YOUNG GUNS 4.0

December 2025

Henry Boote/David Cragg Young Activist Prize Edition

Also featuring Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's 2025 Curtin Oration, Nick Dyrenfurth on the year that was and what's in store in 2026 plus David Connah reviews a trio of new progressive books.

THE TOCSIN

FLAGSHIP PUBLICATION OF THE

JOHN CURTIN RESEARCH CENTRE

Labor ideas for a better Australia

Issue 24, December 2025

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Editorial – Tocsin 24: Young Guns, Old Battles, New Frontiers

Nick Dyrenfurth

he politics of the mid-2020s is defined less by certainty than by flux. Old assumptions about economic growth, national security, technology and democracy itself are breaking down at once. The idea that prosperity will simply trickle forward, that institutions will automatically adapt, or that political stability can be taken for granted has been exposed as wishful thinking. Across the democratic world, citizens sense that something is stuck: that systems designed for another era are straining under the weight of new realities. It is precisely in moments like this that ideas matter most. Not slogans or vibes, but serious thinking about power, institutions and the common good. The John Curtin Research Centre exists for these moments: to interrogate the pressures reshaping Australia, to connect history with hard-headed realism, and to argue for a politics capable of governing change rather than merely reacting to it.

This 24th edition of The Tocsin is a testament to that resolve.

We are especially proud to reproduce Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's keynote address to the 2025 Curtin Oration, delivered in Sydney in July on the 80th anniversary of John Curtin's passing. It is a powerful reflection on Curtin's legacy – not as distant mythology, but as living instruction for leadership in an age of uncertainty: courage without bravado, independence without isolation, ambition anchored in national purpose. You will also find my long-form essay, After the Landslide, which looks back on politics in 2025 and, more importantly, forward to what 2026 is likely to bring. The core argument is of how beneath Labor's overwhelming parliamentary dominance sits a fragile, realigning electorate: collapsing major-party primaries, the normalisation of One Nation, a Liberal Party facing an existential crisis, Greens stagnation, and a brewing left–right pincer on housing and cost of living The piece concludes with five concrete predictions for 2026: major-party vote share stuck at historic lows; Labor retaining South Australia and Victoria; One Nation peaking and plateauing; Andrew Hastie emerging as Liberal leader; and a Greens reset driven by Max Chandler-Mather's re-emergence as a eco-populist figure in exile, following the UK Greens' Jack Polanski playbook. Whether readers agree or not, the argument is clear: the apparent calm of 2025 masks deeper tectonic shifts that will shape Australian politics for the rest of the decade.

The heart of this edition, however, belongs to the next generation.

Tocsin 24 proudly publishes the winners of the 2025 Henry Boote–David Cragg Young Activists' Prize, now firmly established as the most serious forum for emerging labour writing in the country. Our joint essay winners are Oscar Kaspi-Crutchett, whose A New Eureka offers an intellectually rigorous and historically grounded reimagining of labour power in the age of algorithmic management, and Sean Whitworth, whose Democratising Technology is determined to shape – and not just fear – AI's transformation of work. Joint runners-up Indah Johannes and Ray Newland deliver disciplined, policy-focused essays that grapple seriously with surveillance, precarity, skills and solidarity in an AI-driven economy. Together, these four contributions demonstrate something heartening: young activists are not short on analysis, ambition or institutional imagination. They are thinking not just about protest, but about power. We are also delighted to publish the citation of the Young Activist Social Media Prize winner, Timothy Weber, whose deceptively simple video – filmed in his car – captures a profound truth: social media has democratised the message; now it is up to unions to organise it. Weber's understanding of technology as an organising tool, rather than a threat, speaks to where the movement must go next. Honourable mentions are also due to fine submissions from David Connah, Jamileh Hargreaves, Jono Stanbury, and Craig Horwood. As a whole, the essays are a fine tribute to the memory, and intellectual activism of our dearly departed, much loved and much missed comrade David Cragg.

This edition also features an outstanding trio of book reviews by Curtin Scholar David Connah, engaging with three of the most important centre-left/progressive texts of the year: Abundance (Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson), Stuck (Yoni Appelbaum), and Why Nothing Works (Marc Dunkelman). Together, they ask a question that should preoccupy Australian progressives as much as American Democrats: why have rich democracies forgotten how to build—and how can the centre-left recover the confidence to govern at scale?

Beyond the pages of The Tocsin, it has been another landmark period for the John Curtin Research Centre. We released our major new report, Safer, Stronger, Sovereign: Preparing Australia for Climate Disasters, setting out a nation-building framework for resilience, secure jobs and sovereign capability in the face of climate disruption. We also launched a major new report, Winning the Peace: Australia and Ukraine's Recovery, arguing that Australia risks becoming a bystander in the largest reconstruction effort since 1945 unless we act now to support Ukraine's

recovery during the war. Launched at Parliament House in Canberra, the report set out a practical strategy for Australian engagement – grounded in national interest as much as solidarity – linking Ukraine's reconstruction to Australia's economic security, supply-chain resilience and middle-power diplomacy. We published exclusive polling with RedBridge Group showing overwhelming, bipartisan public support for worker representation on corporate boards – a reform with the potential to reshape Australia's social contract between labour and capital. Our Innovation Nation: Common Good Series continued in Melbourne with Assistant Treasurer Dr Daniel Mulino MP leading a vigorous discussion on productivity and growth. And on the commentary Tfront, JCRC has published widely on productivity, banking reform, patriotism, Andrew Hastie's economic vision, alongside a firm response to Larissa Waters' remarks following the Manchester synagogue attack.

And Curtin's Cast continues to spark national debate each week — dissecting polling, people and politics — with tens of thousands of listeners tuning in from across the country.

None of this happens without our supporters.

Your backing ensures that we honour the legacy of John Curtin not merely as a figure of history, but as a model for contemporary leadership. It powers our research, writing and advocacy, and sustains a space where ideas can be tested seriously and argued honestly. Supporters receive priority access to all of our reports, The Tocsin and our weekly digest, Curtin's Corner, delivering curated insight across politics, culture and ideas.

As John Curtin himself reminded us in 1940: "I believe the inspiration for change for progress, for all that demonstrates the best in the Australian people lies in the Labour Movement ... it stands for humanity as against material gain and has more resilience, more decency and dignity, and the best of human qualities than any other political movement."

That conviction animates every page of this edition.

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In Unity,

Nick Dyrenfurth,

Editor of The Tocsin

Executive Director, John Curtin Research Centre

Keynote Address – John Curtin Research Centre Curtin Oration, Sydney – 5 July 2025

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese

Eighty years ago acting Prime Minister Frank Forde rose in the House of Representatives and told a still and sombre chamber: "The Captain has been stricken in sight of the shore." Through the dark days of conflict, Curtin had urged the men and women of Australia forward to: "Victory in war, victory for the peace". He would not live to see either, yet no Australian did more to achieve both.

It is an honour to be with you tonight to reflect on the extraordinary and enduring achievements of a Labor icon and a great Australian. Through 124 years of our Federation and 31 Prime Ministers of Australia, John Curtin stands apart. No leader of our nation has faced a sterner test. No-one has known a darker hour. And no Prime Minister has carried more on their shoulders, alone.

During the collapse of the Menzies and Fadden Governments, John Curtin did not push to seize power. Instead, power came to him. The Parliament and the nation turned to Labor. And within four months of being sworn in as Prime Minister, Curtin found himself leading the 'Battle for Australia'. Singapore had fallen, Darwin had been bombed. And he was locked in a battle of wills with the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill as well as the President of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt.

John Curtin, a person so mindful of his flaws and limitations, pushing back against two of the most powerful men in the world and two of the most forceful personalities of 20th Century politics. This moment is the core of the Curtin legend.

Two divisions of the Australian Imperial Force, returning from the Middle East. Curtin wanted those troops for the defence of Australia. Churchill wanted them in Burma – and Roosevelt backed him. Barely two months after Curtin had said that Australia 'looked to America', America was telling us to listen to Britain. It says a great deal about the nature of our relationship with Britain up to that point and indeed the character of Curtin's predecessors that Churchill had assumed Australia would roll over. We know this because he had already given orders for the admiralty troopships carrying Australian soldiers to change course and steam to Rangoon.

Diplomatic cables between leaders can be wrapped in all kinds of formalities and flattery. Curtin's message to Churchill on learning this news is a study in the power of plain speaking. Language sanded back so you can see the grain. First, he rebukes Churchill for treating Australia's agreement to the diversion of Australian soldiers: 'merely as a matter of form'. And he goes on, speaking not just for his party or his government but for his country: "We feel a primary obligation to save Australia".

Some historians downplay the military significance of that moment. They argue the threat of invasion was always exaggerated. But consider the counterfactual. If Churchill and FDR had got their way, Australian forces would have arrived in Burma barely a week before it fell to the Japanese. Hundreds if not thousands of Australians would have been killed, or taken prisoner. It would have been a disaster every bit as crushing to national morale as the fall of Singapore.

Instead, Curtin prevailed. And he paid for that victory with the hardest and loneliest weeks of his life. Knowing those transports, those Australian troops, were out on the Indian Ocean on his orders. This was the solitary burden he bore on his long walks, around the base of Mount Ainslie. And back and forth in the grounds of The Lodge, under the moonlight. His mind a thousand miles away, fearful of the very worst.

No-one could truly know the weight he carried in those days. But all could see the toll it took. Even when the 7th Division docked safely in Adelaide, that pattern of mental and physical strain had been set.

Today, at the safe distance of eight decades, the story of the Second World War is set in our memory. The Allied victory over tyranny has, in retrospect, taken on a feel of inevitability. Part of the debt we owe to Curtin, together with all the men and women who served Australia in that terrible conflict, is to remind ourselves how close history came to taking a different path. Curtin grasped that. And he never pretended to the people, or to himself, that dealing with these choices came easily.

