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IT is with great pleasure as the Chair of the John Curtin Research Centre that I welcome you to the first edition of *The Tocsin*.

We aim to make timeless Labor ideals relevant to the political debates of today and the future. Economic security, access to affordable, quality health services, a first-class education for all, and the safety, well-being and security of our local communities reflect the day to day concerns of the Australian people. Our centre, through its research and advocacy, will give practical voice to these issues.

We are fortunate to have Dr Nick Dyrenfurth as our Executive Director. Nick with his academic background, practical policymaking experience and Australian and international connections will ensure the centre provides constructive, thoughtful and timely contributions to the national and international debate as we strive to provide Labor ideas for a better Australia.

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**WELCOME to the first edition of the John Curtin Research Centre’s official magazine, *The Tocsin*.

As students of Labor history would recognise, our organ was once the title of the vibrant and influential Victorian labour movement newspaper established almost 120 years ago, later to become Labor Call. The original Tocsin was proudly iconoclastic – it yielded to no orthodoxy of the day, nor did it follow a slavish ideological line. Yet it was unashamedly Labor. It was a publication of the labour interest, by the labour interest, and for the labour interest. The John Curtin Research Centre breathes the same spirit: our motto is ‘Labor ideas for a better Australia.’

A better and fairer Australia begins with the simple aspiration of a good life for working women, men and their families: stable, well-paid and meaningful work, quality time with family, friends and local communities, and the amenities, safety and well-
being of the places in which we live. That is Labor’s enduring mission: to provide Australians with the power and opportunity to enjoy long, healthy and fulfilling lives. As the first Tocsin editorial put it on 2 October 1897:

*We know what wants doing, and we intend to try and do it … we [don’t] intend to fall into another pitfall of similar ventures— namely the divorce of Labour from Life. The labourer loves, sorrows, aspires, sins, dreams, reverses. In a word, he lives, is living. The world is more to him than a mere “statement price” or “union rule”, a statistical column of supply and demands figures or even ‘one man one vote’. The studio is for him, too, the symphony, the coster song, if he so wishes, the stage, the race, and the halls of learning … He has hopes, emotions, wrestlings with faith and with reason, emotion … [However] if you divorce him from life, if you shut out from your editorial chambers the rose-tints of his natural atmosphere, what worth is … your essay … however wise it may be from the … Labour Party point of view?*

We are living in extraordinary times. John Curtin would be bemused by the mention of a Facebook live stream or Twitter – indeed the Internet itself. Yet the political and social turbulence engulfing our nation and the world would be familiar. A precariously placed global and national economy; growing inequality; increasing distrust of democratic institutions and political parties; the re-emergence of authoritarian great powers; the spectre of global terrorism; and revival of extremist right and left-wing populism. The shadow of the 2008-09 global financial crisis haunts our politics and has failed to realise predictions of a social democratic renaissance. The solution, as in John Curtin’s days, was to fight. Fighting the good fight, peacefully, at the ballot box and fighting the battle of ideas, armed with our most valuable weapon – practical, smart, relevant Labor ideas. Ideas can change the world, for better or worse. From its birth in 1891, the Australian Labor Party has been a movement of ideas. Simple, influential ideas. Ideas like the formation of the party one hundred and twenty-six years ago. That the parliamentary road was inherently superior to revolutionary dreaming or purist left-wing impotency. Or the labour movement’s belief in a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work and a fair say for working people and their representatives in our nation’s workplaces. And our bigger nation-building ideas. Like the 2nd Labor Prime Minister Andy Fisher’s construction of a transcontinental railway linking Western Australia to the Eastern seaboard. Or John Curtin and Ben Chifley’s plans for post-war reconstruction – plans that were put into action. Think too of Gough Whitlam’s National Sewerage Program, which meant that this basic service was provided to all Australians, wherever they lived in the 1970s. Bob Hawke’s 1980s consensus politics with the Accord at its heart, which modernised the Australian economy. Paul Keating’s building of a world-class superannuation system. Or Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard’s National Broadband Network and National Disability Insurance Scheme. Now look at Labor’s plan to address the housing affordability crisis eating away at the great Australian dream, the subject of our first policy essay written by Misha Zelinsky, a member of the JCRC’s committee of management.

