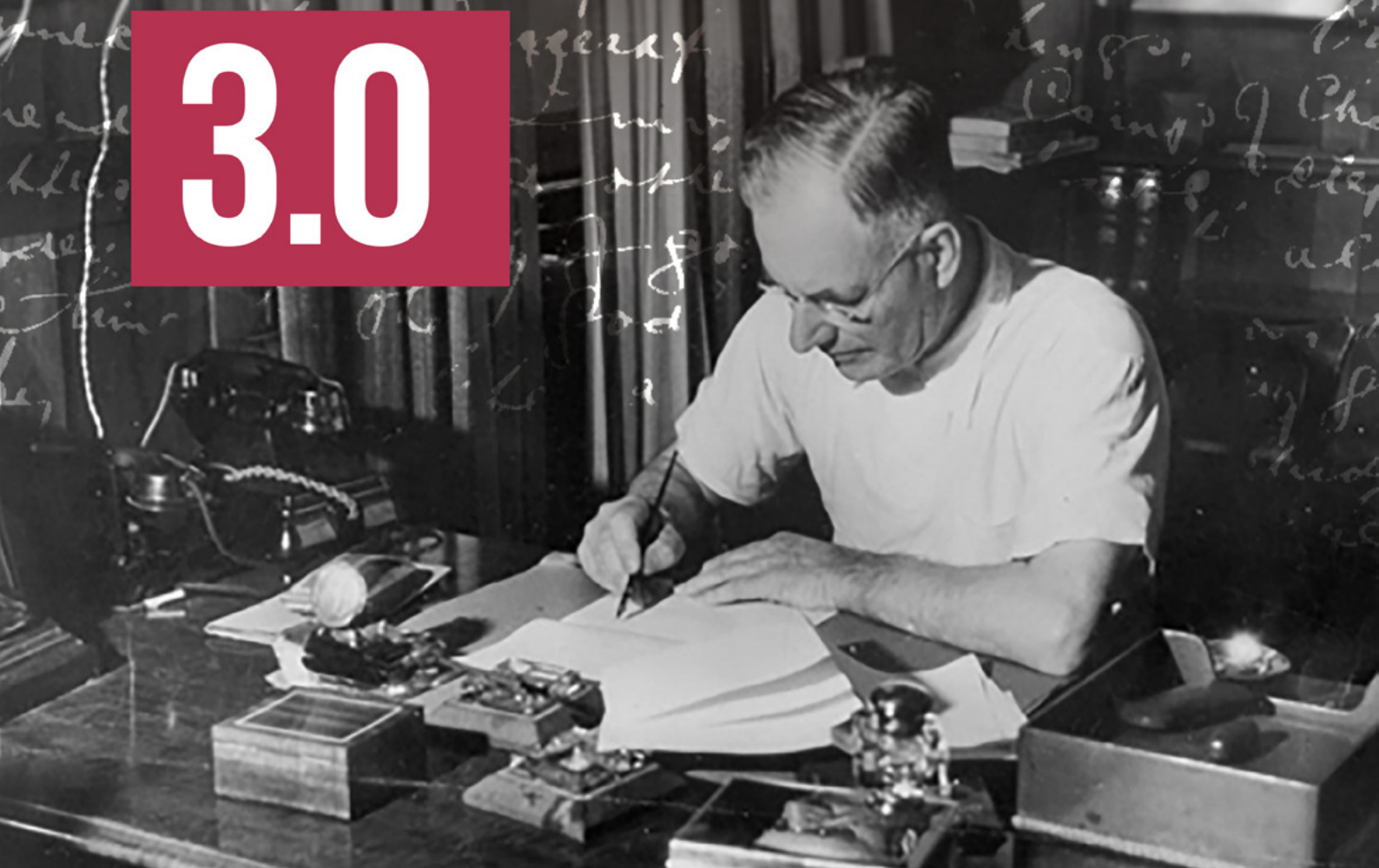


YOUNG GUNS

3.0



THE TROCSIN

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

Labor ideas for a better Australia

Issue 19, December 2023



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The Tocsin, Flagship Publication of the John Curtin Research Centre.

Issue 19, December 2023

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Editorial

Nick Dyrenfurth

As readers are aware, in its seventh year of existence, the John Curtin Research Centre has established a reputation as the boldest labourite thinktank in Australia. Our mission is simple – shaping the national debate and crafting bold new policies so all Australians can live better, longer and more fulfilling lives wherever they reside. In 2023, with worsening economic uncertainty and inequality, geopolitical uncertainty and climate threats, our mission – waging the battle of ideas on behalf of organised labour – is as critical as ever. Here we present the 19th edition of *The Tocsin* magazine, *Young Guns 3.0*, an anthology of the leading entries to our 2023 Young Writers' Prize generously sponsored by our comrades at Victorian Trades Hall. We wish to thank VTH secretary Luke Hilakari for his ongoing support and our advisory council member and labour legend, David Cragg, for acting as a judge. Congratulations to Lachlan White for his winning essay 'Soapbox Sharing'! The future of our movement is in good hands with writers of the quality and boldness on display.

In previous iterations of *Young Guns* I made the case in these editorials for reforming Young Labor, noting that despite the fine contributions to our anthologies and initiatives such as the Labor academy, there is a problem with the youth wing of the labour movement, especially Young Labor – that is Australian Labor Party members aged between 15 and 26. The problem was the narrowness of AYL's membership, its intellectual life and culture – all of which had contributed to the cultural problems and electoral weakness of federal Labor. Winning office nationally last year does not obviate the need for renewal and recruiting more young people from outside our universities and the inner-cities of our capital cities, with more young people drawn from the middle and outer suburbs and regions so that young Labor can truly represent the lived experiences of Gen Z. The ALP's youth wing, like its broader membership, constitutes roughly 0.01 per cent of the Australian population; that is, they aren't like the rest of the population and even their own generational cohort, who do not necessarily share their knowledge-class formed worldview and various policy passions. Young Labor is really university Labor – more on that later.

The Labor kids aren't alright and Labor won't be alright unless it make the lives of young working-class Australians, in all their diversity – occupationally, geographically and ethnically – better now and into the future. The younger segment of Australia's electorate is, like its older compatriots,

more fractured and more volatile and less wedded to the major parties, angry at both left and right-wing elites and the institutions they control – political, economic, and cultural – and looking for alternatives. Witness the growth in the major parties' share of the federal primary vote in the House of Representatives. At the 1949 election which inaugurated the long Menzies era, 96 per cent of votes cast were for the major parties. At last year's federal election this figure had fallen to 68.3 per cent. It means one-third of the electorate or some 5.6 million Australians were choosing to lodge a primary vote outside the major parties, and this is a number that will only grow. For Labor this means finally attending to the task of radically reforming the culture and makeup of the youth-wing of the nation's oldest political party. This year I wish to elaborate the case for change for one two grounds.

The threat from the left

As students of Labor politics well know, the ALP is potentially facing a serious threat from the left of politics. There is the obvious and longstanding danger from the Greens Party who have tapped into the desire of young people for more drastic action on climate change and other progressive post-material issues. Yet of late and especially during this parliamentary session, they have increasingly spoke to grotesque levels of economic insecurity and inequality as well as housing stress faced by young people. This is not to argue federal and state Labor are not addressing material concerns, but the left-wing populism spouted by the Greens, especially its housing spokesman Max Chandler-Mathers – himself a renter and I am led to believe the only renter in federal parliament – is cutting through with Generation Rent. His proposals for a rent cap are foolish in the extreme. He and his party have the luxury of never having to actually implement and deal with the consequences of such a policy change – landlords would simply bump up rents ahead of the cap being made law, blunting its practical effect. There's also the small problem of caps not working in practice internationally – where it matters in the real world. These counter-arguments, as rational as they are, will not suffice alone. As Kosmos Samaras, former Victorian ALP assistant state secretary and Director of Redbridge group, has consistently pointed out, the Greens vote amongst young voters aged between 18 and 24 and 25 to 34 is growing exponentially and routinely eclipsing the Liberals and in some cases Labor. According to the latest polling data from his Redbridge Group, amongst Australians aged 18 to 34,

the Greens are polling 26 per cent, equal with the Coalition, and less than Labor's 32 per cent. We can expect more inner-city to fall to the Greens in years to come. Likewise, the emergence of the Teals has given permission to or licensed the children and grandchildren of (ex)Liberal voters to place their ballots with parties other than those of the traditional left. This is one part of what I will call Labor's pincer threat. Labor's response does not require out-Greening the Greens – a policy and electoral dead end – but necessitates a radical legislative agenda to address the intergenerational inequality and young people's economic security and wellbeing.

