BETTER WELL RED

A very Christmassy 2021 Tocsin Edition

1891 Shearers Strike, State Library of Victoria

THE TOCSIN

FLAGSHIP PUBLICATION OF THE
JOHN CURTIN RESEARCH CENTRE
Labor ideas for a better Australia

Issue 15, December 2021

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Editorial

Executive Director, Dr Nick Dyrenfurth

As the John Curtin Research Centre marks the fifth anniversary of our existence, we are proud to have established a reputation as the premier Australian labourite thinktank. The last two years have been extremely trying for Australians and working people the world over, and as we enter a well-earned holiday season, we extend our festive wishes to our supporters and readers while presenting the fifteenth edition of *The Tocsin*, 'Better Well Red', a special edition featuring the best and brightest minds from our parliaments, academia and unions reflecting on what books have inspired them over the years and what they plan to read over the summer break. Each contributor reminds of us the centrality of reading, writing and thinking deeply to the art of politics. It underpinned the political career of John Curtin, born in 1885 at Creswick to working-class Irish-born parents who moved to Brunswick. With little formal schooling, he became a copy-boy and worked odd jobs. Ideas animated his life. At the local library he devoured political works, poetry and novels. Curtin was always in the thick of the battle of ideas. He gained a reputation as a standout Labor orator, a writer of immense talent and union official, from 1911 becoming the organising secretary of the timberworkers' union in Victoria and editor of its newspaper the Timber Worker. It was Curtin who led the national campaign against conscription organised by the labour movement during the First World War, before moving across the continent to edit the *Westralian Worker*, official newspaper of the WA Labor Party.

Thanks to JCRC supporters we have enjoyed another year full of impactful research work, events and publications from Peter Khalil MP's pathbreaking 'Taxing Times: It's time for Multinationals to Pay Up' on the subject of big-tech companies avoiding paying local taxes to 'Just what the doctor ordered: Dental care for COVID jabs', our plan to incentivise Australians to get vaccinated by offering working and middle-class Australians vitally needed dental care vouchers, and our online InConversation events with stellar local and international guests. Most recently we published an influential policy report, Private Gain, Public Pain: Taking Stock of Privatisation, Outsourcing and Contracting Public Sector Work, commissioned by the Victorian branch of the Australian Workers' Union and forthcoming is Clean, Mean and Green: New Directions for Australia's Steel Industry (co-authored with climate economist Dominic Meagher), commissioned by the AWU's national office.

In addition, we published, along with Redbridge Group's Kos Samaras, a book chapter for Global Progress on Australian attitudes to politics during COVID-19, as well as a discussion paper on pathways towards strengthening unionism written by Alistair Sage and Lawrence Ben. You can read these papers at our website – curtinc.org – and sign up as a supporter of our ongoing fight for a better, fairer Australia.

As always, we have been active in the media, including coverage of our reports, papers and stories on The Tocsin, opinion and feature pieces in newspapers and online, including celebrating the 80th anniversary of the advent of the Curtin Labor government in July 1941 with a feature piece in The Australian. You can also read my most recent opinion piece in the Australian Financial Review on the upcoming federal election here. And in mid-November I was pleased to appear with SDA National Secretary Gerard Dwyer to give evidence at the House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Tax and Revenue Housing Affordability and Supply Inquiry. You can read the SDA's formal inquiry submission to the inquiry prepared with the assistance of the John Curtin Research Centre on our website.

Our sold-out 2021 Gala Dinner with guest speaker, Labor's Shadow Treasurer, Dr Jim Chalmers, will be held at Sofitel on Collins on 1 February 2022 at 6:30pm. Our fifth annual John Curtin Lecture with former footballer Craig Foster will take place just prior to Australia Day on 25 January 2022. Details of these events can be found our social media channels very shortly.

We trust you enjoy Better Well Red – Merry Christmas and Happy Chanukah to all!

In unity,

Dr Nick Dyrenfurth
Editor of *The Tocsin*
Executive Director, John Curtin Research Centre

Tanya Plibersek

Tanya Plibersek shares her love of reading.

I absolutely love reading. I can't fall asleep at all without reading a book. Quite often I wake up in the middle of the night and keep reading if I'm in the middle of something good. I read both because I think every person should try and learn something new every day and because it just gives me so much pleasure. I love non-fiction because it teaches me about the world, about the lives of people in other countries, in other times, and I love fiction because it teaches another type of truth. It teaches you to understand the internal lives, the experience of other people. It teaches you empathy.

I still remember the books that most influenced me when I was young. I've probably still got most of them on my bookshelves. I remember when I was just in high school reading a book called *Girls Are Powerful*, which was a collection of writing by young women. They were writing about inequality, in particular, the everyday inequality in their lives – such as not being allowed to wear pants to school, having to wear a skirt when they wanted to be climbing trees and hanging upside down and enjoying life. This book really made me think about inequality my own life. I guess from primary school onwards, I was always questioning why girls and boys had to have separate playgrounds or the idea that girls were delicate little flowers that would get hurt if they were playing soccer with the boys in the boys' playground. It never really rang true with me and having this early sort of feminist writing by other young women was really influential. It made me realise that there were other people who thought like me. In fact, there was a whole movement of us – and we're called feminists.

Books I read in high school really opened my eyes to inequality in the world. I was incredibly moved by Alan Paton's books *Cry, the Beloved Country*, and *Ah, but Your Land Is Beautiful*, and reading about apartheid in South Africa made me read other books like Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography, *Call Me Woman*. Kuzwayo had a huge role in the South African anti-apartheid movement. She was an activist for almost sixty years, talking about women's rights, about apartheid. Reading about South Africa, and feminism in South Africa made me pick up other books as well – like Nawal el Saadawi's work in Egypt. I read a few of her books, and in fact, when I had the women's portfolio during the Rudd government years, we did some work on female genital mutilation, and supporting women who had come to Australia get access to proper health and maternity services. I wrote to el Saadawi and told her how much her writing had influenced me as a young woman – she very generously wrote back.

I read another book that really stayed with me, called Missing, but it was originally published as *The Execution of Charles Horman: An American Sacrifice*, which was by Thomas Hauser and subsequently made into a film called *Missing* starring Sissy Spacek and Jack Lemmon. It was about an American who goes missing during the 1973 Chilean coup and going to Chile and seeing the places – the Presidential Palace, where Allende lost his life. Seeing houses on the street that were used as torture locations, having that background, having read it as a book very early on made me really conscious of the suffering of the Chilean people following the coup.

So I guess you could say I read a lot of pretty serious books as a young person and they hugely influenced my worldview. I also adore reading fiction, and I could talk about that all day, but my absolutely favourite fiction writer is Jane Austen, and she also has taught me a lot about the world, about kindness and self-knowledge and being in control of your emotions and behaviour. I really like Anthony Trollope's writing as well - *The Palliser* series of novels in particular. I'm a big fan of Alexandre Dumas. I've read millions of words of the musketeer series, but also many of his other works. My taste in fiction is pretty eclectic as well.

What I'm reading now is George Orwell's *1984* – I should say I'm rereading it because my son is studying it for his HSC and I want to be able to talk to him about it. But it has reminded me of just what an incredible writer Orwell is.

In fact, I used to make everyone who came to work with me in the office read Orwell's 'Politics and the English Language' to remind them of how very important it is to be able to write clearly.

Orwell has five rules for clear writing, and the rules, I think, matter so much still. He says,

(1) never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.

(2) Never use a long word where a short one will do.

(3) If it's possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.

(4) Never use the passive where you can use the active.

(5) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent – and,

(6) break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous. So six rules, it is for really clear writing, which I try and use in my own writing.

But what I love about Orwell is not just the phenomenal fiction that people are so familiar with like 1984 and Animal Farm, but also the nonfiction he wrote, like *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which he wrote in the late 1930s about working conditions in Lancashire and Yorkshire. It reminds me of Studs Terkel's writing, particularly a book called *Working*, which is just basically verbatim interviews with people about their work, including this quote that has stayed with me forever from a waitress who says, "when I put a plate down, you don't hear a sound. When I pick up a glass. I want it to be just right. When someone says, how come you're just a waitress? I say, don't you think you deserve being served by me?" I think that beautiful pride that this woman takes in her work is such a reminder that all work has dignity and all workers should be treated with respect. I love this book, *Working*, because it's just people talking about their lives and the importance of work in their lives.

The other nonfiction things I've been reading lately – I've read the recently deceased historian Stuart Macintyre's wonderful *Australia's Boldest Experiment* about Australia's postwar reconstruction after the Second World War. I read George Megalogenis' Quarterly Essay about economic recovery after Covid. And I've read Ross Garnaut's, *Super Power and Reset*. What they have in common is how we rebuild after catastrophes like the depression and the Second World War, in the case of Macintyre, and after the enormous hit to our society and our economy that Covid compelled.

I think it's really important to think about the most productive way of using every dollar of taxpayers' money, to make sure Australians have good, secure work with growing incomes and a high quality of living, not just in the immediate future, but for decades to come. It's such an important responsibility of political leaders now because we, of course, have seen that Australians have sacrificed so much during the Covid lockdowns – they've been disciplined, they've been kind, they've looked after each other – and actually, the reason I edited my book *Upturn* was because I wanted people to be thinking about and even arguing about how we chart a path back to prosperity. Australia truly can lead the world in inclusive prosperity and we've got a chance now to really get that right.

Over the Summer break, I am really looking forward to bit more time to read more fiction. I'll be reading the Louise Penny series about Chief Inspector Armand Gamache. Penny writes about a really lovely Canadian police officer called Inspector Gamache who, like Donna Leon's character Inspector Brunetti, is just a really decent man, struggling with all sorts of ethical questions while he investigates murders and other crimes. I like both of these series, *The Louise Penny* series and the *Donna Leon* series, because of that kind of ethical dimension to their protagonist.

I also really like the Alan Furst books and the Philip Kerr books, most of which is set around the time of the Second World War and have terrific historical colour but also make you ask, "how would I have behaved during this really difficult period of human history? Would I have stuck to my principles and risked my life, maybe lost my life for those principles or would I have tried to just survive through the war and do what I had to do to get through?"

Tanya Plibersek is the Shadow Minister for Education, Shadow Minister for Women, and the Federal Member for Sydney. Between 2013 and 2019, Tanya was Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Deputy Leader of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party. Tanya served as a Cabinet minister in the Gillard and Rudd Governments. Tanya was Minister for Health, Minister for Medical Research, Minister for Housing, Minister for Human Services, Minister for Social Inclusion, and Minister for the Status of Women. Tanya lives in Sydney with her husband Michael and her three children, Anna, Joseph and Louis.

