

JOHN CURTIN
RESEARCH CENTRE
Labor ideas for a better Australia

SOFITEL
HOTELS & RESORTS

MELBOURNE ON COLLINS

Clare O'Neil

2023 John Curtin Research
Centre Gala Dinner
Keynote Speech

THE TUCSIN

FLAGSHIP PUBLICATION OF THE
**JOHN CURTIN
RESEARCH CENTRE**

Labor ideas for a better Australia

Issue 18, May 2023



**AT WORK
WITH YOU**

**OVER 200,000
UNION MEMBERS
ACROSS AUSTRALIA.**

**STANDING UP FOR WORKERS IN
RETAIL. WAREHOUSING. FAST FOOD.
SINCE 1908.**

✓ **Fair pay & working conditions**

✓ **Safe workplaces**

✓ **Confidential workplace advice & support**

READ MORE ABOUT THE SDA AND JOIN ONLINE HERE:



Contents

The Tocsin | Issue 18, 2023

Editorial – Nick Dyrenfurth | 4
Clare O’Neil – 2023 John Curtin Research Centre Gala Dinner Keynote Speech | 5
Natalie Hutchins – 2023 Fiona Richardson Memorial Lecture | 10
Noel Pearson – Taking Responsibility for the Voice | 13
Frank Bongiorno – Orderly and Adult: The Albanese Government’s First Year | 16
John Fitzgerald – Risky business | 19
Dominic Meagher – 2023 Federal Budget Review | 22
Sam Almaliki: It’s time for a National Summit to save the Australian dream | 24
Philip Mendes – Poverty and Jobseeker: ‘Nobody left behind’ | 26
Nick Dyrenfurth – Getting the workers on board | 29
Michael Easson – Whitlam and China | 31
‘Getting to know you with Sam Almaliki’ | 33

The Tocsin, Flagship Publication of the John Curtin Research Centre.
Issue 18, May 2023.
Copyright © 2023 All rights reserved.
Editor: Nick Dyrenfurth | nickd@curtinrc.org
Design: The Brand Project

www.curtinrc.org
www.facebook.com/curtinrc/
twitter.com/curtin_rc

Editorial

Nick Dyrenfurth

Over the past seven years, the John Curtin Research Centre has become the premier labourite thinktank in Australia. And we intend to continue waging the battle of ideas and crafting bold policies. From our call to establish a national housing affordability agency and renters' rights, hydrogen and clean steel policy to make our country a clean energy superpower, revived teacher scholarships and tackling multinational tax avoidance we helped inform the election of and policy agenda of the Albanese government, which was elected this day one year ago.

In this the 18th edition of our flagship Tocsin magazine you will find a reflection on federal Labor's first year in office by renowned Professor Frank Bongiorno. Plus you can read Clare O'Neil's keynote speech to the John Curtin Research Centre 2023 Gala Dinner, Natalie Hutchins's Fiona Richardson Lecture, and Noel Pearson's InConversation address. This edition also features our Deputy Director and Chief Economist Dr Dominic Meagher reviewing the 2023-24 federal Budget, Professor Philip Mendes on welfare policy, Adam Slonim makes the case of Aukus, and a fascinating extract from Michael Easson's new book, Whitlam's Foreign Policy, which will be covered in our next InConversation event, this Thursday 25 May. Finally our Treasurer Sam Almaliki is featured in our revived 'Getting to know you' series looking at the people behind the scenes of the JCRC.

Thanks to our supporters, over the past six months the JCRC has been able to publish impactful research and reports and makes waves in the media and public sphere, from articles on economics and the budget, Bob Hawke's legacy, the aviation sector, workers on the board of the Reserve Bank of Australia and our Deputy Director and Chief Economist Dr Dominic Meagher COVID's research informing the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport's report for its inquiry into long COVID and repeated COVID infections, 'Sick and tired: Casting a long shadow'. His research also featured in last month's The Project TV's report on long Covid, and in a feature piece for The Saturday Paper.

Our events in 2023 started with the Fiona Richardson Memorial Lecture with a splendid address by special guest speaker Natalie Hutchins, Minister for Education and Minister for Women and Gala Dinner with guest speaker, Labor's federal Minister for Home Affairs and Cyber Security, Clare O'Neil MP, and an InConversation webinar with Noel Pearson and Shireen Morris, held in late April

which was reported on in The Age and Sydney Morning Herald newspapers.

This month we published our latest report 'Super Solutions: Tackling Australia's Housing Affordability and Supply Crisis', commissioned by Rest Super. The report offers six 'Super Solution' recommendations to alleviate the housing affordability and supply crisis affecting Australians. You can read the report clicking here and the write-up in the Australian Financial Review. Stay tuned for our forthcoming policy work on COVID safety for essential workers and cyber security.

Finally, but not least we are proud to continue to support the brightest young labourite minds with our Sixth Annual Young Writers' Prize, sponsored by Victorian Trades Hall. The winner will receive a \$1000 cash prize! Entries by Australian writers aged 26 and under are due by 3 November.

You can revisit our work at curtinrc.org and latest news over at our Facebook or Twitter pages.

To continue to advance a bold, practical and relevant Labor agenda in government, federally and a state-level, as we approach the end of the financial year we are asking for your support.

Not only will you shape Australia's future by fighting the battle of ideas but renewing as a John Curtin Research Centre supporter provides you with exclusive access to all of our publications – reports, discussion papers and new monthly newsletter – and Tocsin delivered hot off the press.

BackCurtin's legacy and renew as a supporter by clicking here.

In Unity,



Dr Nick Dyrenfurth

Executive Director, John Curtin Research Centre

Clare O'Neil

John Curtin Research Centre Gala Dinner Keynote Speech

Thank you so much, Henry [Pinskier]. It's wonderful to be with you all tonight. I want to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people, the custodians of the land on the - and waterways around Melbourne. And can I say to Shireen Morris, who's here, that was a beautiful statement about the Voice to Parliament and I certainly dedicate myself tonight to standing with you and with Aboriginal leaders around our country.

Can I say to Nick Dyrenfurth, to Henry and to the team at John Curtin Research Centre how genuinely important your work is to the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party. The John Curtin Research Centre is a highly respected, powerful driver of thinking in our caucus. We have a room tonight full of partners and friends of John Curtin Research Institute, I hope you know how much your support for this organisation is valued by us in the Labor caucus.

The last time I addressed the John Curtin Research Centre was in October 2019. And if you can cast your mind back, it was somewhat more of a difficult time to be a Labor Party member. We had just suffered a very difficult federal election loss and the pathway back to government was foggy and it was difficult. I've been a Labor Party member now for 26 years, since the lowest I felt, and that was just three years ago. Today, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese leads a Federal Labor government which has every hallmark of a long term, visionary, reformist government that will change the course of our country's history.

And I look across the country - I look across the country, I see Labor governments east to west, north to south, wall to wall, across the mainland, and now a Labor Member for Aston after more than 30 years. This is an amazing moment for our party and for our movement. So what is going on here? Why this sudden change of electoral fortunes for Labor? There are some simple explanations here in the day to day of politics and personalities, but I think there are some deeper things going on, too. One is that Australians clearly want sensible people running their governments, people with the ability to deliver prosperity and quality education and health care for Australian families, while also tackling the climate crisis and walking forward with Indigenous Australians. But there is another current, too, running underneath all of this. Think about what our country has experienced in the last three years. We've been through a one in 100 year pandemic that has forced billions of people around the world into lockdown. 7 million people have died. We've faced the biggest economic shock that we've

experienced since the Great Depression. We've had one of the worst bushfires in our country's history. We have a war in Europe. Russia has illegally, immorally and brutally invaded democratic Ukraine, exacerbating global problems from cybersecurity to energy security. Major power competition is in full swing. And the transformation that is occurring in our neighbourhood in the Indo-Pacific is so profound that historians will be writing about this moment in a century to come.

We are living through a time of extraordinary challenge and tension for Australians and for the world. And what the last 122 years of Australian history shows is that in times of difficulty, Australians turn to Labor. Australians have turned to Labor during depression, recession and war. And at no time in our history have Australians needed strong leadership like we did in 1941. And in that moment, the nation turned to John Curtin and to the great Australian Labor Party. So tonight I want to reflect on what we can learn from Curtin's history-defining period in government and how we too can be a Labor government in that tradition.



Thank you so much, Henry [Pinskier]. It's wonderful to be with you all tonight. I want to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people, the custodians of the land on the - and waterways around Melbourne. And can I say to Shireen Morris, who's here, that was a beautiful statement about the Voice to Parliament and I certainly dedicate myself tonight to standing with you and with Aboriginal leaders around our country.

Can I say to Nick Dyrenfurth, to Henry and to the team at John Curtin Research Centre how genuinely important your

work is to the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party. The John Curtin Research Centre is a highly respected, powerful driver of thinking in our caucus. We have a room tonight full of partners and friends of John Curtin Research Institute, I hope you know how much your support for this organisation is valued by us in the Labor caucus.

The last time I addressed the John Curtin Research Centre was in October 2019. And if you can cast your mind back, it was somewhat more of a difficult time to be a Labor Party member. We had just suffered a very difficult federal election loss and the pathway back to government was foggy and it was difficult. I've been a Labor Party member now for 26 years, since the lowest I felt, and that was just three years ago. Today, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese leads a Federal Labor government which has every hallmark of a long term, visionary, reformist government that will change the course of our country's history.

I look across the country, I see Labor governments east to west, north to south, wall to wall, across the mainland, and now a Labor Member for Aston after more than 30 years. This is an amazing moment for our party and for our movement.

And I look across the country - I look across the country, I see Labor governments east to west, north to south, wall to wall, across the mainland, and now a Labor Member for Aston after more than 30 years. This is an amazing moment for our party and for our movement. So what is going on here? Why this sudden change of electoral fortunes for Labor? There are some simple explanations here in the day to day of politics and personalities, but I think there are some deeper things going on, too. One is that Australians clearly want sensible people running their governments, people with the ability to deliver prosperity and quality education and health care for Australian families, while also tackling the climate crisis and walking forward with Indigenous Australians. But there is another current, too, running underneath all of this. Think about what our country has experienced in the last three years. We've been through a one in 100 year pandemic that has forced billions of people around the world into lockdown. 7 million people have died. We've faced the biggest economic shock that we've experienced since the Great Depression. We've had one of the worst bushfires in our country's history. We have a war in Europe. Russia has illegally, immorally and brutally invaded democratic Ukraine, exacerbating global problems from cybersecurity to energy security. Major power competition is in full swing. And the transformation that is occurring in our neighbourhood in the Indo-Pacific is so profound that historians will be writing about this moment in a century to come.

We are living through a time of extraordinary challenge and tension for Australians and for the world. And what the last 122 years of Australian history shows is that in times of difficulty, Australians turn to Labor. Australians have turned to Labor during depression, recession and war. And at no time in our history have Australians needed strong leadership like we did in 1941. And in that moment, the nation turned to John Curtin and to the great Australian Labor Party. So tonight I want to reflect on what we can learn from Curtin's history-defining period in government and how we too can be a Labor government in that tradition.

So let me start with the political environment that confronted Curtin when he came to office. Robert Menzies may have ended his political career as Australia's longest-serving Prime Minister. But his first Prime Ministership from April 1939 to August 1941 ended in what his biographer Allan Martin called "the most humiliating personal collapse in the history of federal politics." Menzies had spent the first five crucial months of 1941, when Australia was already at war absent from his own country. He was in London, where his defining achievement was to be repeatedly snubbed by Winston Churchill. Menzies had gone to London on a mission to place Australia's defence needs higher up in the minds of the British government and public. But instead, he spent most of the time that he was there complaining about Churchill and his war cabinet before returning home, having failed on this critical mission. And by the end of 1941, Menzies had the galling experience of losing first the confidence of his cabinet and then the confidence of his own party. Menzies' complacency to the threat posed by Nazi Germany was catastrophic. His support for the policies of appeasement of Japanese military aggression earned him the name Pig Iron Bob. Menzies did not just leave his party



and his government in a fractious mess. He left our country manifestly unprepared for war.

So, in 1941, October, Australian politics was in an absolute mess. Australia was in the guts of the war, but fundamentally unprepared for what it knew it had to confront. And in that moment, Australians turned to John Curtin. Now, John Curtin was a very unlikely war hero. He was a man of peace, a committed democratic socialist since his youth, and a First World War anti-conscriptionist. But Curtin had the conviction and the qualities and the skills that suited the time and shone through in this moment that his country

needed him. He was a brilliant leader. His love and care for Australians permeates almost all the stories that we have about him during this period. His government will always be known first for securing peace and security for Australians. But he saw, too, that the war could be fought in a way that set the country up for what lay beyond.

Winning the war was always the primary goal, but Curtin never lost sight of the ideals and values that had driven his long-term commitment to public service and to improving the lives of Australians. So, for Curtin, national security and social security went hand in hand. Long before the war ended, Curtin secured the most important change that we had had to our welfare state in decades, the introduction of new pensions and benefits, as well as the most important commitment to full employment after the war. He told the federal parliament in March 1943, to wage war effectually, there has to be a determination on the part of the people to pledge themselves to the cause, because the cause, when won, will have been worth the winning. The war and Curtin's leadership reshaped Australia's place in the world in the dark and frightening days for our country following Pearl Harbour, Curtin built a partnership with the United States, with General Douglas MacArthur, that would see both nations through to victory. That relationship did not make Curtin any less of a proud Australian. In fact, it showed how much he valued his nation's confidence and sense of self-reliance. What Curtin wanted was for his country to have choices.