The threat from the right

As with all pincer moves, there is another political front, which few Laborites want to talk about, at least openly. Non-university educated, working-class younger people – who might not have graduated from high school or took up a trade and/or are studying at TAFE, and remember that this is 70 per cent of the adult population – are also crab walking away from the party which was established to represent them. Admittedly, they aren't voting en masse for right-wing parties such as Pauline Hanson's extremist One Nation or Clive Palmer's zany United Australia Party, but it should alarm every single member of the Australian labour movement that there are any of this cohort voting or contemplating a vote for parties who do not have their best interests at heart and are there to do the bidding of big business. Quite a few young working-class voters have started to vote Liberal or National and will stay there unless action is taken on material issues. Over the past few generations, the children and grandchildren of working-class Australians smashed by Paul Keating's 'recession we had to have' of the early 1990s and who were buffeted by the Global Financial Crisis and then Covid have given the finger to the ALP. They too are angry at, and alienated from, the economic system which they feel is gamed against them, and progressive cultural obsessions which they feel ignore their primary needs, stuck in a loop of poorer educational outcomes, fewer training and job opportunities, unemployment or precarious employment, and with no hope of becoming homeowners or renting on fair terms. These young men and women are not, contrary to right-wing spin merely shifting on 'woke' and culture wars issues. It's the economy, stupid! And if we in Labor continue to think these young voters are the problem – implicitly stupid – they will deservedly punish us. As the entrants to the 2023 John Curtin Research Centre and Victorian Trades Hall Young Writers Prize demonstrated the labour movement has to embrace new media technologies and, in the words of one entrant, allow and encourage young voices to build their own 'media apparatus'. The movement, as the winning entrant argued, has plenty of stories to shape a central narrative around, reviving the once revered art of labour movement journalism. Structurally and culturally, it is time to finally have a serious debate to consider some form of class quotas for rank-and-file members and executives of Australian Young Labor to bring young working-class people living in the outer suburbs and regions into or back into the ALP, not as a taken gesture but to drive a cultural

revolution and change in policy priorities rooted in lived experience. If the party is not intellectually and culturally capable of this change, then it should be honest with itself: Young Labor is University Labor and should be renamed as such. Separate youth bodies should be established to cater for TAFE and vocational education students, those in paid employment or unemployed, and high schoolers. Above all, what is required is a through-going understanding of the anti-establishment mood amongst young people the world over.

We're not all progressives now

Labor must face another unpleasant reality. If Labor folks think young people won't ever vote for right-wing, populist anti-establishment parties and that they as a whole are moving leftward or have all become progressives, think again. Many Gen Y and Gen Xers want to upturn the entire system and that might present in the shape of a populist left or right politics, or combination of the two. Remember Donald Trump had and has a left economic agenda in many respects, at least rhetorically. There is every possibility of a second pincer threat from a new or renewed party on the populist right.

Let's start with a basic assumption. Most young people are not xenophobic, but their lives are precarious, amid crises in the availability and nature of work, and of housing and healthcare options. In Europe, they recently shocked the continent by throwing in their lot with Geert Wilders, the far-right populist whose Party for Freedom (PVV), which won the most seats at last month's Dutch election. The PVV surged to become the largest party among 18- to 34-year-olds, winning 17 per cent of their ballots. To be sure, do the maths – if everyone who voted in the election had been aged under 35, the PVV would have won even more seats. This is in a country with a reputation for being socially progressive. Let that sink in. In Sweden's 2022 election, this the spiritual home of European social democracy, fully 22 per cent of the 18-21 cohort voted for the far-right Sweden Democrats. At last year's French presidential runoff, Marine Le Pen, leader of the openly racist National Rally (formerly National Front) won 39 per cent of votes from people aged 18-24 and 49 per cent of those aged 25-34. In the 2021 Saxony-Anhalt state election in eastern Germany, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) came top among voters under 30, while young voters are likewise predicted to help Austria's far-right Freedom party (FPÖ), which has been at the top of the polls throughout 2023, win next year's national ballot. In Spain during 2019, the ultra-conservative Vox party's share of the under-35 vote soared to a record 34 per cent. When it fell back in July this year it still stood at 27 per cent. Across the continent, the image of the radical-right voter – typically white, male, non-graduate and older – is being transformed before our very eyes. Support for the far right is growing fastest among younger voters. As the young were described in the Dutch election, they are voting for 'livelihood security' – indeed economic insecurity is the common denominator

across Europe. This is not to argue that there a cultural or ideological alignment between young voters and the far right – young voters haven't moved rightwards on migration, abortion, and minority rights. Far-right parties are not the preferred option – or even second choice – for younger voters everywhere in Europe, at least not yet.

Yet look too at issues of image and policy – and again this proves the point about Labor's representation of young people in parliament and of particular cohorts of young people in its membership – as the far-right is increasingly led by younger people. Jordan Bardella, the president of France's National Rally, for example, was only 23 when he led the party's successful 2019 European election campaign, and 27 when he succeeded Le Pen as party leader last year. Sławomir Mentzen, the 37-year-old leader of Poland's ultra-liberal far-right Konfederacja (Confederation) party, has 800,000 followers on TikTok. Several far-right parties have also proposed specific policy initiatives to attract younger voters: Le Pen's 2022 manifesto promised to scrap taxes for the under-30s, provide financial assistance to student workers and boost student housing. It could happen here. In fact, it once did: a younger version of Pauline Hanson won 22.68 per cent of the primary vote at the Queensland state election and eleven seats. These weren't all older voters.

In Australia of 2023, according to Redbridge, if an election were held now, the Coalition is outpolling Labor in outer metropolitan seats nationally – 35 to 33 per cent. Educational attainment which is as good a guide to voting intention as income these days: the Coalition leads Labor 41 to 31 per cent for voters with less than a Year 12 qualification (20 per cent are 'other', which presumably includes a large share for micro-right parties); 37 to 28 per cent for Year 12 or equivalent (18 per cent are 'other'; and 35 to 33 per cent for TAFE, trade or vocational qualified (21 per cent are other). Surprise, surprise the only segment Labor leads the Coalition is university degree holders!

On another continent, there is a similar trend, at least in the case of Argentina. Javier Milei, a far-right libertarian trumpeting socially conservative culture war issues and radical policies to reshape Argentine society, last month won the presidency of South America's second-largest economy in a runoff against Sergio Massa, the centre-left candidate from the ruling Peronist party. Despite recently crowned Time Person of the Year, Taylor Swift explicitly campaigning against him on her tour of the country, and seeking to mobilise so-called 'Swifties', young Argentinians flocked to Milei and his far-right party. Voters under the age of 29 delivered a shocking first-place finish for Milei in the August open primaries, and then later a whopping 11-point victory in the runoff. Almost 70 percent of young voters backed Milei in the November election, with men only slightly more likely to have voted for him than women. Once again the common denominator is economic insecurity. Argentina is a country with nearly 140 percent annual inflation, 60 percent of youth falling below the poverty line, high unemployment, and average incomes dropping consistently in the last decade to around

\$450 a month. No wonder so many young voters were sick of the incumbent Peronist party. I'll leave readers with this story as told to The Nation, the left-liberal US magazine.

Hernán Stuchi, a 29-year-old food delivery driver in greater Buenos Aires, grew up as a left-wing activist. During this year's presidential election in Argentina, however he backed Milei. "It was a kind of innocence," he remarked of his previous support for left-wing politicians. "It's not like us poor people ever stopped being poor."

Come election time, Stuchi was scarcely alone in voting to upend the establishment.

Think it can't happen here? Think again. The whole point of the ALP's foundation in 1891 was to upend the establishment. Modern Australian Labor must act and fast.

The alternative? Stuck in the middle with yooof; clowns to the left, jokers to the right.

As the Stealers Wheel sang in 1972: "I've got the feeling that something ain't right".

As we approach the festive season, the John Curtin Research Centre invites you to join us in spreading the spirit of progress and social democracy – and support our endeavours such as our prize and special annual Tocsin edition which backs and puts on a pedestal young writers and thinkers. This year has been busy as usual, marked by insightful discussions, groundbreaking reports, and a commitment to shaping a fairer, better Australia. Now, we're excited to extend an invitation for you to be a crucial part in our continuing journey.

Reflecting on the past year, the JCRC has continued to champion Labor ideas through engaging events, influential publications, and thought-provoking discussions. From our events such as the Gala Dinner featuring Home Affairs Minister Claire O'Neill and InConversation with Voice advocate Noel Pearson to landmark reports on the housing affordability and supply crisis and artificial intelligence, we've been at the forefront of labourist ideas. We've been busy in media writing opinion pieces and providing expert commentary to a range of publications from our Deputy Director and Chief Economist Dominic Meagher appearing on The Project TV to Nick Dyrenfurth doing radio rounds and his agenda setting articles on the Albanese Labor government's first 18 months in The Saturday Paper, The Age and Sydney Morning Herald, and the West Australian newspaper.

