treasurerin 2016 and social services minister before then, [he] joined a long line of ministers, including Christian Porter, Alan Tudge and Stuart Robert, who believed in the promise of automated welfare debt recovery.' (Jennett, abc.net.au, 30 May 2020) In 2016, Alan Tudge made the government's position clear: 'We'll find you, we'll track you down and you will have to repay those debts and you may end up in prison'.

By the end of the same year, the media began to report on the problems with the program and the experiences of those caught up in the system.

Throughout 2017, the criticism continued as the #notmydebt campaign, The Greens, and Labor all voiced concerns. The first Senate inquiry was held and the Commonwealth Ombudsman reported on the system and debt recovery measures. Increasingly, however, Services Australia continued to find more and more cases of 'non-compliance'. As early as 2017, claims were made as to the illegality of automated debt generation. Yet, the system was strengthened and more citizens pursued. In 2019, shadow minister Bill Shorten publicly supported the idea of a class action pursued against the government. By 2020, there were calls for a Royal Commission into Robodebt and a commitment by Labor to one if elected.

When it came to the human toll, the fallout was immense. According to legalaid.vic.gov, it is believed that more than 2000 people died prematurely between 2016 and 2018 after receiving a 'compliance' letter. Some of the most vulnerable people received letters of demand, were hounded by private debt collectors and forced to prove compliance with the rules. They had, in the words of Alan Tudge, been tracked down and forced to repay false and ultimately illegal debts. Peter Whiteford wrote in 2020 that 'this human cost is difficult to assess and involves much more than financial losses'. Centrelink was aware of the human fallout, writes Whiteford, 'it has been noted that from January 2017, Centrelink began tweeting the contact number for Lifeline, the national charity providing 24-hour support and suicide prevention services'. Yet Centrelink did nothing more.

The class action brought by Gordon Legal in 2019 successfully argued that the program was unlawful and the government was ordered to wipe and repay debts, pay costs and provide compensation.

The Federal Court called the debacle a 'shameful chapter', and approved a settlement worth almost $1.8 billion arguing that the Ministers responsible should have known that the program was flawed. More than 433,000 people had had more than $750 million debts leveled against them.

Even after the scheme was found to be unlawful, Services Australia continued to use income averaging to retrieve money from welfare recipients.

In 2019, as the government came increasingly under fire as to the legality of the program, there were internal signs within Services Australia that the sole reliance on income averaging would be abolished. It would be again combined with manual assessments.

It appeared to be an accident of timing that I, unlike many, was finally able to navigate a deliberately broken and opaque social welfare system. After endless phone calls over many months, I was finally advised to ask for a manual reassessment of my debt. The onus was still on me to prove compliance and that I hadn't been overpaid by supplying pay slips and other information that Services Australia already had.

In the end my debt was 'zeroed' (cancelled) by Services Australia. But because it had been manually

assessed it was no longer considered a Robodebt, despite the initial debt letter being computer automated, my experience is not recorded in official figures; I was not part of the class action. But hopefully, the Royal Commission will hear my voice.

Yet, like hundreds of thousands of Australians, I was a victim of the Coalition's welfare reforms and its budget saving measures. For me, the election of the Labor government promises much.

When it came to the political economy in which the Robodebt scheme was designed, the LNP pursued a neoliberal welfare policy agenda which placed individual responsibility before the common good. Scott Morrison's ominous claim that 'we are on your side. If you have a go in this country, you'll get a go. That's what fairness in Australia means' is emblematic of this attitude. The onus was on the individual to not 'rely' on the government for support, with individuals increasingly required to express their worth through workplace participation without engagement with the state. The Robodebt scheme was designed within these parameters. Individuals were actively discouraged from engaging with Services Australia.

fundamentally believe you have nothing to be sorry about.'

The Robodebt scandal has destroyed lives. The scrapping of the program and the Royal Commission will go some way to right wrongs but, for many, the damage has been done.