Our allies had a lot to offer Australia, that was for sure. But to Curtin, Australia would not be anybody's servant. We were a sovereign, strong country that has much to give our allies in return. And Curtin understood too, that that sovereignty was not just about our defence industry, but about the whole of Australia's economy, its education system and its people. So while we were at war, Curtin remade the Australian economy. Australia, for the first time, became a manufacturing superpower. We became the food bowl of the Indo-Pacific. And we did that because John Curtin and his government used political and legislative powers that they gained during the war to make it happen. And when peace came, the changes that John Curtin led served as a foundation for a new Australia, one that could and would eventually throw off all lock tugging, culturally cringing Australia that Menzies so represented. Thanks to John Curtin, Australia would never again be mistaken for a British colony. We would stand on our own, tall, proud and strong.

In those darkest days of the war, Curtin's government secured greater control over the financial system and income tax as a necessary means of fighting the war. Curtin and his great friend and successor as Prime Minister, Ben Chifley, understood that the capabilities that they used to fight the war could and would be used to secure the peace. For what good is political power if you don't know what to do with it? Curtin and Chifley understood that the war was about transformation, not restoration. There would be no going back to the old Australia and they were not interested in chasing a snapback. And nor did they waste the opportunities that the hand of history had dealt with. The story of John Curtin and Ben Chifley during the 1940s is

the story of how we built a stronger economy by building a broader foundation. They had a vision for Australia's prosperity that went well beyond the woolshed and the sheep's back. The story of Curtin and Chifley is the story of ordinary Australians. My grandparents and your grandparents, they had lived through the Depression, they

This radical transformation of Australian government, of our country and what it means to be Australian, happened within the space of four or five years, because Curtin used his time as Prime Minister to reshape our country.

had lived through war, and they had never even bothered to dream of being able to own their own home, buy a car and educate their children beyond primary school.

But these things were soon within reach of the ordinary Australian family because John Curtin and Ben Chifley put them within reach. And there is nothing, nothing more braver than that. They used levers like the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement, which was signed in 1945 and massively increased the supply of new homes for Australians. They used policies such as the development of new industrial capabilities which supported good, solid Australian jobs. The factories and the workers that were churning out armaments and weapons during the war were soon manufacturing building supplies and white goods and Holden cars. Curtin committed Australia to full employment and that was the goal more than anything else the government did that drove their vision of what Australia would be beyond the war. They delivered a ground breaking 1945 white paper that became the blueprint for what lay beyond the war.

And Curtin and Chifley's vision, too, extended to working women who entered our factories and armed forces in vast numbers. These women were told before that the jobs that they were doing could only be done by men. Yet all that was changed by war. And Curtin understood, of course, too, that his big vision for Australia could not rest on the shoulders of 7.5 million people. So, for the first time, Australia looked to Europe and then to all corners of the globe to help us populate or perish. Curtin was, without doubt, a proud nationalist, but he also understood that Australia would be safest in a world of internationalism. And so Australia becomes a leader in global affairs, helping to establish the United Nations, and doing so from a position of independence and strength and self-reliance. All this, this radical transformation of Australian government, of our country and what it means to be Australian, happened within the space of four or five years, because Curtin used his time as Prime Minister to reshape our country. And that brings me to today. And how can this vision teach and inspire us as Labor people?

Before I draw parallels to the 1940s, let me be absolutely clear, Australia is not at war and we are not about to be at war. But our Prime Minister has said that Australia faces the most challenging geo-strategic circumstances that we have confronted since John Curtin's time. And so, while we are focused on ensuring peace and stability, working to shape those strategic circumstances in our nation's best interest is, and must be, one of our government's defining endeavours. John Curtin was denied the benefit of preparedness for the challenges his government faced in 1941. Joe Lyons and Robert Menzies, they failed to see the storm clouds gathering over Australia in the 1930s. And instead of preparing their country for what was to come, suppose it was back from inviting complacency and governments for government's sake. It was a wasted decade - does that sound a little bit familiar? Because we've just lived through one. We have just lived through a decade of conservative rule, years which could have been sensibly responding to climate change, lifting living standards for Australians and preparing our country for the difficulties that lie ahead. But they were not.

When we arrived in government, the Prime Minister asked me to serve in the Home Affairs portfolio. So my portfolio has this key responsibility of securing the domestic security of our nation. And what I found in this portfolio is that the most essential national security tasks that we confront, the security impacts of climate change, the profoundly important problems of foreign interference, the pervasive threats of cybersecurity, they were not being given any focus by the department. If there was any focus, it was a slideshow to those issues that we know Peter Dutton is so concerned about. So I'm really angry about this wasted decade and you should be too. I'm angry to come to government and to have to begin work fresh on these areas where we should be so progressed in our thinking. This work should already have been years in development.

One of those pieces of work is an important project that has commenced this year in my department, and that is about building and protecting national resilience. One of the really serious threats that we face as a country is the potential for cascading disasters. Think about a Black Saturday bushfire, a major flood and a cyberattack on a state hospital system, all occurring simultaneously with the security issue in our region. A new group within my department, the National Resilience Task Force, will be working to identify what our country needs to do to prepare for a future of rolling challenges, both natural and human induced. My colleague, one of the Ministers I work with, Murray Watt, is already moving out to identify what climate will necessitate in terms of national resilience. We'll do work to scope in detail the domestic risk assessment from an ultra security environment. So whether that's thinking about cyber threats to supply chain disruptions and other contingencies, including in a classified national security context.

Why are we doing this work? Because we already know a lot about what our future security environment could look like. We know a lot about it. Yet the previous government did not do any strategic thinking I can see about what the implications of that environment will be for the domestic security of Australians. Our work will be defining the critical

risks facing Australia, then identifying and prioritising the national capabilities and investments we will need, which will be common to all and vital to many of these risks. Think about things like bolstering planning arrangements to deal with widespread natural disasters. Those same elements and capabilities within government will be critical to help us deal with shocks in the economy from a coordinated cyberattack, for example. So the output of this project will be a clear cross-government picture on the home front, implications

We in this room have lived through an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity. That's for the world, but particularly here in Australia. And every indication we have tells us that the decades ahead will not be as benign.

of the climate and security environment, and clarity on the steps that government will need to take to ensure that Australians continue to live this beautiful life of security and prosperity that we so enjoy while some of the global issues that we all know are underway play out around us.

It's the kind of work that I think John Curtin would have wished Joseph Lyons and Bob Menzies had undertaken in the 30s. If they'd spent more time soberly assessing the environment that they faced and considering how Australia could be made less vulnerable, Curtin would have arrived in government in a position of greater strength, with more choices about how to proceed. One of the really big lessons from the Curtin and Chifley years is how important times of crisis are to shaping Australia's future. And I want to talk about some of the decisions that our government is making, which I think have the same resonance. During the war, Curtin and Chifley drew up plans for a 20th century Australia. A big migration program, full employment, a welfare state and a strong industrial base. And they used the challenge that they faced to create it. Now, as I said, we're not at war, nor is the prospect imminent, but our security situation is changing.

We in this room have lived through an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity. That's for the world, but particularly so here in Australia. And every indication we have tells us that the decades ahead will not be as benign. A world of precarious global dynamics, of unknowable technological risks and unstoppable climate impacts which will reshape life in our regions. We know this. It will. And that is the world that my children are going to have to navigate. So our job is to govern in a way that will give the next generation the best chance of a secure and prosperous Australia. And that's why one of the most substantial decisions that our government has made and will make is the decision to build nuclear powered submarines through the AUKUS partnership.

The first Australian built AUKUS submarine will be completed when my son, who is now nine years old, will be about 30. The decision made by our government will help his

generation ensure the security and defence of Australia. It's that simple. AUKUS is not just a defence technology sharing partnership. It is a decision with the capacity to profoundly reshape Australia's economy. Think about the industrial transformation that occurred when Curtin and Chifley were in power. When the war started, Australia could not build a car. And when the war finished, we were building some of the most advanced industrial aircraft in the entire world. That transformation took guts and confidence and Curtin had that for his country in spades. So when people question Australia's ability to deliver on this AUKUS agreement, this is what I think about. I would back Australians every day of the week over any other country in the world to adapt and grow to meet this challenge.

And that will be helped by the National Reconstruction Fund that has just passed through the Senate and into law, which will help rebuild manufacturing in our country. This is a \$15 billion fund that will restore Australia as a country that makes things and, by the way, creating thousands of secure, well-paid jobs. The money will be spent across seven priority areas, including targeting a billion dollars for

The pressure is there for radical social transformation, the ability that we hold dear for our country to make sovereign choices that are not constrained by our past, that can see Australia make moves truly in our own national interest.

critical technologies such as quantum computing. So why is this so important? We have just lived through a pandemic that has showed us beyond a shadow of a doubt that we are too dependent on the rest of the world for our livelihood. We can change it, we can reshape it. And that is what the Labor government is doing.

Housing is another area where there is a huge amount of work underway. Labor has proposed a \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund that will build 30,000 social and affordable homes in five years. It will include a further 200 million to repair, maintain and improve housing in remote indigenous communities, \$100 billion for crisis accommodation for women and children escaping domestic violence and older women who are at risk of homelessness, and \$30 million for housing and services for veterans. It is such a good deal for our country. Not according to the Greens. Not yet, at least. We're trying to get to help us clear it through the Senate, but it's a really important piece of our policy framework and just like Curtin and Chifley back in 1945 helping deliver fair housing for Australians is a promise that our government is very determined to fulfil.

So there are lots of parallels with the way that the challenges faced by Curtin and Chifley were being dealt with by their government and into how our government is tackling them. We too have come to government after a period of waste where the country wasn't being well served by its leaders

and those leaders were demonstrably not able to move our country forward. The pressure is there for radical social transformation, the ability that we hold dear for our country to make sovereign choices that are not constrained by our past, that can see Australia make moves truly in our own national interest, and the vital importance of building strong alliances with our friends and partners abroad.

When I read about the history of the Curtin government, there are two things that really strike me the most. The first is the unbelievable love that John Curtin had for the Australian people. As you know, Curtin died in office. He gave everything he had, every scrap of energy and intellect went to Australians and to the war effort. The second is the huge optimism and confidence that Curtin had in Australia's future. Curtin knew that Australia could emerge from the war a better and stronger country. The planning and discussion that went into what Australia would look like after 1945 clearly demonstrate that to us. Times of crisis are times of transformation. We can transform in good ways and in bad, but in moments like the ones faced by Curtin, there is no going back. And Australians have shown again and again throughout our history that when the chips are down, we are able, in a way that is very unusual around the world, to throw off old ideas about our country and make big gutsy choices about our future. What our government is trying to do, and what I am trying to do in Home Affairs, is give Australians choice and agency and control over what that future looks like. Mark Twain said, "while history does not repeat, it does rhyme." The path ahead for us is rocky. We can't hide from that and we shouldn't try to. But we have faced bigger challenges before. With good leadership we've emerged from them a stronger, better, older Australia. And I firmly believe that we're about to do it again. Thanks, everyone.

This is an edited version of the Hon Clare O'Neil's address to the John Curtin Research Centre's Annual Gala Dinner, 3 April 2023. Clare is the federal Member for Hotham and is a Cabinet member of the Albanese Labor government as the Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Cyber Security.

Natalie Hutchins

2023 Fiona Richardson Memorial Lecture

I would like to start by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are gathered, the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation. I pay my respects to their Elders, both past and present, and to any other Elders or Aboriginal people here today.

This year we recognise the 100th anniversary of women winning the right to stand for Victorian Parliament. And I think Fiona would be proud of some of the progress that we have made.

Today, in the third term of an Andrews Government, and after decades of quotas and affirmative action, we are proud to have reached equal gender representation – 54 per cent of the Labor caucus are women and 64 per cent of ministries are held by women. And it results in nation leading reforms such as:

1. A massive \$14 billion investment over the next decade to save families money and support women to return to the workforce through reforms to early childhood education and care.
2. This initiative will make Kinder free for every Victorian family – And deliver a new year of universal Pre-Prep for 4-year-olds across the state.
3. We're providing free pads and tampons at up to 700 public sites, including public hospitals, courts, TAFEs, public libraries, train stations and major cultural institutions.
4. We are also completely changing the way women's health is treated in our state – creating 20 comprehensive women's health clinics across Victoria to act as a one-stop shop for women needing treatment or advice on issues from contraception to pelvic pain.
5. We have established the Gender Responsive Budgeting Unit – to consider the gendered impact of government decisions across the entire budget process.
6. And we've now reached parity on Government Boards thanks to our successful Women on Boards policy.
7. The Victorian Government established the Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women and has committed \$3 million to Industry Strategies in

Manufacturing and Energy to help women enter and stay in male dominated sectors.

We've also seen Fiona's legacy come to fruition last year with the release of the first Public Sector Gender Audit Baseline Report by the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector. This is the most comprehensive dataset on gender equality in the public sector to date. It provides a baseline against which to measure our progress on gender equality within the public sector. This reporting is a requirement of the Gender Equality Act 2020, which enshrined gender equality in law— to address issues like the gender pay gap and sexual harassment in the public sector. We are the only jurisdiction in Australia to have such powerful legislation.

Through the Gender Equality Act 2020 300 public sector organisations measure progress on gender equality in their organisations and take action to reduce the gender pay gap and rates of sexual harassment. Public sector organisations including Councils, Health services, TAFE's, Government Departments and universities. These organisations must also consider and address gender bias in their own programs and services – which will lead to better outcomes for all Victorians.

After decades of quotas and affirmative action, we are proud to have reached equal gender representation - 54 per cent of the Labor caucus are women and 64 per cent of ministries are held by women.

The report provides a snapshot of the progress made towards gender equality in the sector and ensures that there are plans in place to create more equal workplaces – like expanded paid parental leave for both parents, as well as strategies to address gender pay gaps and improve diversity in senior leadership positions. And importantly they must make progress in relation to the Act's workplace gender equality indicators, and publicly report on this progress every 2 years.

This is the sort of lasting reform that I know Fiona wanted to see when she set us down this path through our Gender Equality Strategy, Safe and Strong.