We are excited to soon share news about our 2024 Gala Dinner. Other major events include the first Curtin Oration in August which will feature keynote speaker Treasurer Jim Chalmers, plus we are currently working on a range of fascinating and important research projects from affordable housing to AI and cyber-security, Ukraine postwar reconstruction and sport and diplomacy. And early in 2024 we will be launching our own podcast, 'Curtin's Cast', with a stellar line up of local and

international guests on a weekly basis. Stay tuned! Fundamental to our work are our supporters. We encourage you to take a look at our new website and support our efforts. Your contribution will breathe new life into the greatest Australian Prime Minister John Curtin's legacy. Your support is instrumental in shaping the narrative of hope and opportunity in Australia. By becoming a supporter, you directly contribute to the research that fuels social democratic ideas. With your support, we can continue to provide priority access to our policy reports and The Tocsin magazine, and Curtin's Corner, our weekly roundup of the best writing on Australian and international politics, culture, and ideas curated myself and Dominic. It hits supporter mailboxes every Sunday morning with the best reads - and cartoon! - of the week. Supporter packages start from \$40 per annum, keeping you informed and engaged in the crucial conversations that will shape our nation's future. In the words of our thinktank's inspiration, Labor's greatest Prime Minister, John Curtin: "it is only through the ideas and actions of working people that a better and more decent way of life can be given to all." Together, let's make our nation a more optimistic, prosperous, equitable and generous country. Visit our website now and be part of the change.

www.curtinrc.org/support

Wishing you and your loved ones a happy and safe festive break.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Nick Dyrenfurth'.

Dr Nick Dyrenfurth

Executive Director, John Curtin Research Centre

JCRC in the news

THE AGE THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2021

COMMENT

Labor's honeymoon is now over

The Albanese government must change focus and take considered risks as the challenge of married life begins.

NICK DYRENFURTH

In 1975, when an electoral coalition of the Liberal and Country parties was defeated by the Labor Party, the nation's political landscape was forever changed. The Labor Party, led by Gough Whitlam, had won the election, and the nation was on the cusp of a new era of social and political reform.



The deficit of strategic flexibility has left some questioning Albanese's judgment.

Solidarity of Australians needed to support Jews

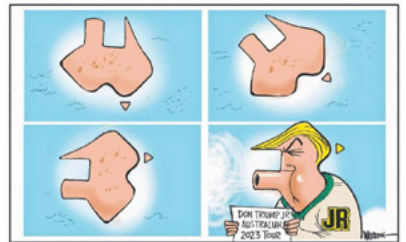
NICK DYRENFURTH

The Jewish community in Australia has long been a pillar of the nation's social and political fabric. It has been a community that has made significant contributions to the nation's economy, culture, and society.

As the nation's Jewish community faces increasing challenges, it is essential that all Australians stand in solidarity with them. The Jewish community has been a part of the nation's fabric for over a century, and its contributions have been invaluable.

Wednesday May 19, 2021 | The Daily Telegraph

Warren Brown



The time is right to act on housing affordability

Sam Alami

The time has come when the Australian government must take decisive action to address the housing affordability crisis. The crisis has reached a point where it is no longer a distant threat, but a reality that is affecting millions of Australians.

Housing affordability is a complex issue that requires a multi-pronged approach. The government must take action on a number of fronts, including increasing the supply of affordable housing, providing financial support to first-time buyers, and implementing measures to reduce the cost of borrowing.

130 OPINION

'Some fights worth having'

NICK DYRENFURTH

Even the most trusted of Labor supporters recognises that the Albanese Government has a bad case of the mid-term blues. Approaching the 18-month anniversary of the ALP's 2022 victory, if an election were held today, Labor would win.



Yet, the two-party preferred vote has narrowed considerably. One poll has shown that the Labor Party's support has fallen to its lowest level since the 2022 election. This is a significant challenge for the government, and it is one that it must take seriously.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2021 THE AGE 21

MPs shouldn't lounge around with Qantas

Nick Dyrenfurth

As the nation's political class continues to grapple with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential that they remain focused on the task at hand. The government must take decisive action to address the economic and social challenges facing the nation.

It is a shame that some members of the political class are spending their time lounging around with Qantas, rather than focusing on the issues that the nation faces. This is a clear conflict of interest, and it is one that must be addressed.

MPs can't have their Chairman's Lounge cake and eat it. The government must take action to ensure that its members are focused on the issues that the nation faces, rather than indulging in their own interests.

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THE AGE THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2021

Comment

The Albanese doctrine

"Albanese has never been prone to theory or regarded as particularly bookish, which isn't to say he is not clever or cunning. His dogged, prosaic government perhaps reflects the desire of Australians to draw a line under a long era of hyper-partisan Canberra conflict."

Anthony Albanese's government has been a source of stability and continuity in a time of great uncertainty. His government has focused on the issues that the nation faces, rather than indulging in the partisan politics that have often characterized the Australian political system.

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN



'Verdict first, trial later': rule of law under threat

The rule of law is a cornerstone of the Australian legal system. It is essential that the government and its officials adhere to the law, and that the courts are able to uphold the law without fear or favor.

The government must take action to ensure that the rule of law is upheld, and that the courts are able to perform their duties without interference. This is a clear conflict of interest, and it is one that must be addressed.

THE NATION

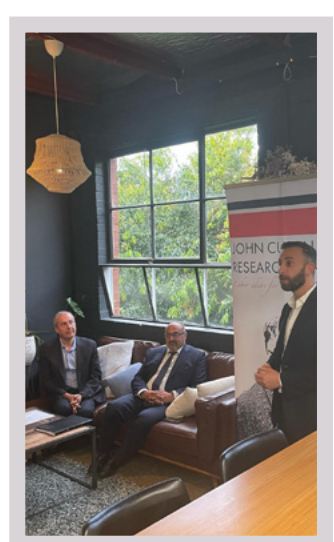
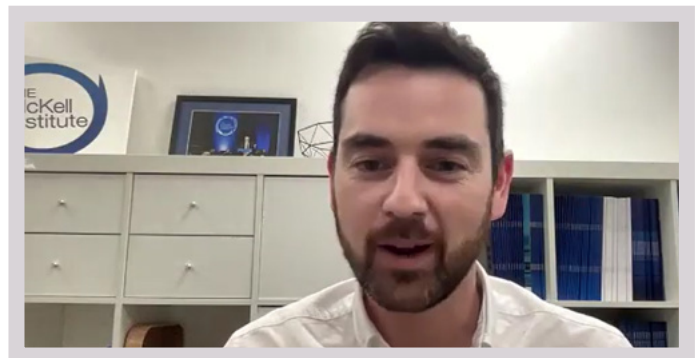
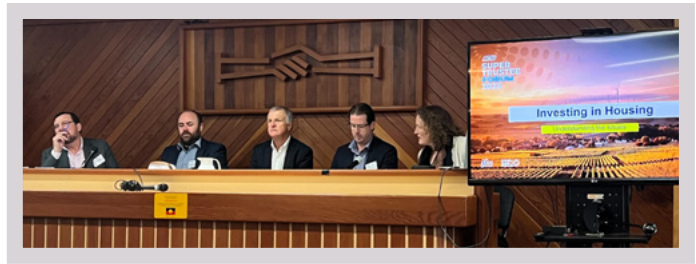
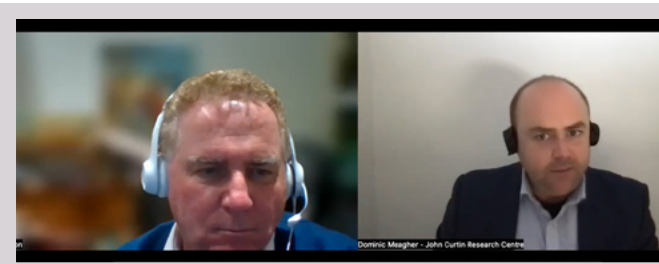


Alarm over cyber crims 'poisoning' AI data

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought with it a host of new challenges, including the risk of cybercrime. The government must take action to address this risk, and to ensure that AI is used in a responsible and ethical manner.

The government must take action to ensure that AI is used in a responsible and ethical manner, and that the risks of cybercrime are minimized. This is a clear conflict of interest, and it is one that must be addressed.

2023 Events



2023 John Curtin Research Centre Young Writers' Prize anthology

Anthology of the leading entries to the 2023 John Curtin Research Centre and Victorian Trades Hall Young Writers Prize

We received many strong entries to this year's competition. A strong theme through most essays submitted this year was the need for the labour movement to embrace new media technologies and, in the words of one entrant, allow and encourage young voices to build their own media apparatus. It's a great challenge for the movement's current leadership.