The task of the John Curtin Research Centre is to develop ideas and policies for a better Australia. Our motto was deliberately chosen. It’s not Labor ideas for a more left-wing or even a more progressive Australia but Labor ideas for a better Australia. Ideas are crucial to the work of a party of progress. They help us avoid the tendency to prioritise tactics over a strategic long game, to focus on the ebb and flow of the four quarter contest rather than a bone-jarring hip and shoulder or spectacular mark. Curtin, a decent footballer in his day, might approve of that metaphor. We at the John Curtin Research Centre draw inspiration from the enduring relevance of our nation’s trade unions and the Labor Party’s rich 126 year old tradition – a party of government, not impotent opposition. We are a movement that at its best is in touch with the basic concerns, needs and aspirations of Australians whether they reside in our suburbs, cities, regions or remote areas and one
In unity,

Dr Nick Dyrenfurth

Editor of The Tocsin
Executive Director, John Curtin Research Centre

informed by traditionalist and progressive values; and both patriotic – unashamedly patriotic – and internationalist. With growing disillusionment towards mainstream parties the world over, and the core vote of centre-left parties fracturing, there has never been a more important time for social democrats to win the battle of ideas. Both inside Labor and in the public arena, we seek to counter the false promises of modern-day extremism and advance a positive, relevant agenda committed to the basic needs and aspirations of working Australians and to their political representation. And we were proud to have board member Kosmos Samaras speak to us on that topic.

John Curtin was a self-educated working-class Laborite, the son of working-class Irish-born parents, who fought the battle of ideas as an orator, journalist and labour newspaper editor, unionist and politician over four decades. During the 1943 election, two years after he came to lead a minority wartime government, John Curtin appealed to electors: “The nation had looked to Labor, and it did not look in vain”. In 2017 the nation again looks to Labor. Malcolm Turnbull’s Coalition government has no plan to deal with the big issues facing the nation in our globalised world. In this vacuum exists the possibility of a Trump/Brexit phenomenon of disaffected Australians turning to populist parties. Australia’s Trumpistas, whether Pauline Hanson to Cory Bernardi, are poorly suited to the task of replicating his success, obsessed as they are with tangential culture wars rather than hip-pocket concerns. By contrast voters will be attentive to a Labor message and policy platform built around their primary concerns. In that task, our movement is fortunate to boast leaders who share Curtin’s belief in the cause of Labor, Bill Shorten and Chris Bowen, who launched our centre in Melbourne and Sydney respectively.

Curtin did not toil alone. Nor can we leave the hard toil of winning government federally or at a state level, and governing successfully, to one man or woman. The John Curtin Research Centre has put its shoulder to the wheel and I would like to thank our committee of management and advisory board for their support in our endeavours thus far. In addition to our launches, including Perth, we have recently hosted talks on globalisation and working people, the New Precariat and housing policy. By the time you possess this magazine, Senator the Hon. Kim Carr will have launched The Tocsin at federal parliament in Canberra.

Our centre has a busy year ahead full of exciting new research work and publications – including policy essays on superannuation and electing employees to company boards – alongside stellar local and international guest speakers. To support our work, please go to www.curtinrc.org/donate. Signing up as a supporter will help fight for a better Australia, provide exclusive access to The Tocsin, and other publications. There has never been a more exciting time to join the battle of ideas with the JCRC – ideological extremists are on the march and threaten the achievements of social democrats everywhere. But working together we can stop them in their tracks. The Tocsin, for its part, will “do its part, and sincerely believes that it will be able to achieve something, but it will never be what it hopes to be till it receives your wholehearted support”.

In unity,

Dr Nick Dyrenfurth

Editor of The Tocsin
Executive Director, John Curtin Research Centre

...
Bill Shorten launches the John Curtin Research Centre

THE John Curtin Research Centre was launched at Melbourne’s Swanston Hotel on Australia Day Eve 2017. A packed audience of Laborites heard speeches by the JCRC’s Chair Dr Henry Pinskier and Executive Director Dr Nick Dyrenfurth, before a rousing address by the leader of the federal Labor Party, the Hon. Bill Shorten MP on the hot topic of penalty rates.

“It’s a genuine pleasure to be here among so many friends and luminaries, to launch the John Curtin Research Centre’, Mr Shorten declared. “John Curtin was a truly remarkable person – at a truly remarkable time. In the wake of Pearl Harbour – John Curtin didn’t wait on word from the mother country. He declared war on Japan. In our nation’s darkest hour … he urged his people to give their every effort in the ‘Battle for Australia’ to work or fight as we have never worked or fought before. This remarkable man … remains revered – and relevant –because he was the leader who showed Australians that Labor is better in hard times ... He beat the drink and battled depression, he healed his party and united a nation. And it’s the Labor story too. Strong in the broken places. A party prepared to learn, to change, to moderate and modernise. A party of government – not protest.”