Sally McManus

Sally McManus talks about why birds will be the focus of her Christmas break.

Covid transformed many things, one of the things it transformed for me has been the adoption of audiobooks and exercise. I've taken up running and walking every inch of the 5km around where I live for every second public health orders allowed. This has meant 2021 required lots of podcasts and also books – so what have I been reading?

I love historical non-fiction and Conn Iggulden is one of my favourites. His book *Wolf of the Plains* about the Mongols and the Khan dynasty still make me believe I have visited the steppes of Mongolia (which unfortunately I haven't). Appropriately, I consumed all five books in his *Emperor* Series about Ancient Rome. Although the characters and the story are well known, Iggulden makes you feel you are living their lives, facing the choices and battles with the sensibility of a Roman. Another one of my favourites in this genre is Tom Holland's *Millennium*, which describes how while parts of the world experienced the so-called dark ages, other civilisations were at their zenith.

Trent Dalton's *Boy Swallows Universe* will leave you with the feeling of baked footpaths in suburban Brisbane, where your only friends are kind-hearted aging criminals and the new generation of crims are right next door or hiding in a closet in your bedroom with samurai swords. I loved David Malouf's beautiful novel *Johnno* which written in 1975 and nearly fifty years later, Dalton's multicultural Brisbane shows how much and how little parts of Australian culture has changed.

In *Rogue Forces* I listened to Mark Willacy tell the story of the breakdown of moral discipline within the SAS. Willacy won a Gold Walkley for exposing SAS war crimes and the book outlines how this breakdown occurred through interviews with those whose moral compasses were strong enough to withstand what became an Americanised macho cowboy culture within the SAS to break the silence. Willacy talks about "moral injuries" and the psychological impact on those who were complicit in covering up war crimes. The account of how the decline occurred was compelling and points to a range of factors, but the most important being a failure of leadership and the changed role of the SAS over the last 20 years with multiple wars and rotations on kill missions. It also demonstrates that some within the SAS also have enormous moral courage in speaking and exposing the crimes which have contributed to efforts dismantling the culture which enabled such a horrid breakdown.

More recently, at the ACTU we discussed certain political leaders and the increasing frequency of using the term "psychopath", along with people's willingness to want to diagnose and explain people's behaviour based on certain pathologies. Some mentioned *The Psychopath Test* by Jon Ronson so I downloaded and listened. This is a fascinating book which scrutinises the history of diagnosis and treatment of psychopaths and, in particular, the tests that were developed to characterise people. This history revealed that once psychopaths who were in the criminal justice system understood the test, they learnt how to manipulate it and fake empathy in order to show they had been "cured", when in fact they had not changed at all. One of the most memorable passages discusses an experiment performed in a jail for diagnosed psychopaths where they were all administered LSD at the same time in order to achieve mass breakthroughs as it was thought the empathetic experiences people appeared to have when tripping could change personalities. Unfortunately, longitudinal studies showed that those who went through this treatment actually had a higher rate of recidivism and the program was shut down.

Three months of lockdown also meant escapism was needed and so I looked to some of the classics, A *Wizard of Earth Sea* and *Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K Le Guin. The first was great escapism and this classic was obviously inspiration for so many heroic fantasies of the genre. A great lockdown listen. In comparison I found *Left Hand of Darkness* a struggle, mainly to do with the pace, but also the far-off planet was perhaps too bleak for lockdown listening – who wants to escape to somewhere bleak in Melbourne in August 2021?

Atomic Habits by James Clear outlines the science on how to build new habits that last. Perhaps it was concern that my newfound daily habit for running would disappear along with lockdown. My lockdown experience was to have the same, disciplined day which effectively used all the time I had and replaced

non-work time with exercise. Fortunately this book and its insights was helpful for me. *Atomic Habits* draws on behavioural science and how new habits can be developed most easily by "stacking" – building them into or on top of the habits you already have. Essentially, new habits need to be as easy as possible to adopt – not rocket science really.

My next book (when it comes out in audio) will be Van Badham's *Qanon and On*. Nothing could be more timely. One of the legacies of Covid is the rise of the far right in Australia which was in some ways facilitated by people stuck at home on their devices entering, and sometimes never leaving, the rabbit holes of conspiracy-based communities. This book adopts a "behind enemy lines" viewpoint, where far right actors actively drench these communities with their propaganda.

Qanon is certainly a cult, but the mass nature of it (this isn't barricaded or fenced in community in Waco or the jungle of Guyana), and its broad accessibility, coupled with their with their call of "do your own research", has enabled Australian extremists to readily point the way to a sheep pen that's very hard to escape.

Finally, over Christmas and the New Year I am intending to refer to one book and one book only - the CSIRO *The Australian Bird Guide*. Post-lockdown I intend to spend as much time as possible in National Parks amongst big open spaces with the sounds and smells of the bush and birds. After all, life has gone on as normal for birds - the coronavirus and our struggles mean nothing to them. I think I like the thought of that.

Sally McManus is Secretary of the Australian Council of Trades Unions.

Bill Shorten

Bill Shorten discusses his appreciation of George Orwell.

For as long as I can remember I've been a bookworm. Growing up, if something was going wrong with your day as a kid you could escape into books. Reading was a door into other worlds, a place of dreams and hopes, that got me interested in travel, geography, and history.

My political worldview was shaped by books largely written about political figures from Australia, England and the US. From Australia, I loved reading *A Certain Grandeur: Gough Whitlam's Life in Politics* by Graham Freudenberg. Not everyone in public life gets a Boswell as Samuel Johnson did, but Gough certainly had one, and a brilliant one, in Graham Freudenberg. Whitlam had to fight the right and then the left and then he had to awaken the nation from the Menzian torpor.

In my adult reading life, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* by Edmund Morris has been another key text I draw inspiration from. Teddy believed individuals could bring about great change through the relentless application of energy, thought and action. On one's darkest days in politics, Teddy's 'man in the arena' speech provides oneself with the petrol for the soul you need to get to the next filling station.

Another political hero is Doctor King and so *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Edited by Clayborne Carson deserves a special mention. His 'I have a dream' speech gives me goosebumps. I love his expression "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." He summed up hope, he eschewed violence, and he believed white and black could unite.

But from my teenage years on the author that most shaped my political worldview is George Orwell. Orwell has recently been co-opted by the nuttier, conspiracy-obsessed end of the right who latch onto the dystopia of *1984* as a byword for our times. This is ironic because Orwell was always on the lookout for cranks and extremists. Orwell remains an inspired left-of-centre populist, defender of the worker and a kind of seer. He was also an extraordinary writer. The greatest proof of this is the way the phrases he invented – such as "thought police" "Big Brother" "groupthink" and even the term Orwellian – have entered the lexicon.

Orwell was correct about the nature of fascist totalitarianism in *1984* just as he was correct about the Russian revolution-turned-sour in *Animal Farm*. *Homage to Catalonia* completes Orwell's best three. He goes to Spain as an idealistic anti-fascist and gradually realises the Soviet commissars were just as bad. Orwell's message was to be alert for extremes of all varieties and the pitfalls of dogma. He was a champion and warrior of the centre-left completely sceptical of establishment and mindless authority.

Of the books that I have read more recently there are two that stand out: *On China* by Henry Kissinger and *Between Debt and the Devil: Money, Credit, and Fixing Global Finance* by Lord Adair Turner. You don't have to draw the same conclusions as regards contemporary foreign policy to extract knowledge out of the Kissinger book. With one foot on the American continent and another in Asia, he effortlessly pulls together two millennia of the middle kingdom to provide context for the China of today. It is essentially an autodidact's delight on China. Turner's book is effectively penned by a Tory, who, later in life, morphs into a social democrat. He does some unconventional thinking and doesn't shy away from the big issue of how to tackle debt.

Over Christmas and summer, I'm planning on reading *The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz* by Erik Larson, *The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy* by Mariana Mazzucato and *Eleven Bats: A story of combat, cricket and the SAS* by Harry Moffitt. I'm looking forward to the Mazzucato book because there are interesting things happening in the global economy and I feel we're at a kind of crossroads. Harry Moffitt is a retired SAS veteran who lives in my electorate and is an excellent Australian who I've had the pleasure of meeting. I'm really looking forward to ripping into his rollicking tale.

I'm not a fan of every decision Churchill made (nor were my Geordie dockworker ancestors) but I'm a big admirer of him as a wartime leader. He was the right man in the right place when not just England, but the world needed him. He had spent 65 years training for that moment.

Bill Shorten is the Shadow Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the Shadow Minister for Government Services, and the Federal Member for Maribyrnong. He was leader of the Australian Labor Party from 2013 to 2019.

Australian Workers
Union Victoria

Chris Bowen

Chris Bowen on reading, politics and the Labor Party.

In 1984, I won a Citizenship Prize in Year 6 at Smithfield Public School. I was given a choice of a $10 book voucher or $10 sports store voucher. This was serious money, but the choice was never in doubt.

My Dad drove me to Angus and Robertson in Fairfield (although tragically, Fairfield has been without a commercial bookstore for many years now). I chose the newly released Paul Kelly book *The Hawke Ascendancy* as my first ever book purchase. In the prologue, Kelly revealed for the first time the existence of a letter from John Button to his friend Bill Hayden, urging him to hand over the leadership of the federal parliamentary Labor Party to Bob Hawke. "You said to me that you could not stand down for a 'bastard' like Bob Hawke", Button wrote. "In my experience in the Labor Party the fact that someone one's a bastard (of one kind or another) has never been a disqualification for leadership of the Party."

I was hooked for life. Hooked on reading. Hooked on politics. Hooked on the Labor Party. Hooked on reading about politics and the ALP.

The best books on Australian politics? Many and varied. The publication Sir Paul Hasluck's journal as *The Chance of Politics* after his death has to be regarded as one of the best. Graham Freudenberg's biography of Gough Whitlam called *A Certain Grandeur* and his history of the NSW Branch of the Labor Party, *Cause for Power*, are both essential additions to any collection. JA La Nauze's *Alfred Deakin* is probably the best biography written of a prime minister, although Judith Brett's *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin* is a very worthy modern version on the same subject.