Congratulations to Lachlan White for his winning essay 'Soapbox Sharing'!

Judges' citation:

Lachlan White pushed a very interesting psychological message for the labour movement as regards "Soapbox Sharing" – that the movement has plenty of stories to shape a central narrative around and through social media. Nonetheless he critiques current efforts for having fallen behind in our usage of media technology, when once we prided ourselves on the vitality of labour movement journalism. His core recommendation is the creation of a cross-platform central social media network, critically with at least three different levels of messaging – one existing example is the Young Workers Centre (Victoria) and its use of Instagram and TikTok. What really impressed the judging panel was White's cutting observations about how effective the Right has been in "dumbing down" its messaging for maximum impact. He points to the efficacy of conservative think tanks and the recent referendum campaign, and the targeted effectiveness of Trump in the US. His essay along with the two joint runners-up, Rheanne Long and Lloyd Skinner and honourable mentions for both Ava Cubit and Liam Crisanti are published below. Congratulations to all!

Soapbox Sharing

Lachlan White

Even before civilisation began, we told stories. Stories are critical for information exchange, and most people—adult or child—learn best from engaging narratives. In ancient times, stories served to teach, collaborate and survive. Stories of which plants kill, which actions would kill or what would lead to increased cohesion. In modern times, people are engrossed in tales which are steeped in ideology. Present day storytelling is critical to ensuring the union movement grows and is why organised labour requires an organised social media network.

The labour movement requires a central social media network—similar to PragerU or Gravel Institute—since it engages the consumption habits of Australians with social barriers. This social media network should post short form videos and photos with an aesthetic style. The process starts with an idea, then advertising the idea on a social media platform, for it to be shared on a network. As that idea gains traction and gets shared on social media, it will become self-perpetuating. When an idea becomes self-perpetuating, it influences public conversations.

Communication is key to ideas to spread. Education, Location, and Wealth; these are three things that play an important role of accessibility in gaining understanding of ideals and issues; reading requires education and time; speeches require time and location. Social media doesn't require education as reading does nor location as speeches do, and for time, we have plenty of time for our online consumption. Simply, wealth plays a role in people's time, if you're working two jobs to make ends meet, you most likely don't have spare time to listen to a speech at a town hall.

That's why we are seeing the political Right slowly spreading their ideas, they are mastering "dumbing" ideas down to be easy to consume. Take the story of Plato's Cave, people chained to a wall and facing a wall—that is their world. Modern Plato's Cave is the phone, with TikTok taking a mere 15 minutes before tailoring to the individual. Although cliché, attention spans are shortening nowadays.

I recommend that this cross-platform labour movement media network must have three tiers or types of messaging. The first stage would be Basic which has content that is engaging and informative, targeting non-political people,

while providing a pathway out of right-wing politics. The second stage is Intermediate which would be more focused on more complex topics for the interested—those beginning to understand politics and activism. The final stage is Expert, for the ones who seek to get more involved and more information regarding the ideas of the movement.

This proposed media network would promote and encourage a renewed sense of labour movement activism by providing a platform for workers and unions to voice their concerns, share their experiences, and engage in collective action.

Content produced from podcasts, short videos on TikTok and Instagram, longer videos on YouTube and well-designed visual posts. The example of the Young Workers Centre in Victoria, which produces some content on Instagram, TikTok and their website aimed at young workers, shows how young people can be engaged and informed and as a result inform others in their circle. Our opponents fear the day when we have our own specifically labour, well-organised platform like GetUp! If we don't act on setting a strong and better platform for a media network, the right will continue to beat us and have a stronghold with their right wing think tanks such as Institute of Public Affairs and the activist group Advance Australia which was so evident during the Voice referendum campaign. Content would be made by Australian for Australians, so our own can relate to it. The content has to speak to them, what will connect more to a kid with lower socio-economic background has to be presented by a guy from Elizabeth, not Upper North shore Sydney-sider. Nor should we talk down, we are here to explain big ideas simply. The platform of easy to share and content that combats right-wing and anti-movement ideals such as PragerU, and Sky News. So when we make content for that audience, here's a tip from screenwriting class, K.I.S.S., keep it simple stupid. Content can be inexpensive to produce yet smash it out of the park with a massive audience.

Our content needs stories, emotional weight, a connection to the audience in an engaging way and then content produced in this proposed media platform. It must be linked with emotional content to make a quick impact. The brain works emotionally, you want people to feel it not merely see it. Because we are influenced by our surroundings and stories we are told, and unconscious and conscious ideologies.

Stories are all important ways of informing others and to win them over to your side. The Right does them very well, they have the resources to spread their stories and embedded ideology even if it's against the best interest of people who vote for them. We in labour do it but not enough. Take a note on the book *How to Win friends and influence people*. You don't win arguments by arguing. This is something the right doesn't follow, they try to make an argument but it's not about making sense – Jordan Peterson springs to mind. They are successful by being entertaining, they don't use facts, they use feelings, shifting the narrative that the audience isn't wrong about what they feel. Trump isn't talking in the rust belt about gender neutral toilets but how Americans lost their jobs. Facts can only go so far in a conversation, whereas emotions carry the weight of a message.



Lachlan White

The ruling class do not want to lose their power, that story is as old as history. We love that story because we know it's true, we know that the rich and powerful can sit in an ivory tower while we slave away, so much so that sometimes we feel like giving up but the stories we craft and consume gives us a little bit of hope, and hope can rarely be fully extinguished. We are privileged to inherit the labour of our forebears – the weekend, 8 hours' working day, and much besides. Yet people need to know what a union is. To us, the answer is easy. However we are already union members and involved in the movement. It's not just about messaging, it's about tailoring the messaging and getting attention. Consider the conservative use of any inheritance tax as a "death tax". Changing one word makes a world of difference to how people feel about an issue of equity.

To grow in this current era, we must look to the past to inspire the evolution of a renewed unionist activism. With every shift in technology, the labour movement utilised it to grow the movement and spread our ideals on a platform; it started with newspapers which helped inform working class people of radical ideas and different perspectives on current affairs; cartoons or photography could be used to convey an interpretation of events or express an idea without language or educational barriers; radio, film and television spread radical ideas in an engaging way by using audio and/or visual stories; and in the age of the internet and digital technology, our movement can once more adapt to changing circumstances, mounting the digital soapbox like our predecessors before us spreading the gospel of labour across old and new platforms in the cause of workers.

Lachlan White, a proud unionist proudly hailing from a regional background, and fervent advocate of labour movement values. He thrives in the realm of creativity as filmmaking student and editor of Flinders University's student newspaper, Empire Times.

Digitised activism

Rheanne Long

The dynamic and multifaceted landscape of Australian politics demands a revitalisation of activism strategies to surge the labour movement forward. A multitude of academic literature addresses the decline in party membership statistics and internal party activism on a global scale; unfortunately, Australian political parties have failed to exempt themselves from this trend. As political membership numbers are declining, those who are involved are ageing and less active than in previous eras. Nevertheless, the established roles of Australian political parties that represent democracy remain consistent, with limited indications of change to their procedural functions. In response to such changes in political involvement, it remains significant to engage younger generations in the labour movement to shape the future of Australia. Thus, this essay explores strategies for advancing the labour movement and approaches to revitalise activism. Such approaches must consider the importance of appealing to Australia's youth demographic through culturally relevant content and contemporary communication modes. Revitalising activism is not only crucial for aligning the labour movement with Australian needs and attitudes, but also for actively engaging and empowering young Australians to foster a progressive and democratic future for the nation.

In Western democracies, it has been observed that the connection between young people and politics is allegedly detached. Despite compulsory voting requirements in Australia, there is a general decline in political interest, party membership, and involvement in voluntary associations. Interestingly, at the same time, there has been a rise in young people's mobilisation towards alternative political action, including engaging in cyberpolitics. Young people are the leading actors that drive significant social movements, which has been evident in the Black Lives Matter protests against racism, and the #MeToo campaign against sexual violence. This dramatic shift in the relationship between young people and politics is a complex phenomenon and researchers have struggled to comprehend young people's disengagement with formal politics and the transition to alternative political behaviour. Therefore, a remarkable consideration for the labour movement would be to reconnect social issues voiced by younger generations to political engagement. Whilst current trends of youth activism, such as protests and online campaigns, can be effective to generate awareness and spark public outrage, it often fails to translate to legal change. To advance the labour movement forward, politics needs to become a direct avenue for young generations to address

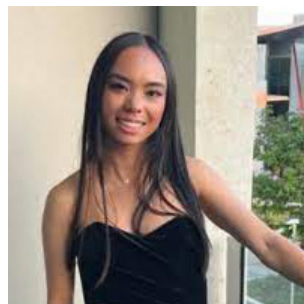
their social, economic, environmental, and legal concerns.