Addressing the topic of jobs and wages, Mr Shorten declared: “For you and me, for our Labor generation, there are new battles to fight, new causes to make our own. In an age of insecure work, increasing casualisation and growing exploitation – it’s more important than ever for our movement to speak up for the rights of working and middle class Australians.”

In a significant intervention ahead of a Fair Work Commission decision, Mr Shorten argued that “cutting penalty rates is more than unfair – it’s unAustralian.” “If the Commission were to cut penalty rates for hundreds of thousands of already low-paid workers without sufficient compensation - leaving people worse off, Labor would not accept this … If the Fair Work Commission backs a cut to weekend rates, Labor will act to ensure modern awards are a safety net Australian workers can continue to rely on. And, friends, if we’re going to win this argument, if we’re going to defend those Australians who we count on in a hundred different ways to keep our economy ticking over then we will need your help, your research, your advocacy. Facts that speak to people’s daily lives, that prove the value of their rights at work. Of course, our opponents will always have deep pockets – and powerful platforms. But there’s one vital area where we have the advantage. The vested interests who oppose penalty rates are putting themselves on the wrong side of the Australian character. They’re setting themselves against the fair go, against the idea that we’re in this together ... An Australia of dog-eat-dog and the law of the jungle. This is not the country John Curtin knew, it’s not the Australia Labor built – and it’s not a future we will accept for the nation we love.”

The JCRC offers its sincere thanks to Mr Shorten and acknowledges Mr Philip Zajac from the Hotel Swanston, a long-term member of the Australian Labor Party, who so generously hosted our centre’s launch.

Read the Hon. Bill Shorten’s full speech: bit.ly/2rN8H6M
THEY call Victoria the ‘progressive’ state. For at least 30 years Labor in Victoria has dominated state politics and delivered to the federal parliament the majority of seats from Victoria. Labor has held office at a state level for 22 of the last 35 years. We should not be surprised that many within the media and political bubble (which I live in) have over time concluded that Victoria is one giant San Francisco. In reality, Victoria, especially Melbourne, is one giant Detroit.

If you were to identify one city which best emulates the once burgeoning manufacturing American states of the 20th century, it would be Melbourne. Before its long decline, blue-collar communities peppering the outer rim of Melbourne not only contributed to shaping the city’s urban and economic heart but were critical to Labor’s recovery from the party split of the 1950s. These epicentres of manufacturing acted as job magnets. They stimulated the growth of communities, shaped its urban sprawl and profoundly impacted this city’s political history.

By the mid-1950s, the Australian Labor Party in Victoria was on its knees. Crippled by a vicious split over the role of the Church in party politics, Labor lost a significant portion of its working-class Catholic vote. In Melbourne, the split handed the seat of Broadmeadows to the conservatives and restricted Labor’s presence to a relatively small group of seats that straddled the then insignificant industrial area between Footscray to Reservoir. A long period in opposition followed. For over two decades Labor was not able to form a significant enough electoral coalition to win. Eventually, Labor was elected to government in 1982, mostly thanks to one man according to Bruce Guthrie.

The former editor of The Age once wrote, “John Cain was the man who led Victorian Labor out of the political wilderness”. Guthrie’s explanation of the root cause of such a momentous result is rather sophisticated compared to the many theories I have read. The most common is that Cain Labor capitalised on the influx of middle-class activists who joined its ranks during the late 1960s and 1970s, making Labor more relevant to the ‘middle ground’. Another suggests that the disaffected Catholic working class merely came back to the fold. Neither are true. The latter in particular continues to hinder Labor in Victoria where many Catholic working class communities now support the National Party. The reality? The vanguard of Labor’s recovery were the blue-collar migrants who came to Melbourne between 1956 and 1981. During this period, Melbourne’s population ballooned by 1.3 million, the influx not only transformed Victoria’s economy but significantly changed its political landscape. These largely migrant blue-collar communities constituted Labor’s electoral ballast, contributing to the expansion of its political territory. Many new arrivals were able to quickly find work in suburbs like Footscray, Collingwood and Brunswick. I vividly remember my mother recounting her experience at Kinnear ropes, an iconic employer for many who once lived in the now gentrified suburbs of Footscray and Yarraville. These hubs of blue collar jobs provided many migrants with the much-needed income to start their new life in Australia. They acted as a kind of beachhead for what was to come: Labor’s renaissance. By 1982 Labor was no longer restricted to only the inner urban industrial seats Labor’s short-lived 1950s Premier John Cain Snr had to rely on.
The manufacturing boom lasted several decades. It provided a generation of Labor voters with secure, rewarding and permanent work, and it allowed Labor to connect to larger numbers of socially conservative blue-collar workers via a political contract. Millions of people in this country voted for a political party that best represented their personal economic interests. That interest had absolutely nothing to do with the ‘national debt’ or how the stock market was travelling. The contract was simple: a stable job, good working conditions and when needed, access to robust political interventions via the broader labour movement. But the boom is now over and so too is the burgeoning blue-collar middle-class. The political contract between workers and social democrats has for many been terminated. You can see the full effects of that separation in countries like Britain, France and Italy. When you separate blue collar workers from their traditional work, you in turn separate them from their traditional politics. That said, the separation was injected with steroids when social democratic parties like British Labour were more concerned about ‘the square mile’ rather than Nottinghamshire.