Our strategy said the government should establish our gender equality baseline and set targets. It also said we should create a gender equality act and establish a prevention agency. These are things that we have done. And I can say from sitting around the cabinet table over this time that having a plan is critical to taking these actions. So I am pleased that it falls to me to update this plan. Through the Gender Equality Act, this Government recognised that as a major employer we have the power – and the responsibility – to address gender inequality within our own workforces. This is also a responsibility I feel as both Minister for Women and Minister for Education. With around 100,000 staff, the Department of Education is the biggest employer in Victoria. Our teachers, teacher's aides, business managers, and personal and administrative assistants are overwhelmingly women – in fact almost three quarters of the education workforce are women. However, like other sectors, in our education system men occupy proportionately more higher paying roles such as technical specialists and leadership roles.

Through the Gender Equality Act, this Government recognised that as a major employer we have the power - and the responsibility - to address gender inequality within our own workforces.

The Department of Education's Gender Equality Action Plan aims to change that. Over the next three years we will specifically focus on embedding inclusive recruitment and career development opportunities, so all staff have the same opportunities to progress. Societal and cultural factors mean women are far more likely than men to work flexibly, especially by working part-time, and taking longer parental leave. That is why ensuring equitable access to flexible work arrangements and leave options will help to reduce the gender pay gap and improve retention of women in our workforces. In addition, increasing the capability of people managers and leaders to address and respond to disrespectful behaviours and complaints is a key priority underpinning the Gender Equality Action Plan.

The new Victorian Government Schools Agreement which came into effect mid last year, has made further strides in supporting parents to re-enter the teaching workforce after paternity and maternity leave. This includes:

1. paid maternity leave increasing to 16 weeks.
2. partner leave increasing from one week to four weeks
3. access to 38 hours of special leave to attend maternity related appointments
4. access to paid lactation breaks when returning to work
5. paying superannuation for the first 12 months of maternity leave

Increasing the availability of part time work and part time work at senior levels within our school system is something I am passionate about. One program that I am very proud of that works toward this is the Tutor Learning Initiative. Sometimes it takes a crisis to spark innovation and that is what has happened in Victorian schools. In 2021, ostensibly to respond to the challenges of the pandemic, we introduced the single largest investment in targeted learning support in our state's history, the Tutor Learning Initiative. This has changed the ability of trained teachers to return the classroom in a more flexible and part time capacity. I have met many tutors, predominantly women, for whom the full time teaching load was not possible, but they have a passion for helping kids learn and the tutor program has got them back into the classroom. Even with sector wide workforce shortages during 2022, over 99 per cent of schools were able to hire a tutor. The program alleviates pressure on classroom teachers (parents who have helped in the classroom will understand immediately how an extra set of hands will help) and enables teachers who are unable to work full time due to caring responsibilities, retirement or other reasons to return to the classroom and support our students.

Just ask Liz Darwish, a parent whose son, Awdel, a student at Melton West Primary School, benefited from the help of qualified tutors. She told us that "In a short period of time, he went from very apprehensive, timid and fearful to a few months later, blossoming." This is what all parents want for their kids. The tutor learning Initiative is for students identified as in need of additional assistance. They work with a tutor in small groups of up to five. The evidence is clear Victorian students have already benefited from this program over the past two years and will again this year. The program has been extended into 2023 through funding of \$258 million because it simultaneously helps deal with a wide range of problems. It helps tackle the teacher shortage, support students and also address the gender pay gap simultaneously. The benefits for kids will extend through their entire adult lives by helping some keep their lives on track and achieve the promise that all their parents will wish for them. At a time when we need more teachers in our schools it is clear that the introduction of tutors are part of the solution. You can see why a recent national study from the Grattan Institute recommends small-group tutoring be taken up by all states and territories.

Is the program working? The resounding response from principals and teachers say that it is. Teachers report that a key reason for the success of the TLI is that it provides a way for students to re-engage with all school activities and helps improve student attendance. Tutors have reported that, after being able to work with students closely and intensively, the anxiety some students feel about school and attendance is reduced. We have such dedicated and talented teachers here in Victoria, and they are now supported by our outstanding tutors.

Another aspect of our education system in which we can do better at gender equality is our select entry schools. Victoria has four select entry high schools for high performing students in years 9 to 12, by select entry it means that student must sit

an entrance examination. In addition to this is the excellent John Monash Science School. Analysis of the outcomes of the enrolments that follow show that, despite two of the four being single gender schools there is an imbalance when compared to the rest of the government school system. The test is designed to ability as opposed to achievement, is a mix of multiple choice, written questions across reading, maths and general ability. And still the evidence shows a gender imbalance. Historically, one reason for this was infrastructure, MacRob's was smaller than Melbourne High and until 2010 they were the only select entry government schools. We did seek to address this. I visited last year to view construction progress as we expand the school to broadly match Melbourne High in enrolment capacity.

But that is only part of the puzzle. There is a gender imbalance at the two non-gendered select entry high schools with around 2 girls to 3 boys, this in a system with close to 50 50 in senior high school. But why, what are we doing and what could we do. We know that having addressed the easy part, the size of the schools, the problems are that there are more boys sitting the exam, the boys are doing a bit better at the exam and sadly more girls are declining the offers. This year the examination has been redesigned to remove gender bias, because there should be none. We also have to change how high performance is viewed at school because it can so easily fit into the gendered frames which we see in our competitive society, and we a responsibility to make sure girls have every chance, not just a place, but an actual change to achieve their best.

In our parliaments we have, well in the Labor Party at least, we have successfully employed quotas to address societal factors that disadvantage women. As Education Minister I have the power to do the same in our select entry schools. With that in mind I will take a good look at the outcomes of the examinations this year and if I need to, I will consider a quota if that can address the issue.

This is an edited version of the Hon Natalie Hutchin's 2023 Fiona Richardson Memorial Lecture. She is the Minister for Education and Minister for Women in the Andrews Victorian Labor government.

Noel Pearson

Taking Responsibility for the Voice

Thank you very much Nick for this very important invitation, I am very keen to speak to Labor people from John Curtin. This is a crucial time for us. The Labor movement is about to secure a historic and tectonic shift in the position of indigenous people in Australia with the forthcoming referendum. I was just so galvanized by Prime Minister Albanese's speech on election night where it really came out of the blue. His first commitment to implementing the whole Uluru Statement from the Heart, I was not expecting that and his complete forthrightness on the correctness of this referendum and the Uluru Statement has been one of the most amazing things that I've witnessed in Labor leadership.

I was an acolyte, and still am, an acolyte of Paul Keating. I was oriented towards Labor in my youth and certainly when I first entered public life, my concentration was on Land Rights, the Mabo decision and Native Title and played a role with Prime Minister Keating and my colleagues from the indigenous leadership across the country in the 90s. So I was a poster boy for Labor side of the struggle. But at the end of the 90s I thought we've just suffered a massive loss at the hands of the Conservatives with the response to the Wik High Court decision by the Howard government, the so-called Ten Point Plan that was legislated narrowly in 1998 when Senator Harradine from Tasmania betrayed the Wik people. He had committed to the Wik people to preserve the Native Title Act and the implications of the Wik decision. We suffered a grievous setback when that legislation was passed, because Harradine changed his mind and changed his position. Over the course of the last two decades, indigenous people and native title holders in particular, it is incalculable what was lost as a result of those amendments. The country has gone through probably two waves of the largest resource development revolutions that has taken place across the planet. A massive resource development over these decades since the Wik decision, and yet the ability of native title holders to secure some of that wealth for the landowners on whose land this mining takes place, was severely cruelled by what happened in parliament in 1998, as a result of the Ten Point Plan, so I was shattered at the end of the 90s that we had lost so much. And for a great win like the 1993 Native Title Act and the High Court decision to then lose that or loses significant leverage and power in 1998. I was completely disillusioned and I was, to be honest, disillusioned with the Labor party and its inability to find a way back to office and my despair at those 12 years of Howard's rule when Labor could not get its act together. It had disowned the Keating heritage.

I then had to give thought to the cause of my own people. I came up with the conviction that some of our agenda we needed Nixon to go to China. On the agendas that I had, we needed a conservative Prime Minister to strike out, in relation to issues that I think were very pressing because I'm a strong believer that rights and responsibilities have got to go together, land rights and welfare reform, human rights and social responsibility, and economic development. All of those are not contradictory positions. We have to find the radical center between those positions and in order for our community to rise up out of the hole that we're in. So I've been an advocate for Alcohol Management and as much as I have been concerned about imprisonment and incarceration of our people. But in that process, I think I lost progressives. I don't think I was successful in trying to explain what our strategy was.

And so there was an assumption by my friends in the Labor movement that somehow I'd gone over to the dark side, the conservatives. But I'll tell you what, in 2007, Howard went to his last election with a commitment to constitutional recognition. The ball was finally kicked off on this by a conservative who committed that within 18 months of him being reelected he would take a question to the Australian people in a referendum.

Now, Howard's thinking at the time was that he wanted a change to the preamble to the Constitution. I recall him literally on the eve of him announcing his election commitment, I recall having a fairly tense phone call with him about my view, that simple preambular recognition would be insufficient and unacceptable, there needed to be substantive recognition in the Constitution. Howard committed at the time that we would revisit this if he got reelected, anyway, there was no chance. Kevin Rudd mirrored John Howard's commitment; he said I will do the same thing. And then, two days before the election, he announced that constitutional recognition would be an agenda for his second term, so the basically the commitment to constitutional recognition was put on the back burner until the second term of a Rudd government. And that second term never came, of course.

So this whole issue was, had been enlivened by Howard in 2007, the ball had been kicked into play but then it kind of sat there for those first three years, and it was only in the negotiations by Julia Gillard to form the minority government that she did that a commitment to picking up recognition commitment commenced. So Gillard formed the Expert Panel in 2011 and I was a member of that and that is a time that I

had the good fortune to have a young intern from Monash Law School join me on this, what is now a 13 year agenda. The set of ideas that emerged in that Expert Panel process, did not include the main idea, the most substantive idea was a commitment to non-discrimination, that there would be a provision of the Constitution that would outlaw discrimination against any group in the Australian community. But when the report was released at the end of 2011, there was a violent reaction to those recommendations, particularly to the non-discrimination proposal, by constitutional conservatives who said this would be a one-line Bill of Rights. The proposal would amount to this dreaded Bill of Rights provision that would empower Courts and particularly the High Court to supervise the laws of Parliament, according to judgments around discrimination. The reaction was just so violent and so determined that Shireen and I soon came to the view that there was no way those proposals from the Expert Panel would survive. We started casting around for a pivot, an alternative. I decided for Shireen and I to go across the North Shore of Sydney and sit down with the Australian Catholic University people, Professor Craven, Julian Leaser and Professor Anne Twomey. We sat down with them and we put it to them, if you are going to object to a nondiscrimination clause in the Constitution, indigenous people have suffered and still suffer from discrimination. How are you going to assure them that they can be treated fairly in the future?

So the concept that indigenous people should have a voice to the Parliament, rather than having the shield of the law, we would have the sword of the voice and we could point out to Parliament, our views on laws and policies before they are made. That really was the origins of the idea of the Voice, It would be a political mechanism, a mechanism for indigenous people to participate in the democratic politics of the country and to advise parliament on bills affecting indigenous people, but also to advise the executive government on the policies and programs that affect indigenous people.

The process over this last decade has been around the building of an indigenous consensus around the voice. The 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart was the high watermark of self-determination in my view, there's never been anything like the rigor and the participation that eventually resulted in the Uluru Statement after dialogue meetings were held in locations all around the country from the Torres Strait to Tasmania, Western Australia to Central Australia. All corners of the country were covered by these dialogues and the resulting Statement from the heart at Uluru, the extraordinary consensus that was achieved there. I've certainly not participated or witnessed anything near the amount of thought rigor, debate discussion that went into the formation of the Uluru Statement.

This has been a long process, I know of no other policy, or constitutional proposal, or legislative reform that has been subject to as long and involved a process as this. This has been going on for 12, 13 years now. If you count back to when it was first kicked off by Howard, we are entering the 16th since this process was started. At every turn, the potential objections that constitutional conservatives could raise against the proposal at every turn, we have sought

to anticipate them and to make provision to address the concerns they have. The arguments that have been thrown around in the last year in particular, are really baseless because the questions I raised have actually already been answered. We have had a number of High Court judges contribute to reviewing the provision that the Prime Minister has announced and which the Attorney General has now introduced into the parliament and which is now the subject of the parliamentary committee process. The extraordinary thing about the process we're going through now, the debate and the truculent lies that are being generated by the No campaign, the extraordinary thing is that Julian Leaser was as much an author of the provision as anyone in the country. When the story is probably told about this history, Julian will be seen as one of the architects of the concept of the Voice. I can tell you that, and I won't go on too much longer, I can tell you that every Prime Minister I've dealt with, from Abbott in 2013 and then Turnbull and then Morrison, they all went to the various elections with a policy commitment to indigenous constitutional recognition. There's never been an election where the two major parties have not been committed to constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians since 2007. This has been a consistent commitment, and indeed in the 2019 election, Morrison went to that election with a commitment that included setting aside a significant budget, \$170 million, to conduct the referendum. Morrison went to the 2019 election with a referendum budget in forward estimates.

That really was the origins of the idea of the Voice, it would be a political mechanism, a mechanism for indigenous people to participate in the democratic politics of the country.

This gulf between what the leadership of the conservatives was committed to versus their inability or their cowardice, in terms of getting their party room into order, and to lead their party room forward, was the reason why the politics of this was courted for so long. Abbott wanted to do this, but he couldn't. Turnbull wanted to do this, but he couldn't. Morrison wanted to do this, but he couldn't. They were all looking over their shoulders, in the case of Turnbull; he was looking over his shoulder at Abbott coming for him again.

Abbott wanted to use any kind of commitment that Turnbull might make, to going forward with constitutional recognition as a motivation to cut his throat.