Humanising politics will allow young generations to overcome the perception that politics is an inaccessible field – an exclusive industry of privilege, intellect, and power. Members of Parliament that are active at the forefronts of the community are able to connect young voices to legal solutions, thereby advocating for meaningful change. An Australian politician that successfully connects with her community is Caitlin Collins, the member for Hillary in Western Australia. Collins actively engages herself in youth functions, connects to her community, hosts local events, and advocates for critical issues. Further, Collins uses accessible digital media platforms, such as Instagram, to provide her community with insight to her professional work. Notably, Collins has shared footage of herself speaking about the Abortion Legislation Reform Bill in Parliament, posted about the introduction of Containers for Change at the local shopping centre, and invites the community to meet her personally at local venues. For the youth in her electorate, Collins serves as an inspirational and approachable public figure that addresses their concerns through political solutions. Collins symbolises the type of political engagement essential for the progression of the labour movement; a progression dependent on constructing a direct and inclusive pathway for younger generations to address their concerns and bridge the gap between social issues and political engagement. In the modern era, online tools have revolutionised the way political movements connect and mobilise supporters. In unionism, organising is essential to connect individuals, more specifically in a workplace, to support a cause. Recognizing the potential of online tools, the labour movement should proactively employ digital organising strategies to enhance its outreach and engagement with young Australians. To achieve this, an essential step involves establishing a dedicated marketing team within the movement that focuses on youth engagement. The team's primary responsibility would be to research and analyse current youth issues and develop these issues into consumable, appealing, and engaging social media content. The labour movement should then strategically utilise platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok to interact and at interact the intended audience. Specifically on TikTok, the content strategy could involve a nuanced combination of addressing serious issues through a comedic approach that ultimately encapsulates the concerns of young Australians. On Instagram, the platform allows for interactive engagement, through question boxes and polls on the account's story. The nature of social

media platforms also encourages users to share content on their stories, or through republishing. This would allow the movement to reach an even wider target audience, amplifying the message across diverse networks. This approach should capture the attention of the intended demographic and further foster a connection by representing the party as culturally informed and proactive movement. The team could even consider a simplified version of unionised mapping and charting strategies. This approach would involve developing a map of each state and territory, then locate youth issues within specific communities, cities, and regions. This would allow a heavy focus on youth concerns within differing jurisdictions, and a deeper understanding of the issues that greatly impact local communities. Notably, in Western Australia, there is a major youth-led motion towards raising the age of criminal responsibility, which is a campaign that would not be as relevant in states where bills have already been introduced. A strategic element could involve leveraging local and public figures, such as business owners, politicians, or celebrities, to enhance engagement with the digital content. Subsequently, digital algorithms could tailor content to the geographic locations of these users to ensure personalised and relevant engagement within the identified youth issues.

Fundamentally, this strategy must focus on bridging the divide between political responses and action on social issues, fostering a more cohesive connection between politics and societal concerns. Subsequent to sharing posts, it is critical to ensure that the online support directly translates into political measures. This aims to minimise the stigma surrounding slacktivism, assuring users that the labour movement is committed to acting beyond the digital platform. To reinforce this commitment, the labour movement could establish a centralised hub for the individuals that their media platforms have attracted. This could involve an application that allows users to access a centralised platform of matters related to the labour movement. This would include educational resources, with access to news and updates surrounding the political landscape. It would also present a great opportunity to have a petition centre that allows direct support from community members and politicians, as well as progress trackers to display progress made on campaigns, policy amendments, or advocacy efforts. The hub should serve as a centralised and current communication channel, with a calendar that highlights relevant activities and events to foster a sense of community. Utilising digital organising and a centralised labour hub to bridge the connection between social issues and the labour movement will empower younger generations to understand the significance of political activism and engagement. This effort would not only attract passionate youth to meaningful causes, but also foster a growing movement for a better future in Australia. Ultimately, the need to connect youth concerns with politics is significant to advancing the labour movement and revitalising activism. A proposed strategy to achieve this is the employment of digital organising the creation of a labour hub. Through a digital medium, the labour movement aims to attract the attention of young Australians by appealing to their individual values and fostering enthusiasm for engagement with meaningful issues. In recognising the pivotal role that

the young generation plays as future leaders, fostering this connection with politics becomes essential to ensure Australia continues to develop. Through this, the labour movement will strive to address the immediate concerns of youth, support their activism efforts, and empower them as a voice to the ongoing progression of Australia.



Rheanne Long

Back to basics

Lloyd Skinner

The modern labour movement faces many challenges, marked by a significant decline in trade union membership. Factors such as reduced physical attendance at workplaces and the dynamic nature of the labour market, characterised by frequent job changes and shorter tenures, contribute to the weakening of union membership. The rise of casual and insecure job positions further complicates efforts to expand union membership, challenging traditional reliance on those with permanent contracts. This struggle is heightened by the gig economy, where workers often lack union protection, emphasising the need for unions to adapt to the evolving employment landscape. Growing the labour movement during this time is challenging which is why unions need to draw upon innovative strategies for renewed activism. This essay contends that unions and their peak organising bodies should shift their focus from being primarily workplace organisations and adopt a more multidisciplinary approach. There is room for improvement in unions having a greater community outlook and a hyper-local focus to strengthen their relevance and impact in the face of challenging social and economic circumstances. Notably, in pursuing this community-centric approach, unions should prioritise reaching out to young people and multicultural communities particularly in outer-suburban areas.

To enhance their influence and effectiveness, unions must transition towards a community-centric model, with a focus on the outer suburbs where a substantial proportion of young people and multicultural communities reside. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 lockdowns, there is a notable shift towards localised living, with people organising their lives within the context of their immediate communities. Recognising this trend, the union movement should proactively reach out to individuals in the spaces where they socialise, particularly within their local communities. In line with these principles, trade unions can implement various strategies. This may include setting up information stalls at community markets and festivals, organising local educational forums to enlighten communities on how unions can be of assistance. Additionally, forging connections with local branches of progressive political parties can offer unions a valuable platform to effectively engage with their target demographics. It is imperative for unions to be perceived as entities operating within a social context, openly sharing information about their mission, and actively cultivating relationships with potential members. Participation in community events serves as a tangible demonstration of a union's commitment to addressing the

unique concerns of local communities.

The engagement of young people, typically aged between 16 and 25, is pivotal for the labour movement. It holds particular significance as these younger generations have grown up in an era where the presence of trade unions in the workplace has not been constant. Recognising them as the future membership base is crucial, especially given that early outreach is essential during the initial stages of their careers. At this vulnerable juncture, when many may find themselves in casualised or insecure occupations, there is a risk that they may not fully comprehend the indispensable role of unions in safeguarding workers' rights. Involving the younger generation not only introduces fresh perspectives and priorities but also contributes to sustained advocacy aligned with the evolving needs of the workforce. The powerful activism of young individuals injects vitality into union activities, campaigns, and efforts, particularly in championing issues of social and economic justice. Additionally, by actively addressing contemporary challenges faced by young workers, such as those in the gig economy, housing unaffordability, and grappling with student debt, unions demonstrate their continued relevance and effectiveness in the ever-changing landscape of work.

Engaging young people can pose a challenge, they are a notoriously hard to reach demographic. Young individuals tend to be hesitant unless they perceive concrete benefits or a genuine alignment with a cause. To bridge this gap, unions must tailor their communication strategies to resonate with the aspirations and concerns of the younger generation. This involves addressing contemporary issues such as climate change and housing unaffordability, expanding the union's focus beyond traditional workplace matters. Adopting a more multidisciplinary approach, akin to a think tank, can enhance relevance and appeal. Strengthening social media presence is crucial, positioning unions as leading voices in progressive public discourse. A notable example is Wil Stracke, Assistant Secretary of the Victorian Trades Hall Council, who effectively connects with young people on platforms like TikTok, showcasing an articulate and eloquent style. Union leaders should emulate this approach to effectively engage the younger demographic. Furthermore, recognising that many young individuals lack established jobs and wages, implementing a tiered membership system tailored to their employment conditions could be more enticing, encouraging greater participation and support.