The Labor government's proposed reforms will touch the surface of a system that has suffered at the hands of neoliberal governments for years. At the time of writing, the Jobseeker mutual obligation 'points based [automated] activation system' is being widely criticised. It too, is based on the assumption that the welfare recipient owes a debt to society. If economic welfare is 'designed to promote the basic physical and material wellbeing of people in need' to ensure 'the health, happiness, and fortunes of a person or group', then we are yet to achieve it. And, while Labor has promised to 'tweak' the program, there are no plans to raise the level of the Job Seeker payment. I'm just one of thousands that has been caught up in the LNP's program of welfare 'reform'. I am not the only one who is hoping for a significant change in direction, and not alone in hoping for

The onus was on the individual to not 'rely' on the government for support

The punitive nature of Robodebt was largely confined to the working and lower-middle classes. For others there were tax cuts and other benefits as if they were the only ones 'having a go'.

There has been no sincere apology from those in government responsible for the unlawful nature of automated debt generation. There has been no apology to those who have been caught up in it. Nor to families who have lost loved ones. In June 2020, the then Prime Minister Scott Morrison chose his words carefully when he stated: 'I would apologise for any hurt or harm in the way that the government has dealt with that issue,' and for 'any hardship that has been caused to people in the conduct of that activity'. Despite this, and while the Robodebt program would be wound back, Morrison announced that automated debt recovery would continue. After all the inquiries, media coverage, a successful class action and the promise of a Royal Commission, the Coalition had learnt nothing. It simply did not care. As Michelle Pini wrote in *Independent Australia* 'it is hard to apologise sincerely for something when you

a reframing of what it means to be deserving of government support. A commonwealth must mean all are considered worthy and no one is left behind.

A Royal Commission into the Robodebt scandal and the scrapping of the Indue debit card will hopefully go some way to mend a broken system and improve lives of the vulnerable. It will give back some power to those who are at the end of 'budget saving' or other nefarious measures.

My Robodebt came at a time when I was most vulnerable. The program was not the sole reason that I became seriously unwell but it certainly was a significant factor. Before the scandal, I worked in higher education as a sessional lecturer in the humanities. The Coalition's repeated attacks on the sector has made my position redundant. But that is a story for another time.

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FICTION

So Blue and So Much Lost

CAT SPARKS

"That ink on your arm don't mean what you think," says China.

The squeezes of washing-grade trading post water cost Nara three hand carved dice, items she'd not been ready to part with. Not yet, so far out from Glass Cathedral, which the crew assures her is a real place, not merely tavern fantasy.

"A shell within a shell," says Nara, angling her bicep. "Ocean's where I'm headed, following the gulls."

"Good eating if you can catch one."

Nara wipes damp hands on her pants. "Coot says you've crossed these sands before. How long you been travelling?"

China grunts and turns her back, like she always does when conversation bores her. Which, lately, is often. China rarely looks folks in the eye. Hangs back unless she's arguing a point.

"Dirty Ellen inked my shells. Best tattooist in all of Traders Gate. Copies pictures from old books and maps. Letters too." Nara holds up her sketchbook, flipping pages. "Take a look?"

"Read 'em, can you?" China snorts, "Numbers and letters?"

Nara shrugs. "A few. Got a blue eagle on my other shoulder, and a power flower. Wanna see?"

But China's already heading to the wagon where Hagan and the others smoke and wait. Badger and Coot, deep desert men with leathered skin, guarding packs they've oath-sworn to protect. Nara's pack makes three, with China's hands left free to swing a stave or blade.

They're taking medicines to a man called Doctor Dove, the solar wagon past its prime, yet surely sound enough to carry packs? The wagon is a decoy, Nara learns, carrying tarps and water and small sacks of trading millet. Wired to explode if things go sideways, Badger says. Some days she believes him, others not. Today seems like a believing day so she takes a risk and needles China further.

"Three weeks back when we left the Gate and you pulled that gun. You never would have fired on me."

"Too right," says China. "Wouldn't waste the bullet."

Six long days across the sand before Nara realised China was a woman; another week before she sensed unrequited love between the ugly bodyguard and the rich man paying for protection. Nothing spoken, not even stolen glances, but clues and plenty of them once she noticed.

What Hagan noticed most was Nara, tucked into a crate-stacked corner behind the Gate's best tavern, scribbling in her little pocketbook. Later, slamming tankards down, he spotted a flash of ink beneath her sleeve.

"What bird is that? I've never seen such."

"Me neither."

He nodded, smiling, "Landlord says you're keen for passage out past Glass Cathedral. We could always use another mule."

Glass Cathedral, first new wonder of the Broken World. All she knows about cathedrals comes from Dirty Ellen's wall; two rows of faded rectangles kept safe behind thick glass. Massive buildings named for saints: Peter, Sophia, Stephen and Mark. Next row down the lady shrines: Fatima, Lourdes and Mary.