John Curtin dedicated his life to our country – and he gave his life for Australia. His colleagues saw him as a casualty of the war, as much as any fallen soldier. And that self-sacrifice has shaped every reflection on his legacy.

When Prime Minister Gough Whitlam laid the foundation stone for John Curtin House in Canberra in 1974. He paid moving tribute to a man 'enslaved by the times' for whom 'time was a cruel master'. That is a fundamental, inescapable part of the John Curtin story. But it is not the whole. His leadership has earned a bigger place in history than that. And his legacy runs deeper than that, for our party and for our country.

Because Curtin restored in Labor what he revived in Australia: Unity and purpose in times of crisis and uncertainty. Ambition and co-operation in pursuit of opportunity. And, above all, the confidence and determination to think and act for ourselves. To follow our own course and shape our own future.

Curtin once said that the greatness of the Australian labour movement lay in the fact that it: "had never followed the flags of other lands, or patterned itself on the movements which originated in other places." This was the country John Curtin was born into. The 'social laboratory', 'the workers' paradise'. A nation that led the world in creating a fair minimum wage, independently set. A pension when you grew old, support if you got sick. Protections – and respect – for the right of workers to organise and bargain and demand better for themselves. And a democracy that was stronger because women could vote in elections and run for parliament.

That spirit of social democratic creativity had ebbed away under conservative governments. Curtin, together with Chifley, gave it new life and meaning. Curtin empowered Chifley to lead the Department of Reconstruction in 1942. Think about that. As John Edwards wrote: "Roosevelt remade the US economy before the war. Atlee remade the British economy after the war. Curtin remade the Australian economy during the war."

Because his vision, even in the darkest hour of conflict, was for a peace worth the winning. A nation that honoured the courage and sacrifice of its citizens, with more than monuments and memorials. Where the bravery of Australians had won them the right to build a good life for themselves and their families. With new opportunities in education. Secure, well-paid jobs in manufacturing. Affordable medicines through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. And a society where, to quote that Government's housing policy, a home was 'not only the need but the right of every citizen'.

I used those same words at our campaign launch in Perth this year. Because while our nation has changed beyond the imagining of the Labor generations that have gone before us, respect for the aspirations of the Australian people still drives us. And the spirit of progressive patriotism still moves us. We understand that part of what makes this the best country on earth, is that all of us share a responsibility and a determination to make it even better and fairer.

That is why we are making the biggest ever investment in Medicare. So more Australians than ever before can see a doctor for free. It's why we've made it clear that under our Labor Government, the PBS is not up for negotiation. And it is why on Tuesday, we built on two great Labor reforms – and brought them together. We lifted superannuation to 12 per cent. We expanded Paid Parental Leave by a further two weeks. And for the first time ever, we are adding superannuation to it. So women who take time away from work to be with their new baby, don't pay a penalty in retirement.

This is about building an economy and a society that upholds Australian values – and values every Australian. That is the Labor way. And it is the Australian way, under Labor. Because we do not seek our inspiration overseas. We find it right here in our people. And we carry it with us, in the way we engage with the world.

John Curtin is rightly honoured as the founder of Australia's alliance with the United States. A pillar of our foreign policy. Our most important defence and security partnership. And a relationship that commands bipartisan support, respect and affection in both our nations. Yet our Alliance with the US ought to be remembered as a product of Curtin's leadership in defence and foreign policy, not the extent of it.

Because Curtin's famous statement that Australia 'looked to America' was much more than the idea of trading one strategic guarantor for another. Or swapping an alliance with the old world for one with the new. It was a recognition that Australia's fate would be decided in our region. It followed the decision Curtin had made in 1941 that Australia would issue its own declaration of war with Japan. Speaking for ourselves, as a sovereign nation. Where Menzies had said that because Britain was at war with Germany, as a result Australia was also at war. Under Labor, Curtin said Australia was at war: "Because our vital interests are imperilled and because the rights of free people in the whole Pacific are assailed."

That's what Curtin recognised – this was a Pacific war. It was its own conflict which demanded its own strategy. Our security could not be outsourced to London, or trusted to vague assurances from Britain. We needed an Australian foreign policy anchored in strategic reality, not bound by tradition. Dealing with the world as it is, not as we would like it to be. As Paul Keating put it, in his John Curtin Memorial Lecture. "Curtin began us thinking in our own terms."

So we remember Curtin not just because he looked to America. We honour him because he spoke for Australia. For Australia and for Labor, that independence has never meant isolationism. Choosing our own way, doesn't mean going it alone. It was the Curtin and Chifley Governments that brought Australia into the United Nations, the World Bank and the IMF, at the outset. Australia did not just join the institutions which created the international rules based order, we helped shape them. Because we did not want the future of our region to rest on what Doc Evatt called a 'great

power peace'.

Then – and now – we championed the rights and the role of middle powers and smaller nations. Then – and now – we recognised that our region's security depends on collective responsibility. Then – and now – we strive for a world where the sovereignty of every nation is respected and the dignity of every individual is upheld. Then – and now – Australia backs our words with deeds.

Eighty years ago, Australia under Chifley was one of the first countries in the world to publicly support the people of Indonesia in their struggle for independence. And part of the first-ever UN peacekeeping mission to help secure Indonesian sovereignty. Ever since, Labor Governments have understood that Australia's security and our prosperity depend on engaging with our region, as ourselves. Investing in our capabilities – and investing in our relationships.

In times of profound change in our region and against the backdrop of global uncertainty, Australia under Labor has always had the courage and imagination to play a constructive and creative role. That's the approach our Government has taken, from day one. Rebuilding our standing as a leader and partner in the Pacific. Patiently and deliberately working to stabilise our relationship with China. Deepening our economic engagement across South East Asia. Forging new defence and security co-operation with our nearest neighbours, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. And giving our security and trade and energy partnership with India the long overdue investment and attention it deserves.

The Australian Labor Party is Australia's oldest political party – and the movement which gave it life is older still. Anniversaries like this – along with the work of Nick Dyrenfurth and the John Curtin Research Centre – remind us of the fullness and richness of the story to which we belong. Yet the great creative tension of Australian Labor is that while we love our history, we are not hostages to it. We are links in a long chain – but we are not shackled to our past. We draw from it, we build on it and we learn from it.

As a junior member of the Scullin Government, Curtin had watched, in dismay and frustration, as the hopes invested in that Labor Government fell victim to events. Its ambitions crushed by the Great Depression. Its fate sealed by foreign banks and the state premiers. For Curtin, who lost his seat in the landslide defeat that followed, a hard lesson of those years was that Labor could never again allow itself to be seen as ineffectual in times of economic crisis.

That's part of what drove Curtin and Chifley to put the Commonwealth at the centre of tax and revenue. They understood that Australia could not meet the twin challenges of mobilisation and reconstruction as a disparate collection of states pulling in different directions.

And when you consider the big challenges and opportunities facing Australia today: building the new homes and infrastructure our suburbs and regions need. Securing the future of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Powering new jobs and industries through the energy transition. Training our workforce and workplaces so that Artificial Intelligence is a creator of good jobs – not a threat to them. None of that can be realised by one level of government on its own, or indeed by government alone. It depends – as ever – on mobilising the talents and capacity of all Australians.

The world John Curtin knew and the nation he served belong to history now. Yet the lessons of his life and legacy endure. Because while the nature of global uncertainty evolves, this fundamental truth remains. Australia cannot predict, or control the challenges we will face. But we can determine how we respond.

We can choose the way we engage with our region and deal with the world. The stability and prosperity we build and defend with our partners, the peace and security we seek for ourselves. And – above all – we can choose the nation we strive to build here at home. An economy that rewards hard work and creates opportunity. A society true to the values of fairness and aspiration that Australians voted for. And a government worthy of the people we serve. Repaying the trust that Australians have placed in us. And living up to the example of courage and kindness that Australians set for us, every day.

That is the Labor way. That is the Australian way. That is our way forward, for the future.

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After the Landslide: Why No One Is Safe in Australian Politics

Nick Dyrenfurth

Australian politics in 2025 combined overwhelming dominance at the top with deep instability underneath. On the surface, Anthony Albanese's Labor government ends the year bestriding the federal landscape: a massive lower house majority, the Coalition reduced to its lowest primary vote polling intention on record – 24 per cent – having been cannibalised by One Nation on its discontented right flank, polling around 18 per cent nationally and eclipsing the Coalition among Gen X men. Scratch the surface, though, and a different picture emerges: a fraying electoral map, an exhausted political class, and a country where most people under 65 are either angry, anxious or quietly checking out. It has been, in other words, a year where Labor dominated but where the conditions for future trouble emerged – a familiar pattern in periods of apparent political calm that mask deeper realignment.

Labor's high tide and gathering undertow

Labor's federal position at the end of 2025 is historically rare. It governs nationally, in most states and territories, and enjoys a comfortable two-party lead – roughly 54–46 on recent numbers – even as its primary vote remains low. Brand Liberal, especially in the big capitals, is at its weakest since the party's founding. There is some talk, among disaffected moderates, of building a new centre-right vehicle. Former powerbroker Walter Villatora, declaring that the Liberal Party is "finished", is in the process of establishing Reform Australia – a venture that appears consciously modelled on Nigel Farage-style British right-wing populism.

Yet the Albanese government's dominance is open to exogenous shocks. Post-election survey work – including the latest Australian Election Study – suggests voters now see Labor, not the Coalition, as more trusted on economic management, a reversal of decades of conventional wisdom. But trust is not baked in and heavily contingent on one thing: whether people feel their material lives are getting better, or, at the very least, not collapsing.