Young people, as empowered activists, can significantly

bolster union campaigns if unions authentically connect with them. The union movement has commendably made strides in this direction, and it should capitalise on existing initiatives like the Union Summer and Winter internship programs. These programs have proven effective in providing young students with opportunities to actively engage and contribute to the trade union movement while pursuing their studies. There is a need to expand these initiatives, with a particular emphasis on internships for young women and individuals from multicultural backgrounds. By doing so, these programs can serve as powerful tools for inclusion with these specific groups. By establishing genuine connections, unions have the potential to tap into the robust support of young individuals and their extensive networks, particularly within TAFE and university campuses. This engagement can significantly amplify the impact of union advocacy efforts.

Engaging multicultural communities stands as a paramount priority for the trade union movement, which has historically been predominantly composed of male, Anglo-Celtic, blue-collar workers in the trades sector. While the movement member base has diversified with the growth of unionisation in occupations like teachers and nurses, actively involving multicultural communities is essential for its growth and relevance in an increasingly diverse Australia. Outreach to these communities is particularly crucial due to their vulnerable working conditions. Many individuals from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds may face language barriers, making them less aware of their rights under Australian employment law and susceptible to exploitation and discrimination. Moreover, CALD communities, known for their tight-knit nature, possess a profound sense of unity that can be a potent force in organising efforts, especially on workplace issues. If trade unions effectively attract and nurture this loyalty, members of multicultural communities are more likely to participate in collective actions, bolstering the union's advocacy impact. By building trust and demonstrating a sincere commitment to community well-being, unions can enlist the formidable support of these close-knit groups in their mission to champion fair and equitable working conditions for all. In essence, the loyalty of multicultural communities becomes a powerful ally for trade unions in their pursuit of workplace justice. To effectively engage multicultural communities, especially in outer suburban metropolitan growth areas, trade unions should adopt a community-centric approach. Employing more CALD individuals within unions and utilising their linguistic and cultural abilities, is crucial. These individuals act as invaluable bridges, reaching out to multicultural communities through targeted communication on social media platforms. Establishing a robust digital presence is essential for connecting with a diverse audience. Additionally, engaging community leaders within these multicultural groups is imperative, fostering relationships and partnerships with influential figures who hold trust within their communities. Active participation in multicultural events is vital, offering unions a significant opportunity to expand their reach. While entering places of faith and worship in multicultural communities may be a sensitive issue, participating in their social festivities provides unions with an appropriate chance to connect. Having a visible

presence at these gatherings allows direct interaction with community members, promoting a deeper understanding of their concerns and needs. This visibility is particularly crucial, considering that many union offices are typically located near inner metropolitan areas, underscoring the importance of expanding into outer suburban regions with significant growth potential for the union's membership base. By integrating these strategies, trade unions can establish meaningful connections, bridge communication gaps, and build trust within multicultural communities, particularly in the dynamic landscape of outer suburban metropolitan growth areas.

In conclusion, it is essential that unions transform into community-focused organisations, with a targeted approach towards young people and multicultural communities to remain relevant and effective in the contemporary era. Shifting from the traditional purely workplace-oriented model, unions must embrace a more multidisciplinary role and emerge as leading national spokespeople for progressive issues in Australia. By comprehending the unique challenges faced by these demographics and employing innovative strategies involving digital engagement and community outreach, unions can revitalise their activism and expand their membership base. The significance of this expansion cannot be overstated; a declining union membership undermines collective bargaining power, leaving employees with diminished leverage to negotiate improved pay and conditions. Furthermore, unions must rely on their membership base for organising and campaigning efforts against employers and governments that may seek to impede or suppress workers' rights. The imperative for the labour movement to grow their membership base thus resonates as a crucial element in safeguarding the rights and interests of all workers across Australia.

Lloyd is a recent undergraduate having completed his Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in history and is an aspiring secondary school teacher. He is passionate about getting young people to get involved in progressive causes, particularly in politics and the labour movement, as a means of catalysing positive change. Drawing from firsthand experiences of the benefits of trade union membership and progressive government policies, Lloyd is committed to actively participating and advocating for initiatives that enhance people's lives, like secure employment and housing affordability. During times when he is not immersed in political activities, you'll frequently find Lloyd on his bike, relishing the numerous fantastic cycling routes that Melbourne has to offer.



Lloyd Skinner

Hearts and minds

Byron Cubit

The once great Australian Trade Union movement has been on the backfoot for over four decades. Where once it showed real leadership and advocated a clear vision of how society should be organised, it has abandoned this in favour of advocating for modest legislative changes. Today's movement focuses on abstract terms like justice and fairness.

Do they have a plan to drag its way out of an era of decline? As of August 2022, just 12.5% of the total workforce were union members, a continuation of a decline beginning in the early 1980's. For young people, just 2% of employees aged 15-19 years and 5% aged 20-24 were members of a union (ABS). This low membership is due to a number of factors, due to the insecure work of young people, as well as the decline of industries with traditional high membership and rise of service industries with traditionally low union membership. Other factors include tight regulation of industrial action, anti-union media campaigns, a general lack of understanding about unions in creating a more equitable society and leaders who want to maintain the status quo. Unfortunately, the current strategy will not capture the hearts and minds of young people who are wanting to fight for a better world. As political parties tend to focus on the length of election cycles, unions need to plan for the long term. A functioning democracy requires strong voices that advocate for the interests of the majority. The movement also needs to understand that its salvation does not come in the form of legislation. This is institutional power. Its strength has always come from the power of people. The movement's diminished power combined with the increased power of capital means its ability to create change is at an all time low, even with the Labor party in power federally and in most states. Attempting to exercise power in a weakened state within electoral politics will not result in growth. Therefore, leaders need to look inwards and refocus their energy on building power through collective organising and empowering working people. If they are to create real positive change, the next 10-15 years is crucial in rebuilding the movement and it starts with young people.

The first task for unions is to ensure its strongest areas remain this way. Many of these areas have an ageing workforce and an ageing union leadership. This poses a monumental challenge with great risks. How do unions ensure they can maintain and grow through this shift in demographics? They can increase their power by encouraging active participation in young members with proper succession planning. Firstly,

by implementing mentorship programs at the delegate level, many young members can begin to receive a proper education. Experienced delegates and leaders can become great mentors and provide a great transference of knowledge to young members. If this is completed in a widespread and coordinated manner, the identification of new leaders becomes an easier task. By investing in young workers and developing them at a younger age, they can use their creativity and energy to organise and create new strategies that complement traditional union work.

The creation of youth committees has already begun in some areas. Unfortunately, most without enough education and thus, many are currently struggling to build. With a strong emphasis on education and development, young members can emerge to effectively lead these committees. The committees should be relatively autonomous and largely focus on recruiting young members, campaigning on issues young members care about, as well as pushing for internal improvements to their union. The committee leaders for each union should meet at the peak body level to discuss their progress and share ideas that can contribute to improving each union's youth committee, as well as developing recommendations for peak body executives. They can also utilise their members to show up in solidarity with different union campaigns.

Furthermore, union leadership needs to reflect union membership. Over time, this active participation will lead to young members becoming delegates, health and safety representatives, organisers and positions in leadership. While many unions have specific leadership positions available to women, unions don't currently have youth positions adequately built into its structures. As young people are the future, they should have a role in the decision making that shapes that future. This would need to be from the local delegate level through to the peak body executive.

An increase in participation will ensure the best new leaders will rise. This will have a ripple effect over the medium to long term, providing the conditions to rebuild the movement that holds enough power to overcome the challenges young people will face over the course of their careers, such as casualisation, privatisation, automation and transitioning to a green economy.

Rupert Murdoch has kept the flow of information under tremendous control. New media is beginning to loosen this

grip, thereby opening a window of opportunity for unions to re-enter this space in a way that can build support in both young people and the general public. Too many young people have given up hope of a better future. Without hope, apathy follows. Unions can position themselves to become the answer to the problems our society faces, but they don't have an adequate mouthpiece. There is a clear history of unions being at the forefront of rising living standards. As membership declines, declining living standards follow.

Unions need to speak to young people where they are. Generally, young people are creative and malleable, they can be utilised as content creators to make other young people more receptive to unions. This can be communicated through an independent media network, which initially would need to be funded by unions. A network of new media services can include podcasts, online publications, Youtube channels, Tik Tok channels, books and publishing to provide an alternative narrative and bring it into the mainstream. By opening the Overton window closed by the mainstream media, it can bring hope and drive people toward a fulfilling set of actions. Anybody with a phone can begin to create, it doesn't require massive capital investment begin. A new media network can both create original content and help to amplify existing content creators that share similar values and produce content that can shape public opinion. Quality marketing leading to this amplification can lead to increased audience and therefore monetisation. The network can provide creators with equipment, marketing and editing for a small percentage of earnings that can be reinvested to remove barriers for new creators to join the network. Most creators currently have to do their own marketing and editing. If the network can provide this service, creators can concentrate on creating the best content possible. Alliances with other community organisations have begun to merge and a media network can encompass these messages as well. The effective aim is to make young people more receptive to joining their union or getting involved in other community organisations, building public support for our campaigns and shaping public narrative.