It's been the inability of the conservative leadership to bring their party room with them that has been the fundamental problem the conservatives have had, and they still have it now, Dutton has got an intransigent party room, he's too weak to have shifted them and shown the necessary leadership to move his party out of the rut that it's in.

I am of the great belief that we are in a good position. I think we can carry this, I think the Australian people will say, Yeah, that's a fair deal. That's a fair deal. That's a decent deal. This is the least, this is a simple proposal. It's a profound proposal, but it's simple and it's just. I have a great belief that the referendum will succeed when it is put to the people in October. But the headwinds and fractiousness of the No campaign and the sheer difficulties we're having in from the media, it's just extraordinary the uphill battle, the work that we have cut out for us. But in the final analysis my view is that we're on a winner here, I just urge the Labor movement to stay the course, let's complete this, let's convince our fellow Australians about the correctness of this cause and let's bring this home in October.

Noel Pearson played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Cape York Land Council in 1990, has led a number of major reforms for Cape communities and has served as a member of the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians and the Referendum Council. The Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership is an organisation which promotes the economic and social development of Cape York in far north Queensland. Noel delivered the 2022 Boyer Lectures. This is his address to the John Curtin Research Centre InConversation Series held online on Thursday 27 April.

Frank Bongiorno

Orderly and Adult: The Albanese Government's First Year

An Albanese Labor Government seemed an immensely unlikely prospect before summer of 2020-21. In April 2021 Peter Van Onselen and Wayne Errington's published a book, *How Good is Scott Morrison?* confidently predicting a Coalition victory at the next election, that Morrison had "the next election in the bag". But given the timelines involved in producing a book, these words would have been written earlier: by the time they appeared in print, this judgement was already out of date. When an extract of *How Good is Scott Morrison?* appeared in the *Australian*, it was quietly edited to indicate that Morrison's slowness in responding to women's concerns and his botched vaccine rollout "left him more vulnerable as a political leader than at any time during his prime ministership". A summer of further lockdowns followed by a shambolic vaccination program had Labor poised for victory by the summer of 2021-22, when a shortage of testing kits drew further attention to Morrison's deficiencies.

Labor's mandate at the 2022 election was a muted one. It had eschewed the larger target provided by Bill Shorten in 2019. But it was not devoid of content either. There was a large commitment to childcare and there were more ambitious targets for the transition to renewables. Albanese sometimes spoke a language of universal provision that recalled Whitlam: we were perhaps reminded that his political mentor and early employer was Tom Uren, a left-wing member of the Whitlam government. But Labor's primary vote ended up only in the low 30s. The story of the election seemed less about Labor than the Teals and the Greens. But once the balloons and streamers are gone, it matters a great deal who is in government and is not. "A win is a win", Tanya Plibersek said on election night, when asked on TV about Labor's low primary vote.

Election night began at Albanese's Marrickville home, with Penny Wong, a factional colleague, close confidant and shadow foreign minister, present. She would later introduce Albanese when he made his victory speech. As he had done on several occasions in the campaign, Albanese spoke feelingly of his upbringing, and he committed his government to the full implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which called for a First Nations Voice to Parliament, a treaty and truth-telling.

The large size of the crossbench in the new parliament – 17 in a House of 151 – was widely interpreted as a symptom of disillusionment with the old parties and an old politics. Albanese, a Labor factional warrior from way back, in some

ways seemed an unlikely bearer of a new one. But he had come a long way from the time of his 1998 excoriation of John Howard on the floor of parliament as the latest in the Liberals' "pantheon of chinless blue bloods and suburban accountants". Albanese could now have passed for a suburban accountant himself.

Still, he hit the ground running. He and four colleagues were sworn in the following Monday, just ahead of an overseas visit to Tokyo for the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ("The Quad") with Japan, India and the United States, the latter represented by President Joe Biden. High in the government's early priorities was repairing Australia's international relationships, with France – which resented Morrison's double-dealing over the purchase of submarines – as well as with China, which had placed relations with Australia in the deep freeze over various matters. Albanese – as well as his foreign minister Wong and deputy and defence minister Richard Marles – spent a good deal of time overseas in the early weeks of the government in a period of considerable international turbulence following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February. Wong visited several Pacific nations in an effort widely seen as an attempt to counter Chinese influence in the region. Albanese undertook a tightly controlled visit to Ukraine himself.

Rising inflation, accompanied by climbing interest rates, contributed to the most serious cost of living crisis in three decades. Energy prices, stimulated by the war in Europe, were particularly troublesome, especially in light of Labor's pre-election commitment to get prices down. After a tussle between the minister, Chris Bowen, and energy companies extending over several months, in December 2022 the government used its powers to intervene directly in the energy market to cap coal and gas prices. An October budget delivered by the Treasurer, Jim Chalmers, advanced implementation of election commitments in areas such as the extension of paid parental leave, higher subsidies for childcare, and more social and affordable housing. The parliament also agreed to industrial relations reforms intended to strengthen enterprise bargaining and boost wages, especially for women. A bill for the long-anticipated and long-delayed federal anti-corruption commission passed before Christmas.

In the first year of the government, there were consultations and enquiries across a wide range of areas, including a Royal Commission into Robodebt – the Coalition government's illegal effort to steal money from welfare recipients by

raising fictional debts against their names. The testimony it heard served as a reminder of failures of the previous government and the incapacities of the senior ranks of the public service. The Reserve Bank, criticised for its recent interest rate hikes after its governor had earlier given the impression an increase was unlikely before 2024, was also the subject of an enquiry, as was Australia's immigration system and the National Disability Insurance Scheme. There was a consultation on a proposal for an Australian Universities Accord, and another on cultural policy that led to the launch of *Revive* in late January 2023, followed by a major financial boost to the national collecting institutions. The parliament also found time for a two-week period of mourning following the death of Queen Elizabeth II, while Albanese travelled to London for the coronation in May 2023.

The emphasis in all this, however, was on order, regularity and trust – a rebuke to the Morrison government but also, arguably, to the Rudd and Gillard era. Albanese had some of the instincts of the "lone wolf", as the journalist Katherine Murphy put it, but his approach in both opposition and government became increasingly collaborative. He relied on the competence of a strong frontbench, and he made it clear that he wanted to re-establish the ALP as the natural party of government, in line with Bob Hawke's approach in the 1980s. Like Hawke, he seemed prepared to allow ministers to get on with things in their respective portfolios.

Like Hawke, Albanese would be criticised for being too moderate, too cautious in pushing back on Coalition-era initiatives, too attached to old ways of doing politics. Several of the new independent parliamentarians expressed outrage when the government reduced their staffing entitlements. There were also criticisms, from the outset, that the middle path Albanese and Labor had sought to tread on the shift from fossil fuels to renewables lacked sufficient ambition. In its defence policy, the government added crucial detail to the bare bones of the Morrison government's AUKUS agreement with expensive plans for the purchase and manufacture of nuclear-powered submarines. The critics, which included former Prime Minister Paul Keating, argued that the government was surrendering Australia's sovereignty to the United States, an accusation that Albanese and Marles denied.

The government ended temporary protection visas for asylum-seekers, thereby offering them a pathway to fuller participation in the life of the nation, and it established a pathway making it easier for New Zealanders to become citizens. Critics, however, pointed to the retention of off-shore detention of asylum-seekers who had languished for years. The government initially displayed little interest in increasing the pitiful unemployment benefit, JobSeeker, not even after one of the advisory committees that it established, that on economic inclusion, recommended an increase. Yet it was committed to fulfilling its pre-election promise not to dismantle the Morrison government's Stage 3 tax cuts, despite the windfall they would offer the super wealthy. Albanese wanted to avoid being considered either as breaking a core election promise or as guilty of profligacy.

In one area in particular, however, Albanese's approach seemed to owe more to Whitlam-era idealism than the more cautious and pragmatic Hawke tradition. The Albanese government's commitment to holding a referendum on the First Nations Voice to Parliament before the end of 2023 remained steadfast, even as an otherwise demoralised opposition, led by Peter Dutton, did its best to use obstructionism as a means of reviving the coalition's political fortunes. These had declined to alarming levels for the Liberal Party especially, and voters were unimpressed by the federal coalition's attempts to lay blame for the nation's difficulties, such as the rising cost of living, at Albanese's feet. At a by-election on 1 April 2023 for the outer-suburban Melbourne seat of Aston, long held by the Liberals and recently vacated by scandal-plagued ex-minister Alan Tudge, Labor won a two-party preferred swing of over six per cent. It was the first time since 1920 that a federal government had managed to win a seat from the opposition in such circumstances.

Labor won a two-party preferred swing over six per cent. It was the first time since 1920 that a federal government had managed to win a seat from the opposition in such circumstances.

It was hard to avoid seeing in it some kind of verdict on the first few months of the Albanese government. Commentators have written of a sense that the country was again being run by "adults". Albanese's own image as a likable, trustworthy and competent leader contributed something to that impression. The government's second budget – delivered by Jim Chalmers in May 2023 – reinforced the image of a cautious government seeking to achieve a balance between the diverse constituencies that helped it into office in 2023, and which it will need to keep onside to be re-elected. Following widespread reports that the government would only increase JobSeeker for people aged over 55, there was in the end also a minor improvement – of \$40 a fortnight – for younger claimants. There was also a strengthening of bulkbilling of Medicare and energy bill relief, all geared to those most vulnerable to cost-of-living pressures. The government also reversed a welfare policy that sought to force single parents back into the workforce once their youngest child had turned eight: the threshold was now raised to fourteen.

Despite Chalmers delivering the first surplus for a decade and a half, critics from the right raised the spectre of worsening inflation, while those from the left argued that abandonment of stage 3 income tax cuts would have allowed the government to lift the unemployment benefit back above the poverty line – that is, to where the Morrison government lifted it during the pandemic. The government was unmoved by such claims, regarding the dropping of the tax cuts as likely to undermine voters' trust, considering the party's commitment before the 2022 election. Instead,

it pointed to the relief to low income-earners offered by the combination of measures around health, energy and welfare.

Rather, for the time being, this government's "story" is of the return of orderly government, and that is appealing to voters who were sick of having Morrison and his army of fourth-rate ministers in their faces. The revelation soon after the 2022 election that Morrison had during the pandemic secretly had himself appointed by the governor-general to five ministries in addition to the prime ministership underlined the sense of norms, conventions and even sanity having been restored (and Albanese moved to legislate to prohibit any repetition of that affair).

We do not yet know if Albanese will be a short- or long-term leader – the last in the procession of 2-to-4-year prime ministers we have had since Howard, or a more enduring proposition. His age works against Howard-like longevity, but he could emulate Hawke's eight years. His ambition is clearly for at least a couple of terms, and the problems of the Liberal Party following the 2022 election and a succession of humiliating failures in state elections augur well for federal Labor's, and Albanese's, prospects. Coming to the prime ministership at 59, as did Ben Chifley, on assuming office Albanese was a little older than Harold Holt and a little younger than Malcolm Turnbull. Of these, only Holt had comparable longevity in parliament before reaching the top job.

What are we to make of this first year if seen in wider perspective? Governments often falter early on. The first year of the Whitlam government was marred by the scandal created by his Attorney-General Lionel Murphy's raid on ASIO's office in Melbourne, as well as by rising inflation – to which the government responded with a widely-criticised 25% tariff cut. Hawke's first year is often recalled as a triumph but there was a major spy scandal which resulted in the loss of one of his ministers, Mick Young, along the way. It was not long before critics within the party and outside it on the left were complaining that it was too cautious and pragmatic, both in domestic economic policy and in foreign affairs. John Howard's first year included the loss of ministers in various scandals – and the stalking of the government by Pauline Hanson. Kevin Rudd was being accused in the media of running a chaotic government within a year of his election victory.

By comparison, Albanese's has been a remarkably clean first year, unworried by any kind of scandal or major error. Its image has been greatly enhanced by the juxtaposition of Morrison and the Coalition offered by the royal commission on Robodebt and the secret ministries revelation. This has been critically important: Rudd erred when he talked big about scandals in the Howard government such as the Australian Wheat Board's payment of bribes to the Iraqi government but failed to follow up with enquiries when in government. It was also a major error to have no enquiry into the Iraq war. By way of contrast, the Albanese government has provided many opportunities for reminders of the failures of its predecessor.

The Albanese Labor government has benefited from the crisis

in the Liberal Party. The Coalition seems to be a long way from a return to office because it faces a massive crossbench, most of which has been carved out of its traditional heartland. The Liberals are now largely confined to the occasional outer-suburban or regional seat. The Nationals are a larger portion of the Coalition, and accordingly better able to dictate terms that alienate the Liberal Party from those heartland seats it has lost to independents and, in Brisbane, to the Greens. Labor therefore has advantages that it has not enjoyed since the Hawke era. The prospects of an extended period in government are fair. The main dangers lie in the economy, which may well fall into a recession, in ministers becoming atomised and isolated in their portfolio work, and in old-fashioned political miscalculation. For the time being, voters are disinclined to blame Albanese's government for the cost of living, but that time may eventually come.

Frank Bongiorno AM is Professor of History at the Australian National University, Distinguished Fellow of the Whitlam Institute, Western Sydney University, and President of the Australian Historical Association. He was formerly a Senior Lecturer at the University of New England and at King's College London. His books include *The People's Party: Victorian Labor and the Radical Tradition 1875-1914*, *The Eighties: The Decade That Transformed Australia* and, co-authored with Nick Dyrenfurth, *A Little History of the Australian Labor Party*, and most recently *Dreamers and Schemers: A Political History of Australia (2022)*.

John Fitzgerald

Risky business: A nuanced understanding of Chinese Australians' views

On 19 April, Sydney's Lowy Institute launched its third annual report on *Being Chinese in Australia* surveying current views and experiences of 'Chinese Australians.' Are there lessons for political parties here?