On that front, 2025 has been unkind. Wages are still playing catch-up. Real incomes for renters and mortgage-holders have been squeezed by higher rates and resurgent inflation. Housing affordability and supply remain BBQ stopper issues. And the longer Labor governs, the harder it will be to talk about a "housing crisis" as if it were something that simply happened to the country, rather than something the government is now judged to own. There's a real risk of generational anger hardening into anti-establishment rebellion.

Albanese's style – cautious, decent, small-target even in office – has bought him time. The government's economic management, mirrored by its incremental social and environmental reforms, and its relatively steady hand on foreign policy, has benefited from a contrast effect: the risk of Peter Dutton in the age of Trump 2.0 and the Coalition's lurch into anti-net-zero and anti-immigration culture wars, Labor looks like the last grown-up at the kids' table.

But you cannot govern indefinitely on being the least-worst option. At some point in this second term, the Australian people will ask more insistently: what is this project for?

The Liberal crisis: humiliation or existential?

If Labor's problem is purpose, the Liberals' problem is more existential.

The numbers are brutal. The Liberal primary hovering in the mid-20s. One Nation at record levels. Greens, teals and independents eating into its urban base. And a Coalition that chose, in response, to abandon its net-zero commitment and double down on anti-immigration rhetoric – precisely the mix most likely to repel the educated, urban middle class it needs to win back, nor diverse suburban voters, while failing to out-Hanson Hanson in the regions. The Coalition is behaving more like an angry pressure group than an alternative government.

If you squint, you can see the historical rhyme. The Liberals today look disturbingly like Labor in the 1950s and 60s: faction-ridden, culturally anchored in a shrinking constituency and ageing membership, and ideologically

unmoored from the centre. The difference is that Labor, then, still sat atop a mass union movement and thick working-class institutions. The Liberals have donors, think tanks doing little thinking and unhelpful right-wing pundits.

It is little wonder some on the centre-right now dream of building something new.

One Nation and the new angry centre

The other structural story of 2025 is the normalisation – even respectability – of One Nation's vote. One Nation is polling nearly triple its 2022 election result, with support jumping to 26 per cent among financially stressed male Gen X voters. These are not fringe numbers. One in four Gen X men is now prepared to tell a pollster they would back Pauline Hanson's party, one actively recruiting defectors like Barnaby Joyce and promising more to come.

What explains this surge? Some of it is old-fashioned grievance: immigration, cultural change, and a rebellion against progressive "woke" politics. But that misses the deeper story. One Nation's strongest support is not among the very poor or the very rich, but among men in mid-life financial stress: those feeling that the deal they were promised – work hard, own a home, your kids will do better – has been quietly shredded with retirement not far off.

Keep an eye on the unfolding global class-education realignment. Labor, Greens and teals now dominate among degree-holders, but the former is vulnerable among the working class. The Coalition bleeds on both flanks. One Nation mines the resentment of those who feel looked down on by "lanyard class" professionals and ignored by mainstream parties. It is not that these voters have suddenly become more racist or authoritarian; it is that economic insecurity gives cultural narratives sharper teeth; status anxiety becomes political identity.

The Greens, teals and the squeezed progressive edge

If the Right is fragmenting, Left-liberal or progressive politics is hardly unified. The Greens enjoyed an annus horribilis. They lost three lower-house seats at the May election, including Melbourne, home of their former leader Adam Bandt. They remain formidable in inner-city seats and continue to draw young, highly educated voters. But the national polls are sobering: stuck at roughly 10–13 per cent, well short of the kind of breakout one might expect amid intergenerational economic insecurity, a housing crisis, and heightened climate salience.

The Greens' problem is both ideological and strategic, as well as cultish arrogance. Their hard-line posture in federal housing negotiations won attention and angry headlines but not necessarily trust beyond their base. They lost their heads over October 7 and ensuing Gaza tragedy. For some reason they decided to campaign on "Keeping Dutton Out", a permissive nod to centre-left voters to plump for the real thing – Labor – to get that job done. The teals, meanwhile, have had a quieter but still important year: consolidating in most seats, losing just Goldstein, but maintaining an image as a kind of moral-liberal conscience – pro-climate, pro-integrity, socially progressive, fiscally orthodox. Their very existence is a daily reminder that a big chunk of the traditional centre-right base no longer trusts the party of Menzies, Fraser, Howard and Turnbull with their material prospects nor the nation's long-term interests. Still, the combined presence of Greens and teals ensures Labor's left-liberal flank remains contested territory. For a government trying to hold together a multi-class, multi-educational coalition structured around wealth and credentials, that pressure can be destabilising: progressive maximalism may animate inner-city activists, but is often off-putting to small-c conservative, non-ideological voters in the outer suburbs who ultimately decide elections.

The mood of the nation: fragile plenty

One of the most striking statistical stories of 2025 is the growing divergence between aggregate wealth and felt security. The value of Australian dwellings has soared – close to $12 trillion by some estimates – delivering a huge wealth effect to those lucky enough to own property. At the same time, consumer confidence is stuck in the doldrums; many families report being worse off than a year ago, even as GDP continues to grow modestly.

This bifurcation – between asset-holders and everyone else – is the fault line of the shifting tectonic plate reshaping our politics. It ripples through housing, inheritance, the tax system, access to education and healthcare. And yet it remains remarkably hard to talk about honestly in mainstream debate. As Sean Kelly argues in his Quarterly Essay The Good Fight, Labor has been cautious to the point of self-censorship on questions of wealth, privilege and structural inequality, aware that any discussion of inheritance or asset taxation triggers a Howard-era reflex in the commentariat. The result is a strange kind of ideological stalemate. Voters intuit that the game is rigged – that the ladder has been pulled up – but hear only technocratic language about productivity, fiscal consolidation and "targeted relief". Meanwhile, smaller parties and movements exploit the vacuum with bolder, simpler stories: the system is broken, the elites have sold you out, your anger is justified. In this environment, the danger for Labor is not instant defeat but a slower accumulation of discontent that, gradually then suddenly, leads voters to conclude the government has possibly run out of answers.

Five predictions for 2026

So where does all this leave us as we head into 2026 – a year of two key state elections and possible federal fireworks? Let me stick my neck out with five concrete predictions.

1. Major-party vote doldrums and Albanese Labor facing a left-right housing pincer

   I expect Labor and the Coalition together to remain stuck at or below the mid-60s in primary vote terms, with One Nation, Greens, teals and others hoovering up the rest. The easy phase of Albanese's dominance is over. As inflation risks re-emerge and the Reserve Bank keeps

rate rises on the table, cost-of-living anger will sharpen. On housing in particular, Labor will be squeezed by the populist left and right: Greens and younger activists demanding far more radical tax measures, and a populist right blaming migrants. By year's end it will be politically impossible for a fifth-year Labor government to speak of a "housing crisis".

2. Labor will be returned easily in South Australia and win Victoria (narrowly)

   Despite the national volatility, I expect Peter Malinauskas in South Australia and Jacinta Allan in Victoria to hang on to government. In SA, a weak and internally divided Liberal opposition, and Malinaukus's Bob Hawke-like touch, will see Labor easily re-elected. In Victoria, the contest will be tighter, reflecting fatigue and specific state issues. But here, too, the federal Coalition's drift toward One Nation talking points – especially on immigration and culture – will poison the Liberal brand in exactly the metropolitan seats it most needs. The paradox is that One Nation's presence makes it harder, not easier, for state Liberals to win in big, diverse states. That said the class-education realignment will be seen in swings in Labor heartlands.

3. One Nation will peak and then plateau

   I expect One Nation to maintain strong polling through much of 2026. But I also think we are close to its high-water mark. The very factors driving its surge – economic anxiety, anti-elite sentiment, disgust with the majors – are also prompting talk of a more disciplined, post-Hanson populist right. My bet is that during 2026 Hanson will publicly signal, or at least privately confirm, she does not intend to contest the 2028 election, and that the party's vote begins to plateau as voters look for a vehicle that can actually govern, not just rage.

4. Andrew Hastie will become Liberal leader and reclaim much of the populist right vote

   Whether through an orderly transition or an untidy coup, I think 2026 is the year the Liberals turn to Andrew Hastie. He offers, for many on the centre-right, a tempting combination: a new way of thinking about the economy, cultural conservatism, and national security credentials. A Hastie leadership will not magically restore the Menzian broad church – his worldview is distinctly post-liberal – but it will give some disillusioned conservative voters, including a slice of the current One Nation base, permission to come "home". One Nation's numbers will remain elevated, but most of the cannibalised Coalition vote will be clawed back as Hastie stakes out a more coherent – if harder-edged – project on the Right.

5. Mixed Greens' fortunes will hasten Chandler-Mather's return

   ictoria remains fertile ground for the Greens' brand of progressive urban politics. I expect further gains or consolidation at the state level in inner Melbourne. Federally, however, the party will struggle to break beyond its existing ceiling. Its brand will continue to excite the activist base but fail to win over enough ageing Millennial voters. Compounding this problem, the party is now living with the real political consequences of its post-October 7 descent into a Corbynite, protest-movement posture — a form of ideological sectarianism that has alienated large sections of the mainstream electorate and reinforced perceptions of cultish, performative radicalism rather than governing seriousness. Internally, federal underperformance will sharpen questions about Larissa Waters' leadership and fuel growing talk of former MP Max Chandler-Mather as the party's de facto national leader heading into 2028: a younger, sharper eco-populist with a clearer story about housing and generational equity.