Real energy and focus on these avenues could build enough growth and power to genuinely consider a campaign to deregulate the conditions of taking industrial action. A fundamental human right, Australia has the tightest regulations on withdrawing labour in the developed world. A decline in work days lost by industrial action contributed to the decline of the movement. A renewed ability to strike will mean unions can better utilise its most effective tool to fight for better outcomes for working people. The direct result is raising living standards for the majority of the population. Collective action leads to more growth.

The trade union movement needs to transition from the era of decline to an era of rebuilding, empowerment and growth. Maintenance of the status quo is proven to fail. The road to rebuilding the movement will be long and difficult. It will require bold leadership who are willing to invest in the future. They will need to provide quality education, allow young voices in decision making and build a media apparatus. Winning the hearts and minds of young people will translate

into the long-term, sustainable growth that is required to become a force to be reckoned with, as it once was.

Byron Cubit is a train driver by trade. His progression in the union movement began with the creation of his union's youth committee, which he led for four years. He became an RTBU delegate, then organiser and will be a Branch Secretary as of 1 January 2024. Byron wants the opportunity he had to be available to more young members across the movement, which is why he came up with a delegate mentoring program to dramatically increase education for young members.



Byron Cubit

Getting the diagnosis right

Liam Crisanti

The labour movement in Australia has a centuries-long history of fighting for workers' rights and upholding social justice. In recent decades, the movement has faced significant challenges, such as the decline of traditional industries, the rise of precarious and casual work, the erosion of collective bargaining rights, and the hostility of conservative governments and media. However, these challenges are mere 'symptoms' of a more evident 'disease' which has plagued the labour movement in Australia for several decades.

In reviewing our history, these symptoms and the movement's decline were in fact presaged during the Accord period between 1983 and 1996 and became inevitable following John Howard's victory for the Liberal/National Coalition in 1996. To this extent, former ACTU Secretary and comrade, Greg Combet, has noted that 'one of the consequences of changing [the] economy and the ... restructuring done during the Accord period, has actually been the decline in the level of union membership in the Australian workforce, and that has weakened the influence of trade unions'. The movement has, for too long, ignored this central issue and raised the symptoms as the key issues facing it, rather than the disease itself. This essay seeks to clarify the cause of the 'symptoms' afflicting the movement and briefly indicate strategies which may cure the malady.

One of the main symptoms arising out of the affliction facing Australian industrial relations as detailed above has been the deteriorating nature of work and employment at a higher rate than most OECD nations. The shift from manufacturing to service and knowledge-based industries and subsequent growth of precarious work including in the gig economy and digital platforms, outsourcing of work, and the increase of casualisation have all contributed to the weakening of the traditional bases of union power and solidarity. Many workers today feel isolated, insecure, and unaware of their rights and benefits. They may also face barriers to joining or forming unions, such as legal restrictions, employer opposition, cultural differences, or lack of information and support.

However, these changes also present opportunities for the labour movement to reach out to new and diverse groups of workers, such as young people, women, migrants, and ethnic minorities, who may have different needs and expectations from their work and their unions. These workers may be more receptive to issues such as work-life balance, health and safety, discrimination and harassment, and social

and environmental responsibility, rather than just pay and conditions. They may also be more open to alternative forms of organising and campaigning, such as online networks, social media, and direct action, rather than formal structures and procedures. The labour movement can tap into these potential sources of membership and activism by offering relevant and responsive services and representation, and by engaging with workers in creative and participatory ways.

Another symptom facing the labour movement in Australia has been the hostile political and media environment. The labour movement has been under constant attack from conservative governments and media outlets since the mid-1990s, who have portrayed unions as corrupt, outdated, and disruptive. Some of the results of this have been described above; however, recent Coalition governments have introduced a number of bodies with the express purpose of targeting and investigating unions, so as to undermine them further. The Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC), which had the power to investigate and prosecute unions and workers for alleged breaches of industrial laws, including on matters including industrial action, coercion, and secondary boycotts, pursuant to the former Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Act. The Registered Organisations Commission (ROC), had the power to audit and monitor unions' finances, governance, and compliance, pursuant to the former Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment Act 2016. These agencies had been accused of being politicised, targeting and harassing unions and workers, and were abolished by the most recent Labor government earlier this year.

Again, however, these attacks have afforded opportunities for the labour movement to mobilise and resist, and to expose the hypocrisy and injustice of the anti-union agenda, as they had during the most recent Federal election. The labour movement can also use these struggles to raise awareness and support among the public and the media, and to demonstrate the value and relevance of unions and workers' rights. These symptoms, while serious, are only indicators of a deeper problem. From the peak of the labour movement following Gough Whitlam's tenure as Prime Minister in the mid-1970s, the number of union members in Australia has declined from around 2.5 million to 1.5 million in 2016. In the same period, the union member share of all employees (or union density) has fallen from 51 percent to 14 percent. These figures, on their own, indicate that there are serious

threats to the movement's ability to effectively represent and protect workers' interests and to influence public policy.

The Labor victory of Bob Hawke and resultant Accord was rightly a time to be optimistic about the potential for a more predictable industrial and economic system. The Accord was aimed at reducing the economic pressures facing the nation at the time, seeking to reduce inflation, interest rates, and industrial disputes. At the same time, the Accord improved access to the social wage for many marginalised groups including women, migrants, and those living with disabilities by providing access to Medicare, childcare, education, and family payments. At the other end of the scale, however, was a more worrying compromise. The Accord had the necessary effect of reducing bargaining power of unions by centralising wage determination and limiting industrial action. Unions were forced to accept wage restraint and productivity trade-offs, which directly eroded workers' wage gains and working conditions for the promise of longer-term gains. The Accord ultimately made unions more dependent on the government and less responsive to their members' needs and preferences.

The Accord did not address the structural changes in the Australian economy, which it had arguably created by way of its microeconomic reforms, such as the increased exposure to international competition, the technological changes, and the labour shift from manufacturing to services. The Accord failed to prevent the eventual decline of the manufacturing sector and the rise of precarious and casual work, via the Hilmer Report and National Competition Policy. The Accord also did not protect the workers from the effects of later economic downturns, such as the recession of the 1990s, which increased unemployment and inequality. Both issues created a backlash which saw the successive Coalition governments under John Howard find itself in a strong position to push neoliberal policies which undermined the union movement, culminating in that government's eventual WorkChoices policy.

While WorkChoices was defeated emphatically by the people in the 2007 election, returning Labor to power, the labour movement remained in an extremely precarious, weakened position. This was in no small part due to the High Court decision of *NSW v Cth*, arising out of this policy which would forever change the industrial landscape in Australia. It was no longer for several governments to determine what this landscape would look like; it would be up to the Federal government to impose its policy, essentially unilaterally, on workers. The Rudd government's Fair Work Act ultimately provided a relatively moderate position to the disappointment of unions and businesses alike. This position was eroded by the Coalition governments which followed it, including by seeking to entrench precarious work in the Fair Work Act, and reduce the standing of unions with their proposed Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment (Ensuring Integrity) Bills. Unfortunately, by this stage, the Accord had placed unions in a position whereby they were unable to effectively fight back against detrimental government policies.

None of the symptoms plaguing the labour movement

in Australia are intractable; however, they will continue to arise for so long as the disease remains uncured. The movement is not doomed to irrelevance or extinction. There are still many opportunities and possibilities for growth and renewal, if the movement can adapt to the changing political context and embrace new and innovative strategies for activism. The movement needs to recall and honour its past achievements and struggles, and to draw lessons and inspiration from them. The labour movement in Australia has a proud and powerful legacy, and it has the potential and the responsibility to shape a better and fairer future for all. In doing so, however, it must remember that its voice is the amplification members' voices. This power is not to be underestimated or taken for granted.

The movement must be willing to revisit the long-expired Accord to correct the issues of the past. When facing existential issues, the movement's "Your Rights at Work" campaign to oppose the WorkChoices legislation introduced by the Howard government evidenced its ongoing influence in our society. The union movement must be willing to use this power in this critical time to reach an agreement with current governments around Australia to guarantee the centrality of the concept of unions in the industrial landscape. This would necessarily include entrenching and simplifying the scope and criteria for protected industrial action, and reducing or removing the penalties and risks for unprotected industrial action. However, it would also require reinstating and enshrining the central position of unions in the bargaining arena away from individual and non-union collective bargaining. Some steps have been made in the right direction with the recent changes to bargaining in the Fair Work Act, but more must be done. This paper concludes simply: now is the time to resolve the disease afflicting the movement, solidify the industrial system and protect workers across Australia.