One thing we don't too well in Australia is political diaries. The Brits, on the other hand, do them superbly. I love political diaries. They aren't everyone's cup of tea. Some people find the daily recordings of others monotonous, but I devour them. They are a contemporary recording of thoughts in the moment. Not every observation stands up to hindsight. But that's why they are so good. Revisionism is impossible. You go on a journey with the diarist in real time. They are a reminder for us political practitioners that others have been through the same stresses, the same daily challenges as we go through. And, importantly, they persevered. The best political diary is timeless. A good political diary is an essential accompaniment to serious histories of an era. There are many great books on the Blair/Brown era for example. But two sets of diaries detail the daily trials and triumphs brilliantly: Chris Mullins' three volumes of diaries and Alistair Campbell's daily records which are now up to their eighth volume (with the most recent one published this year). While Campbell is now well into the post-New Labour era, his daily accounts are no less gripping.

Lovers of political diaries have had a particular treat this year: the release of the full diaries of the arch-appeasing Tory, Sir Chips Channon. His edited diaries were a scandal when they were released 50 years ago. His full, three volume (two volumes out so far) diaries now show us the best (worst) bits were hidden from us. His arrogance, poor judgement, bitchy gossip about absolutely anyone who was anyone in British society make for the probably the most outrageous, and most highly entertaining, political diary ever written. I loved volume one and volume two is high on my January list.

Closer to home, the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party amidst the ongoing concern and speculation about the geo-political shoals of our region has provided plenty of reading material on China, although its quality varies significantly. Two highly thoughtful, realistic and nuanced recent books worth considering books are Australian David Brophy's *China Panic* and American Ryan Hass' *Stronger*. Both provide a balanced, clear-eyed view of the challenges China provides for the West and a sensible analysis of the way countries like ours can and should respond. For a quick refresher course on how we got here it's hard to go past Linda Javin's *Shortest History of China*. But I have to say the best book I have ever read on the geo-politics of Asia, with an emphasis on China and Japan is our Richard McGregor's *Asia's Reckoning* which was published in 2017.

Living through the Trump presidency was enough of a nightmare without reading any of the hundreds of books written about it. But two books on the demise of Trump (at least for now) are well worth your time. *Battle for the Soul* by Edward-Isaac Dovere and *Lucky* by Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes are both excellent accounts of the 2020 Democratic primaries and presidential race with plenty of inside information and revelations, like how seriously Hilary Clinton was actually weighing another run and how

Democratic insiders regarded Andrew Cuomo as the most likely "go to" stand-in candidate if Joe Biden should have to suddenly withdraw before nominating a vice presidential candidate for any reason.

The summer break is, of course, a good time for fiction, so here are some recommendations:

The Irish novelist John Boyne is, I think, one of the finest writers alive today. His books have been incredibly important to me. *The Absolutist* is a fairly thin novel, but one which will stay with you forever. It is moving and thought provoking and . It is one of the best novels I have read. Similarly, his *History of Loneliness* is a stellar book, dealing with confronting and important issues. For something a bit lighter, his most recent novel *The Echo Chamber* is a hilarious but still thought-provoking book on some of the more ridiculous elements of our social media world.

Sebastian Faulks is another modern novelist not to be missed. His latest work *Snow Country* is a lovely sequel to his brilliant *Human Traces* (although both novels could very successfully be read as stand-alone works). His *Birdsong* is now widely regarded as a classic and *Charlotte Gray* is a beautiful work, well worth your time.

I find fiction is the best way into the complex history of the Ancient World. Almost everything I know about Ancient Rome I know from good quality historical fiction. Reading Colleen McCullough's seven volume *Masters of Rome* series is a serious undertaking (I did it over three years) but well worth it. The level of detail, meticulous research and superb writing makes up for the daunting prospect of tackling over 8000 pages. But if you want a less confronting but no less enjoyable way into ancient historical fiction, it's hard to go past Robert Harris' trilogy on Cicero (*Imperium, Lustrum* and *Dictator*) and his brilliant, stand-alone novel *Pompeii*. While we're on Harris, his other historical fiction masterpiece is *An Officer and a Spy*. You won't read a better book on the Dreyfus affair.

In terms of Australian historical fiction, I've made a bit of project in 2021 of catching up with Kate Grenville's works which I had previously missed. Frankly, I'm glad I did so. *Secret River* is her most famous and probably her best novel, but you shouldn't stop there. *The Lieutenant,* Sarah Thornhill and Lilian's Story (the moving fictionalisation of the life of famous Sydney eccentric Bee Miles) are all wonderful contributions to Australian historical fiction. Finally, I'm looking forward to consuming her latest work *A Room Made of Leaves* over summer.

Chris Bowen entered Parliament in 2004 as the Member for McMahon and has held a wide range of portfolios, including being Treasurer, Shadow Treasurer, Minister for Immigration and Minister for Tertiary Education. He served as Interim Leader of the Labor Party in 2013 and is currently Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Energy. He has degrees in economics, international relations and the Indonesian language. He is the author of three previous books: Hearts and Minds (2013), The Money Men (2015) and On Charlatans (2021). He lives in Smithfield in Western Sydney with his family.

JOHN CURTIN RESEARCH CENTRE

2022 John Curtin Lecture

with special guest speaker

Craig Foster AM

Date: Tuesday 25 January, 5:30pm for a 6pm start
Location: Maurice Blackburn Lawyers Level 21, 380 La Trobe Street, Melbourne

RSVP essential at info@curtinrc.org

Maurice Blackburn Lawyers Since 1919 WE FIGHT FOR FAIR

Kimberley Kitching

Kimberley Kitching highlights her top thought-provoking book on China and Asia.

Many books have influenced me, but I hold particular love for the great epic poems, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* (and indeed Joyce's *Ulysses*), Virgil's *Aneid*, Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (the Latin is so beautiful that I understood contentment as I read it), and Cicero's *De Re Publica*, as well as more modern poets, T.S. Eliot and Robert Frost. Shakespeare's *Henry V* is thrilling and makes you realise what it is to be a King – the power and the terror of it; as his father said "heavy is the head that wears the crown".

Of course, I also enjoy *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* – both of whom, shall we say, have flaws as would-be leaders. Finally, I would include the King James Version of the Bible because the language is so rich.

One of the most formative novels of my youth was the tale of morality, inequality and justice as told in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*. As Scout and Jem are introduced to the adult notions of prejudice, bigotry and ignorance, so too were generations of young readers. For me, the lasting influence of the book's hero Atticus Finch lies in his fairness and morality. Despite his understanding of the evils of the world, his faith in humanity remains resolute.

I had been to elementary school in Chapel Hill, North Carolina when I was 7 turning 8. When I first read *To Kill A Mockingbird* I was taken back to that place, enjoying the heat on my arms. Like Jem and Scout, I knew the sound of the lightning bugs, or fire flies (said with that alluring southern accent), hovering, and how magical they were on the air. I knew what it was to explore the streams and creeks. I remember hearing Dixie, and hymns when I went to church with the friends I made, and how intrigued by the differences that arose at a Catholic mass they were.

I identified with Jem and Scout – and I knew Atticus is one of those inspirational literary figures who motivated children to become adults that stand up for what is just and fair. I remember Atticus telling Scout: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it". As someone who tries to bring empathy to my work, this passage resonates.

It reminds me that future generations will not only need to be equipped with a social conscience, but also be ready to fight for what is right, over what is wrong.

To Kill A Mockingbird is as relevant today as it was in 1960. While segregation has long ended, there are still deep divisions in the United States that hark back to this legacy. But what I am reminded of when revisiting my childhood through this book, is that today, across large swathes of the world, authoritarian regimes continue to subjugate their own populations in order to protect their privilege and power. It is only through the collective action which my party, the Australian Labor Party, was founded upon, that we can fight back against injustice, cruelty and obscenity.

A recent book which has influenced me is Jack Fairweather's *The Volunteer: The True Story of the Resistance Hero who Infiltrated Auschwitz*. *The Volunteer* is the biography of Witold Pilecki, a member of the Polish resistance movement during World War Two. He has such courage. In 1940, Pilecki allowed himself to be captured and taken to the Auschwitz death camps to gather intelligence on the Nazi atrocities taking place and organise rebellion. There was no way Pilecki could prepare for what life was like inside the camps. After three years of survival, he was able to escape, which he did in order to try to convince the Polish Home Army that an uprising at Auschwitz would work. His reports were the principal source of intelligence on Auschwitz-Birkenau for the Western Allies, detailing the realities of the camps so that those outside could understand the true extent of what was happening, and shape subsequent Allied responses.

Unfortunately, many thought the reports regarding the Holocaust were exaggerated. Like *Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank or *Eichmann in Jerusalem* by Hannah Arendt, I see Pilecki's sacrifice, and Fairweather's telling of it, as adding to a long list of important works that help us to understand the true horrors of the Holocaust and the industrial-scale murder of the European Jewry.

I have been to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. It is a "memorial and a name". It is impossible to forget. We can never forget. It is very hard to describe the impact of Yad Vashem – the piles of shoes and the toys and the

chess sets, the haunting underground memorial to the 1.5 million children murdered, the Hall of Names and the Pages of Testimony where the six million Jews who were murdered in the Shoah are commemorated.

One of the many things I think about when I think about this book, and this book is but one story of the Holocaust, is that in a time when pure evil held so much sway, pure good was also there trying to counter it. In our time again when there is rising anti-Semitism, this book asks you what would you do?

One book I am planning to read over Xmas/Summer is Rory Medcalf's *Contest for the Indo-Pacific: Why China Won't Map the Future*. This book was released in 2020, so I am a little bit behind, but it has proven to be highly influential in Australian policy-making circles. I've got to know Rory through my work on the Senate's Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee. He is a deep and erudite thinker, and in recent times his analysis has been proven right, and right again. This includes his arguments for the centrality of the Indo-Pacific to Australia's regional security, as well as the importance of maintaining and promoting our Alliance with the United States – especially given the turbulent past few years.

Successive Labor Governments have promoted three pillars of our nation's foreign policy. That being:

(1) Support for the Western Alliance, and in particular, our alliance with the United States;

(2) Engagement with the countries of our region, most obviously China and Indonesia; and

(3) Support for the United Nations multilateral system.

On the first pillar, we can and should, rely on our strong alliance, and friendship, with the United States. As former Labor Prime Minister John Curtin – the great man that this publication takes its name from – wrote in 1941:

"Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom."

I have been heartened that in recent times our alliance has been further buttressed and amplified through groupings such as the Quad, and AUKUS.

On the third pillar, Labor has a long history of engagement through the multilateral system, especially in our region. Labor's External Affairs Minister, Dr H V "Bert" Evatt, served as President of the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 and 1949. Australia was also a founding member, and key to the establishment of the Asia Pacific Economic Forum (APEC), including its heads of government meeting. Labor's greatest Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans, helped negotiate the UN's Peace and Resettlement Plan for Cambodia.