Several upbeat findings emerge from the report, bearing on reduced experiences of racism among respondents and warming sentiment towards Australia, a deeper sense of belonging, and positive views about Australia's role in the world. Lowy highlights these findings in its promotional material.

Less reassuring were other findings that mainstream media chose to focus on, related to Australia's national security and international relations, and to the sizeable proportion of those polled who professed a stronger sense of belonging toward China rather than Australia. Just over a quarter (27%) of respondents thought the AUKUS trilateral alliance made Australia safer, compared with over half (52%) of the general population. On 'foreign interference' more respondents were concerned about influence on Australia's political processes from the US (62%) than from China (54%). Further, just two thirds (64%) of respondents identify as Australians at all, while one third identify as Chinese and almost one in five (18%) feel a strong sense of belonging to China.

The report left many Chinese Australians scratching their heads. Who are Chinese Australians? Who was consulted for the poll? What were they asked exactly?

The online report stumbles on its opening page where the headline statement reads that 45% of Chinese-Australians were born in China and 15% in Australia. This contradicts published ABS 2021 data and inflates the China-born segment by almost a fifth while halving the proportion of Australian born. The headline claim fails to point out that its numbers are based on the survey sample, adjusted for age, not ABS totals for people identifying as of Chinese ancestry. Baldly stated, the opening statement is incorrect.

According to 2021 national census data there are 1.4 million people in Australia who identify as having Chinese ancestry, of whom about 400,000 were born in Australia and one million born overseas. Of the overseas-born, 536,000 were born in the People's Republic of China and the remainder born elsewhere, including Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Relatively speaking, China-born make up 38 per cent (not 45 per cent) of the 1.4 million total, those born in Australia 29 per cent (not 15 per cent) and people

born elsewhere make up 33 per cent.

Who responded to the survey? The report rests on online responses from 1,200 self-selecting adults, recruited through social media platforms, and weighted against a basket of demographic parameters based on 2021 census data around age, education, gender, language spoken, country of birth, and state or territory of residence. Visa status is not factored in beyond requiring respondents to have been in Australia for 12 months. All are classified as Chinese Australian for the purpose of the report.

Readers can sympathise with the difficulties entailed in surveying large, diverse and dispersed communities. Online self-selection is especially fraught. All credit to the Lowy Institute team for persistence.

Classification of findings also presents challenges. The views and experiences of visiting students and residents on limited-term working visas, for example, are worth surveying on several counts, not least because Australia's universities and work places would be hard pressed to get by without them. Their experiences of racial discrimination should be surveyed along with their sense of whether their schools or employers are treating them fairly and how services could be improved on their behalf. But it's a stretch classifying their views as those of Chinese Australians.

Properly speaking, Chinese Australian refers to Australians of Chinese descent, which is to say citizens and self-identifying Australians who claim Chinese ancestry. Modifying the definition of a familiar term for the purpose of a survey confuses the communities concerned and, judging from online responses to mainstream media reports, bamboozles the public.

Visa and citizenship status are not weighted. The report offers a one-page pie chart on visa/citizenship status of all respondents, indicating that 21 per cent were on limited-term student, worker and other visas, and that 56 per cent were Australian nationals – that is, people self-identifying as ethnically Chinese and possessing Australian citizenship. The remainder were permanent residents. It follows that the percentage reported as identifying as Australian (64%) exceeds the number of citizens among respondents. In this respect multicultural Australia appears to be doing what it does best in embracing would-be citizens, as well as Australian nationals, as self-identifying Australians.

And what of the questions? These are classified into several

clusters dealing with way of life, belonging, media, trust, foreign policy, foreign interference, and relations with China and the US, all important issues on which Chinese Australians and residents should be consulted.

Problems with the classification of respondents as Chinese Australians emerges most clearly in questions of identity and belonging, where just 41 per cent of Chinese Australians identify as Chinese Australian. Overall, 64 per cent identify as Australian in one form or another (Chinese Australian, Australian Chinese, and Australian) and 32% as Chinese. 18 per cent report a strong sense of belonging to China.

As a rule of thumb, belonging correlates closely with citizenship and to some degree with permanent residence. Among expatriates the world over, temporary residents live in one place while maintaining their identity in another. In all probability, most of the residents who don't identify in any way as Australian, or say they feel they belong to China, are citizens of China and plan to stay that way. But as the findings are not broken down by visa or citizenship category, readers are left pondering why international students and other temporary residents from China should be included in the category of Chinese Australians in the first place.

The sixth line of questioning, relating to 'Foreign Interference,' raises a different set of concerns. Several questions under this head ask respondents to estimate the degree of attention paid to foreign interference by journalists, politicians and the public. These aren't the questions that made their way into newspaper headlines. One widely-quoted headline read that Chinese Australians were more concerned about 'foreign interference' from the US than from China.

This claim is not born out by survey results which show more respondents concerned about foreign 'influence' emanating from the US than from China. Respondents were not asked to weigh their concerns about interference from one country or the other. Again, this is a problem of classification: reasonable questions probing responses to foreign influence are classified and reported in the survey under the misleading heading of foreign interference.

Distinguishing between foreign influence and interference may not matter in some countries but it is important in Australian public life. The first is welcomed, the second outlawed. The Department of Home Affairs frames the distinction this way:

Australia is not concerned with foreign influence activity that is open and transparent and that respects our people, society and systems... Foreign interference occurs when activity carried out by, or on behalf of, a foreign power, is coercive, corrupting, deceptive or clandestine, and contrary to Australia's sovereignty, values and national interests.

As the survey fails to highlight the distinction between these two terms, and places them together under the heading of Foreign Interference, newspaper headlines are true to the report and at the same time highly misleading.

Responding to criticisms of the report that I raised in an 800-word Opinion piece in The Australian, Lowy authors

correct a careless error on my part to the effect that that one third of respondents identified with China. I appreciate the correction. That mistake was made in the course of reducing to 800 words a 2,500 word article that did not refer to one third identifying with China, as the authors would know from the longer draft I shared with them ahead of publication.

We disagree on the nature of the problem all the same. They 'respectfully disagree' with a view they attribute to me that the survey should be limited to people 'of Chinese ancestry who are Australian citizens,' and then proceed to explain why they disagree, at length. This is puzzling at best as no such view was expressed by me in either the published opinion piece or the longer version. The point at issue is not who should be surveyed but who should be classified as Chinese Australian in survey analysis and reporting.

All categories of residents claiming Chinese ancestry should be surveyed, including temporary workers and international students. The survey needs to be as wide as possible to capture experiences of racial abuse and other issues bearing on the comfort and well-being of visitors and residents. Our disagreement is not over who should be surveyed but how survey responses should be classified.

In this case, everyone sampled is classified as Chinese Australian. In their defence, the authors say they were simply following the practice of the ABS 2021 census data collection. This may be true for data collection but does not hold for data classification. To the best of my knowledge, the term Chinese Australian is not found in formal census reports classifying all residents in Australia claiming Chinese ancestry. Again, I would be happy to be corrected.

Chinese Australians is an everyday term referring to Australians claiming Chinese heritage. It is not confined to citizens, as I point out in my earlier published commentary, as it includes both citizens and self-identifying Australians claiming Chinese ancestry, who together far exceed those with citizenship. As a rule, the term does not apply to international students although exceptions could be made for students from China who explicitly identify as Australian. My point is that analysis and reporting should clearly distinguish between different cohorts, and that the term Chinese Australians should be used selectively.

Further, it is disingenuous for the authors to claim in their response that they cannot control how others report their polling when their classifications are misleading on such basic terms as Chinese Australian, foreign influence, and foreign interference. Adjusting names to match the order of things (zhengming), the Chinese classics tell us, brings order to the world. Some zhengming is in order here.

What prompted me to comment publicly on flaws in the survey design in its third year was not just the community alarm generated by media reporting but a sense that some of the reported survey results could prompt mainstream political parties into factoring the findings into their electoral strategies. On one level that would be unfair to the research team which had no intention of feeding their findings into electoral politics at state or federal levels. Still, the temptation is understandable. It's a small step from popular media

talking up a report of this kind and then political parties and factions taking the report's findings into account in their internal debates and election number-crunching. The Lowy report did not emerge in a vacuum.

In April, the federal government captured a seat from the opposition at a by-election in the Victorian seat of Aston for the first time in a century, and the ABC attributed that historic outcome to the substantial presence of Chinese Australians who make up around one in seven of the electorate's population. In the NSW state elections held a month earlier, according to The Australian, the governing Liberals saw a 9.3 percent slump in their primary vote in the 10 seats with the largest Chinese-heritage populations, double the swing state-wide.

Assuming these reports are accurate, Chinese-Australian voters were signalling widespread disaffection with the Liberal Party and coalition governments around the time the Lowy report appeared. Not surprisingly, this confluence of events and reporting encouraged political speculation across the spectrum, arguably spooking Liberals who are trying to plot their way back into office, dividing Greens concerned about human rights abuses in Xinjiang and Tibet from their pro-China anti-America colleagues, and possibly nourishing complacency in Labor about its ability to balance multi-cultural, trade, and security policies.

Chinese Australians are clearly sending a message but what message? Is it about foreign and defence policy? About international trade and commerce? Anxiety over racial profiling and discrimination? Could it be a combination of those factors? If so in what blend exactly and in what order of priority?

In my judgement, political parties should set the Lowy report aside in considering these questions. For a start, no more than 56 per cent of the Lowy sample is eligible to vote in state and federal elections, as citizens. The report makes no effort to correlate respondents' view on policy matters with citizenship, i.e. with capacity to influence these matters through the ballot box.

Further, while China-born residents make up almost half of the Lowy sample, they make up a relatively small segment of Chinese-Australian voters. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 data show that just 227,000 China-born residents are citizens (out of the 1.4 million people claiming Chinese ancestry) among whom perhaps 200,000 are of voting age. So survey findings heavily favouring China-born respondents cannot be correlated with Chinese-Australian voting behaviours. To put those numbers in perspective, the number of China-born citizens in Australia falls midway between those born in India, who number about 350,000, and the 156,000 Australians born in The Philippines.

No published research answers these questions. My hunch is that for the broader Chinese-Australian community, anxiety over racial profiling and discrimination resulting from the way the former federal government framed the COVID-19 pandemic and relations with China weighs more heavily than the state of diplomatic relations with China. Many are also concerned about disruptions to business and commerce

which were severely affected by ruptured trading ties with China.

At a guess, the key message coming across is that managing trade and community relations takes a different type of skill-set than the one displayed by the former federal government in its dealings with China and Chinese Australians. Labor would be foolish to fall into complacency on that account. If Chinese Australians are scratching their heads over the Lowy survey, the rest of us are scratching ours over managing relations with China in ways that meet the views, experiences and long-term security and prosperity needs of all Australians.

John Fitzgerald is Emeritus Professor in the Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, where he worked in the Asia-Pacific philanthropy studies program from 2013 to 2017. Before that he served five years as China Representative of The Ford Foundation in Beijing and before that again as Director of the International Centre of Excellence in Asia-Pacific Studies at the Australian National University. From 2015 to 2017 he was the elected President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. His research focuses on the history of nationalism, public administration, and philanthropy in China, and on the histories of the Chinese diaspora, and his public commentaries focus on China-Australia relations. His recent books include *Cadre Country: How China became the Chinese Communist Party* (2022) and (ed) *Taking the Low Road: China's Influence in Australian States and Territories* (2022). Earlier books include *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* (2007), awarded the Ernest Scott Prize of the Australian Historical Association, and *Awakening China* (1997) awarded the Joseph Levenson Prize of the U.S. Association for Asian Studies.

Dominic Meagher

2023 Federal Budget Review: stronger foundations for a better future

Treasurer Jim Chalmers recently handed down the Albanese Labor government's first full budget, which may be destined to be seen as more transformational in hindsight than in the moment. Imbalances and neglect across such a wide range of priorities is so deep that none of them can be resolved in a single budget. Housing affordability, wages, poverty, Medicare, power bills, the energy transition, productivity, strategic capabilities, skills shortages, women's economic equality, the public service, the growing importance of the care economy, technological transformations, climate destabilisation: on all of these priorities, a foundation has been laid from which early steps toward restoration have been taken. Bet even Chalmers himself describing it as "foundational", acknowledges that this is the beginning (not the culmination) of rebuilding Australia after the decade of neglect.

The national agenda is as packed as it has ever been, but global inflation makes capacities as limited as they've been in half a century. Limiting inflation was an economic necessity. That it was a Labor government that brought in the first surplus in 15 years also has real political consequences: it solidifies trust, empowering the government to take bolder action in forthcoming budgets. Since the challenges we now face will require sustained boldness over several years, that investment in trust will come to be seen as a wise choice.

Among the priorities that face the government, we discuss below some of the big hits and a few where opportunities were left on the field.

Medicare

The centrepiece of Labor's foundational budget was, of course, the transformational investment in Medicare. \$3.5 billion to triple the bulk billing incentive for Australians with the most health is a critical foundation for restoring health care in Australia.

The budget also included significant new efforts to prevent vaping, a new national lung cancer screening program, and \$91.1 million to begin establishing the Australian Centre for Disease Control (ACDC). Regretfully missing was the complementary step of investing in infection control and indoor air safety: a deflationary investment that has become the most essential foundation for public health and for reducing labour shortages across the economy. That this critical part of public health was ignored should raise questions about whether the Chief Medical Officer is the

right person to appoint to lead the ACDC.

Women's economic equality and safety

Labor's budget backed its actions with money when it comes to the commitment to ending the neglect of 52 per cent of Australians. Improving workforce participation and economic inclusion while closing the gender pay gap, as well as ending violence against women were all headline priorities of the budget. Importantly, improving workforce participation was approached by expanding eligibility for Parenting Payment Single to single principal carers with children up to age 14. Facilitating participation rather than penalising people based on circumstance will always be more productive.