The through-line in all of this is simple, if uncomfortable. The tectonic plates under Australian politics are shifting: class, education, culture, assets versus wages, Zoomers vs Boomers. 2025 was not the end of that process but its consolidation. The major parties can no longer assume loyalty; they must earn it. And there are exogenous shocks no party or leader can plan for: how will geo-politics and new or renewed wars play out? Where will public opinion land on domestic terrorism in the wake of Bondi? For Labor in particular, the lesson of 2025 is that being competent is necessary but not sufficient. Kerry Packer once said you only ever get one Alan Bond. Albanese got Scott Morrison in 2022, then Peter Dutton. Leaders seldom get a third gift, especially in today's disorderly, realigning politics.

Nick Dyrenfurth is Executive Director of the John Curtin Research Centre

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A New Eureka

Oscar Kaspi-Crutchett

A few years ago, a pandemic swept the earth. In the years after, rapid inflation drained workers' savings. Old regimes fell, and new ones came to power. In many countries, radicals usurped moderate progressives. Political violence, while sporadic, appeared on Australia's streets. Technology, meanwhile, was transforming the pace, intensity, and content of work. Revolutions in steel, chemicals, and electricity allowed specialised crafts to be performed by a much broader pool of workers. Stable, even prestigious, job roles became pliable and insecure. An economy-wide tendency set in towards greater speed, regimentation, monotony, and surveillance: scientific management. Trust in politicians sank. Even in the Labor base, an 'acute sense of economic malaise' fuelled murmurs that the interests of workers were 'continuously sabotaged … by their parliamentary leaders.'

This was Australia in the early 1920s, as Henry Boote approached the heights of his significance as a labour intellectual. In the decades following, the democratic world slouched further into 'private affluence and public squalor'—with its four attendant horsemen of inequality, populism, hopelessness, and violence. By the mid-century, these forces metastasised into a brutal crescendo: a war unparalleled in its destruction and carnage.

Australia finds itself today at a moment that echoes those years after the Great War. The stakes are, certainly, equally high; and although history is always particular to its context in a way that is 'naïve to transcend,' it does offer revelations that can help us chart the seas ahead.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a machine that can analyse and generate text, produce images, manage inquiries, organise production, interpret scans, and evaluate performance. It can administer care, dispense medications, educate children, and counsel executives. AI, therefore, is not simply a novel piece of capital equipment, but an entirely new factor of production. It will transform all existing productive inputs—above all, labour. Much of the prevailing commentary about how AI will impact workers can be distilled into a single, underwhelming phrase: 'it depends.' This essay will answer what exactly it depends on: worker voice—more specifically, the extent to which working Australians can take collective action that forces their concerns and preferences about AI deployment to be recognised.

At the task level, AI will shift workers from generating productive outputs towards refining, proofing, and editing the work of AI. Algorithmic task allocation will rapidly shift workers between stations according to instantaneous changes in market demand or operational need. Increased output will be achieved with fewer specialists. Complex tasks, usually undertaken by one well-trained in-house worker, will be simplified and distributed between several less-trained workers, outsourced labour, or AI itself.

At the firm level, AI will become integrated into the functions of management: recruitment, coordination, discipline, instruction, and termination. The use of AI to justify and enforce managerial decisions necessarily reduces their contestability: 'the computer says no.' As algorithmic complexity increases, so too does this opacity. Already, roughly two-thirds of Australian employers use AI in hiring, firing, and performance monitoring. Bias testing, risk management, and worker consultation remain sparse.

In many firms, algorithmic management will produce intense but highly repetitious work environments: 'electronic sweatshops' where work is quantifiable and strictly delineated, with minimal space for experimentation, spontaneity, variety, or discretion. The modern call centre is the best example of such a workplace, but many Australian factories, retail outlets, and warehouses are coming to resemble it too.

In some industries, dynamic wage-setting will see gig-economy-style arrangements introduced, where workers are used and discarded according to instant fluctuations in market activity—the Hayekian ideal realised. Centralised, cybernetic management systems will coordinate sprawling but isolated workforces, 'breaking down the social fabric that holds potential for worker power in the first place.'

AI will also drive a massive upscaling in workplace surveillance. This will allow employers to intensify workloads,

identify opportunities for job destruction, and eliminate operationally induced gaps in production. The location data produced by wearable devices worn by warehouse workers not only enforce discipline, but also train the robots that replace them.

In the worst cases, perpetual monitoring, job strain, and automation anxiety will increase workloads and multiply hazards. Industrial-era union-busting may also reappear: censorship, blacklisting, espionage. Amazon uses AI to forecast whether warehouses will unionise. Deliveroo's algorithm punishes riders who join union protests. Woolworths deployed an AI-driven performance-monitoring system to target union delegates. Rushed automation efforts will endanger workers' lives. Last year, a 27-year-old warehouse worker was crushed by an automated robot at a Melbourne distribution centre. The most automated Amazon warehouses in the US have the highest worker injury rates.

At the economy-wide level, we arrive at the most significant dimension of this issue: how AI will adjust the quality of work, wages, and national income shares that workers can command with their skillsets. Even workers in stable jobs will face immense downward pressure on wages as they compete not only against machines but against novices who can use AI to rapidly ascend the skill curve. AI will make many jobs simpler, and a very small number significantly more complex. Job losses will occur, but overall AI will likely increase demand for lower-paid, insecure work. The destruction of each full-time role in a factory or office will be paired with the creation of a new, more precarious position elsewhere. Over time, jobs and incomes will polarise—and the general configuration of society may regress to its pre-modern form.

The effects of AI on collective bargaining could accelerate this process. Workers' ability to bargain for a better life is determined by several factors:

1. The asymmetry of information between workers and employers about each party's relative power;
2. The degree to which the work environment allows workers to develop bonds that can form a basis for solidarity; and
3. Whether workers possess productive knowledge that can be strategically leveraged during bargaining.

AI augments all of these. As employers automate key duties currently performed by humans, they neuter the disruptive potential of industrial action:

'I'm siphoning off his knowledge ... he is replaceable now.'

Automation, therefore, will be initially concentrated at chokepoints where workers retain strategic advantage. Efficiency considerations are secondary. Even where businesses are inclined towards restraint, competitive pressure will drive a race to the bottom. There are no demons or devils here—only the forces of the market.

The role for unions, therefore, is very clear. While regulators have an incentive to prevent harm, they are not proximal to AI deployment and can only respond to it after the fact. Employers, meanwhile, are proximal to deployment but structurally incapable of restraining it for collective ends. Only organised workers have the combination of proximity and incentive necessary to steer AI towards human enrichment.

The collective agreements of the future will include clauses that give workers the right to contest status-altering automated decisions, receive a share of profits made by the sale of their data, order union inspections of task-allocation systems, veto covert surveillance, commission bias testing, enforce directorial liability for AI-driven discrimination, and issue stop-work orders when AI deployments imperil public safety.

Both intellectually and tactically, Australian workers are well positioned to face our century's challenges. This is demonstrated by their world-leading rates of AI scepticism and concern. Many elites decry this lack of enthusiasm as an embarrassing marker of national parochialism—urging workers to 'get educated,' 'upskill,' and trust the technology despite its lack of social licence. In fact, widespread trepidation is not only entirely appropriate, but a shining demonstration of the ever-sound and ever-sober instincts of our national community. Removed from the tumult of the old world, Australian workers and their unions have always been 'resistant to both dreams and doctrines,' invariably drawn to 'being practical.' On AI, that means caution and concern. Laissez-faire is radicalism.

The long memory of the labour movement affords it a maturity not available to professional futurists or prophets of doom. We understand that innovations like AI always carry immense destructive and generative potential. The process that translates their emergence into broad prosperity is not automatic or guaranteed. It demands political courage and tireless struggle. We have done this before.

For the union movement, strategic myopia, timidity, and bureaucratic inertia are all hazards—but so too is overestimating modern workers' zeal for upheaval and reconstruction. As one prominent labourite in Boote's day warned, 'hitch your wagon to a star,' but remember that 'the people want Labor to do something for them today.' History demands a visionary turn. We must take it with clear eyes and steady hands.

Unmanaged, the AI rollout presents incendiary risks for the future of work. Steering it towards fairness is the greatest challenge of our time: a fight that will either restore the movement to its lost zenith or deliver the final blow in its annihilation. History watches, as do our descendants. I conclude here with the words of Boote himself:

"Everything is in the melting pot. Labor too. It must show that it can survive the ordeal, and emerge imbued with a new vitality. It must show that it is swift to seize upon the psychology of the times and turn it to the purposes of progress. If it cannot do that ... then assuredly when the

melting pot is emptied you will have to look for Labor in the dross that remains."

Oscar Kaspi-Crutchett is a 25-year-old trade-union activist and writer based in Melbourne. Currently employed as a Senior Research Organiser in the Victorian labour movement, Oscar previously worked as a freelance journalist and a political staffer in the Commonwealth Parliament. He completed his studies at the Australian National University in 2023, producing an honours thesis on the Labor Party's Socialist Objective. Although often focused on the future of work and the challenges of new technologies, his writing is historically grounded and draws on the styles, insights, and traditions of Australian labourism. Oscar is an ardent believer in workers and considers their movements and perspectives to be society's single most effective instrument for achieving justice.

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Democratising Technology: The Role of Organised Labour in Australia's AI Transformation

Sean Whitworth

Every industrial revolution has tested the strength, imagination, and courage of working people. Artificial intelligence is the next frontier, and once more, it is our movement's turn to lead. Across Australia, from warehouses to universities, AI is transforming the way we work, who holds power in the workplace, and how the rewards of productivity are distributed. The choices made in this decade will determine whether AI worsens inequality and insecurity or helps build a fairer, more democratic economy. As members of the labour movement, we cannot afford to be bystanders. We must shape the future of work on our terms, guided by fairness, solidarity, and the conviction that technology exists to serve people, not replace them.