This brought an end to decades of civil war and conflict in that country. More recently, Australia worked with the international community in response to the Syrian humanitarian disaster, settling thousands who fled, and committed more than $400 million in aid. I expect that we will be doing something in response to the ongoing situation in Afghanistan.

The second pillar, though, is where there has been a seismic shift, and the main reason I am so eager to get stuck into Rory's book as soon as Parliament rises for the year. In the past few years, the nature of our regional engagement has been upended by an aggressive turn in China's rise. From its invalid claims on parts of the South China Sea, to its abrogation of its obligations under the "One Country, Two Systems" framework in Hong Kong, as well as its ongoing repression, cultural erasure, and what many jurisdictions have determined constitutes "genocide", of the Uyghur and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang, there has been a pattern of domestic and international behaviour which undermines global peace and security.

To call this out is not to deny China its place as a great power in the global system, but to remind those responsible for this behavioural pivot that it is bound to international rules and norms.

This is the responsible thing to do.

Kimberley Kitching is a Labor Senator for Victoria. She serves as the Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate and Shadow Assistant Minister for Government Accountability. She is also the Chair of the Senate on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee.

In case you

While COVID-19 turned our nation on its head, and fi
2 years, the John Curtin Research Centre has pivote

THE AGE

BITE-SIZED CHALLENGE

EXPLAIN THAT

KHAWAJA v HEAD

VACCINE ROLLOUT AUSTRALIA 83.89% VICTORIA 80.17%

Protester charged amid talk of killing Premier

Somyurek sows doubt as crucial vote looms

There is no excuse for threats of violence

Focus on far right misses the point

Government slammed on its privatisation record

Greens, Labor donor in push to oust Liberal MP

Tyrrell search: Ex-foster parents charged with assault of another child

Influencing our nation's political debate

ALP's youth branch 'too like the Greens'

EXCLUSIVE

GREG BROWN

A Labor-aligned think tank has lashed out at the party's youth wing for failing to implement reforms that would broaden its membership from inner-city university students that are "socially liberal and likely non-religious or atheist".

John Curtin Research Centre executive director Nick Dyrenfurth has accused Young Labor—for members aged 15 to 26 — of having a narrow membership that "contributes to the cultural problems and electoral weakness of federal Labor".

Writing in the think tank's next Tocsin publication, Dr Dyrenfurth is critical of Labor for failing to reform its youth wing and mandate a working-class quota.

"There has been no attempt to reform Young Labor which draws upwards of 95 per cent of its members from our university campuses, mainly G8 unis; in other words, not from the 72 per cent of non-tertiary degree-holding Australians," Dr Dyrenfurth wrote.

"Our proposal for reforming

religious or atheist, and destined for white-collar, higher-income secure work, living in the inner cities. Labor does not properly reflect the full diversity of working people in its ranks."

Dr Dyrenfurth wrote that Labor "must change ourselves before we can change Australia", and warned Anthony A against relying on a sma strategy. He said the relu reform the youth wing "labourback into Labor trasted with the ALP's executive intervening torian branch over t Somyurek scandal.

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Dr Dyrenfurt

Election about who you trust not to change things

Politics

Labor wants the contest to be about shaping the future. Yet the PM's focus on the economy and jobs is closer to public sentiment.

Nick Dyrenfurth

The battle lines for the federal election almost certainly to be held in May next year are clear. Prime Minister Scott Morrison seeks to portray the contest as one over trust, John Howard-like, despite accusations that he plays fast and loose with the truth. Labor's Anthony Albanese has taken to calling Morrison a "liar", whether it be his dealings with foreign leaders or previous claims on electric vehicles.

In Howard's case the tactic didn't work when he was likewise accused during his long prime ministership: think of his "never, ever" GST backflip or committing troops to the 2003 Iraq War.

For Morrison, it is a matter of "choice", a rather abstract ideological invocation of "can-do capitalism" and who can be trusted to manage the post-pandemic economy. With interest rates tipped to rise next year, and despite projections of resurgent growth and low unemployment rates, it is a familiar refrain. But the strategy is not without risk.

Morrison is also betting that after two years of unprecedented government intervention

(aided by Australia's now world-leading vaccination rates) should put Labor on alert. The pandemic has merely built on a widely held view that people are sick of change.

This is confirmed by exclusive Global Progress/YouGov polling conducted in 20 democracies across four continents in October, revealed in this column. In only three countries out of 20 do the majority think change is a "good thing" for people (not Australians). Just five out of 20 countries, this time including Australia, show a majority believing their country is heading in the right direction.

The ALP must fight on the economy and people's jobs, job security and wages.

Interestingly, or perhaps not given surging house prices in Australia, housing was a key issue. Fifty-four per cent of people wanted more affordable homes built and 49 per cent urged "combating speculation" by investors. A key takeout was a "home is a home, not an asset". For Australians, 58 per cent believe the state of the housing market will become either "much worse" or a "little worse". Only 17 per cent said it would become "much" or a "little better".

The Global Progress survey concluded its findings by focusing on language. "Pluralities of people place themselves in the centre rather than on the traditional left and right," it noted. "Building a winning coalition then means appealing beyond left and right."

This ought to prompt Morrison never to use the phrase "can-do capitalism" again, but also contains a warning for the ALP. It must fight on the economy and people's jobs, job security and

State Labor slammed over its record on privatisation

From Page 1

prepares to bring in private operators to maintain vast stretches of country roads in the state's north, east and west.

Report author Nick Dyrenfurth, the centre's executive director, told *The Age* yesterday that privatisation had benefits in some circumstances but there were some public services that should never to be sold off, leased or contracted out, and that a new approach was needed to ensure privatisation delivered the benefits it promised.

"We ... require a far more stringent framework around privatisation which ensures that all citizens – children, students, families, consumers, workers and the community – are able to access ... higher-quality essential services and that workers are paid adequately and treated fairly," he wrote. "At the very least ... there should be a process of ensuring that privatisation, or contracting of government services, delivers clearly articulated outcomes for workers, service users, taxpayers and ultimately governments."

The state government says it has become increasingly sophisticated in designing public-private partnerships and has developed business models designed to avoid many of the pitfalls identified in the Curtin critique.

Dr Dyrenfurth says there is nothing in the VicRoads deal to protect motorists from sharply increased registration fees – a claim the government disputes – after a deal is done to lease licensing and registration to the private sector for 30 years in return for the development of a new IT system.

He also notes that the West Gate Tunnel, which began as an unsolicited offer to the government from toll road giant Transurban, could be as much as $5 billion over budget.

And Dr Dyrenfurth questions why Australia's most costly road project, the $15.8 billion North East Link, is proceeding on the same "public-private partnership" model as the $1.8 billion Western Roads Upgrade that collapsed when an overseas contractor walked away from the job, leaving 200 subcontractors millions of dollars out of pocket or in liquidation. The state government spokesman told *The Age* the government had changed the contracts on the North East Link to reduce risk to the taxpayer and it would retain the ability to set registration and licensing fees after the private sector began delivering the services.

"Whether it's through building the infrastructure we need or maintaining the roads we rely on every day, we're delivering high-quality jobs, supporting local businesses and ensuring value for money now and into the future," he said.

The Curtin Centre proposes a six-point plan – including a moratorium on any more sell-offs until a parliamentary committee can be formed and reports on the issue – to set up a comprehensive framework to ensure future public-private deals provide value for money for taxpayers and good outcomes for consumers.

The Australian Workers Union, which commissioned the Curtin Centre report, is warning of a "lose-lose" outcome for workers, road users and taxpayers under a government plan, first revealed in October, of outsourcing road maintenance in the Barwon South West, Gippsland region and Hume regions.

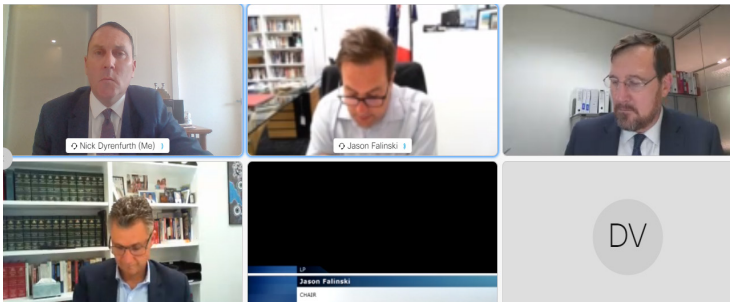
AWU state secretary Ben Davis – whose union represents many of the workers employed directly by the state on road maintenance in the regions earmarked for private providers – said the Department of Transport had never considered doing the work itself.

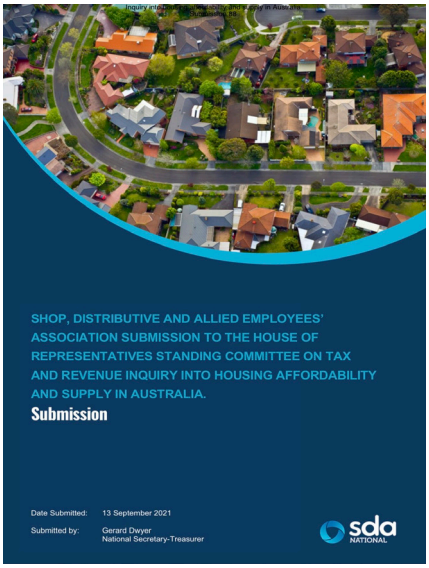
"Outsourcing just doesn't reflexively deliver the benefits it's assumed to deliver, and it's just lazy thinking to assume it does," he said.

missed it ...

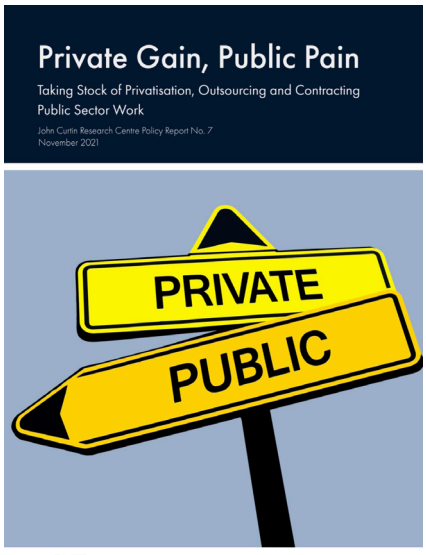
rmly dominated the national conversation over the past
d its efforts and continues to fight the battle of ideas.