Glass Cathedral's said to be a place of healing.

China's gun is likely just for show, made back in the years of rain and plenty when common folk owned many wondrous things. Not much but relics left of the Magic Age. So tricky figuring safe from deadly, but she's gotten this far. None of her mates ever stepped a single foot beyond

Traders Gate, yet here *she* is, right out on open sand, her precious book half-filled with sketch, head fit to burst with stories if she ever makes it home.

That pack stays on your back, Hagan insists, *same as it does for Badge and Coot. Even when sleeping. Especially when sleeping.*

Leaving in a hurry at the Divinator's signal, for who would dare to cross the sand unblessed by one born sensitive to poisoned climate trickery? Beyond the Gate's perimeter they follow trails of migratory birds, Hagan assures, though Nara has not glimpsed a single feather.

But she has seen pictures of places Hagan describes, heard tell of others, wrecks and ruins, yet apparently still holding populations. Humanity scattered rather than defeated, despite the cyclones, wars and raging flames. Falling stars and exploding plains. Craters bigger than whole towns, so he reckons.

They smell their destination long before they see it. A looming huddle of shapeless ruins ringed by a mess of shanties. Dull and glowing in the distance, cutting through the crusty twilight.

Travellers approach in lines across windy plains.

"Pilgrims," offers Hagan, pointing, "Glass Cathedral's calling travels far."

A truth she's doubting more and more, beneath the weight of Doctor Dove's supplies. If Cathedral heals, then what's the point of salves? But she shuts her mouth, passing shabby rows of tents with ragged figures lurking. Men and women on the prowl for easy marks, eyeing Hagan's crew with interest, fading once they cop a look at China. Constant jerking crowd momentum. Shouting, swearing, shoving, cursing – most of it in unfamiliar tongues.

The ruins warrant close inspection, but it's all she can manage to keep up.

Eyes watering in the abominably stinking air. Roasting meat and pungent spice tang mix with unwashed flesh and human shit. Nara tightens her khafiya to protect her face from the heat and noise and grief. Even a rusty gun would make a difference.

"Keep moving," Hagan says. "Do not engage."

Nara moves when Hagan moves, stops when he stops, bombarded by foetid stench, which comes in waves, some much worse than others. But despite it all, she's been treated well, sharing their food and flame and liquor. Unfortunate to have made an enemy of China, but too late to turn those tables now.

She stumbles, almost tripping over a bloated corpse half trodden into sand. Nobody else gives a damn.

This place is colourless beneath the dirty ochre sky, but no, wait -- flashes of blue stitched upon clothing, inked on skin. Stained around eyes, beads and ribbons plaited around wrists. The *only* colour—these poisoned sands have leeched out every other.

Blue beads and bangles selling as well as roasted sand skinks and pan-fried scorpions. The hungry choosing to buy them over food.

Vendors plead, whine and harry, hoisting their dubious wares on sticks, protecting livelihoods from grubby, thieving hands. Shallow fire pits adorned with burbling pots of indescribably stinking gruel. Sand skinks blackening over flame. Snake and dog and pickled roots. Water sellers wander freely, selling single swallows from dilapidated goatskins.

Some pay for food with dusty coins, others with themselves. Transactions take place in the open, modesty having no currency in this place.

China walks a pace behind, eyes perpetually flicking across the crowd, then back to Hagan where her sharp gaze softens. What misfortunes can have brought such a woman to this harsh and uncompromising life? Lingering in Hagan's shadow. Wanting a man who will never want her back.

Without warning, brutes lunge, larger framed and better fed than most. One slams hard against Hagan's legs while the others go for his arms and shoulders. A blur of limbs, then three brutes writhing on the sand. China so swift, despite her bulk, no weapon evident. China needs nothing but her hands.

"Come on," snaps Hagan, dusting himself off. "The Doctor's waiting."

Locals fall upon the failed assailants, rifling pockets while the downed men groan. China almost smiles at men deserving what they're dealt, yet Nara's stomach buckles at the cruelty. Foreign sands with foreign rules. No wonder gulls soar high, avoiding landing. The ocean will be kinder, she is sure. Everywhere is kinder than this place.