The political contract between workers and Labor in Australia has not yet been severed but it is certainly fraying. In Melbourne it can be isolated to two periods. The first was the massive exodus of manufacturing within the inner urban areas of Melbourne. For a good part of the 20th century suburbs like Brunswick were more renowned for their boiler pits rather than their cold pressed broths. But that changed as road infrastructure such as the Western Ring Road allowed existing industries in inner urban areas to relocate to cheap industrial land with good access to the port. The relocation freed up these industrial areas for residential development. This coincided with the collapse of the textiles industry, exacerbating the factors pushing inner-urban working class migrants further out along Melbourne’s fringes.

The second but more devastating wave is the permanent decline of manufacturing. This is having the greatest impact on peoples’ lives and in turn politics in this country. Melbourne’s manufacturing-based economy is undergoing significant structural change. Before the mid-1980s, manufacturing contributed around a quarter of the city’s GDP. Today it is closer to 8%, while professional/finance services have taken over the lead role in the city’s economy. The increase in demand for skilled labour has also stimulated population growth, only this time people migrating to Melbourne looking for work are not refugees from war-torn Europe but skilled professionals from interstate. The latter class are almost exclusively settling in the gentrified suburbs of Melbourne and in turn transforming that part of the city’s political landscape. Over the past 20 years Labor’s primary vote has remained stable. However, its overall share of a much larger population has decreased. Labor is not securing the support from the wealthier professional classes settling within Melbourne’s inner-urban suburbs. What about the old economy worker? The once thriving industrial hubs of Melbourne are looking a bit tattered. People who lose their job in manufacturing form 1 of 3 groups. They find work within the same industry, re-enter the workforce via precarious jobs, or become long-term unemployed. The first group remain loyal. However, people entering precarious employment or not finding work become disheartened. As this economic pain continues, we will see the deepening of political disenchantment.

The electoral consequences are not always immediate. We can still see the political aftershocks of the 4 million US manufacturing job losses of 15 years ago. At first, the retrenched workers who either found insecure work or became long-term unemployed protested at the ballot box. They were followed by an even larger group of voters: their children. 30 years ago these children would have followed their parents into the same stable jobs and voting behaviour. Instead, they have now contributed to the Democrats’ gradual decline in states like Ohio. These disaffected voters do not vote

“If Labor wants to survive the next decade... it needs to re-establish a contract with not just people working in traditional industries but now the largest growing class in the world – the Precariat.”
for another major party, but just as in the case of the US, the ‘Precariat’ in this country are opting for third parties or outsider candidates. In the US they have supported outsiders like Obama, Sanders and Trump whilst in this country we have seen support for third parties like One Nation rise. At the 2013 federal election most of Labor’s losses did not directly benefit the LNP but rather third parties like PUP. There are other similar examples in Victoria, such as the state seat of Morwell. In the 1980s Labor’s primary vote in Morwell was around 60%; it’s now 35%. During the 1990s the state electricity industry was privatised by the Kennett Liberal-National government. 5000 jobs were lost in the region; 9% of the population left the area, including 15% of males between the ages of 25-44. Workers and their families that did not leave endured significant hardship. They continued to vote Labor but just like elsewhere around the world, it was their offspring that finally delivered a blow to their parents’ ‘mother’ party.

State-wide, the decline in traditional blue collar jobs has fragmented the two party system. It has certainly hurt Labor. You can draw an easy correlation between the two. But it’s also bad news for conservatives in regional and rural Victoria. Yes, there is such a thing as a conservative poor voter. In fact, some of the poorest electorates in the country are held by the conservatives. Voters within these electorates are increasingly opting for independents like Suzanna Sheed in the Victorian state seat of Shepparton. In 2014 Sheed enjoyed the biggest swings from the poorest areas within her electorate. The Liberal National Party cannot address this problem. After all, it’s primarily their political ideology that is responsible for the economic plight now fuelling the seachange in Australian politics.