Working with the SDA on their parliamentary submission and appearing at the Parliamentary Housing Inquiry ▸





Debating the role of States and Territories in the industrial relations policy space ▸



AWU Vic Branch

JOHN CURTIN RESEARCH CENTRE

◂ **Launch of *Private Gain, Public Pain***

Deborah O'Neil

Deborah O'Neil recalls the role religion and war played in instigating a love of reading.

The recent SBS documentary 'Lost for Words' was an amazing revelation of the lives of eight Australians who were a small sample of the estimated 43% of Australian adults who don't have the necessary literacy skills they need to manage the reading challenges of everyday life.

This should occupy our minds as thinkers and policy makers. It also reinforced for me the absolute joy and influence of being a reader as I witnessed the transformative power of that 'learning to read moment' achieved by those adults. It made me think about exactly how transformational my own reading has been of late. And frankly, I was a little disappointed.

It has been way too long since I wept into the pages of a novel. Tearlessly commencing writing this article, I was reminded of the life lesson I took from Daniel Defoe's Moll Flanders, to remain of 'soft heart' despite the hardships of life. Am I becoming too hard of heart? And that's what reading and what thinking about reading does. It lingers in you; it disturbs your quiet and your certainty; it undoes your busy-ness, and it returns to you in voices that echo the ghosts of glorious reading of days past.

As a child there weren't that many books in my home, but I was reading independently and loving it by age 5. (Thanks Mum and Miss Ricketts, my Kindy teacher at St Andrew's, Maryong and Miss Walker, Year 1, St Anthony's Girraween). I read what I could, and I loved books as presents much more than dolls and toys. When I was about 9 years old, former neighbours, Iris and Neville Wootton saw my hunger for reading and gave our family a set of aged encyclopaedias.

I liked dipping into all the volumes, but my favourite was Volume 5. It was full of myths, fables, and stories from across the world and from all cultures. Or so it seemed to me, under the covers reading and re-reading by torchlight into the wee hours. That single volume was brimming with the exotic, and I loved it. Different lives, different people, different places, different times, different ideas, and different dreams, they were all there. I think that particular volume, combined with the visual text of young boys and girls from across the world in national dress that spread across the opening pages of our '*My Way to God*' religion books in primary school, served to shape my excitement about the world beyond the world I could see and know myself. It developed a disposition of interest in me that over time has come known as an interest in 'otherness'.

The next significant text I acquired at school at about the same time. I was in Year 4. The weekly newsletter alerted Mum to the arrival of a book seller visit. She sent me off with a note in my hand to buy any book or books of my choosing within the budget. I was determined to get value for my money and frankly, was a little disappointed that it was an exclusively religious themed bookstore. The book I chose was *Our Lady's Fool: Life of Father Maximilian Kolbe*. The second edition 1965 authored by 'A Sister of Mercy'. I still have it. It's a book about a Polish priest at the time of World War Two. Kolbe is now a saint of the Catholic Church having given his life for another in Auschwitz.

So much has changed since it was written, and I enjoyed re-reading it prior to writing this article. I felt so sad that the Sister of Mercy who wrote it wasn't acknowledged in the standard way. The silencing of women is unfortunately everywhere in our society and our history. I knew a little about Poland from neighbours in our street, so I was ok with the European geography and Kolbe's visit to Japan but then the plot twisted when the Gestapo arrived at his religious community in Niepokalanow.

I couldn't understand it, but I kept reading the shocking narrative. I ended up out in the kitchen asking my Mum about the Gestapo and Auschwitz. She left school in the equivalent of Year 9. She knew a little but not a lot about World War Two and we ended up talking about rationing after the war in England. I imagine it came as a bit of a shock to her that I was asking questions about Nazi's after picking up a 'holy' book. But I wanted more, and I did ask lots and lots of questions of anyone I could engage with about World War Two. I found it hard to believe that there could be so much hate and violence in the world. It was unfathomable to me that people could hate others who had a different faith so much that they would just kill them – millions of them.

Reading the Life of Father Maximilian Kolbe, I found out that real people in a time not so long ago, when my Mum was a child, a person who was not an ancient historical figure gave their life as a sacrifice for another. That book shaped me in a truly profound way.

It was followed by another revelation of World War Two, again set in Poland. Ian Serrallier's *The Silver Sword*. One of the early works of the genre now known as 'Adolescent Fiction'. It gives incredible agency to the young Ruth, Edek and Bronia Balicki whose parents Joseph, a teacher, and his wife Margrit are taken away separately by the Germans. The trio join up with another orphan, Jan, and they survive many challenges in Poland and Germany in the later years of the war. Finally, they make their way to Switzerland to a predetermined meeting spot in the hope that their parents survived the war. I have also kept my copy of this book.

When it came time at the end of the Year 7 to return it – I lied and said I'd lost it. And that's a thing with me and books – not that I lie to keep them, but I do like to buy to keep, so I can return to them, and they can return to me with new lessons to reveal. I've lost so many of them along the way, through the house moves and natural attrition.

But there are books I won't ever let out of my careful view; old friends to whom I hold fast as though they are a personal lodestone that help me navigate my world with confidence that there is always a pathway to be discerning.

Later, in high school, texts that influenced me were nearly every novel or play or poet that was put in front of me. Happily, for me the rent and return model of books was changed to a purchase-if-you-can-model. My parents very kindly purchased my further copies. I particularly remember Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country,* so political and so full of 'othernesses'; Slessor's evocative *Five Bells*, and *William Street Sydney* in colour, rain and darkness, John Donne, the craft and the challenge of words and worlds from so long ago, A *Man for all Seasons* – Robert Bolt's play about Sir Thomas More, the high-stakes politics of the time of Henry VIII and its collision with conscience; Shakespeare, the sonnets and the plays – my very first was *Julius Caesar*. I read the introduction and discovered the world of literary criticism.

Then there was *Macbeth, Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice*. I devoured Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* on the madness of war; Jane Austen's *Emma* – the niceties, the romance, the positioning of women, the contract of marriage, the importance of a good letter and a good postman and a world of delicate niceties to hide the poverty and social hierarchies; of course I loved the wildness of the moors and the melodrama of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights,* p.122 in my yellowed copy is marked up and underlined with a quote for an essay or exam:

"Nelly, I am Heathcliff – he's always, always in my mind – not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself – but as my own being – so, don't talk of our separation again – it is impracticable."

And of course, DH Lawrence's masterpiece *Sons and Lovers* with its brutality and coldness, the collision of nature and the built environment and the manacles of class. And so many more. It is a record of a joyful fictional feast but for the record, I also loved a couple of textbooks too including *The Web of Life (Biology) and Two Centuries (Modern History)*. What wonderful worlds they opened to me and so many other lucky learners! And then there was all the wonderful university reading, research, and thinking that built on this solid high school reader platform.

As a parent and as a teacher, I was able to delve into the wonderful world of picture books. But in terms of books that changed or influenced me I most like Jenny Wagner's, *The Bunyip of Berkeley Creek* that deals with the rich concept of identity in an Australian setting. It asks the essential question - "Who am I?" The Bunyip emerges from the dark waters and seeks an understanding of himself. Scientists assert he doesn't exist and finally he finds a reflection of himself in an 'other'. And of course, Mem Fox's lovely books, especially *Wilfrid Gordon MacDonald Partridge*, about love and age and dementia; Whoever you Are? about connectedness and common humanity in our multi-cultural, multi-faith world; both books made me cry. Totally different but powerful in impact was the novella Christos Tsolkos gritty and powerful Loaded and his later work *The Slap* both so raw and revealing of the role and influence of family, the intensity of locating your identity and the place and challenge friendship in urban modern Australia.

Tim Winton's *That Eye the Sky, Dirt Music, Cloudstreet* are so rich in the sounds and images of Australia I loved everything about these wonderful books and couldn't believe I actually got to meet Tim in Parliament when he was lobbying for protection of the marine environment in WA. Such an unassuming man with a truly profound gift for storytelling. And from the subcontinent, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* exploring the accidents of birth and the profound impact it has on every moment that follows is a book I can still feel, smell and hear.

I've been reading a lot for work really, not much for personal joy or self-determined growth – and some more personal reading time is really for me a Christmas gift to myself. Stop, catch up with family, and spend some days totally immersed in books. Most recently I finished a re-read of Craig Nakken's *The Addictive Personality*. I actually met Craig in Sweden where I spent about five days learning from him alongside treatment professionals, many of whom were recovering addicts. It was an immersion experience in learning about drug and alcohol policy as well as understanding of addiction and treatments modalities. A close family friend is going through the great challenge of how to respond to addiction in his family. I recommended this book to help him understand what might be going on with the person he was trying to care for and help into recovery as well as minimising the harm. The former addicts who were with me for those days of training convinced me this is a valuable book to read to help understand the urge to addiction – in their words "When I read this book I thought, how did Craig get inside my head." I will continue to recommend this book to people who share their concerns about addiction with me.

Robert B. Reich's *The Common Good* is a very easy read. The Common Good is a principle that I encountered early in my Catholic schooling and later in my theology studies in preparation to teach in the Catholic School System in Australia. This book influenced me by rekindling that old knowledge and embedding it in a political frame in our current time.

Particularly useful was Reich's discussion on the way which, in times of strident difference, the concept of communitarianism is a refuge.

I've also been dipping into and out of *Fratelli Tutti 2020* and *Rerum Novarum 1891*. On fraternity and social friendship in 2020 meets with the discussion on the rights and duties of capital and labour in 1891. Two such different documents but both offering challenges and insights into the intersection of the Catholic tradition with the pressing realities of people's lives and our social challenges. The things that divide us and the things that might bind us in our common humanity in two entirely different eras.

For fun I'm reading Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*. I'm enjoying the powerful writing. The opening is one of the most disturbing and brutal commencemaents to a novel that I've ever read. It reveals in a rich and nuanced way the intense personal and political lives of key figures of the times of Henry VIII, and it revolves around Cromwell whose life is a world of contrasts – the family world of Wolf Hall and the other historical world outside those walls. They protagonists are profoundly complex and flawed people in remarkable times. It won the Booker Prize of 2009. Absolutely worth a read.

Finally, what books are you planning on reading over summer? In no partiualr order: The Booker Prize 2021 winner, Damon Galgut's *The Promise*, Christos Tsolkos *7 ½*, Sean Kelly's *The Game*, Rgahuram Rajan's *The Third Pillar* and Sheila O'Flanagan's *The Women Who Ran Away*.

Good reading asks something of you. It shows you other worlds and ways of being which settle on your soul. Words and images beautifully conjured, crashing and colliding into your current moment and place, challenging and demanding that you reshape your worldview. Good reading for me prises your eyes open a little wider every time you turn a page. And that is my Christmas wish for you.