AI promises extraordinary potential. It can improve safety, free workers from repetitive tasks, and boost national productivity. Yet, without deliberate governance, those benefits risk flowing disproportionately to employers and shareholders, while workers face job losses, increased surveillance, and eroded bargaining power. Studies show that AI is already changing the task composition of many professions rather than replacing entire jobs outright. In sectors like customer service, logistics, and administration, algorithms now evaluate performance, manage workflows, and even make hiring decisions. While efficiency may increase, workers are finding themselves monitored by opaque systems and pressured to meet AI-generated productivity targets. The human cost is real, with a loss of autonomy, increased stress, and a growing sense that technology is being used to control rather than empower.

This challenge echoes our history. The labour movement has always confronted the dual nature of technological development. During the industrial revolution, mechanisation threatened craft workers but forged the foundations of the modern labour movement. The post-war automation wave prompted new demands for job security, retraining, and fair redundancy terms. Each generation of workers has fought to ensure that progress does not come at the cost of dignity. AI is no different, however the scale and speed of change are unprecedented. Decisions previously made by managers are now allocated to algorithms, with data becoming the new terrain of power. Our response must be equally innovative and collective.

The first task for unions is to defend fairness and security in the age of AI. Employers must not be allowed to deploy technology secretly or unilaterally. Every workplace introducing AI must do so under clear, enforceable agreements that ensure transparency, consultation, and protection from unfair displacement. Enterprise bargaining must include clauses that give workers the right to be informed about any AI systems impacting their jobs, to challenge automated decisions, and to access retraining or redeployment if their roles change. The ACTU has already called for such rights to be enshrined in law, alongside strengthened privacy protections and safeguards against algorithmic bias. As unionists, we must take these initiatives into every bargaining table and policy forum.

Fairness also means ensuring that the gains from AI are shared. Productivity growth achieved through automation must not become a one-sided windfall for corporate profits. Collective bargaining can help capture these dividends for workers, through higher base wages, shorter working hours with no reduction of pay, and profit-sharing mechanisms. The principle is simple: if technology cuts the effort or time required for production, workers deserve their fair share of the benefits. In the twentieth century, union campaigns for paid leave and the eight-hour day transformed productivity into social progress. In the twenty-first century, we can achieve the same by converting AI-driven efficiency into more time for family, learning, and civic life.

The second task for organised labour is to democratise technology itself. AI systems are not impartial; they reflect

the values of those who create and utilise them. Without worker participation, these systems risk undermining privacy, encoding bias, and concentrating power in management's hands. Union representation in AI governance, whether through workplace committees, industry standards boards, or national advisory councils, is vital. We need laws that require employers to conduct impact assessments before implementing new technologies, and to disclose the data used to evaluate worker performance. In practice, unions must train their delegates and organisers to understand AI, data rights, and digital surveillance so that we can bargain from a position of knowledge.

Australia's privacy and labour laws are still catching up to this new reality. Workers currently have limited opportunity to dispute automated decisions or access the data used against them. This gap leaves people vulnerable to deskilling and discrimination. The labour movement must therefore be at the forefront of shaping national AI policy, pushing for accountability, transparency, and ethical standards that prioritise human wellbeing. By allying with civil society, researchers, and ethical tech advocates, unions can build coalitions capable of influencing regulation. We must insist that AI in Australia be human-centred—but that phrase must be more than a slogan; it has to translate into enforceable rights and worker voice.

The third, and perhaps most future-focused, role for unions is to lead collective upskilling and transition strategies. The fear of being left behind in a rapidly evolving economy can only be met through collective security, not individual anxiety. Traditional market-driven training frequently fails those most at risk—low-paid or casual workers who can least afford to invest in upskilling. Our movement can fill that gap by negotiating employer-funded training programs, portable learning entitlements, and national transition funds to aid workers in moving from shrinking to expanding sectors. Through partnerships with TAFEs, universities, and Jobs and Skills Australia, unions can co-design courses that prepare workers for AI-enhanced roles instead of allowing education policy to drift under employer control.

It is important that we also see AI not only as a threat but as an organising opportunity. The digital economy is producing new classes of workers—platform drivers, data annotators, and content moderators—whose work is often insecure and invisible. These workers require unions more than ever. Organising them will require new tactics, utilising digital membership tools, cross-border solidarity, and cooperation with tech professionals who want ethical workplaces. By building unions that are fluent in technology and grounded in fairness, we can renew our movement's reach and relevance. The lesson from history is clear: every wave of change creates new workers who require a voice.

To succeed, however, unions must practice the solidarity we preach. The AI transformation will not affect all workers equally. Regional Australians, older workers, and communities already facing disadvantage are likely to bear the brunt of disruption. Indigenous workers and culturally diverse communities face additional risks of exclusion if algorithms are trained on biased data. Our movement must advocate for transition policies that are inclusive, directing investment and retraining to the people and regions most affected. Fairness must be measured not by economic averages, but by whether every worker and community is carried through the transition, not left behind by it.

The future we want will not emerge automatically from technological advancement. It must be built through negotiation, struggle, and vision. That vision should rest on three commitments: first, that every worker has a right to participation and dignity in decisions about technology; second, that the wealth created by AI belongs to society as a whole, not only to capital; and third, that solidarity, not competition, is our greatest strength in navigating change. These are not abstract ideals. They are the living principles that built Australia's fair work system, our safety net, and our culture of mateship.

Government has an important role to play, but it will only act if the labour movement demands it. We must push for collective bargaining coverage that extends to digital and gig workers, national standards on algorithmic transparency, and investment in public digital infrastructure that ensures communities, not corporations, own the benefits of automation. Public procurement serves as a powerful lever; governments should only contract with companies that meet strong labour and fairness standards in their use of AI. By aligning industrial policy with worker rights, Australia can set an international example of what a just AI transition looks like.

Ultimately, our movement's power rests not only in opposition but in imagination. We have the capacity to design a better future of work—one where technology liberates rather than disciplines, where productivity transforms into learning and leisure, and where solidarity remains the backbone of social progress. To accomplish that, it is vital we modernise our organising, deepen our understanding of technology, and speak confidently about what a fair digital economy should look like. This is not a technical debate; it is a moral one about who benefits from progress and who bears its burden.

Artificial intelligence will reshape Australia's economy, but it will not decide our values. The true question is whether we allow technology to entrench inequality or use it to strengthen workplace democracy. As unionists, we have faced such crossroads before. We won the eight-hour day, superannuation, and safety standards by working together. Now, we must fight for fair transitions, algorithmic transparency, and an economy that measures success by human wellbeing. The tools may be new; however, the struggle is the same.

The future of work must be one of solidarity. AI will not determine that for us; we will. If we negotiate with vision, organise with courage, and refuse to let technology divide us, then the next chapter of Australia's working life can be one of dignity, fairness, and shared prosperity. The labour movement has always been the conscience of progress. It is time, once again, for us to lead.

Sean Whitworth is a Geelong-based activist and policy contributor with experience across community service, public administration, and political organising. He recently completed a Bachelor of Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Deakin University and is currently undertaking a Master of Public Policy at the University of Canberra. Sean is committed to publishing further work on Australia's reindustrialisation, the economic development of regional Australia, and economic resilience. His writing also seeks to advance debate on the growth and strategic renewal of the labour movement as a central force in securing long-term economic growth and social cohesion. Alongside his policy and research work, Sean volunteers as a firefighter with the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and is actively involved in Australian Labor Party politics. Outside of study and volunteering, he enjoys spending time with his wife and two daughters. His experiences across academia, politics, and community life continue to inform his commitment to building a fairer, more resilient, and reindustrialised nation.

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Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work: Why Organised Labour Must Lead Australia's AI Transition

Indah Johannes

Artificial intelligence is increasingly reshaping the global economy, and Australia is part of that transformation. Artificial intelligence can mean anything from the automation of a few steps in workplace processes right through to the transformation of complete industries. It changes what work is, who gets the benefits, and what kinds of protections workers need. While it offers productivity gains that may create new roles and eventually absorb some displaced workers, AI also accentuates inequality, displaces large numbers of workers, and undermines labour rights. In this regard, organised labour has a legitimate and necessary claim to play a central role in shaping the adoption of AI toward fairness, solidarity, and equity.

AI is going to disrupt the Australian labour market most sharply in sectors where routine and manual work prevail. These include jobs in transport, retail, and administration. Self-driving vehicles may reduce the need for truck and taxi drivers. Self-checkout systems and automated logistics are becoming a growing threat to retail and warehouse positions. Low- and middle-skill workers are increasingly required to take on new responsibilities or face displacement, as AI-powered software replaces clerical tasks such as data entry and scheduling.

AI is not a purely disruptive force. It can also augment existing roles, allowing workers to focus on higher-order tasks that are more complex and human-centred. In the healthcare sector, AI assists with diagnostics and patient monitoring, enabling faster and more accurate decision-making. In the legal profession, it speeds up document review and research, freeing time for strategic work. Education is being transformed by adaptive learning technologies that personalise instruction to individual learners. These developments underscore the critical need for large-scale reskilling and upskilling, so workers can work with AI rather than against it.

Artificial intelligence also creates new jobs, both technical and creative. Fields such as data science, machine learning, cybersecurity, and AI ethics are growing rapidly. However, access to these opportunities depends heavily on digital and analytical skills. While these roles often require training and tertiary education, such pathways remain inaccessible for many Australians, particularly those from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds. Without targeted investment in digital literacy and lifelong learning, AI risks perpetuating existing inequalities.