The defeated men are soon forgotten as the sand choked air begins to hum with prayer. The babble of a thousand tongues, and then, rising in front of them amidst the swirling dust and dirt, a jagged peak, like a sawn-off shard of mountain.

Nara stares, automatically fumbling for the book inside her shirt.

China slaps her hand. "Not here. Not now."

Nara swallows, dry mouthed.

"Cover yer face and keep it covered," spits China.

Glass Cathedral is a mighty stack of ancient relics fused. A wall of glass fronted rectangles atop each other, each one slightly different and yet the same. Boxes reinforced with metal, black and grey, cracked and crazed and scoured by sand and sun. Ancient artefacts hammered and cemented. Unfathomable. Impenetrable. Old glazed bricks are common enough in relic markets, only never so many and never stacked impossibly so high. A show of wealth, status, or both, marking the birth or death place of a warlord? A cairn built over and over with sand-harvested treasure to protect it from the ravages of storms.

Makes sense as much as anything, this craggy mountain built by human hands.

Glass embedded on every aspect, like buds on a rapid blooming desert bush, taking advantage of a flash flood when it strikes.

When at last she drags her gaze away, the crew have vanished, swallowed by the throng.

Good.

She joins the crush of pilgrims sheltering in the metal mountain's shade. No violent motions or flashing blades, murmuring prayers and whispers, calmer than the ones winding their ways amongst the vendor's stalls and lean-tos.

She edges around the jagged structure's girth, expecting the farther side to be less crowded.

Not so. Prayers continue in melodic waves. Pilgrims waiting for a promise held in glass, steel and cement. Tomb of a prophet, a sorcerer or wise woman. Mystic healing bones is one thing, but no way could she ever have imagined *this*.

Glass Mountain's surface is marked with scratches, smears and scorches. Letters spelling words in long forgotten scripts. Her eyes widen at familiar symbols: *the red and yellow shell within a shell; the green and yellow power flower*, the black six-legged beast breathing fire, and others: stars, flames, cogs and wheels. *Earth power*. She shivers with connections she can barely comprehend.

"Told ya to stick close," says China, tugging on her arm, pushing pilgrims aside.

At the far end of the settlement a cluster of tents stands apart from the mess of jury-rigged lean-tos and scrappy shacks improvised from cobbled refuse. Canvas peaks standing out like palaces amidst the sea of want. Men with swords and rifles guard the entrance.

Three in heavy sheepskin jackets loiter. Hagan stands alongside, smoking and laughing. One of them gestures to Badger and his pack.

Another ducks and raises the tent flap. A blast of scents from within: rose, frankincense and coffee.

Hagan bows his head to enter, closely followed by Badger. When Nara moves to follow, China stops her. "Nuh uh. You wait here."

Coot is also made to wait outside.

China lingers, lowering her voice, "If I was you, I'd piss off now, before the dark falls proper and the blue kicks in. And keep yer face covered."

"What blue?"

"More than a couple of coast-bound caravans amongst this lot," China adds, ignoring the question. "Reckon you could whore yourself a passage to the coast."

Nara glares at her. "I'm good."

China sniffs. "Suit yerself." Wipes her nose on the back of her hand, then follows the other men into the tent.

Who the hell does she think she is? Nara's had a gutful of endless gritty sand, this stinking camp and whatever else is coming. Leering plump and fleshy vendors, squeezing coin from misery. China's jealousy and the mysterious Doctor Dove.

Other dusty travellers carrying packs like hers warm their hands over flames leaping from a rusty drum. Share swigs from rag wrapped bottles or crouching, swilling palm toddy and throwing dice and bones. Waiting their turn.

Twilight bleeds into darkness proper. Chilly air speaks of coldness yet to come. Fights are breaking out all over. The setting sun takes with it the last of people's tolerance and humour.

No one emerges from the tent to offer those waiting refreshment; inhospitality unthinkable at Trader's Gate. Voices raised within the tent make her uneasy. What could possibly be taking so long?

Fuck this.

When she stands to leave, nobody stops her, not even Coot, distracted by the gambling mat.

That shell within a shell, embedded in Glass Cathedral, same as on her arm.

The crowd has thickened, rejuvenated now the sun has set.

As she moves, a hiss and crackle, then a high-pitched whine, then another sound she can't describe, only that it hurts her teeth, then a flash of colours layered atop each other. Brighter than sun and lightning combined.