Senator Deborah O'Neill is a Labor Senator for NSW, a position she has held since 2013. Before then she held the nation's bellwether seat of Robertson on the Central Coast in the Gillard and Second Rudd Governments. She is the current Chair of the Senate Privileges Committee, Junior Vice-President of NSW Labor and Deputy Co-Chair of the ALP's National Policy Forum.. Prior to entering Federal Parliament, Senator O'Neill was a high school teacher on the Central Coast for the best part of two decades. She lectured in the School of Education at the University of Newcastle, where she co-ordinated courses in teacher education.

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Ticket prices starting from $150 via Trybooking

MORAY&AGNEW
LAWYERS

Shireen Morris

Shirreen Morris reflects on writings discussing emerging economic ideas.

As a primary school kid, I was obsessed with Roald Dahl poems. I loved the combination of rhythm and dark comedy. It prompted me to mimic his style in my own attempts at verse. A friend and I wrote annual poetry collections from about Grade 5, which are, in all likelihood, still gathering dust at the primary school library. We penned collections titled 'Loony Lyrics' and 'Dangerous Doggerels' fashioned after Dahl's Revolting Rhymes – a favourite original was 'A Fart on the Prairie'. Much later, we morphed our rhyme and rhythm skills to craft pop songs which we recorded in my mate's parents' basement. I spent my twenties putting those early lyrical lessons into practice through song. Dahl's poems and our mimicry had a lasting impact on my brain development – for better or worse. I never quite stopped finding merriment in base humour.

Australian bush poetry, on the other hand, instilled in me a romantic vision of Australia's landscape and character. Like many descendants of migrants, I did not always find myself reflected in the national symbols of a nation that was — as Tim Watts points out in *The Golden Country* — forged in the image of white Australia. The poetic national symbols I grew up with were limited in range: the outback, convicts, shearers and drovers, Ned Kelly, Clancy of the Overflow and the Eureka Stockade. These were the images of our country that I learned about at school through songs and stories. There was no multicultural Australia in my 8-year-old patriotic imagination, nor was there a real conception of the ancient Indigenous heritage that I only much later understood to be part of Australia's heritage.

Perhaps that's why I was drawn to the colourful and exotic world brought to life in Salman Rushdie's *Haroun* and the *Sea of Stories*, which painted a rowdy universe that was the exact opposite of Australian bush ballads. Haroun's adventures had me mesmerised me as a child. Who could forget the captivating first page of that fantastical and comical yet strangely melancholy novel?

The narrator begins: 'There was once, in the country of Alifbay, a sad city, the saddest of cities, a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name. It stood by a mournful sea full of glumfish, which were so miserable to eat that they made people belch with melancholy even though the skies were blue.'

In the north of the sad city stood mighty factories in which (so I'm told) sadness was actually manufactured, packaged and sent all over the world, which never seemed to get enough of it. Black smoke poured out of the chimneys of the sadness factories and hung over the city like bad news.

And in the depths of the city, beyond an old zone of ruined buildings that looked like broken hearts, there lived a happy young fellow by the name of Haroun, the only child of the storyteller Rashid Khalifa, whose cheerfulness was famous throughout that unhappy metropolis, and whose never-ending stream of tall, short and winding tales had earned him not one but two nicknames. To his admirers he was Rashid the Ocean of Notions, as stuffed with cheery stories as the sea was full of glumfish; but to his jealous rivals he was the Shah of Blah.

My tastes went downhill after that – I spent my early teens curled on my bedroom floor reading the *Sweet Valley Twins* collection, wishing I was blonde and a twin – but later became higher brow. It's probably little surprise, given my simmering identity crisis, that I was drawn to the writing of ground-breaking women of colour – writers like Toni Morrison and Zadie Smith seemed to offer an answer to the constant question faced by brown girls growing up in a nation where white faces dominate TV screens and magazine pages and all positions of power - where do I fit in?

I studied Toni Morrison's debut novel, *The Bluest Eye*, at university. Pecola, the eleven-year-old black protagonist, was shunned by schoolmates and spent her days dreaming of having blue eyes and wishing she was Shirley Temple, which deeply resonated with me. For Pecola, such longings hit hard against the reality of the world that reflected back to her a wholly negative self-image. Eventually Pecola accepted her place in the world and "just didn't care no more ... I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly." The book presents a seductive and affecting insight into internalised racism, family tragedy and one woman's descent into madness. Morrison's writing was mesmerising because it buried tragedy and horror like tiny jewels beneath dense and curly prose. You always had to look twice to see the most confronting snippets of narrative. The reader is only given glimpses of the worst pain, which makes the book's secrets, revealed almost inadvertently, more affecting – for they are private sufferings, not announced loudly, but borne quietly by the sufferer alone. Again, the book's opening has stayed with me:

Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow ... It was a long time before my sister and I admitted to ourselves that no green was going to spring from our seeds. Once we knew, our guilt was relieved only by fights and mutual accusations about who was to blame. ... It never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding. We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as

Pecola's father had dropped his seeds in his own plot of black dirt. Our innocence and faith were no more productive than his lust or despair. What is clear now is that of all of that hope, fear, lust, love, and grief, nothing remains but Pecola and the unyielding earth. The seeds shriveled and died; her baby too. There is really nothing more to say—except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how.

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* took me to the colourful multicultural communities of London, where I spent a few years exploring a theatre career in my early twenties. Smith captures the roughness and vibrancy of that world. Her writing brings characters of different backgrounds, generations and attitudes unjudgmentally to life. Like Morrison, her prose presents colloquialisms and phrases that sound fresh off the street. Reading *White Teeth* we hear Anglo-Jamaican patois, along with the Bengali teenager's bastardised version of London slang. I found affinity with her characters who had to straddle several worlds and cultures, just as I had to cop my family's teasing for my Aussie-accented, broken Fijian-Hindi. Smith's society is messy and crowed and tangled with connections. She gives us an insight into the frenzied cosmopolitanism of a big modern city still grappling with the legacies of colonisation, but forging friendships and bonds notwithstanding division.

Let me change tack completely to highlight the most influential books I have read recently. There is probably no book that has changed the way I think about law reform and policy in recent years than Stephanie Kelton's *The Deficit Myth*. this book transformed my perspective. Conventional wisdom regarding deficits is that they impede economic growth and weaken the economy. Kelton debunks exposes this as a myth, driving home a fundamental realisation: we citizens have been coached to applaud government surpluses as responsible economic management and decry deficits as irresponsible, instead of looking at overall economic outcomes.

As Kelton explains, applauding a surplus simply applauds the fact that government has taken from the economy more money than it has invested into it. A surplus appears on the government books when it has taxed citizens and businesses more than it has spent on us, or spent into the economy. In Kelton's view, a government surplus equals a private deficit.
Paul Keating would seem to agree with Kelton. He has urged leaders to abandon their obsession with surpluses and to realise that the Commonwealth's budget "is not like the budget of a corner shop that in the end must be able to close the door on Friday night and be in surplus." This sounds like a phrase Kelton, an economist of the Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) school, would use. Bill Mitchell, also an MMT expert, explains that unlike household budgets, "currency-issuing governments have no intrinsic financial spending constraint. They can purchase whatever is for sale in their own currency, including all unemployed labour desiring work." The main limit is inflation. This means a surplus may sometimes be appropriate, but not always. That governments pursue surpluses instead of full employment is cruelty that has become normalised. We must fundamentally rethink our priorities.

Kelton uses effective metaphors to explain different attitudes to debt across the political spectrum, most of which stay unhelpfully stuck in problematic and limiting assumptions. She is writing about the US, but the dynamic is similar in Australia. Kelton describes what she calls the 'deficit hawks' who contend the government deficits are always irresponsible and therefore call for a balanced budget at almost any cost. This group argues that public debt will destroy a currency and country. They warn of intergenerational debt that must be paid off by our grandchildren. Then there are 'deficit doves' who mostly agree, but accept that deficits can be used for short term emergencies.

Australian Labor usually falls into the latter camp, but as Kelton shows, this leaves economic debate stuck on the erroneous assumption that deficits are prima facie bad. It leads the major parties to attack each other for deficits. This also leads to apologetic timidity, because by playing along with this assumption, Labor becomes cornered by the LNP narrative that any deficit equals bad economic management. The ALP thus paints itself into a corner. Instead, we should change the narrative. Kelton shows that we need to fundamentally change our perspective. She calls herself a 'deficit owl' – because these wise birds can rotate their heads for more holistic and well-rounded perspectives.

The ALP need to become deficit owls. The ALP should realise the federal government, as the currency issuer, has the capacity to spend what we need to achieve the outcomes we want to see in society – the only constraint being inflation. There is no need to always painstakingly show where the money is coming from to fund policies and programs. Nor is there a need to always have to match spending promises with taxes. Progressive parties should stop obsessing about where the dollars are coming from: the dollars are there when political leaders decide they want to spend them – COVID has taught us this. Instead, Kelton rightly argues, progressive parties need to show where the votes are coming from. The ALP need to sell their policies to persuade people.

It's time to change the narrative around deficit and debt. Attacking the LNP for their debt accumulation during COVID is unwise, because it plays by rules and understandings and assumptions that leaders should be seeking to challenge and change. It is not enough just to say: it's too political difficult to change the narrative around debt and deficit. It starts with Keating's words: the Commonwealth's budget "is not like the budget of a corner shop that in the end must be able to close the door on Friday night and be in surplus." COVID has shown that the federal government has money to spend when it wants to spend it. This is the perfect moment to change the narrative.

Over the Christmas/summer break I intend to read Trent Dalton's *Boy Swallows Universe*, or Henry Reynold's *Truth-Telling: History, sovereignty and the Uluru Statement*, or Sean Kelly's *The Game*. These titles beckon from my bookshelf, but sleep, TV and playing with my one-year-old will beckon over summer as well. I can't promise anything.

Dr Shireen Morris is a constitutional lawyer and senior lecturer at Macquarie Law School. Her books include Radical Heart (MUP, 2018) and A First Nations Voice in the Australian Constitution (Hart Publishing, 2020).

Misha Zelinksy

Misha Zelinsky notes his love of political literature and biographies.

One of my first memories is my mum reading *Charlotte's Web* to me. Truth be told, the complete memory involves bawling my eyes out at the untimely death of Charlotte the Spider as Wilbur the Pig bid her goodbye; but, of course, details like that are best kept to oneself.

Mum loves to tell the story (every Christmas) of bringing Baby Misha home from Wollongong Hospital, and the only way to stop me crying at night was her reading aloud to me. Reading would calm me down; stopping would dial up the water works again. Tears aside, since those early days I have been fascinated by the written word and the books in which they live.