Beyond reshaping individual roles, AI is transforming the very structure of work. Gig-economy platforms such as Uber and Deliveroo use artificial intelligence for task allocation, performance monitoring, and logistics optimisation. While highly efficient, these systems shift risk onto workers and erode traditional labour protections. Algorithmic management fragments work, introduces unpredictable scheduling, and intensifies surveillance, creating stress and insecurity for casualised and gig workers.

AI is also polarising the labour market. High-skill, data-driven roles expand at the top, while low- and mid-level jobs are devalued or automated. This contributes to wage stagnation and increased precarity at the lower end of the labour market. Workers often lack access to training for emerging roles. In industries such as retail and hospitality, AI reduces labour input but also suppresses wages and intensifies insecurity.

Surveillance technologies compound these pressures. Productivity-tracking apps and algorithmic schedulers prioritise output over wellbeing, leaving workers feeling constantly monitored and powerless over their time and tasks. This pressure is most acute in precarious work, where algorithms police rather than support workers.

Australia's digital divide further deepens these challenges. Remote and underserved regions often lack reliable internet access and digital infrastructure, excluding them from participation in the AI economy. Targeted public investment in digital access and learning infrastructure is essential to ensure no one is left behind.

In this period of rapid change, organised labour remains a vital force for equity and dignity at work. As algorithms increasingly manage hiring, scheduling, and performance review, unions play a crucial role in demanding transparency and preventing arbitrary decision-making. Collective bargaining helps secure fair pay, safe conditions, and job security, even as workplaces become more digitised.

Unions are also central to building long-term workforce resilience through reskilling and lifelong learning. Publicly funded training and employer-supported upskilling enable workers to transition into meaningful new roles. These efforts must be prioritised in sectors facing the fastest disruption.

Importantly, organised labour advocates for inclusive AI adoption. By representing vulnerable groups—including older workers, migrants, and First Nations communities—unions push for policies grounded in social justice. The ACTU's call for enforceable AI implementation agreements, including guarantees on job security, skills development, and data protections, demonstrates how equity can be embedded directly into national policy.

To remain effective, unions must also innovate. Digital organising through online campaigns and virtual meetings allows engagement with dispersed and precarious workers. Gig platforms have given rise to new forms of unionisation, as seen in campaigns by Uber and Deliveroo drivers. These struggles reflect a broader demand for international solidarity against multinational tech companies that often bypass local labour laws.

A fair AI future requires strong tripartite cooperation between government, business, and organised labour. Such collaboration ensures workers' voices are embedded in AI policy and workplace standards. Jointly developed frameworks—including ethical guidelines, transparency requirements, and accountability mechanisms—can reduce risks while allowing innovation to flourish.

Expanding social protections is also essential. Portable entitlements, such as leave and superannuation that move with workers between jobs, are increasingly important in a fluid labour market. Specific reforms for gig workers—covering minimum pay, safety, and dispute resolution—are necessary. Universal safety nets, including healthcare, housing, and income support, will become even more critical as automation reshapes employment.

Central to all of this is worker participation in AI governance. Drawing on Germany's model of co-determination, Australia could establish mechanisms for democratic oversight of workplace technologies. Embedding worker perspectives in AI governance builds trust and ensures technology serves people, not just profits.

AI presents both enormous opportunities and serious risks for Australia's workforce. As automation and machine learning advance, workers' rights must be protected while change is embraced. The organised labour movement is essential to this task, acting as a democratic counterweight to corporate and algorithmic power. By championing transparency, retraining, and inclusive policy, unions can ensure technological progress strengthens rather than undermines fairness and solidarity. Ultimately, AI should serve humanity—and organised labour is the vehicle through which that goal can be realised.

Indah Johannes is a dedicated Youth Practitioner committed to advancing social justice, community wellbeing, and opportunities for young people. At South East Community Links, she empowers multicultural youth through advocacy and engagement initiatives rooted in inclusivity and social impact. Her leadership journey includes completing the Yarra Ranges Council Community Changemakers Program, strengthening her ability to drive meaningful community change. She has also contributed to gender equality and violence prevention efforts through the Leaders for Change program. Indah's background spans youth work, social policy, and health promotion. She previously worked as a Health Promotion Officer with Eastern Health, focusing on youth-related health issues including vaping education and prevention. Her policy and advocacy skills were further developed during her traineeship with FORE Australia, where she worked on research-driven policy briefs and awareness projects. Driven, compassionate, and community-minded, Indah continues to champion youth empowerment through storytelling, leadership, and meaningful collaboration.

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Artificial intelligence, solidarity, and the trade union movement

Ray Newland

Artificial intelligence (AI) presents Australia with an opportunity to lift productivity, raise wages, and improve working lives. But these benefits will not materialise automatically. The Australian trade union movement is essential to ensuring AI adoption leads to opportunity rather than exploitation. Unions can provide essential democratic oversight over workplace transformation and secure training and redeployment opportunities to ensure AI is adopted in ways that enable shared prosperity. In an era of increasingly atomised and technology-mediated work, unions can help build solidarity by giving workers a collective voice in shaping their future.

AI offers significant potential to improve productivity and incomes across both private and public sectors. In healthcare, AI tools can analyse large clinical datasets to spot anomalies and streamline reporting, reducing clinicians' administrative workload. In education, AI can help teachers cut time spent on paperwork and some elements of assessment, allowing them to focus on deeper student engagement and the creative aspects of lesson design that make learning meaningful.

AI-driven predictive maintenance can reduce machinery downtime in manufacturing, power generation, and transport, minimising costly interruptions. Supply-chain algorithms that forecast demand with greater accuracy can streamline procurement and reduce waste, and generative design can cut engineering time by producing optimised design alternatives. These productivity gains are not abstract. The Productivity Commission estimates that AI alone could raise labour productivity by 4.3% over the next decade, an extraordinary improvement from the recent dismal performance of 0.4% over the decade to 2024, the slowest it has been for 60 years. If realised, this would add an extra $116 billion to GDP, meaning more economic output per worker across the economy, which could translate into higher wages, shorter working hours, and better living standards.

Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) estimates that 68% of occupations are more likely to be augmented than automated, meaning AI will mostly transform jobs rather than replace them. Professional and managerial roles are most likely to be augmented, for example through AI copilots that can summarise text, draft analysis, and support scheduling, enabling workers to focus on complex decision-making and interpersonal work. AI could also create opportunities in industries that have lagged in technology adoption due to skills shortages and persistent underinvestment. Australia's revealed technology advantage, measured through AI patenting relative to global peers, shows a strong comparative advantage in construction and manufacturing, sectors that have faced declining productivity over the past decade and are essential for delivering on national priorities such as housing supply and reindustrialisation.

Despite these opportunities, AI adoption also poses substantial risks if poorly managed. Registered AI companies and AI-intensive job postings are heavily concentrated in inner metropolitan areas, raising concerns about rural–urban inequality. Through stronger labour-augmentation relative to automation exposure, university-educated metropolitan professionals are more likely to capture the gains from AI-driven productivity growth, while tradespeople, factory and retail workers, and other blue-collar occupations face the risk of job fragmentation, wages decoupling from productivity, and further casualisation. These risks follow deeper structural shifts in labour markets associated with task-biased technological change, where new technologies disproportionately automate routine cognitive and manual tasks and jobs in the middle of the income distribution, leading to higher employment in high- and low-wage work, known as wage polarisation.

JSA predicts that some of the largest long-run employment gains resulting from AI will be in care work, occupations that have been historically undervalued and underpaid. Ensuring these jobs are not left behind is critical. Care work must be recognised as productive, socially essential labour that supports labour participation, enhances community wellbeing, and delivers major economic spillovers. The wages of these workers must keep pace with broader productivity growth to ensure AI-driven prosperity is shared

broadly across society, not accrued in the hands of the few.

As work becomes increasingly mediated by digital systems, collective experiences and bargaining power risk further erosion. Millions of Australians are already in some form of insecure work, with 2.3 million casuals, over a million 'independent' contractors, and over 400,000 fixed-term contracts. The rise of insecure work and multiple job holding already makes it harder for workers to build the relationships required to organise and negotiate. AI could intensify these trends through algorithmic management and surveillance systems that monitor performance, allocate work, and even determine pay using opaque "black-box" decision rules that not even the software engineers understand. Algorithmic scheduling and demand-forecasting tools may allow employers to precisely vary shift patterns across large casualised workforces, even when the underlying work is regular. This makes work patterns more volatile, reducing economic security and fragmenting workers across incompatible schedules, undermining their ability to build solidarity and act collectively. Without safeguards, AI-powered algorithmic management can deepen existing power asymmetries by depriving workers of the ability to understand or challenge the conditions under which they work.

AI also raises broader concerns related to safety and accountability. In 2024, 188 workers died on the job. Unlike human workers, AI cannot adapt to unexpected conditions or exercise moral judgment. On construction sites, factory floors, warehouses, and hospitals, misjudgements by automated systems can have immediate and severe consequences. AI relies on digitised information that may not capture non-quantifiable variables such as cultural context or tacit knowledge embedded in informal, firm-specific workflows. This not only risks human lives but also creates confusion over who is responsible when things go wrong.

A human-centred approach to AI must be anchored in strong workplace agreements that guarantee funded training, redeployment pathways, and shared governance over skills development. Negotiated training and redeployment clauses in workplace agreements address the core problem that many workers occupy highly specialised and isolated roles, leaving them exposed when technology reshapes tasks or renders skills obsolete. Without collective structures, workers bear the full cost of skill mismatch when redundancies occur. By establishing joint training funds, financed by employers and administered with unions, and union-run or jointly governed RTOs, the burden of adaptation is shared more fairly across society. These mechanisms give workers guaranteed access to relevant, portable qualifications and clear pathways into new roles rather than being discarded when technology changes. Crucially, they also strengthen solidarity. When training is won through collective bargaining and delivered through shared institutions, workers have an incentive to bargain collectively for entitlements that will benefit them across their whole career, even when the nature of their occupation changes due to technology.