Liam Crisanti is a recently admitted lawyer working with the Australian and International Pilots' Association. He was awarded the Prize for Labour Law during his time at the University of Sydney and has led the industrial and employment law division in a national Labor private practice firm, assisting hundreds of clients in litigation and negotiation in that time. Being brought up in the labour movement, he is a passionate advocate for workers. Outside of this, he is a sports aficionado, barracking for the Sydney Kings, South Sydney Rabbitohs, and AS Roma.



Liam Crisanti

Book Review

Max Monroe examines a new fictional novel on the War in Ukraine.



Misha Zelinsky, *The Sun Will Rise* (Sydney, Simon and Schuster, 2023). Paperback \$34.99.

After all the analytical writing that has focused on the Ukraine War, how could anyone present an additional angle to this terrible conflict?

Well, it seems that Misha Zelinsky has found a way with his new gripping novel 'The Sun Will Rise'. Misha's background, as a leading expert on the global rise of authoritarianism, a war correspondent on the ground in Ukraine in 2022 and 2023, as well as his extensive economic and political prowess, have all come together in this fictional work that tugs at the heart of all democracy-loving citizens of the world. Misha's extensive journalism on the Ukraine War and his strong criticism of Vladimir Putin's government has also earned him the badge of being personally sanctioned by the Kremlin.

When this book was published, many who had known him for years, and those who are familiar with his work, questioned, 'Why fiction?' It is a logical question since

Misha's work has been grounded in facts and figures. However, as he argues, it allows this incredibly horrific situation for Ukrainians to reach people on a more personal level and he's right of course. It gives readers the chance to connect to those brave men, women and children of Ukraine who have fought and are fighting for their freedom from tyrannical authoritarianism.

The novel takes place in the recently occupied medium-sized city of Heryvin, located in the south of the country, where many citizens young and old chafe against the brutal occupying forces. Freedom of expression and of thought are suppressed, yet the courageous people of this city resist in every way possible.

The focus of the novel is on heroine twenty-nine-year-old Oksana Schevchenko, Union Secretary for the nuclear power plant. She must ensure the safe operation of the plant, now controlled by the central antagonist Lieutenant General Mikhailovich and at the same time remain loyal to those resisting the occupiers. Oksana and the city of Heryvin have known catastrophe before, when disaster struck the plant in the days of the 'Empire' (a nod to the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident) taking the life of Oksana's father Timofei. Ignoring this pain, Mikhailovich seeks to sap the power of the plant to dangerous levels whilst enforcing brutal suppression of the 'Natives' for the goals of the 'Motherland' (Russia), the 'Commander' (Putin) and his own selfish ambitions of glory. This evokes memories of the dangerously reckless shelling of the Chernobyl plant in the early days of Russia's 2022 Kyiv offensive as well as the continual arrogance of Putin's government in using the Zaporizhzhia plant as a bargaining chip.

Whilst she is the protagonist in this near-Orwellian novel, she is not alone in the struggle for freedom. Ukrainian men and women of all ages in this city openly obey ordinances by the occupying forces whilst actively and passively resisting in any way they can. Colourful clothes, bath toys and tranquil yet powerfully symbolic sunrises, are all means of expression, that inspire these patriots with hope. Misha shines a light on all facets of daily life in a city as large as Heryvin and the individual stories that make the community what it is. A school principal prepares for the new school year operating reluctantly with new 'approved texts' in the non-native tongue of the Motherland. A reluctantly rebellious teenager looks to express her individuality through colour and an elderly couple peacefully protest the savage forces that have taken over their homes.

These stories are all intertwined and share a camaraderie or 'mateship' as Australians might describe it, while bringing to life the horrific challenges of living in an occupied city such as Mariupol or Melitopol. Misha humanizes the inhumane circumstances of living under the thumb of a dictator.

Native culture is erased, and the history books are rewritten to suit some mythical fate of unity in brotherhood between the occupying and the occupied. Misha has made it clear that this novel is not a work of exact stories from the occupied territories of Ukraine, but it mirrors what is happening on the ground, and what is being done by Russian forces to civilians in these areas. President Putin has made it his goal to rebuild the Russian Empire and to eliminate the so called 'fascists' in power in Kyiv. Yet Ukrainian culture has continued to thrive. Ukraine has resisted Russian efforts to suppress it for centuries, during the time of the Russian Empire, the Holodomor genocide and the period of Soviet censorship. This is exactly what we read in this book. It's an age-old struggle for Ukrainians to exist as an independent people.

Though the occupiers are resolutely and rightfully categorised as the villains of this story, much can be discussed about the inner conflict some officers in this book have about their purpose in the war. Mikhailovich is villainous, and Misha seems to draw on several aspects of Russian foreign policy to categorise him as ruthless, paranoid, arrogant and at times cowardly in the face of a reality beyond his 'Commander's' propaganda. He is flanked in this book by Colonel Sokolov and Major Goublov, both of whom are older than the Lieutenant General and who come from a time before the Wall came down. Goublov's personal experience of war in Afghanistan and the futility of it gives him unique clarity in a world of misinformed Russians. The Major also shows that not all Russians are undying in their loyalty to the Commander, something which is crucial about the war in Ukraine. Not all Russians support Putin's war.

Throughout this novel we also read about the progressive victories of the resistance in surrounding areas. With new Western weapons and weakened Russian defenses they soon close in on the city. However, victories by these fighters and on the battlefields in Ukraine can only be achieved when those who cherish democratic ideals lend support.

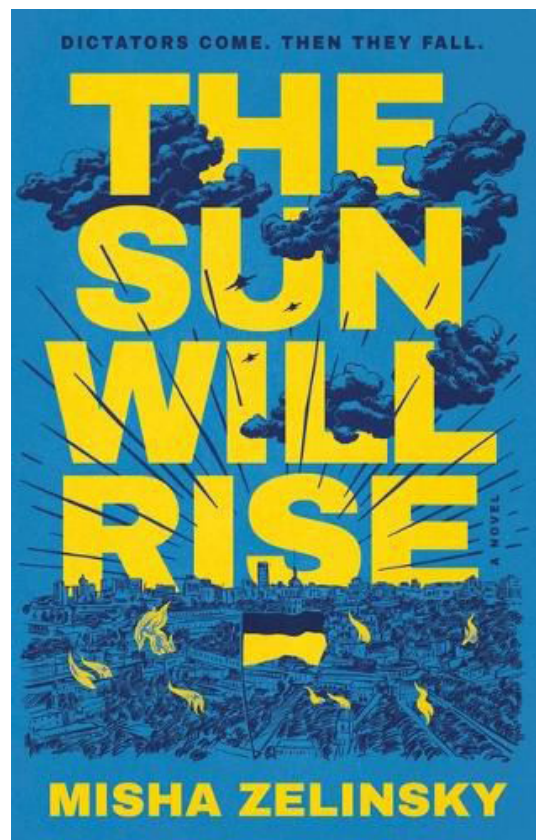
It is not that Ukraine's armed forces are incapable of the inner strength to fight. They are driven by the desire for self-determination, and they need our weapons. What is troubling for many in Kyiv and those who read and understand the conflict is that the will to give military and financial assistance is slipping. Recently for example, the Republican controlled US House of Representatives has begun to question the purpose of continually using American taxpayer dollars to aid Ukrainians. These questions are getting louder from within Congress and in the American media, which echoes the pre-WWII isolationism that allowed Nazi Germany and Japan to plunge much of the world into darkness.

Ukraine's struggle is not just for their country, but for all of ours. If a larger more powerful country can take over a smaller one through brute force and eliminate their right to self-determination, where does that leave the state of

the world? The problem that we face as a society is that our attention spans have shortened significantly. In the early days of the invasion there was a rare clarity of right and wrong which gifted governments around the world a chance to act and stop this aggression in its tracks. We have seen the fruits of that support in Ukraine's 2022 September offensive, and it can be done again but not without the continued help and interest from citizens of countries like Germany, France, Australia, and the US. 'The Sun Will Rise' has taken a different angle to the war by highlighting the resilience of characters on the front lines in Ukraine. After all, Governments are only willing to act on something if people's attention is turned towards it.

This book is about hope. Hope is a powerful sentiment that can reach beyond the jackboot of authoritarianism and can permeate through the soul. This novel seeks to bring that hope of the Ukrainian people to light, by allowing us to feel the hope of those brave teachers, Union Secretaries, students and plant workers. The Ukrainian peoples' struggle is not over, not by a long shot, yet they must know that they are not alone in this fight. They need us, and by connecting to the characters in this story, our empathy with their struggle grows.

Glory to Ukraine! Слава Україні!



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