Books have a certain kind of magic. They can inspire, inform, challenge, and entertain. The title, its author and physical book itself has a story to tell of its own. Every folded page, coffee spill or underlined passage is a window into a book's journey and its impact on the world and its readers. Pieced together, books can soothe in the way nature speaks to us. Walk into a great library or secret bookshop and its impossible not to be struck by both wonder and reassurance.

I used to love when mum gave me a new book to devour. And if I didn't have a new one, I read the same one over and again. A few books stand out in my earliest memories. Matilda and her story of overcoming the evil Trunchbull, blessed with magical powers. The rabbits of Watership Down. Crafty Mr. Toad in Wind in the Willows. The Selby Speaks series. Bilbo's adventures in *the Hobbit* followed by more Tolkien. As I got older, *The Great Gatsby, Catch 22, 1984 and Anna Karenina* – the first book I felt connected with my Russian ancestry. I also try to devour every Aussie political and or policy book, but George Megalogenis' *The Longest Decade* in my view the gold standard. I'm still blown away by the fact that for thirty years either Keating or Howard held the role of Australia's treasurer or PM! Charlotte's Web, however, was a oncer.

This year lockdown helped speed my reading along ever so slightly. I have recently returned from Washington DC as part of my Fulbright Scholarship researching political warfare and competition between autocracies and democracies. For Australia, managing its relationship with an increasingly belligerent Chinese Communist Party looms large – and there is plenty of reading on the topic if you're after it. Anyone seeking to understand this problem in depth should get their hands on *Red Zone* by Peter Hartcher – a world class expose on the CCP's global intentions and how Australia and other democracies should respond to that challenge. Rory Medcalf's *Contest for the Info-Pacific; Why China Won't Map the Future* is compulsory reading for strategists. Battlegrounds by former national security advisor, General HR McMaster is an excellent study of Putin and Xi's playbook when it comes to waging 'grey zone' warfare. Roger Garside's *China Coup* is a fascinating – and plausible – 'what if' scenario involving a palace coup against Xi Jinping by party leaders worried about his brinkmanship and belligerence. *Why Nations Fail* is a brilliant academic analysis as to why extractive regimes fail in the end – the only question is when. Those seeking inspiration in this struggle should consult *Troublesome Young Men*, the story of Churchill's rise to the prime ministership and how he saved Britain and Europe from tyranny. Ben Rhodes' *After the Fall* is a clear-eyed assessment as to how far right authoritarianism is taking hold and what democracies must do to resist the external and internal threats it poses.

Political bios are no doubt on every Laborite's list, but it's hard to go past Barack Obama's *A Promised Land*. While the story itself is uplifting, the quality of the prose and insights from its author are sublime. The President's Club is a ripping read about the relationships between the members of the world's most exclusive club – you'll be shocked who hated who, though, unsurprisingly, Richard Nixon was in a league of his own. Students of contemporary American politics will see parallels in Lincoln on the Verge, a book detailing Abraham Lincoln's perilous thirteen-day train trip to Washington after winning the 1860 election. With the country on the edge of civil war, Lincoln must unite the country and evade would be assassins to take office.

Today, anyone looking to understand what makes Joe Biden tick in an afternoon's reading should grab Evan Osnos' Joe Biden the Life the Run and What Matters Now. Indeed, the US election produced a flurry of books, but Lucky by Allen and Parnes holds to the tradition of gossipy, behind the scenes' accounts of American elections in the style of Shattered or Game Change – get your popcorn and enjoy! Trump's presidency created an entire publishing genre of its own, yet it's hard to go past the legendary Bob Woodward's Peril which details the white knuckled events leading up to the January 6 Capitol Insurrection and troubles that may lie ahead. His fly on the wall approach uncovers some unbelievable exchanges, including detailed conversations between House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milly.

If you've had enough handwringing and want to be uplifted, read 'To Obama' – an account detailing Obama's practice of reading ten letters from constituents each night. The book

includes copies of the letters and Obama's handwritten notes and responses. George Packer's brilliant *Last Best Hope* is one of the shrewdest and insightful takes on the US's predicament, roiled by inequality and partisan divides. Kennedy lovers must track down a copy of Thurston Clarke's *The Last Campaign* (it took me the better part of a year!). It is a brilliant, tear-jerking account of Bobby Kennedy's ill-fated 84-day presidential campaign. And to keep faith with humanity, I highly recommend *The Happiest Man of Earth*. It's 'Charlotte's Web-esque'.

In recent years I've become fascinated by stoicism. Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* (get the Gregory Hayes translation) is compulsory reading for those seeking to understand less about 'why' and more about 'how'. Letters from Seneca, likewise, overflows with timeless lessons on how to live one's life. Further, Ryan Holiday's *Lives of the Stoics* is an excellent introduction on the history of the school. If you're after a quick – and hilarious – primer in ancient Greek legend and mythology, grab yourself a copy of *Heroes and Mythos* by Stephen Fry. Fast paced, insightful, meticulously researched, and witty in the way only Fry can manage – you won't be disappointed.

If you drive a lot for work (or like to cheat a little) plump for self-narrated autobiographies on Audible. *Becoming* by Michelle Obama, *Total Recall* with Arnold(!), Alex Ferguson, Jessica Simpson's *Open Book*, *Born to Run* by Bruce Springsteen, *Believer* by David Axelrod, *No Spin* (read by Rhys Muldoon doing an excellent Warnie) and *Working Class Man* by Jimmy Barnes are all belters.

Looking for raw, honest fiction? Douglas Stuart's *Shuggie Bain* is a brilliant, if rather bleak account of how the working class became the underclass in Thatcher's Scotland. It is told through the eyes of a small boy struggling with his sexuality and managing his alcoholic mother. Likewise, *Beautiful World, Where Are You* by Sally Rooney – an author I happily discovered while strolling one of the world's great libraries in Trinity College – did not disappoint. Fans of dialogue heavy, relational, coming-of-age drama will love Rooney's work including *Conversations with Friends* and *Normal People*. She is perhaps the best new author of recent times. Where the *Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens is a fascinating, brilliant story of growing up in the marshlands of the US's South.

With the release of the three-part documentary, the world is going through a bit of a Hemingway renaissance (if he ever left). While it's difficult to go past the tragic *Farewell to Arms* or the inspiring *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in terms of literary brilliance, I recently found myself reading his cannon of short stories. If you haven't already, do yourself a favour and read *The Snows of Kilimanjaro, The Short Life* of Francis Macumbo and any of the Nick Adams war-based stories.

Over summer and next year, I am looking forward to the second half of Obama's memoirs; the Angela Merkel bio, *The Chancellor*; Troy Bramston's *Hawke* biography; Evan Osnos' *Wildland*: *The Making of America's Fury*, *The Vanishing Half* by Britt Bennett and anything that looks good during my Christmas shopping for others. More importantly, I'm hoping to break my habit of buying more books before I've finished reading the last batch! Happy reading and Merry Christmas!

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Amanda Rishworth

Amanda Rishworth shares her appreciation for progressive literature.

It is not an exaggeration to say books have changed the course of my life.

As an avid reader from a young age, I have been part of a number book clubs over the years. It was in 2009, two years into my first term as a Member of Parliament, that I joined one where I met my now husband, Tim. While it was not our taste in books that bonded us – Tim has quite the affinity for both fantasy and science fiction – reading prompted much discussion in our early relationship. Safe to say, without our mutual love of reading, we would have never met.

I must also begin with a confession – I am a lover of fiction. After spending years with my head buried in university textbooks and working for fourteen years in a profession that requires a significant amount of reading, indulging in fiction is a pleasure that allows me to explore other perspectives and challenges. The best fictional stories allow me to completely step out of my own shoes, and into those of others. Whilst I still grab non-fiction books to expand my knowledge, it is the stories told through fiction that have encouraged me to reflect on humanity, morality, ethics, and social issues in a profound and meaningful way. Indeed, writing this piece has been a fascinating exercise, as I noticed unexpected common threads throughout the books that have influenced me. I feel my interest in the human psyche consistently comes through.

What books have influenced me? I started reading heavily as a child, so it is only right to start with the *Lion Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S Lewis. Set in war time England, this book provided me with important context to the conversations I was having at the time with my grandmother about her life during the Second World War in her home country of England. The book also introduced me at a young age to important concepts like betrayal and redemption, through the easily accessible and beautifully created world of Narnia. Looking back on the book decades later, I realise it particularly explores a value that is important to me now as an adult – loyalty.

In my final year of high school, like so many others, I read and studied *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller for Year 12 English. This book has stuck with me as it highlighted the danger of mob rule and the politics of fear. Its dark themes were formative in forcing me to think about some of the more challenging sides of human nature, what we are capable of, and the circumstances that can push people to their limits. For my 21st birthday I was given *Catching the Waves: Life in and Out of Politics* by Susan Ryan. I was trying to figure out where I stood politically and the causes I was passionate about. After growing up in a household cynical about politicians, this book helped me understand the potential for people to make a positive impact through involvement in politics. At 21 I had no desire to become a politician. However, things change, and Susan's story influence me as I journeyed into politics. One of the many lessons of Susan's story is that progressive change can be slow, but persistence pays off and progress will inevitably be made.

I read *Never Let Me Go* by Kazu Ishiguro when I was 25 years old. This book reflects deeply on the ethics of human life. *Never Let Me Go* made me think critically about how we treat the vulnerable, the varied ways our society values people's lives, and the role of advancing medical technology. This book's lessons linger fifteen years after I first picked it up, as our society repeatedly confronts moral and ethical issues about whose life is worth saving over others.

Another book I read in my twenties was *Birds Without Wings* by Louis de Bernieres. For me this book was another timely reminder of the destruction nature of war. It left a particular mark on me as I read it shortly after the coalition forces invasion of Iraq in 2003. The book highlights how harmonious communities, made up of different religions and cultures, can quickly become divided in the wrong circumstances. In an incredibly poetic way, it draws on different perspectives to showcase the way religious division and extreme nationalism are used to create new ingroups and outgroups in society, and pitch neighbours against one another.