Portable entitlements are also a key reform. Funded through employer levies, portable entitlements allow workers to carry benefits such as sick leave, annual leave, and training entitlements across jobs and sectors. This directly addresses the insecurity caused by casualisation, short-term contracts, and platform work. If frequent job-changing becomes the norm and workers lose their sick leave every time they change jobs, it effectively ceases to exist as an entitlement. Without legislative change, we face a situation where a generation of workers could have a 50-year career and never become entitled to long-service leave. Portable entitlements solve this by improving labour mobility, allowing workers to retrain, relocate, or shift sectors, while maintaining stability and certainty so workers can sustain their income when life circumstances change. Importantly, portable entitlements strengthen solidarity by establishing common standards of protection across multiple employers and workplaces.

Ensuring the right to convert to permanent employment is also essential in this context. When workers can transition to permanent roles, they gain stable incomes and the confidence to plan for the future. Permanent roles also deepen workplace cohesion. Stable groups of workers can advocate collectively, understand the systems they operate within, share knowledge, and participate more meaningfully in workplace governance.

Safety and ethical safeguards are equally critical. AI systems must be governed by legal frameworks that ensure workers are consulted on how technology affects rostering, monitoring, training, and risk assessment. Transparent governance ensures accountability and prevents employers from using AI systems to obscure decision-making or shift responsibility. Robust regulatory enforcement, worker-elected health and safety representatives, and consultation with unions can help ensure AI operates as a tool that supports human judgment rather than replacing it. This can be reinforced through 'right to know' legislation that requires firms to be transparent about how AI and other technologies are used in decision-making that affects workers. When workers can supervise technology, solidarity is strengthened through shared responsibility for workplace wellbeing.

Without strong support for workers as AI reshapes jobs, the technology could deepen inequality and weaken job security. The union movement in Australia is well placed to respond by negotiating access to training, strengthening workplace rights, and fostering greater solidarity—building a stronger, modern economy capable of addressing the great social and economic challenges of our time.

Ray Newland works in policy for the Electrical Trades Union National Office and is the Chair of the Macquarie University Economics Society, where he is currently studying a Bachelor of Economics. He is also the Founder of the Youth Climate Policy Centre, volunteers for a range of organisations involved in the energy transition and economic justice, and has been a proud member of the Australian Labor Party since 2020.

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Henry Boote/David Cragg Young Activist Prize Social Media Winner

Timothy Weber

"Social media has democratised the message. Now it's up to unions to organise it"

Head to www.curtinrc.org to watch Timothy's video!

Judges Citation

Timothy Weber's entry stood out immediately for its clarity, originality, and instinctive grasp

of how technology can transform union organising. Filmed simply in his car, Weber delivers

a compelling and highly relatable piece of communication that demonstrates exactly the point

he is making: the extraordinary power now sitting in the hands of every worker and every

union organiser. His use of the shocking example of an Indonesian paramilitary killing a food

delivery rider — and how a single social-media video sparked a national movement — is

deployed with precision. Weber then deftly connects this to Australian labour history,

reminding us that unions once reached workers through newspapers, travelling organisers and

word of mouth. Today, he argues, a smartphone — combined with AI language translation tools — gives organisers the same reach at unprecedented scale. As he puts it beautifully:

"Social media has democratised the message. Now it's up to unions to organise it."

Timothy Weber is a secondary school teacher of politics, religion, history and drama. He believes strongly in the importance of political education, and can be found on Instagram providing political analysis and telling stories @theweber.report - He's a proud social democrat, public transport advocate and Australian republican based in Melbourne, Victoria

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Book Reviews

David Connah

Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson, Abundance: How We Build a Better Future, Avid Reader Press (an imprint of Simon & Schuster), 2025.

Yoni Appelbaum, Stuck: How the Privileged and the Propertied Broke the Engine of American Opportunity. Random House, 2025.

Marc J. Dunkelman, Why Nothing Works: Who Killed Progress – and How to Bring It Back. PublicAffairs, 2025.

For many Australians, US politics sits close enough to follow but also far enough to comfortably ignore. After the 2024 Democratic defeat, though, the post-mortem has felt different; less about campaign gaffes and more about whether progressive politics still has the ability to wield power in a world that badly needs it.

This anxiety has spurred a renewed progressive canon. Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson's Abundance, Yoni Appelbaum's Stuck, and Marc Dunkelman's Why Nothing Works are being described as the new Democratic toolkit for 2025. Each book circles the same puzzle from a different angle: why can a rich democracy that talks endlessly about growth, climate, and opportunity no longer build homes, build transmission lines, or support people's aspirations to build a better life? For Australian readers, the temptation is to treat this puzzle as an American "house-of-cards" drama. The wiser move is to read these books as early warnings about problems that are already becoming visible here as well.

Abundance appeared in the June 2024 Tocsin, in a sharp review that laid out its central case: progressives need a supply-side politics focused on making essential goods abundant rather than simply redistributing scarcity. Aman Gaur's review rightly emphasised how a web of individually defensible rules has turned urban planning into a significant hurdle. Klein and Thompson ask what is unjustifiably scarce in 2050 and what it would take to make it plentiful: clean energy, housing, and public space. They argue we should rebuild the state as a competent agent that can diagnose where the process has become broken.

Rereading Abundance now, in light of its two companion books, what stands out is less the clever branding of "supply-side progressivism" and more its institutional imagination. Klein and Thompson are at their best when they describe the state acting with focus. The wartime science agencies that moved from idea to penicillin, and more recently Operation Warp Speed, aligned procurement, regulation, and logistics to achieve something big. Government, in their telling, is a co-producer of innovation, not a limiter. The frustration, however, stems from turning diagnosis into a plan, and proposals sometimes feel more like a concept than a programme. They want fewer veto points, faster planning approvals, and more mission-driven investment, but the mechanisms for trading voice against speed are sketched only in outline. That is forgivable in a popular book, but it leaves plenty of work for the politicians and public servants tasked with the inevitable job of operationalising the idea.

If Abundance is about what to build, Stuck is about where and who gets to say no. Appelbaum's history of American mobility is the most narratively compelling of the three books—and the most radical. He starts from an observation that most already recognise. Location, he argues, is destiny, and for most of American history people moved to better their destinies. They left failing regions for booming cities, poor states for rich ones, and small towns for large labour markets. Mobility narrowed inequality between states, spread growth, and allowed people to reinvent themselves again and again.

The story Appelbaum tells is how that engine stalled. Zoning, historic preservation, and environmental review were once progressive projects. They promised to shift power away from central authorities and towards communities. In practice, however, they armed a very particular kind of citizen: older homeowners, often well-educated and disproportionately white, who learned how to politicise the community-consultation schedule and the appeals process. The people who might have lived in the new housing development rarely managed to attend. As Appelbaum argues, making it easier to lodge objections did not change

the distribution of power. Instead, it amplified it, and a once-progressive movement that promised to protect the public interest ended up empowering private vetoes.

The heart of Stuck is its attempt to find a way out without retreating into central state power. Appelbaum's three principles for restoring mobility—tolerance, consistency, and abundance—are deliberately modest words for an arguably ambitious agenda. Tolerance is the request to accept slightly imperfect forms of housing rather than ban everything that does not match an idealised streetscape. Consistency is a call for clear, predictable rules that allow as-of-right development rather than case-by-case warfare. The end goal is that of Abundance: so much housing in the right places that homes revert from speculative assets back to essential goods and basic human rights. The book is honest about the trade-offs: heritage protections matter, local ecologies matter, and community consultation matters. The real question is whether these can be redesigned to channel growth rather than stop it.

Where Abundance and Stuck are about materials and maps, Why Nothing Works is about power itself. Dunkelman's argument centres on the "progressive soul." Reformers, he suggests, have grown so uncomfortable with concentrated authority that they have made serious government nearly impossible. Progressive politics wants big things—clean-energy infrastructure, high-speed rail, social transformation—but also fears coercion, abuses of discretion, and unaccountable elites. Out of that tension has grown a model of governance in which almost everyone has a voice and nearly no one has responsibility.

Dunkelman calls this "vetocracy," tracing its roots through legal doctrine, administrative reform, and a cultural turn against expertise. Courts that once deferred to officials now second-guess them. Layer on environmental review, civil-rights enforcement, and interest-group litigation, and the result is a system in which infrastructure is less built than litigated. The implication is clear: a model built entirely around suspicion cannot deliver the outcomes progressives claim to value. You cannot decarbonise the grid if every affected group can effectively veto the plan.

The most useful contribution in Why Nothing Works is its effort to separate solution domains. Some problems are genuinely suited to Jeffersonian decentralisation. Housing, for instance, often benefits when property owners are allowed to add reasonable "missing-middle" upgrades without seeking permission from a dozen boards. Other problems are the opposite. You cannot assemble a rail right-of-way or a transmission line by local consensus. Those projects require what Dunkelman calls "Hamiltonian" arrangements—clear lines of authority, bounded discretion, and political courage. A healthier system, put prosaically, means giving people a voice, not a veto.

Taken together, these three books form a blueprint for a renewed progressive politics. Abundance tells us to focus on essential goods and build more of them. Stuck reminds us that geography—and the ease with which people can move to opportunity—is central to equality. Why Nothing Works insists that none of this will happen if progressives cannot reconcile themselves to a government that actually has the capacity and permission to act. None claims to offer a universal theory of good governance. They are political essays expanded to book length, with the limits that popular literature entails. But they converge on a shared insight that should matter in Canberra as much as in Washington: a politics that majors in branding and minors in effective government will lose both.