If Labor wants to survive the next decade, it better start representing labour, in all its forms, and in all its precarious and stable incarnations. It needs to re-establish a contract with not just people working in traditional industries but now the largest growing class in the world – the Precariat. It is Labor’s calling – these people need an economic champion.

Kosmos Samaras is Victorian ALP’s Assistant State Secretary. Kosmos is an advisory board member of the JCRC. This is an edited version of his address to the centre on 17 February.

Things Don’t Always Get Better

The federal budget was anything but ‘Labor-lite’ argues Nick Dyrenfurth.

I am perhaps showing my age – and an embarrassing musical collection – but for a moment on Budget night 2017 we were back in the mid-1990s. At the heart of Scott Morrison’s 2017 budget was a promise of “better days ahead”, unconsciously referencing pop group D:Ream’s 1993 anthem ‘Things Can Only Get Better’. The chart-topper was adopted by British Labour as its theme for the 1997 election, which saw Tony Blair’s New Labour end 18 years of Tory rule in a landslide victory. ‘Things Can Only Get Better’ soared back into the charts. Amid the celebrations, the ill-advised nature of Labour’s political soundtrack of choice was slow to emerge. But as the GFC revealed: things don’t always get better.

At this point, ScoMo’s budget has been well received, at least by the commentariat. Its harshest critics appear to be the embittered forces gathered around PM-in-exile Tony Abbott, whose disastrous 2014 budget is widely seen as having been killed off by this year’s effort.

‘Labor-lite’ is the charge they’ve levelled at Malcolm Turnbull’s so-called ‘tax and spend’ agenda, pointing towards a $6.2 billion new levy on the big banks, a new Medicare levy, National Disability Insurance Scheme and health funding, and a “Gonski 2.0” education funding package. “I don’t think it is credible for the Coalition side of politics to deliver a tax-and-spend Budget,” claimed Abbott’s former chief of staff, Peta Credlin on Sky News. “This is a Labor tax-and-spend Budget, this is not who we are as … Liberals.” The Howard-Costello era was at an
end, she mournfully told readers of the Australian. (Never mind that Peter Costello was the highest-taxing, highest-spending treasurer in Australian history.) Former Liberal senator Cory Bernardi, who now leads the Australian Conservatives, said the Coalition was “just another faction of the Labor Party”. About the only measure to receive conservative approval was the plan to drug test new welfare recipients. Pundits and fringe right-wing senators won’t decide the fate of this budget nor that of the government. That’s the people’s job. And on the available evidence it is far from ‘Labor-lite’.

Let’s start with the bank levy. It’s a spin-laden move, one that would have made Shane Warne at his peak blush, to push back against calls for a royal commission into the sector. The heads of the big banks have already warned that customers and shareholders may bear the costs. In effect, Turnbull has introduced a regressive new tax on most Australians, because we all have to bank somewhere. The budget’s regressive nature does not end there – $24 billion in corporate tax cuts remain at a time when company profits already sit at record highs. The Medicare levy rise from 2% to 2.5% to raise $8.2 billion will disproportionately impact lower- and middle-income Australians. A worker on $65,000 will be taxed an extra $325 a year, but the 2% deficit levy for those earning over $180,000 ends. University students will pay more for their degrees, and start repaying them earlier.

Then there is the small matter of the Commonwealth’s burgeoning debt, giving the lie to the notion that the Coalition are superior economic managers. The debt ceiling has been lifted to $600 billion. There is almost more chance of the Greens winning majority government in 2020–21 than there is that the budget will have a $7.4 billion surplus that year, a projection based on optimistic growth forecasts amid sluggish wages growth and underemployment. The spin of Labor-lite also conceals the deceit behind the establishment of a $75 billion, 10-year infrastructure fund underscoring Morrison’s mantra of “good” and “bad” debt. The budget figures actually reveal that Commonwealth infrastructure spending is set to decrease during the next four years: from $9.2 billion in 2017–18 to $5.1 billion in 2020–21.

The Howard-era hangover that is the challenge of housing affordability has been shirked. Older Australians who downsize their family homes will be eligible to divert a non-concessional contribution of up to $300,000 into their super funds from sale proceeds, potentially opening up a space in the housing market for first home owner families. But negative gearing and capital gains tax remain untouched. The proposed First Home Super Saver Scheme allows prospective homeowners to shift pre-tax earnings into super funds to save for a deposit from July 2017. It’s a first home owner grant scheme by another name.