Steve Jobs by Walter Isaacson was a surprise in my thirties – the kind of book I never thought I would be influenced by. I found it to be a fascinating insight into what drove him to innovate, succeed and push boundaries. Jobs was a deeply complex character, but someone who, from a young age, clearly had the

necessary ingredients for entrepreneurial success. This book gave me a new appreciation for the importance of taking risks and unwavering self-belief. I still regularly find myself thinking about *We Need to Talk About Kevin* by Lionel Shriver. I have always been fascinated by the concept of nature versus nurture, due to my studies as a psychologist. This book explores that concept beautifully and powerfully. It delves into important themes, including the complexities of parent/child relationships, the meaning of loyalty, and the journey to forgiveness. After reflecting deeply on the nature verses nurture debate throughout the book, I felt it helped me take a step back and ultimately conclude that whatever influences are at play, a child is always its own person and must be treated as such, not as an extension of their parents.

I stand in a long line of progressives who have been influenced by *Don't Think of an Elephant* by American writer George Lakoff. Published many years ago, Lakoff's message remains an important one. I believe that to give Australians the future they deserve, we absolutely must elect Labor Governments, which means the left must understand how to win against the right. His book is one of the best reflections on the challenges of communicating progressive politics, and what we must do better to win – the importance of knowing your values, framing the debate, and simplifying messages. I read this book before I became an MP, and it still resonates.

One of the most defining events of my life has been becoming a parent, and I have instilled in both my children a love for reading. Therefore, it would be remiss of me not to include a book that has influenced me as a parent. Mem Fox is not only a brilliant author, but one of the loudest advocates for ensuring Australian children from all walks of life read as much and as early as possible. Mem has greatly influenced me to ensure my children read, and to undertake work in my community to encourage other parents to do the same. Her 2018 book *I'm Australian Too* has become one of my all-time favourites. It provides a simple and eloquent way to teach young children about migration, and the beauty of multiculturalism and diversity in Australia. The touching passages have inspired many of the speeches I give at local citizenship ceremonies.

Most recently, I enjoyed *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernadine Evaristo. It has had a profound impact on so many across the world, as it uniquely highlights the collective voices of the most marginalised women in society. It deepened my thinking about gendaered issues, in particular how they distinctively impact women from marginalised groups. One of the things I found most interesting was its exploration of the generational differences and often resentments between mothers and daughters. Another favourite read from 2020 was *Phosphorescence* by Julia Baird. In the midst of a pandemic, this book has been a timely reminder that there is always something bigger than yourself. It is perfect for when you're caught up in the minutia of work and life; it reminds you to think outwards and upwards and appreciate simple things. I found myself reflecting on Julia's message during my permitted one-hour of exercise during COVID lockdowns in South Australia, taking a moment to appreciate the beauty around me.

As we approach the next federal election, I have found myself reaching for some political non-fiction books. I have recently read the *Twilight of Democracy* by Anne Applebaum, which provided an always pertinent reminder of why democracy matters, and the more insidious ways it is under threat around the world in seemingly robust democratic countries. It is also a timely reminder of my responsibility as an MP in defending the checks and balances that exist to ensure democracy succeeds, even if it is not in our political self-interest. In the hope and belief that in the not-too-distant future we will form a Labor Government, and I will have the opportunity to implement our early education policies, I am also reading *Successful Public Policy Lessons from Australia and New Zealand* by ANU Press. Finally, I am in the middle of reading *The Girl with the Louding Voice* by Abi Dare, another critical reminder of the struggle for equality for women across the world.

Over summer, I am planning to read *Klara and the Sun* by Kazuo Ishiguro. I am certain he will yet again challenge my thinking on humanity, technology and ethics. I am also going to dive into Adelaide author Hannah Kent's new release *Devotion*. I am drawn to it not only because I am a huge fan of her past work, but because the story of escaping religious persecution in Prussia by emigrating to Australia in the early 1800s is a familiar one to so many families, including my own. On my 'to read' list is also the *The Accidental Prime Minister* by Anika Smethurst, because as we approach an election it is always prudent to know your opponent! I suspect that my list might be overly ambitious, but if time allows I would add *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel, and a book I have been meaning to read for such a long time, *The Happiest Man on Earth* by Eddie Jaku.

Amanda Rishworth is the Federal Labor Member for Kingston and Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education and Development and Shadow Minister for Youth.

Josh Burns

Josh Burns talks housing asks us to understand our political opponent.

Parliament is wrapping up for 2021, the summer holidays are fast approaching and a well-earned break for all Australians is on the horizon. After two of the most disruptive and difficult years our nation has faced in generations, some time off to relax and enjoy the warmer weather couldn't be more attractive. Of course, one of the best things about the summer break is the opportunity to indulge in some quality reading time. 2022 will be a huge year for politics thanks to a federal election and state elections in Victoria and South Australia. With my last bits of downtime before we hit the hustings again, I'm looking forward to reading about big ideas and even bigger political personalities. Thinking about some of the books that have influenced me most in my political career, one book that I can't go past was *No Place Like Home: Repairing Australia's Housing Crisis* by Peter Mares. It's one of the most comprehensive and straightforward explanations of what has gone wrong with our housing market and some of the ways we could try to fix it. At the heart of Mares' thesis is that the problem is getting worse and we need to put forward ideas to do something about it. As one of the youngest MPs in Federal Parliament, I'm acutely aware that with every passing generation the dream of becoming a homeowner is fading and growing further out of reach for more and more Australians. Prices continue to skyrocket while wages flatline and not even the COVID-19 pandemic could halt the momentum of our housing bubble. We treat housing as a commodity rather than a basic and essential human right to shelter. This has created a system which makes it increasingly hard to break into the housing market, but easier to accumulate multiple investment properties once you're in it.

This is clearly one of the biggest challenges facing the future of our nation – home ownership is one of the biggest determinators of security in retirement. In 2018, a person over 65 with at least one property had a median net-worth of $960,000, but a person of the same age with no property had a median net-worth of just $40,800. People forced into the rental market their whole lives not only face the rising and constant risk of rental stress and insecurity, but they accumulate significantly less wealth through their working lives than homeowners do. And understandably, they're at the greatest risk of becoming homeless at some stage in their lives. If we don't do something about this, future generations will be all but locked out of the housing market entirely.

No Place Like Home takes a really insightful deep dive into this issue and was one of the most influential pieces that has helped me formulate a number of essays and articles on this topic, including 'The Crumbling Australian Dream' which I launched earlier this year with my good friend, our Shadow Minister for Housing, Jason Clare. Among the recommendations I made was for Australia to follow places like France and Scotland in formally enshrining housing as a human right in legislation, so we can start to hold Governments accountable for making sure we start to treat housing for what it really is – essential shelter for people, not merely for an investment.

In the political world, I'd have to say the book that most influenced me to this day remains Don Watson's *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart*. Watson remains one of Labor's finest ever writers and his partnership with Prime Minister Paul Keating, tumultuous as both it was and how it ended, was surely one of Australian politics' most legendary. For starters, as a passionate Laborite on housing policy, Keating's legacy of reform in this country in creating our Superannuation scheme has allowed Australians to seamlessly and passively generate capital to retire with greater security. Watson's brilliantly written memoirs of his time writing for Keating is an honest, intimate and vividly passionate portrayal of what it was like 'on the inside'. Watson's view of Keating and his Government showed us all sides of the man and the Prime Minister from up close. While we often reflect on the past with a romantic tinge, and overlook the more tumultuous aspects of it in favour of reminiscing on the good parts, the Keating years stand in stark contrast to the state of federal politics we are living through today. His intellect, acerbic wit and his vision could not be more different to the chaotic and dithering years of the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison Government.

This book is particularly relevant as Federal Labor continues to sit in Opposition for too long. It feels like an all too distant a memory when thinking about the last time the ALP held national office for a significant period

of time and was able to implement serious and necessary reform. As a young staffer in the Gillard era, the Hawke-Keating era felt like the golden days for Federal Labor. While the Gillard Government was able to implement some extremely important reforms, it was obviously a turbulent and unstable time and its premature defeat after just two terms meant that our vision could not fully be realised, and many of our legislative achievements could be repealed or watered down by the incoming Abbott Government.

Of course, times change and so too do the challenges we face. Social democratic parties around the world are facing similar struggles to reconcile the values and beliefs of our traditional working-class base with our urban, educated activists and members. While we cannot merely keep gesturing at the Hawke-Keating reform era in the hope it will provide us with light, taking time to immerse ourselves in that history is a powerful reminder of two key principals: firstly, we can only enact change when we're in power, and secondly, we can only govern when we win and maintain the support of the public.

This brings me to what I'm looking forward to reading this summer. One book I'm very much looking forward to reading soon is my friend John Safran's new book, *Puff Piece*. Unfortunately, Australia Post delays meant the preview copy John sent me only arrived in mid-November, but now that it's finally arrived, I'm very excited to get stuck into it.

I had the pleasure of talking to John about the book as he was writing it, giving him a bit of advice and insight into the workings of the Parliament. John wanted to know more about Parliamentary Committees and hearings, because he was writing an expose on the ways tobacco giant Phillip Morris was still interacting with and lobbying our political system, and in particular their fight to legalise their new e-cigarette device, which they called a 'heat stick'. John is an icon of my electorate whose career has shifted markedly from his days as a provocative TV series maker best known for racy stunts, to one of the country's finest authors and investigative reporters. His last book was a fascinating look at Australian extremists across the spectrum, so where better to raise the bar than by taking on big tobacco. He uncovered plenty of interesting things in his quest about how lobbyists and PR firms were working behind the scenes with 'independent' vaping companies to fight the Federal Government's attempts to regulate vaping and force smokers to get a prescription. I won't spoil anything – I haven't read it yet – but you won't be shocked to know he suspected a few Liberal MPs were coordinating with the lobbyists.

Another book I'm looking forward to digging into during my downtime this summer is Sean Kelly's *The Game*, a portrait of Scott Morrison. Laborites will know Sean as a former adviser to the Gillard Government and more recently one of the most thoughtful and eloquent writers on Australian politics for The Monthly and more recently The Age. Sean's attempt to piece together the politician and person that Scott Morrison has become promises to be a fascinating read.

As we head into an election year in 2022, we need to understand our opponent and what has made him successful. We can't take it for granted that people hate Scott Morrison as much as we do – any more than we could with John Howard, or Tony Abbott. Morrison is a liar, a phoney and someone who loathes responsibility and avoids it at all costs – but he's also a successful politician who beat us in an election we should have won. The persona he has crafted for himself has resonated with people whose votes we used to be able to rely on and whose votes we need to recapture to win Government. We must be humble about why we lost, and we have to understand what has made Morrison successful in ways we have failed. In that context, I look forward to seeing what Kelly has uncovered about Morrison, because we really, really need to beat him. Whatever you're reading this summer, whether it's to soak up some big ideas or just to relax, have a great break and see you on the hustings in 2022.

Josh Burns is the Federal Labor Member for Macnamara.

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