There are obvious cautions for Australian readers. The American legal system is more adversarial and its federal structure more fragmented than Australia's. Our planning system is different, our union movement remains relevant, and federal Labor enjoys a more coherent parliamentary majority than the US centre-left could dream of. It would be easy to say that what Appelbaum describes at "Boston zoning hearings" has little to do with a Sydney terrace or a Perth subdivision. Yet with approvals that drag on, infrastructure projects that are perpetually delayed, and local opposition that treats any change as an existential threat to "local character," the obstacles are uncomfortably familiar.

The real question is what an Australian centre-left does with this material before it is forced to. One lesson from Abundance is that debates on housing and climate should start with explicit missions: how many homes, in which places, by when? How much clean-energy capacity and transmission, built to what standard, and on what timetable? A second lesson from Stuck is that mobility must be understood as a core social capability, not merely a lifestyle choice. Where Australians can afford to live determines access to jobs, schools, and social networks. A third lesson from Why Nothing Works is that process design is itself a progressive question. If every layer of consultation, appeal, and review reinforces existing power rather than dispersing it, then a formally inclusive system can reproduce deeply unequal outcomes.

Structurally, these books point toward several concrete reforms. These include greater use of clear, as-of-right planning rules for well-located density, backed by state-level consistency rather than endless local variation. Australia needs stronger, better-resourced public agencies capable of acting as genuine counterparts to developers rather than ineffective referees. Legal and administrative frameworks should give communities a meaningful say in how projects land, but should not grant an indefinite veto over whether they proceed.

To reiterate, a book review is not a substitute for a policy platform, and none of these authors has written the "Australian plan." What they have done is map the traps awaiting any progressive movement that confuses good intentions with real capacity. Klein and Thompson will appeal to those who still believe in a confident, problem-solving state. Appelbaum's work will resonate with anyone who has watched young renters squeezed out of growing cities while older voters defend restrictive land-use rules. Dunkelman will challenge readers who instinctively flinch at

the word "power," yet quietly know that a politics that never trusts itself with the tools of government will eventually hand them to someone else.

In that sense, these three books present the Australian centre-left with a choice. We can treat them as foreign curiosities and continue muddling through on the fumes of old Australian luck, commodity cycles, and inherited institutions. Or we can use them to catalyse and rebuild our own ideas of how to build, move, and govern at scale. A fair, secure, and opportunity-rich Australia does not arrive by accident. It comes from a politics willing to embrace abundance, restore mobility, and reclaim the hard work of effective government. This is not uniquely American; it is our problem now.

David Connah works at the intersection of policy, Infrastructure, and strategy across public, private, and political sectors. He has led election efforts at all levels, contributed to urban and economic policy development, and held special advisory roles across Australia, China, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. A graduate of the ANU, Connah supports building fairer, better-connected communities, and spends most of his time thinking about how to make policy more practical, hopeful, and human.


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NICK DYRENFURTH

Time for centre-left to reclaim patriotism


THE AUSTRALIAN

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New national polling shows voters, including many Coalition supporters, back elected worker directors on company boards.

EWIN HANNAN

@EwinHannan

3 min read October 20, 2025 - 12:00AM

John Curtin Research Centre executive director Nick Dyrenfurth


NICK DYRENFURTH

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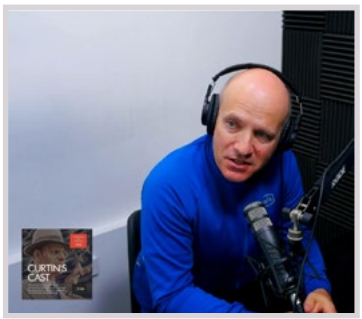


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Commentary | Nick Dyrenfurth


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THE AUSTRALIAN

Saturday, November 15, 2025

HOME BUSINESS WEALTH CULTURE NATION

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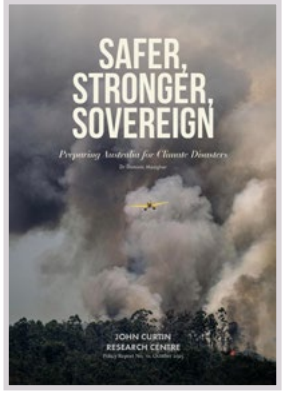
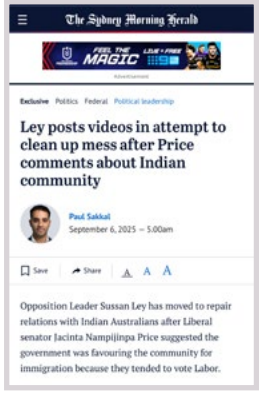
By NICK DYRENFURTH

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Paul Sakkal

September 6, 2025 — 5.00am

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THE AUSTRALIAN

NATION POLITICS

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The South Australian Premier endorses the end of woke, warns against repeating the hands-off approach to social media when it comes to AI and urges Labor to connect with young men and those of faith.

GEOFF CHAMBERS and SARAH ISON

3 min read August 20, 2025 - 5.00AM

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By NICK DYRENFURTH


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Getting to Know ... JCRC Board Member Stacey Schinnerl

What got you interested in unionism and politics?

I was fortunate to find a mentor in the late Nils Timo, an academic with a deep passion for industrial relations and health and safety management. Nils was a former industrial advocate with the AWU, and he ignited my interest in representing workers and helping them build power in their workplaces. Once I started at the AWU, my political interest and activity followed naturally.

Tell us about your working life.

Like many people, I worked my fair share of retail, hospitality, administrative and research jobs to get through school and university. In 2004, at the age of 23, I began working at the Australian Workers' Union (Queensland Branch) as an industrial advocate under the leadership of the great Bill Ludwig. In Queensland, the AWU represents more than 20,000 workers across industries including health, disability and aged care, metalliferous mining, civil construction, local government, youth justice, manuf8acturing, retail (North Queensland), oil and gas, aviation, transport, hospitality, waste services, water, agriculture and horticulture, forestry and much more.

In 2020, I became an elected official, serving as Southern District Secretary. The Southern District is the largest in Queensland and home to half of our total membership. In 2022, I had the privilege of becoming Secretary of the Australian Workers' Union of Employees, Queensland, and Branch Secretary of Queensland AWU – the first woman in the AWU's nearly 140-year history to hold these roles.

I also serve on the Australian Council of Trade Unions Executive and am a Vice-President of the Queensland Council of Unions, as well as ALP state and federal executives. In addition, I am a Director of WorkCover Queensland and Chifley Services Pty Ltd, and an alternate Director of the Australian Construction Industry Redundancy Trust.

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

Housing. Young Australians across urban and regional communities were promised prosperity and progress, yet many now find themselves constrained by economic and policy frameworks that limit opportunity. They are exposed to misinformation through technology, restricted in where they can live and work, locked out of home ownership, and facing mounting sovereign and environmental risks, all while inheriting the financial liabilities of an older generation that controls most of the housing assets.

At its core, we need to radically alter the policy settings that have turned housing into an asset class in this country. In many other places, homes are simply homes – and nothing more. Tough decisions will need to be made across multiple areas, including taxation. Perhaps most controversially, there must be a major cultural and narrative reset as the benefits begin to flow to those who need them most. If we are serious about allowing our children to live with dignity, asset values will have to come down. That will be a bitter pill for many to swallow.

We also cannot ignore the risk housing poses to health and infrastructure pipelines. In Queensland alone, we are tens of thousands of workers short. Even if we could find them—where would we house them?

Separately, we can't forget regional Australian and worker voices. Across the country – but particularly in Queensland – the ALP has lost its ability to speak the language of working people who live in regional areas. Frustratingly, this vacuum has allowed the political Right to feign interest in working people, often under the banner of "regional pride", and to position themselves as their voice in our parliaments. It's all smoke and mirrors.

That must end. We are the party of working people, and we must reclaim our rightful place as their voice and their

champions. Policies that pit city against country only deepen division. The pathway forward is unity. It is the only way, particularly in states like Queensland.

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

My family has owned German Shepherds for more than four decades, so I love spending time with our current boy, Tama. I also enjoy time with my four "babies" – although, as moody teenagers, I'm not sure how much they enjoy time with their daggy mum! Thankfully, they all still love my cooking (which I also love doing), so that usually gets them out of their bedrooms and talking to me. We also love travelling to Japan – in fact, I'm here with my family right now.

Tell our supporters an unusual fact about yourself.

My superpower is having babies two-by-two! With the assistance of modern reproductive technologies, I was blessed with two sets of twins in under three years. For a brief period, I had four children under the age of three. Truthfully, I remember that time mostly through photos—it was a wild ride—but absolutely worth it.

Any advice for young activists?

There's little point throwing stones from the sidelines, so jump in.

Surround yourself with people who share your values, but also take the time to learn from and understand those who don't. History matters. We stand on the shoulders of giants, and their battles – and victories – are the foundations on which we build.

The labour movement is steeped in history, and that history deserves respect. Those of us within the movement must work tirelessly to keep both the industrial and political cannons well-armed in the fight against those who oppose the cause of Australian workers. It's too important not to. There is too much at stake. Strong labour activists have never been more necessary. Our opponents have not exhausted their enthusiasm for dismantling the movement and appear indifferent to the bitter harvest of their obsession. They miss the point—as they always have. Blinded by bias and a gutter-rat instinct for electoral opportunity, they fail to recognise that a strong union movement is one of the clearest indicators of a healthy democracy. When politicians speak about the dignity of work, they too often forget who put the dignity into it in the first place. The union movement did. I'm happy to keep reminding them and every young activist should be too.

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