The crowd screams with delight, ragged people she was sure had not a voice between them left, not the energy to cry, let alone scream. They've been waiting. They knew what was coming.

The mountain crag of glass and twisted metal has become a living thing. Mostly blue, a creature with a thousand eyes, awake. Pictures like the ones in Dirty Ellen's well-thumbed books, flickering, shifting, changing shape and form: a serpent, a river, a field of poppies. Wheeled wagons moving single file on long grey bridges. Relics she has seen before, dug up from flooded crags and gullies, eaten through with rust and choked with weeds. Fat people garbed in finery, clean skins of many shades and hues. Birds and beasts she never knew existed. Images she can't make any sense of.

Music takes her breath away; so loud and bright and pulsing through her bones. Infectious dancing lifts and shakes and slams even the elderly and sick. Old gods infusing limbs and minds with fresh, raw, ancient power. Who would ever believe a word of this? Not the folks back home, no matter what she scribbles in her precious book. Some things must be seen to be believed and this is one of them.

The crowd carries her along, sweeps her up then spits her out to stumble backwards, almost falling upon a truly desperate sight. A family huddled around a pathetic heap of rags, praying over the listless body of a child. The mother hooks an amulet around her neck as the girl emits shallow gasps.

The pack on her back. Nara has almost forgotten it. When she drops to the sand, the family flinch and freeze.

"Let me help," she says. "I have medicines."

Do they understand? When she shrugs the pack and unfastens its buckle, the mother cranes her scrawny neck. The others—brothers, probably—watch her keenly from the side, pulling back so shadows don't block what light there is.

Nara works slowly, not wanting to alarm with sudden movements. Tugging back the threadbare blanket reveals an infected mess on the child's right thigh. She's been attacked by something; a sandskate, perhaps, or a hungry dog. The wound is horribly infected.

But the pack does not contain what it's supposed to. A few jars of salve. No instruments. Not even willow bark for pain. Underneath, something else, metal-hard, wrapped in oilcloth, imprinted with a symbol she's seen before: black and yellow, three triangles inset with a circle.

Nara presses her lips together, unscrews a jar of what smells like aloe, turmeric and lavender, smears paste on her own arm as good faith.

"Bandages," she shouts over the thumping music, her throat so dry, making wrapping motions with her hands. A brother tears strips from a dirty shirt. Nothing is clean in this place. The child hasn't the energy to whimper as water dribbles through her lips. She drops back into a fitful doze. The family stares at Nara with hard, suspicious eyes, no thanks offered in any language.

When Nara stands, her eyes meet those of an old woman wrapped in a chequered blanket.

"Playing with fire," the woman croaks. "Wound like that's past healing."

"Can't hurt to try," says Nara.

"You reckon?"

The family goes back to mumbling prayers, the mother pressing an amulet to her daughter's clammy forehead.

Nara takes a deep breath. Towering above, luminous colours enhanced by infectious beats. Oceans, vast and swirling, shimmering fish with glossy scales. So much blue. Pounding repetitions, curling waves the size of cliffs. Blue depths thick with shoals, underwater dogs, fish-tailed, big eyed and sleek. Sharp-toothed beasts and swaying grasses.

So much blue and so much lost.

All of it. She wants all of it.

She's frozen, gawking, when the shouting starts.

"Girl's not breathing. Witchcraft!"

An anguished man shaking his clenched fist at *her*.

"Witchcraft!" he repeats, his face familiar; a brother of the child whose life she tried to save. A mob gathers, no longer dazzled and distracted by Glass Cathedral blue. Folks in of need of blame for all their suffering.

She's shielding her face with her arms when Coot appears, grabbing her wrist and shouldering her pack.

"I tried to save her!" Nara shouts as the dead child's brother howls in rage. No words, just fury.

"Witch cast a spell—we saw!" cries another brother, flinging himself after Coot, spittle flying. Wiry Coot aims a swift kick at his stomach, sends him tumbling backwards. Dips his hand, flings small coins upon the sand. Spectators dive and scuffle, snatching at the metal with fumbling hands.

"Sorry for your loss," he shouts, still dragging Nara, laughing as the mob is absorbed by the dancing throng. "Witchcraft!" With every one of 'em strung with amulets or wards!" He guides Nara out through clusters of leering onlookers still lingering in the hope of further violence. "You're more stupid than you look."