Foreign policy and defence

Foreign policy continued to be a star performer for the Albanese government, much to the confusion of those who prefer to "speak loudly while building no sticks" and those who prefer to kowtow to the biggest bully. \$1.9 billion in funding for the government's Pacific program highlights how central the region is to our national interests. That the emphasis was on diplomacy, strategic communications and countering disinformation shows how integral the region is to modern diplomacy.

But preparing for future challenges requires investments in defence and defence industry that are constrained by skill shortages even more than by inflation. Creative Australian policy thinking may be required to resolve this. Australia has long been a pioneer of education financing. Working initially with AUKUS partners to establish bilateral HECS arrangements would allow Australia to draw on international students from more diverse markets, setting the education sector on a more sustainable foundation while also helping resolve skills shortages in the defence industry. It would also give Australian students more chances to study abroad, deepening our international connections and facilitating investments in the skills that will determine the future. Among those, we'd like more government investment in education and research into Artificial Intelligence. We should be spending billions on AI which, as we have argued, will be a massive job-creating, productivity enhancing opportunity.

Inflation

Inflation still looms over every decision in this budget.

There are welcome initiatives to control the cost of living. The \$14.6 billion cost-of-living package will make healthcare, energy bills, and housing more affordable, while targeting income support through JobSeeker, youth allowance and others. The energy-bill rebate is a smart way to target relief where it is most needed: rather than attempting to control prices across the economy it invites only those who need help to step forward and receive it. The budget also begins to scale up the build-to-rent sector, which we have long argued is a crucial piece of the puzzle of tackling the housing affordability and supply crisis.

A better and fairer tax system will also help rebalance the economy to take heat away from pockets of inflation and ensure the government is able to properly resource essential priorities. A global minimum tax and a domestic minimum tax on multinationals, as well as a reduction in tax concessions available to ultra-high super account holders, will each help ensure the sustainability of public finances.

But the government may not have fully recognised the degree of control it has over some of the main drivers of inflation:

Inflationary invasion of Ukraine

First, Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine has created global shortages of food, oil and gas, but the budget does not reflect a specific agenda to force Russia to relent. The sooner Russia abandons its efforts to impose itself on Ukraine, the sooner the cost of energy and basic food will return to normal. As Ukraine's needs are more similar to our past needs than our future needs, some capabilities that we intend to use less of could be diverted to support Ukraine. Demonstrating that military imperialism has no place in the modern world would also make other potential catastrophes in our own region less likely.

Inflationary climate disasters

Second, climate disasters have driven up the costs of domestic food production and created new demand for reconstruction.

The budget laid foundations to help stabilise the climate with significant investments in energy transition, headlined by the \$2bn "hydrogen headstart" program. This program will demonstrate commercial viability, bringing the technology to a level of readiness that we have consistently argued will be crucial for a decarbonised industry and economy, especially in manufacturing and steel production.

Unfortunately, we no longer have the luxury to focus only on mitigation: we also have to adapt to the cost of climate disasters today. The previous government relied heavily on defence for disaster response and that has to change. However, the effectiveness of the ADF demonstrates the value of well organised basic skills to disaster response. That raises an opportunity to turn our national resilience capabilities into a form of a limited job guarantee, whereby anyone who wanted to develop the relevant skills to join a disaster reserve could be paid to undertake training. This again deals with entrenched disadvantage while

simultaneously reducing inflation, because it would help manage supply-side shocks more efficiently and ensure a more equitable distribution of resources, reducing pockets of inflationary pressure. It would also give Australia a national capability that we need.

The Pacific Package included \$2 billion, mainly in security assistance. Australia wants to ensure that when PICs have security needs, they turn first to Australia. But the Pacific Islands identify their most pressing security needs as climate related, not defence related. As future budgets invest in developing our own climate disaster resilience, we should integrate their needs into the capabilities we invest in and develop. We can contain inflation by (not instead of) responding to these major challenges.

Inflationary infection driven labour shortages

And third, the pandemic continues to contribute to excess labour shortages, but the budget lacked funding for any measures to reduce infections in workplaces, schools, hospitals, aged care centres, or people's homes.

Schools are particular hotbeds of infection, exacerbating the teacher shortage but also causing working parents to miss more days of work either because they or their kids are sick. This is how illness contributes to inflation, and how infection control is deflationary. Expanding the School Upgrade Fund would have been the single easiest for the budget to contribute to deflation: an extra \$92 million would improve air safety in an additional 3,700 schools where the planning work has already been done: all that is missing is the funding approval, and the number of sick days can be reduced.

The government is not impotent in the face of inflation: it has controls to influence the causes, even in the relatively short term. The more the government addresses these causes, the sooner we will return to economic normalcy and the more freedom the government will have to live up to its promise of no one held back, no one left behind.

The treasurer says this budget laid the foundation for future reforms and responding to major challenges. Now is the time to build on that foundation. Australians have high expectations for this government. The budget was an opportunity to rule a line under Australia's decade of neglect. The next task is to accelerate the transformation to the tolerable limits because the task ahead of us is immense. What we have seen however, is that federal Labor has formed the best government Australia has had in 25 years. If anyone is up to the task, it is this Labor government.

Dominic Meagher is Deputy Director/Chief Economist of the John Curtin Research Centre

Sam Almaliki

It's time for a National Summit to save the Australian dream

The latest report on the housing crisis graced newspaper front pages last month and the coverage of the affordability and supply crisis has only intensified. The peak housing advisory body, the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC) has released its 'flagship' research report on the nation's housing shortage.

And bottom line, it is bad and getting worse.

The 'perfect storm' of high inflation and interest rates, ballooning construction costs, record low vacancy rates as well as strong population growth and post-pandemic groans, has met decadal neglect and underfunding.

The headline-making figure that demand will outstrip supply by more than 100,000 over the next five years seems to have taken some by surprise. But we have been hearing this for years. Our housing system is failing everyday Aussies, notably young and vulnerable Australians.

At the federal level, the Albanese government's key legislation, the Housing Australia Future Fund, which could see some 30,000 new social and affordable homes built, has stalled in the Senate with the Greens Party impeding progress to the detriment of working people.

This dance feels unbearably familiar. And all the while we as a nation accept people living in tents for years following national disasters and accept single parents escaping abuse living in cars. These are social problems with political causes and political solutions.

According to census data, homelessness is record high with a worrying trend of young people increasingly experiencing homelessness compared with the 2006 figure.

Sydney and Melbourne consistently rank in the top five most unaffordable cities to live globally, but in our suburbs and regions too, the cost of living and, in particular, household rents and mortgages are alarmingly on the rise.

According to research published by the Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA), over 100,000 Victorian households are experiencing rental stress. "The status quo just isn't working. Everyone knows we need a new approach", said CEO Wendy Hayhurst in response to last Monday's report.

The supply of affordable, social and community housing stock is sorely missing.

We need to refocus on outer suburban and regional development projects to make living outside Melbourne and Sydney attractive to young people, especially frontline workers. We need long-term investment to make our second cities and towns the cultural and employment hotspots that they could be. The reimagining of Parramatta is a good starting point for what we can do elsewhere in places like Sunshine in Melbourne.

Tinkering and driving the demand side of the equation will not fix this problem. It goes without saying our solutions should try to avoid creating other problems down the track. For example, giving aspiring homeowners access to super or lowering the deposit threshold may address some of the short-term symptoms, but changes nothing about the background unaffordability of the housing stock. As our recent report at the John Curtin Research Centre, 'Super Solutions' recommends, the role of superannuation rests with the fund managers themselves and creating a policy framework that encourages and enables institutional investment. Namely this could be done through supply side regulatory, tax and zoning reform.

We need to refocus on outer suburban and regional development projects to make living outside Melbourne and Sydney attractive to young people, especially frontline workers.

Australia needs a mature conversation about housing affordability. We have a planning system that is clogged up by bureaucratic red tape, as well as a deficit of leadership and anything close to the political mandate required to solve our housing crisis and drive outer urban development and infrastructure projects.

Of course, we would need buy-in from the whole of society to get the right outcome. Broad support, and contribution from major players as well as often side-lined voices.

The city of Birmingham in the UK is hosting their National Housing Summit this September. Great initiative – we should be planning on having one in our very own Birmingham Gardens, NSW.

Rents going through the roof, mortgage repayments sky-high, homelessness and housing insecurity at all-time highs, as well as a backdrop of a cost-of-living crisis – we need action now.

There is a valid argument that we do not need yet another summit, another conference to hear what we already know. Wrong. We need coordinated action with consensus from all the key players to ensure there is genuine willingness to act on the root causes. If there was one summit we needed to have, it is this one. Our social ethos and fabric as a nation depends on keeping the Australian dream alive for all.

We need a national summit that centres the dignity of affordable, secure and safe housing, and coordinates action addressing supply bottlenecks and dated tax settings. One that brings all levels of government, industry, superfunds, homelessness organisations, unions, representatives from renters and landlords – a truly multi-sector coalition to act on housing affordability across the country.

How political leaders respond to the housing crisis that grips Australia will determine not just their fortunes in years to come but our nation's too.

Sam Almaliki is a Board Member and Treasurer of the John Curtin Research Centre and Founder of online conveyancer, Settle Easy.

Philip Mendes

Poverty and Jobseeker: 'Nobody is left behind' is a communal respon

Poverty policy in Australia has long been a contested concept in terms of the identification of causes and targeting of potential solutions. Too often, this debate has been polarised between those who view poverty as solely a matter of individual agency and responsibility (i.e. neoliberals), and those who argue that government and the community have an obligation to reform unfair social structures and systems that cause disadvantage (i.e. social democrats). The latter sentiment is arguably reflected in Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's May 2022 election victory speech where he highlighted his belief in government responsibility to ensure that no Australians are 'left behind because we should always look after the disadvantaged and the vulnerable'.

Australia has had three major inquiries into poverty over the past five decades. The 1972-75 Commission of Inquiry into Poverty (often called the Henderson Inquiry), which was established by the Coalition Prime Minister William McMahon but implemented by the Whitlam Labor government, arguably represented the high point of policy engagement with poverty concerns. That inquiry proposed a framework for measuring poverty based on a link to the minimum wage and incorporating housing costs which has influenced all subsequent research.

The First Main Report of the Commission published in September 1975 reported that 10.2 per cent of Australians were very poor and 7.7 per cent were rather poor. It framed poverty as the result of 'structural inequality within society' and urged 'a redistribution of income and services to increase the capacity of poor people to exercise power thus enabling them to take an effective part in decision-making processes along with other sections of the community'.

Its policy recommendations targeted both increases in specific levels of income needed to alleviate poverty for individuals, and broader societal factors that could alternately create or prevent disadvantage. The first component influenced major raises to the unemployment allowance by the Labor Government from 1972-74 so that they achieved parity with pension rates. The second component referred to what has been called a structural approach whereby a range of social and economic structures and institutions such as housing, education, labour markets and location influence unequal life chances and opportunities. That approach informed its recommendation for the medium-term establishment of a universal basic income to replace the existing system of social security payments, which they calculated would cost \$900 million to be funded by higher taxation on affluent

sections of the community. The basic income was never introduced.

Over a decade later, Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke promised that 'By 1990 no Australian child will be living in poverty'. His pledge was influenced by a concern that one in five Australian children were estimated to be living in poor households, and provoked substantial reform measures via the 1987 Family Assistance Package including large increases in support payments for low income families whether in work or reliant on social security. These Labor initiatives significantly improved the incomes of low-income families, and reduced levels of child poverty.

In 2004, the Senate Community Affairs References Committee headed by the Opposition Labor Party (the Chair was the late Senator Steven Hutchins) conducted a major inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship which was estimated to afflict between 2 and 3.5 million Australians. The Committee proposed a range of reforms to tackle growing poverty and inequality including a national jobs strategy, enhanced minimum wage, and lifting the Newstart Allowance for the unemployed to the same rate as pension payments. However, the ruling Coalition government dismissed the inquiry findings, arguing that poverty was mainly caused by poor individual choices and behaviour (i.e. so-called welfare dependence) rather than by broader structural or systemic inequalities.

That individualistic view of poverty has informed the introduction of multiple manifestations of conditional welfare requiring members of disadvantaged groups to demonstrate behavioural changes in order to access payments or support services. They include mutual obligation requirements such as Work for the Dole, forms of compulsory income management such as the Basics Card and the recently abolished Cashless Debit Card, and the Parents Next program.

However, in contrast, the structural view of poverty as linked to wider societal unfairness, seems to be informing the current Senate Committee inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia. That inquiry, which is chaired by Greens Senator Janet Rice and includes Labor Party Senator Marielle Smith as Depute Chair, will report its findings in October 2023. To date, the inquiry has consulted widely, holding public hearings in seven separate locations. It seems evident from a reading of those hearings transcripts that a major increase in the Jobseeker rate will be one of the

principal recommendations of the inquiry report.

In addition to official inquiries, poverty advocates have used the annual Anti-Poverty Week (APW) event as an effective forum for stimulating public and political debate and policy initiatives to reduce and preferably eliminate poverty. The most recent APW urged action to halve child poverty by 2030.

In a recent study of parliamentary debates on Anti-Poverty Week from 2012-21, a colleague and I summarised the framing of policy causes and solutions as follows. The Coalition adopted a neoliberal approach which attributed poverty to the limited skills and capacity of affected individuals and identified paid work as the only effective solution. The Greens presented a social rights perspective which linked poverty to wider manifestations of inequality and injustice and argued in favour of major increases in working-age social security payments. Labor adopted a social fairness framework which viewed poverty as associated with wider inequities. Their preferred solution was secure and fairly paid work, but they agreed with the Greens that an increase in social security payments was required. Notably, from 2017 onwards, all Labor parliamentary speeches recommended an increase in the NewStart/JobSeeker rate.