There is some good news. The Coalition has finally admitted we have a revenue problem – only a decade too late – and killed off the simplistic political argument that the only way to return to surplus is by cutting spending. The $1.2 billion Skilling Australians Fund – something that ought to have been established at the peak of the mining boom – isn’t at all bad public policy.

Turnbull’s penchant for a big policy reset has rarely worked. Good luck to “fairness, security and opportunity”. Don’t forget, the measures contained in the budget need to pass a pesky Senate, to say nothing of Abbott’s troublemaking.

“Better days ahead” is a new, slightly more realistic twist on Malcolm Turnbull’s ridiculous, politically unwise assertion upon becoming PM in 2015 that “there has never been a more exciting time”. Yet this is a Coalition budget that, despite claims of a break with that era, maintains the short-termism and regressiveness of the Howard–Costello years. British Labour won three elections in a row, with Blair having moved his party to the so-called centre. His successor, Gordon Brown, was tipped out of office in 2010. By then five million Labour voters had abandoned the party. Labour is effectively dead outside of metropolitan London and the North. I may be wrong, but the recently concluded 2017 general election bodes ill for the Jeremy Corbin-led party. So much indeed for things can only get better. Malcolm and ScoMo, you can’t say you weren’t warned.

This is a revised version of an opinion piece first published in The Monthly on May 11.
Globalisation is hurting working people, argues Peter Khalil.

IN 1942, Prime Minister John Curtin told the Australian people in his famous speech, “The task ahead: “Australia must go on a war footing… Australians must realise that to place the nation on a war footing every citizen must place himself, his private business and affairs, his entire mode of living, on a war footing. The civilian way of life cannot be any less rigorous, can contribute no less than that which the fighting men have to follow… Australia is now inside the firing lines. Australian Governmental policy will be directed strictly on those lines.”

Curtin’s speech illustrates how total war dominated the lives of the Australian people. It also highlights the interconnectedness of national security and domestic affairs in that period. What this means, and how it impacted the lives of working and middle class Australians, is instructive because it can illuminate a similar phenomenon in today’s world: the enmeshment of national security and domestic policy, not because of global conflict but prevalent for other reasons.

World War Two created a tangible connection between national security policy and the lived experience of ordinary Australians. They heard Curtin’s battle cry that every Australian must perform even the most mundane of tasks on a war footing, from rationing food and water to working in munitions factories. Just as iron ore and raw materials come together to make steel through the intense heat and pressure of the fire, domestic and foreign or national security policy were forged together by the furnace of war.

Following the Second World War – one can argue – there was a separation, or at least a siloing, between national security policy/international affairs and domestic policy. There were times when international conflict flared and a dynamic interaction between domestic and national security policy occurred. The activism and protest of the baby boomer generation was born and defined by the crucible of the Vietnam conflict. In addition to world war the working and middle classes have and can be affected by sporadic outbursts of international conflict and major events.

Today the impact on ordinary Australians flowing from conflict in the Korean peninsula would be severe. One constituent, bless her, wrote to me asking where the bomb shelters were in our electorate. She is right to be concerned though, but for other consequences. 47% of our jet fuel comes from Korea. Our commercial airline industry and military aircraft would be down to 14 days of reserve. Another example is our trade routes in the South China Sea and Straits of Malacca. These sea lanes are critically important for Australia as a trading nation, and they are emerging as a hot zone for potential conflict. 91% of our crude and refined oil travel through the South China Sea and Malacca Strait. The NRMA reports that Australia retains enough fuel in stockholdings to continue delivery of chilled and frozen goods for just seven days, dry goods for nine days, hospital pharmacy supplies for three days, retail pharmacy for seven days and petrol stations for three days. Our Defence Forces would grind to a halt. Any disruption would be felt across society and in every sector of the economy. It wouldn’t matter if Australia is directly involved, because in the event of a major standoff, involved countries are unlikely to send their fuel products offshore.