"I was trying to help!"

"They already dead, girl. All of 'em. Stop messing with shit you don't understand. Lucky he sent me back for ya."

"Give me a gun. Let me defend myself."

"Guns no good. Most of 'em'll blow yer hand off."

Nara lets herself be led, the pulsing beat gradually losing its grip.

China's waiting and she's not smiling as Coot and Nara approach the big tent. "Thought you'd pissed off to the coast already," she says grimly. "Doc Dove's waiting on ya."

Coot shoves her through the flap before Nara has a chance to argue.

The space inside smells wonderful, stark contrast to the evening's tainted air. Thick woven carpets of red and gold, low tables, coffee pots and bowls, hanging lamps casting dancing shadows.

Well-dressed men with beards and golden earrings, all of them staring hard at Nara.

She stares back, first face-to-face, and then at the embroidered runner at their feet laid out with relics. Some round, some hard edged, others trailing cables like intestines. Hundreds of years old, probably much older.

"Your pack," says Hagan, beads of sweat along his forehead.

Coot hands it over.

"What does that black and yellow symbol stand for?" she asks.

The men ignore her, haggle amongst themselves in a tongue she doesn't understand. But China does and she does not look comfortable.

Hagan yanks the pack open, discards the salves. Another man helps remove the package within, sets it gently on the runner beside the other things.

The men continue to haggle, gesturing aggressively.

Nara glances to China. The bodyguard shakes her head almost imperceptibly.

The dark shapes on the runner are bombs. Somehow, she knows this. Some are stencilled with letters and numbers. Several have the black and yellow mark. Most have human skulls etched roughly on grey casing. One is marked with an X.

"You had me carry a bomb across the sand," she says.

The men stop talking all at once.

"To this place of healing," she adds.

The stream of words that follow cause China shift her weight from foot to foot. Nara can't understand any of it, only that none of it is good and that some of it, at least, seems to be about her.

Hagan bargains loudly as others shout him down.

When, finally the shouting ends, rough hands grip Nara's shoulders from behind. Cold fear spasms through her belly. The men have been haggling over *her*. Trading her like a bomb or a sack of millet. When she slaps the hand, another takes its place. Yet another grabs her wrist. She kicks and screams as they attempt to bind her. "No!"

Everybody stares. Nobody moves. As Doctor Dove opens his mouth, China steps up.

"Give it here," she says, her voice emotionless, barking something foreign, then snatching bindings from one of the tent guardsmen.

Nara panics. "No! No—" help me—please!" She kicks and thrashes, pummelling China with useless fists. China wrestles her effortlessly to the ground. Others shuffle back to give them room. China pins Nara beneath her knees.

"No. Get off me!"

"Quiet," China whispers. "Keep still. Yer only makin' things worse. Told ya to keep yer face covered. That shell inked on yer arm—what else you got? Numbers? Letters? Old stuff?"

Nara nods, wide eyed and terrified.

"Then talk it up. Make real big noise. Tell 'em yer special. Touched by gods. You get me?"

Nara whimpers as China hauls her, bound and gagged, to standing, then makes a show of wiping her hands on her clothing. "Why don't youse all go fuck yourselves," she says to gawking guard.

As the men back off, she makes a show of straightening Nara's clothing.

"Listen up, and listen hard. You can't turn the tide, but that shell within a shell's an ancient power totem. Tell 'em Glass Cathedral's in yer dreams. Tell 'em all the bullshit they can handle."

Nara's answer is muffled by the gag.

China smirks. "Glass Cathedral drives people insane. Want ocean passage, you gotta push in the right direction. 'Less you wanna knife your way out instead." China slips something cold and sharp into Nara's trouser pocket.

"Shell ink makes you somebody – you got Hagan half convinced. Others'll catch on. All them scribbles in your little book? Them's *magic spells*. Shell magic. Round here, that's the good kind."

Empathy flickers across China's face before she lets Nara go and turns her back, leading Hagan and his men beneath the tent flap, leaving behind the row of traded relics etched with skulls. Doctor Dove stares at Nara and she stares back, feeling cold steel pressing through thin cotton weave.

Outside the tent, two seagulls screech, ripping into the remains of something meaty and abandoned, half trodden with sand, ignoring the blasting noise from Glass Cathedral, the stench and dregs of what humanity has to offer.

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