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) have been arguing for more than two decades for a major increase in the JobSeeker rate, both on the grounds that the low rate reinforces chronic poverty and disadvantage, and also that it excludes the long-term unemployed from opportunities for social and economic participation. ACOSS and other advocates have highlighted the growing gap between the JobSeeker rate and the pension rate; the increasing disparity between JobSeeker and the average wage; the increased gap between JobSeeker recipients and other low-income Australians; and the fact that JobSeeker is the 3rd lowest unemployment benefit replacement rate in the OECD.

To be sure, the JobSeeker cohort (totalling 843,390 as of March 2023) are not a homogenous population, and vary across age, gender, qualifications, prior work history, literacy, English language skills, location, family relationships and social connections. But, it has been highlighted that many have a disability or caring responsibility that limits their options for labour market engagement; many are women 45 years or older; and a large majority have been on the payment for longer than 12 months.

Two recent ACOSS reports emphasise the adverse impact of the low rate on the well-being of recipients. One report, based on a survey of 365 people reliant on JobSeeker and related payments, found evidence of major housing instability, problematic physical and mental health including in some cases suicidal behaviour associated with poor nutrition, social isolation and limited access to medication and health care, and low capacity to engage in paid work.

A further joint research report by ACOSS and the University of NSW found that households reliant on JobSeeker were living \$269 per week below the poverty line, whereas those reliant on the lower Youth Allowance rate (for 16-21 year

olds) were living \$390 per week below the poverty line. An associated report by Anglicare Australian documented that only four rental properties across Australia were affordable for a single person reliant on JobSeeker, and none for a person on the lower Youth Allowance rate.

These research findings were duplicated by the report of the government's own Interim Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (IEIAC) chaired by former Labor Government Minister Jenny Macklin. The Committee found that the existing JobSeeker rate was inadequate via any reasonable comparison with other social security payments or average incomes and resulted in unfair adversity to claimants. Consequently, they proposed as the highest priority a 'substantial increase' to the JobSeeker rate of \$256 a fortnight in order to lift the payment to 90 per cent of the age pension rate.

In April 2023, ACOSS coordinated an Open Letter addressed to the Labor Government urging a major increase in the JobSeeker rate (ACOSS's preferred increase is from \$50 a day to \$76 a day). The letter highlighted the adverse circumstances of many recipients such as having to choose between paying rent or purchasing food or medicine and added that these afflictions had been worsened by the recent rise in prices for food and housing (termed the 'cost of living crisis'). The letter was signed by a wide range of Members of Parliament (8 Labor, 1 Liberal, 12 Independents and 12 Greens), prominent former politicians and policy makers including an ex-Reserve Bank governor and ex-Treasury Secretary, economists, business and union leaders, First Nations leaders, academics, and other welfare policy advocates.

However, the recent federal budget only increased JobSeeker by less than \$3 a day or \$20 a week which is only 16 per cent of the increase recommended by the IEIAC, and unlikely to be sufficient to enable the long-term unemployed to access a decent level of food, housing and medication.

Barriers to policy reform

So why have consecutive governments both conservative and at times Labor ignored the overwhelming social and economic evidence in favour of a more adequate JobSeeker rate? There appears to be two principal barriers which have blocked proposals for badly needed policy reform.

The first is philosophical in that Labor as well as the Coalition have favoured paid work as the preferred strategy for social protection. For example, former Prime Minister Julia Gillard emphasised that Labor was 'the Party of work not welfare'. She framed a binary distinction between the 'working class' whose lives in her opinion were characterized by 'dignity' and responsibility, and the 'welfare class' who she stereotyped as workshy and idle.

Yet the low JobSeeker rate is a direct barrier to seeking paid work in that it restricts their access to core needs such as good hygiene, new clothes and transport that are necessary to engage with the labour market. It may also exclude them from maintaining broader community and social

relationships and connections that are often advantageous to securing employment.

The second is the monetary cost given Treasury estimate a sizeable increase would cost \$6 billion per year. But this argument is contentious for two reasons. Firstly the forms of government spending and indeed revenue raising adopted are a political choice. The Grattan Institute has identified numerous measures on both sides of that net that could arguably restore budgetary balance. Secondly, that estimate ignores the cost of not increasing the rate. One item is the cost to NGOs of providing emergency relief goods and services to those that cannot afford their core needs. For example, a recent ACOSS study found an enormous rise in demand for support services provided by the non-government welfare sector.

The second cost is the resulting demand on crisis intervention services in the areas of housing, mental health, family violence, and crime/criminal justice. Those costs are likely to be prohibitive. Given the government's stated emphasis on a broader measurement of community well-being that includes social and environmental as well as conventional economic indicators, it is recommended that any future costing of JobSeeker rate increases should involve a cost benefit analysis that outweighs those outlays against the almost certainly higher social and economic costs of not undertaking policy reform.

What should be done and why?

After three decades of neo-liberal hegemony, Labor has an opportunity to regain control of the welfare state policy agenda, and to reframe that agenda from targeting the negative stigmatisation of disadvantaged individuals to instead resolving the root causes of long-term financial deprivation. The most important step is to tackle the major cause of long-term social exclusion in Australia: the inadequate rate of JobSeeker payment. An additional substantial increase in that rate would be consistent with the actions of past Labor governments (both Whitlam and Hawke/Keating) to lift the relative rate, and conversant with the findings of major poverty inquiries and research evidence over five decades. Labor could signal their long-term progressive reform intentions in this area by appointing at least two lived experience representatives (i.e. persons currently reliant on Social Security payments) in a paid peer workforce capacity to the IEIAC so that further deliberations on the JobSeeker rate are directly informed by the real needs and challenges of those living in poverty.

Professor Philip Mendes of Monash University has been researching the Australian welfare state and welfare advocacy groups for more than 30 years. His recent books include *Australia's Welfare Wars* (3rd edition, 2017), *Empowerment and Control in the Welfare State* (2018) and *Compulsory Income Management in Australia and New Zealand* (2022).

Nick Dyrenfurth

Getting the workers on board

April's announcement by Treasurer Jim Chalmers splitting the Reserve Bank of Australia's board into two – comprising a new nine member monetary policy board tasked with setting interest rates and maintaining the bank's inflation-target framework and a separate governance board – deserves and will likely receive bipartisan support. It is the major recommendation flowing from the independent review of the RBA commissioned by Chalmers in July 2022, the first such since the 1990s.

Chalmers has indicated in-principle agreement to adopt all 51 of the "An RBA fit for the future" report's recommendations. Crucially, attaining full employment will be placed on the same pedestal as fighting inflation. It appears implausible these long overdue reforms will be steered through by consultation with the much-criticised RBA governor, Dr Philip Lowe, whose seven-year term expires in September. In any case, the RBA's recent troubles are deeply institutional, while not absolving Lowe of blame.

Splitting the board, whilst retaining its independence from government, emulates the central bank structures of Canada and the UK. Two new board members have been appointed to the new nine-member board – former Fair Work Commission president Iain Ross and company director Elana Rubin – until the new system is legislated in 2024.

So far so good. Yet there is scope for more ambitious and inclusive reforms.

Canada's central bank framework involves a separate governing council of six members drawn from the Bank of Canada's top echelons. The Bank of England's 13-member financial policy committee includes six from the bank and five so-called 'outsiders', selected "for their experience and expertise in financial services." The other two are the financial conduct authority's CEO and a non-voting member from the UK Treasury.

Australia can take a leaf out of the UK's 'outsiders' model by comprising the RBA with representatives of workers, consumer groups and key stakeholders such as superannuation funds as well as more women, regional inclusions, and energy experts, instead of the current non-economist, company director dominated board of late. Some have suggested the appointments of Ross and Rubin address these gaps. However, with no disrespect to either of these well-credentialed candidates, there is a strong argument for a 10th policy board member directly representing the labour interest.

Indeed, this would signal a 'back to the future' moment. Bill Kelly while serving as Secretary of the Australian Council of Trade Unions was regarded as an outstanding RBA director by former governor Bernie Fraser during the Hawke-Keating governments, bringing an intimate knowledge of wages and wage forecasts and the concerns of workers, all the while not acting in the interests of unions but the nation-at-large.

The specific inclusion of worker representatives on the RBA's board could disrupt the 'groupthink' of present arrangements. It would bring to the table the interests of ordinary Australians, notably in tough times, such as the effect of successive rate rises which have created record rates of mortgage and rental stress. These representatives bring expert knowledge of how the real economy works and labour market operations.

April's announcement by Treasurer Jim Chalmers splitting the Reserve Bank of Australia's board in two... deserves and will likely receive bipartisan support.

There is no need to stop there. In March this year, the Albanese Labor government opened the Postal Services Modernisation review to public submissions.

Apropos Australia Post, as a government business enterprise, worker representation could be implemented by including a board member elected by its employees. Indeed, to quote the Australian Postal Corporation Act, "in nominating persons for appointment as directors, the [responsible] Minister must have regard to the need to ensure that the directors collectively possess an appropriate balance of expertise and, in particular, include a person who the Minister, after consultations with representatives of industrial organisations representing employees, is satisfied has an appropriate understanding of the interests of employees." Employee directors merely fulfil existing legislation.

Working Australians face a gloomy global economy, persistent inflation, high energy prices and cost of living pressures, an ongoing (yes, ongoing) pandemic, geopolitical tensions, and climate change. They are best served by a more accountable and inclusive RBA board in touch with

their immediate and long-term concerns.

RBA worker representation would aid the 'fit for purpose' report dual objectives of "price stability and full employment, with equal consideration given to each" to guarantee the "economic prosperity and welfare of Australians now and in the future".

This is Australia's and Labor's back to the future moment. To paraphrase an 1890 union report that led to the latter's founding, including worker representatives and other new voices on the RBA board can help ensure "every man [and woman], by the opportunity of fairly remunerated labour, a share in those things that make life worth living.'

Nick Dyrenfurth is Executive Director of the John Curtin Research Centre. This article first appeared in The New Daily (26 May 2023)

Michael Easson

Whitlam and China

Nine days before the United States' then National Security Adviser and later Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's visit, nine months before US President Richard Nixon's, Australian federal Labor Opposition Leader Gough Whitlam visited China in July 1971. On no diplomatic issue had the Billy McMahon-led Coalition government suffered more embarrassment than that of relations with China. On 12 July 1971 Liberal Prime Minister McMahon boasted: "In no time at all Zhou Enlai had Mr Whitlam on a hook and he played him as a fisherman plays a trout." McMahon "was left uninformed" of Nixon's strategy, announced with Kissinger's trip to Beijing 9-11 July 1971, to open diplomatic channels to China. Within weeks, the Americans announced a China strategy that made Australian conservatives look awkward and locked into an out-of-date policy paradigm. Margaret Whitlam remembered: "Gough could not stop himself from laughing at [McMahon's] gaffe. Neither could the media." Recognition of the Peoples Republic of China was conferred by newly elected Prime Minister Whitlam on 22 December 1972.



Dr Rex Patterson, MP, then Opposition Spokesperson on Primary Industry and Northern Development; Opposition Leader Gough Whitlam; and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, with interpreter behind him, in Beijing in June 1971.

Australia "acknowledged" China's claim to Taiwan. In contrast, in October 1970 the Canadians "took note" of the claim. Would it have been wiser to "note" rather than "acknowledge" China's claim to Taiwan? Stephen Fitzgerald, Australia's first Ambassador to the Peoples' Republic, who had learnt Chinese in Taiwan in 1964 understood that in the previous three hundred years "the island was only nominally ruled by the Chinese government". The Chinese pressed for stronger wording than what they got from the Canadians a few years before.

Both the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China on Taiwan had campaigned for full recognition of their claim to be the legitimate government of all of China. The word "acknowledge" is stronger than "note" as the former can mean "accept the validity or legitimacy of" (Oxford English Dictionary). The Americans too, on 27 February 1972, in the Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China, also known as the Shanghai Communiqué, formally acknowledged that "all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China." This document was signed by Nixon during his visit to Beijing in February 1972. Beforehand, Mao promised no military conquest, saying: "The small issue is Taiwan; the big issue is the world."

Taiwan was yet to develop into a thriving democracy. In 1972 General Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) ruled the island under martial law. But that was not the end of Australian considerations. Perceptively, on future Australian-Taiwanese relations, in a 1 April 1973 memo to Australian Ambassador Fitzgerald, Whitlam wrote:

Present Chinese thinking appears to be against armed action and in favour of liberation by 'people's diplomacy'. We hope that this policy will continue and be successful. In the meantime, we intend to be quite firm in insisting that private trade and travel between Australia and Taiwan should continue. To use Peking's own argument, we have nothing against the people of Taiwan.

Fitzgerald himself confidently proclaimed: "[Australia] is able to contemplate a rational relationship with China, independent, and free from the neuroses of the Cold War." More realistically, as Whitlam's biographer and speechwriter Graham Freudenberg wrote: "Whitlam's China initiative involved a felicitous combination of timing, courage and luck." Fitzgerald recognised it was luck that made the visit appear prescient or well-judged – Whitlam visiting in 1971, just before Kissinger: "But the ALP move was grounded on a policy which had been debated and endorsed by the party..."

In 1971, during Whitlam's first visit, China was still a strange place. Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) remained banished to the countryside as a worker at the Xinjian County Tractor Factory in rural Jiangxi province. The disastrous Chinese Cultural Revolution was unsubdued. Reform prospects looked unpromising. In 1972, however, Deng's apology to

Mao led to the possibility of a return from exile to Beijing. In 1973, Premier Zhou Enlai (1898-1976) brought Deng back to Zhongnanhai, the central government compound, to focus on reconstructing the Chinese economy.

Whitlam, based on his meeting with Mao in early November 1973, recollected that: “[Mao] lacked Zhou’s grasp of detail and incomparable knowledge of particular events and personalities, but his wisdom and sense of history were deep and unmistakable.” It was wise for Australia along with other nations in the 1970s, the United States particularly, to belatedly cultivate healthy diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China. But given Mao’s murderous legacy, his “wisdom” is an odd thing to note in celebratory terms.