The economist Branko Milanovic writes about the
historical trends of inequality in his work Global Inequality. He argues that one of the ways inequality has decreased historically has been through war, bringing most of the population to levels of just above subsistence; while the wealthiest are often taxed heavily to pay for the war. It certainly applies to the twentieth century and the so-called ‘Great Levelling’ of income and inequality. For the many countries involved, the First World War destroyed assets (particularly in Germany, France and Russia), and large taxes were brought on the rich to finance the conflict. However, reduced inequality continued owing to more benign factors. The renewed vigour of socialist and labour movements and trade unions, the massive increase to public education and the greater participation of women in the workforce, each ushered in a period of more than half a century of growing equality in all developed countries. This levelling was also global in scale. Policies in 3rd world or developing countries such as the distribution of land to landless people, or nationalisation of agriculture, the introduction of widespread education and the creation of state-owned enterprises — such as those running the railways, or producing coal or sugar — boosted equality in developing nations (particularly in Turkey, Iran, South Korea and Egypt). Following the levelling, the onset of globalisation in the late 1980s has led to a new period of rising inequality within nations and within our nation, if not necessarily rising global inequality. There is evidence of decreasing global inequality – and this is largely due to China’s rise. But for Australia and other OECD countries, the great levelling is at an end. Inequality within nations has been on the rise since the late 1980s at least – coinciding with the peak period of globalisation (from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the fall of Lehman Brothers). We are all aware of the rise of inequality, but there is something different about the period we live. First, national security and all that this entails: foreign policy; defence policy; international relations and affairs are inseparable from domestic affairs and policy in a manner unlike anytime in human history. Secondly, the impact of this is pervasive on the lives of the working and middle classes but in ways that are largely negative. There is a difference in the degree of interconnectedness of national security and domestic affairs engendered by World Wars or conflicts such as Vietnam or even of potential conflicts such as the South China Sea. The intertwining of international issues and domestic issues in a global capitalist system is at levels we haven’t seen before, and there has been significant structural shift or realignment caused by the period of globalisation.

Frankly, the global capitalist system in which we live is structurally disadvantageous to the working and middle classes. In other words the system is stacked against workers and the middle classes. Put simply, the free movement of capital and the relative difficulty or inability to move labour and the gains from globalisation have not been evenly distributed. We all know that. But what is of interest is who and how they have benefitted. This massive boom, this era of peak globalisation, seems to have practically offered little for the people in between: households in the 75th to 80th percentile of global income distribution, working and middle class people from established and wealthy countries like Australia and other OECD countries. They have simply been squeezed out by the top 1% who have benefited the most from the unparalleled movement of capital, and the ability for this capital to avoid taxation. The other winners are the poorest of the poor, and the emerging Chinese and Indian middle classes, thrown the crumbs from the tables of the top 1%. In 1987, Forbes identified 236 billionaires worldwide. In 2017, it is 2,043, and according to a 2017 Oxfam report, the top eight billionaires own as much combined wealth as half the human race. Peak globalisation has mostly benefitted the individuals in this top 1%. These super wealthy, 70 million people out of 7 billion, make up the global 1%, with 12% from the USA, the rest entirely hailing out of West Europe, Japan and Australia/NZ. Just 100,000 super wealthy individuals out of this 70 million are estimated to be hiding between $21 and 32 trillion in offshore jurisdictions. Australians in this group effectively hide billions out of the ATO’s reach. We have one famous example – our Prime Minister – who uses the Cayman Islands. These massive conglomerates – the multinationals and the private companies – also manipulate the tax system to their benefit – often legally. 579 local and foreign based companies paid no tax in 2013/14 on a combined turnover of $405.9 billion. In Australia alone, the ATO has said that 30% of large private companies pay no corporate tax. Of the 321 privately

"...we also need to be part of the potential global political solution that not only diagnoses the problem but puts an effective break on the global capitalist system that enriches the wealthiest top 1%..."
owned companies earning over $200 million in revenue, 98 of these did not pay tax in 2014. Oxfam estimates that Australia is losing $6 billion a year through multinational tax avoidance. These billions, trillions across countries, could/should have been spent on social transfers to redistributive policies in education, health, infrastructure, and affordable housing which would have been to benefit the working and middle classes, just as these social transfers benefitted societies post World War Two.