Nicholson’s cartoon on the morning after the earthquake the night before, late July 1976.

Whitlam purchased the original, framed it, and hung it over the marital bed. As Peter Hartcher, the Sydney Morning Herald journalist wrote in 2014: “The Whitlams had a sense of humour. And Gough was entirely at home with great tectonic shifts.”

Perhaps it is an ironic tribute to Whitlam’s success that the opening of diplomatic ties in 1972 is now seen as necessary and relatively uncontroversial. Whitlam’s move in 1971 to visit China and forge diplomatic links, was innovative and courageous. This was in defiance of conservative allegations that Whitlam was soft on communism, a witless tool of Mao, and conducting – in Prime Minister McMahon’s phrase – “instant coffee” diplomacy. It is not unfair to say that Coalition governments in the early 1970s were lazy and confused or, more charitably, unable to guide a small power at sea in a storm.

Of one thing there can be no doubt. Whitlam’s realism about recognition was consistent throughout his political life. As he said in the debate on international affairs in the parliament on 12 August 1954:

We must recognise the fact that the government installed in Formosa [the name for Taiwan coined by the Portuguese] has no chance of ever again becoming the government of China unless it is enabled to do so as a result of a third world war. When we say that that government should be the government of China, we not only take an unrealistic view but a menacing one. The Australian Government should have recognised the Communist Government in China, in view of the fact that all our neighbours, including the colonial powers, Great Britain and the Netherlands, have recognised it.

Labor policy, from 1955, had been to recognise the PRC. On this score alone – initiative, boldness, and long-term impact – the visit to China in 1971 and return as prime minister in 1973 marked Whitlam’s importance as one of the greatest of Australia’s foreign ministers.

This is an edited extract from Michael Easson’s new monograph, Whitlam’s Foreign Policy (Connor Court, 2023).



Australian Ambassador Stephen FitzGerald (right) and then Australian prime minister Gough Whitlam meet Chairman Mao Tse-tung on 2 November 1973, in Beijing.

On Whitlam’s second trip to Beijing, as prime minister, in late October/early November 1973, he proposed to Zhou Enlai: “There should be consultations between Australia and China as close and significant as we have traditionally had with Britain and the United States and similar to discussions we now have annually with Japan at ministerial level and with the Soviet Union at the officials’ level.” In writing that, Australian Ambassador Fitzgerald noted that the then head of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, Sir Keith Waller (1914-1992), looked at the ceiling as Whitlam said those words. Whitlam’s statement expressed the beginnings of Australia’s desire to know China well, to act as a bridge in explaining China to allies, and to forge a creative relationship, without being either uncritical, dotting, or hostile. That remains Australia’s ambition today.

As a side note, on a subsequent visit to China, Gough and Margaret Whitlam were in Tientsin, an hour’s drive from Beijing, on 28 July 1976 when a severe earthquake hit at night. Peter Nicholson composed a cartoon, decried by some as in poor taste.

‘Getting to know you’ with Sam Almaliki

John Curtin Research Centre Treasurer

What got you interested in politics?

I was raised by my maternal grandparents and parents – all of whom have an active interest in politics. My dad particularly so, since he was a Political Science lecturer at the University of Babylon, Iraq. My maternal grandmother, who left school at 14, listened to BBC World News on her radio every night before going to sleep and was never shy to engage with my dad on current and world affairs. As a result there was always a dose of healthy political debate and discussion at home. All of this, not to mention living under the brutal dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein, made me curious about politics and conscious of the impact it has on people.

My political interest intensified when my parents fled war torn Iraq and reached Australia as refugees. While in Villawood, as an 8 year old I witnessed firsthand the cruel and crushing impact of inhumane policies. With a strong sense of social justice, at Villawood I learned English from scratch and so quickly that within three months I was acting as an interpreter to the Arabic-speaking detainees, working alongside a legal aid barrister. This experience inspired an early and lifelong passion for advocacy.

Tell us about your working life?

Whilst I am 34, I’ve done many and various paid and volunteer jobs over the years starting with being the local paper boy. As a youngster I also briefly worked at KFC, founded and ran a winter cricket association across Sydney and did other roles including with Lions and Toastmasters. In my early 20’s I worked for a NSW Labor MP briefly and then commenced a career in cricket administration that led to me joining the Cricket Australia management team at 24 and moving to Melbourne. I was the Head of Community Engagement and Diversity Council Secretary at Cricket Australia, driving its efforts to be a sport for all, in particular girls and women, first nations’ peoples, people with a disability and migrants. After a rewarding four year stint at Cricket Australia, I moved into the startup world in 2018.

I am the Co-Founder and Chairperson (previously CEO) of leading online conveyancer, Settle Easy, and most recently, acted as Head of Commercial at ASX listed company Acusensus, a world leader in road safety technology. Today, I am the Founder and Facilitator of the Regional Angel Investor Network and Director of Almaliki & Co, which provides cross-industry solutions to businesses and

governments. I am passionate about the role of startups in changing lives, driving prosperity, and delivering societal benefit.

I’ve also previously held leadership positions at the ABC Advisory Council, been a member of the SBS Advisory Committee and a Victorian and New South Wales Multicultural Commissioner. Of course, I am proud to be Treasurer of the John Curtin Research Centre and to serve as the Chairperson of the Caulfield Racecourse Reserve Trust.

What is the one big policy problem facing Australia and the solution?

As someone who lived for four years in public housing, keeping the Australian dream alive has always been close to my heart. Addressing the ongoing challenge of housing affordability and supply crisis (nothing current about it, it’s been there for well over a decade, it has just intensified due to an abject public policy failure) is the biggest challenge confronting working Australians. Left unaddressed, it will undermine our social fabric as a nation. Home ownership, besides being a fundamental right, is a significant enabler of social mobility and cohesion.



Sam Almaliki outside the public housing home he lived in Narwee, NSW for four years.

The supply of affordable, social and community housing stock is sorely missing. We need to refocus on outer suburban and regional development projects to make living outside Melbourne and Sydney attractive to young

people, especially frontline workers. We need long-term investment to make our second cities and towns the cultural and employment hotspots that they could be. The reimagining of Parramatta is a good starting point for what we can do elsewhere in places like Sunshine in Melbourne. The Albanese government's proposed key legislation, the Housing Australia Future Fund, which when it passes the Senate, will see 30,000 new social and affordable homes built, is a solid start to addressing a problem that requires lots more to solve. How political leaders respond to the housing crisis that grips Australia will determine not just their fortunes in years to come but our nation's too.

What do you like to get up to outside of work?

I enjoy being active, including going for long walks and having a splash on a hot day (sometimes not that hot!) as well as reading, cooking, and spending fun and fulfilling time with loved ones. I also appreciate chance encounters with people and places. They often excite and enthuse me about life.

Tell our supporters an unusual fact about yourself?

I am fascinated by bees and last year completed a short course on beekeeping. In many ways bees are an embodiment of life as we know it. I look forward to having a beehive or two ... but first to realising the elusive Australian dream of owning a home!

Any advice for young activists?

I am always careful to offer advice, however for the benefit of our young readers the best I can do is to share my approach to life: stay focused on your goals, exercise equanimity and be true to your values. It's incredibly powerful to have the courage of one's convictions and the moral clarity to traverse life's trials and tribulations.

If you work in the Plumbing and Fire Protection Industry (including Heating, Cooling, Insulation, and Refrigeration), then you need to join your Union.

Your Union is the PPTTEU – the Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union.

THANKS TO YOUR UNION

- Plumbers and Sprinkler Fitters have better **pay and conditions** than ever before (EBA rates more than 100% above the Award);
- The sites our members work on have never been **safer**;
- Members enjoy conditions like superannuation, **long service leave**, the 24-hour support through the Employee Assistance Program, the locked in holidays and **RDOs**, access to free leading **industry-based training**;
- Our **licensing and registration** system, the backbone of our trade, has withstood several attempts to strip it away, and that's thanks to the union.

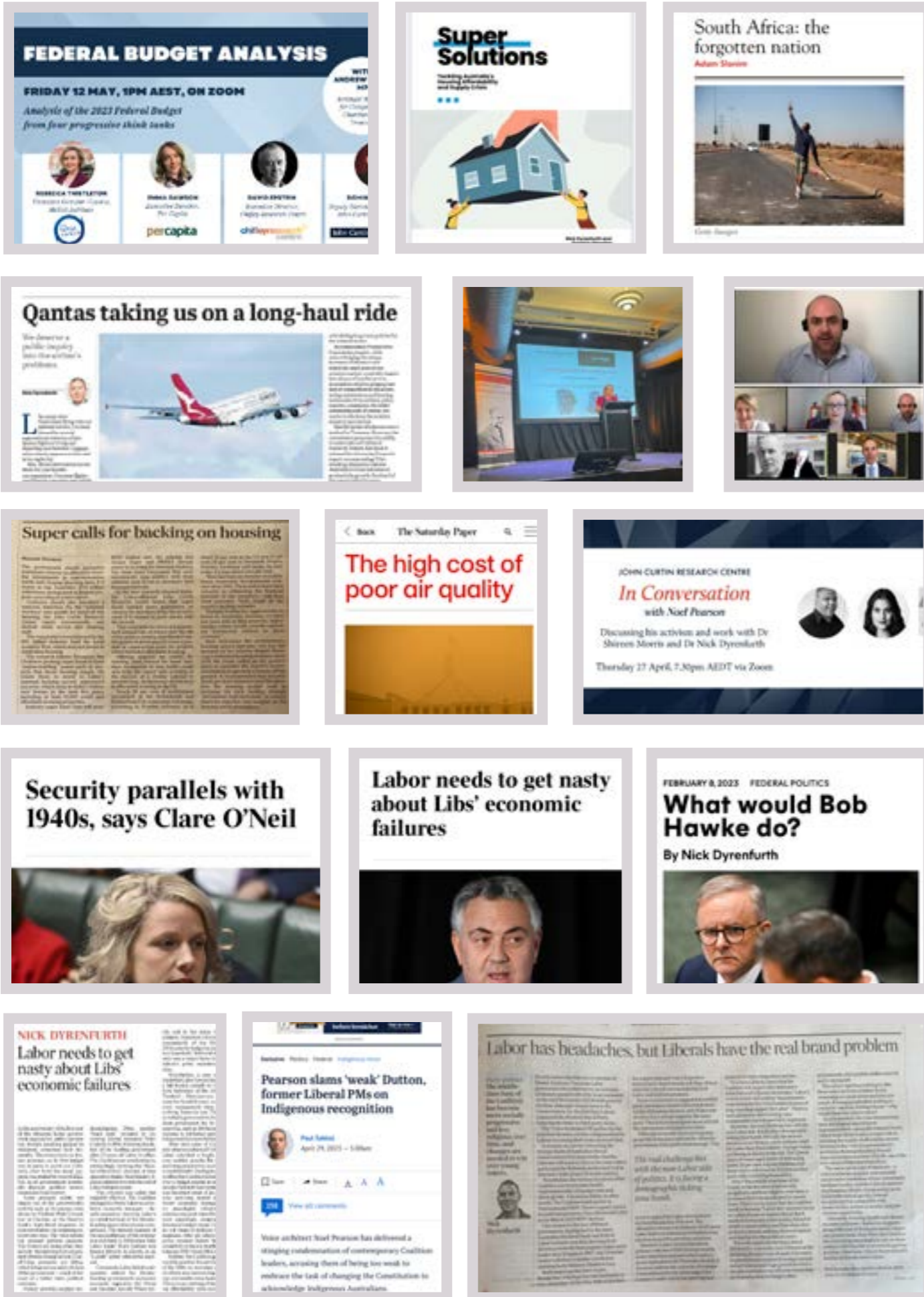
Make no mistake, without the Union, all these things would not exist today. And, without a strong Union, all of these conditions will be at risk..

WE NEED TO STAND STRONG. WE NEED TO STAND TOGETHER. WE NEED TO STAND UP AND FIGHT BACK. JOIN US TODAY.

For more information please visit our website at www.pteu.asn.au or call (03) 9662 3388



JCRC in the news



2023 Gala Dinner



JOIN YOUR UNION
SCAN ME!




ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR SAFETY AT WORK? DO YOU WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR WORKPLACE AND IN YOUR INDUSTRY?

JOIN AWU VICTORIA TODAY AND BE A PART OF A POWERFUL MOVEMENT FOR WORKPLACE SAFETY.

STRONGER TOGETHER

John Curtin Research Centre Governance

BOARD

Dr Henry Pinski (Chair)
Adam Slonim (Secretary)
Sam Almaliki (Treasurer)
Ben Davis
Gerard Dwyer
Dr Nick Dyrenfurth
Dr Shireen Morris
Filomena Pifaretti

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Hon Morris Iemma | Former NSW Labor Premier
Hon Kim Carr | Former Labor Senator
Hon. Stephen Conroy | Former Labor Senator
Jenny Hill | Mayor of Townsville
Dr Mike Kelly | Former Labor MP
Hon Michelle Roberts MLA | Speaker, Parliament of Western Australia
Kosmos Samaras | Assistant Secretary, Victorian ALP
Ari Suss | Executive Director, Linfox Private Group
Marcia Pinski | NFP Advisory Services
Zosia Kilmartin | Lawyer
Geoff Fary | Former Assistant Secretary, Australian Council of Trade Unions
David Cragg | Former Assistant Secretary, Victorian Trades Hall
Marina Chambers | Australian Workers Union, National President
Josh Peak | Secretary, SDA South Australia & Northern Territory
Lord Maurice Glasman | UK Labour Party
Jon Cruddas MP | UK Labour Party
Arnie Graf | Community Organiser, US
Simon Greer | Cambridge Heath Ventures, US