The forgotten working class and the ignored middle class are angry and vote for those who feed and reflect that anger. We have seen this across the Western World: the rise of ugly nationalism and of xenophobic populism and nativism. It’s happening at both ends of the political spectrum – far right and far left. It’s up to us to address this frustration, not feed it. Yet the Coalition has done the opposite with their budget that masquerades as ‘Labor lite’ while actually being another budget full of austerity measures that targets the poor, the unemployed, pensioners, student and the most vulnerable. Going after some $500 debt to Centrelink while handing wads of cash to millionaires and multinationals. What is it we should be doing as the Labor Party? Our party is busting out of the business-as-usual paradigm. We are certainly not a small target opposition. And we are developing policies that are aimed at increasing the quality of life and standard of living for all Australians. Yet we also need to be part of the potential global political solution that not only diagnoses the problem but puts an effective break on the global capitalist system that enriches the wealthiest top 1% and which smashes the scam of a globalised system that skews to the top 1%, and push through our redistribution policies of social transfer through the taxation system while reigning in the millionaire/billionaire and multinationals tax cheats for the revenue side of the budget. But we also need different ways and new models of policy development to address structural disadvantages. Domestic policy levers are not enough to redress the disadvantage to the working and middle class attached to what is a global capitalist system. Milanovic argues that nation-state redistributive policies will not be enough, even by a good left or centre-left government. Instead the left-of-centre parties and governments around the world must coordinate the development of their domestic policies. I mean much more than the ALP attending conferences with Labor and social democratic parties in the US, UK and Europe. We must develop policies in a more coordinated, methodical approach. Granted, this is an enormous challenge in a globalised system that is skewed in favour of the top 1%. But we can do this as a social democratic party, as the Australian Labor Party, and we must do this.

Peter Khalil is the federal Labor member for Wills, a foreign policy expert and JCRC board member. This is an extract from his John Curtin Research Centre lecture, 17 May.

Housing Addicts

Misha Zelinsky’s plan to save the great Australian dream

“I think we might lose the house.”

If you have ever heard or spoken these seven words then you know the power they can exert. Housing speaks to a core human need for shelter and protection. A stable, secure home and home life can be the difference between a good childhood and a lousy one – the foundation of what we do and hope to achieve as adults. Housing is one of the yardsticks in measuring how well our society is functioning, but at an individual level having a roof over one’s head is deeply personal – it’s about our self-respect, dignity and the ability to stand on one’s own two feet and provide for those closest to us.

Throughout my childhood, mum, a talented and capable woman with - by her own admission - an inability to manage money, was frequently battling to ‘save’ our home. The dreaded mortgage loomed large. Now thanks to oversized mortgages, so-called ‘housing distress’ is something that more and more Australians are now experiencing.
Home ownership is not silly. It is one of the most important investments any of us will make and central to our national ethos. There are large benefits to the individual investor, families and society from high levels of home ownership. I hope to buy my own someday. But over time I grew to resent ‘The House’. Not for the memories – it was a beautiful, quaint and quirky home in the northern suburbs of Wollongong. It was a safe, secure, and homely place to grow up. No, I resented the constant feeling that it owned us, rather than us owning it. I detested it for the stress. For the obsession. For the addiction.

As an adult I now reflect on my mother’s motivations as part of the broader national story. Any student of our increasingly frenzied property market should be wondering if the problem is a little bigger than a lot of overly eager Aussies willing to pay any price for their own little slice of Australia. Home ownership is central to an economic agenda of inclusive prosperity where any Aussie can expect to have a good job, access to affordable health care, the opportunity of a great education and a chance to better themselves in life – something we would all rightly recognise as the ‘Fair Go’. Where did we go wrong? When and why did we allow the honourable Australian dream of owning a home to morph into a tax dodging vehicle for multi-property owning investors? Why would we let taxpayers, including young workers, underwrite such poor policy? Have we accidently locked the next generation of Aussies out of theirs? Australia, we have a problem and we need to talk about it.

The ‘American dream’ is getting a shot at making it from rags to riches. The ‘Australian dream,’ on the other hand, has always been both more humble and more universal: the expectation that everyone who wants to should be able to get a job and own their own home. Alongside access to education, healthcare and a good job, home ownership is central to our fair go ethos and the deal between generations – where if you work hard and play by the rules you should be able get head. This link between job creation and home ownership has created one of the great societies on earth. But today this link has been broken. And it is young Australian workers and their families who are suffering the most. If we aren’t careful, our runaway housing market threatens to unstitch the Australian way of life as we know it.

Our crazy approaches on housing and tax disadvantages young Australians in two ways: by locking them out of the surging housing market and denying them jobs to pay for a home of their own. Young people entering the workforce today might never buy a home. In Sydney, you need to earn over 12 times your annual income to buy an average house. Historically you only needed three times your salary. Every major Australian city features in the world’s 20 most unaffordable places to live. With house prices comfortably outpacing wages by roughly 10 to 1, the fact is if you’re young worker, it doesn’t matter how hard you work or how many smashed avocados you forgo. This is neither sustainable nor fair. Less than one in two young Australians own their own home, with that number falling fast. Our government does less to help a family buy its first home, than it does for an investor who wants to purchase a fifth, sixth, or seventh.

Our national approach to housing is policy madness, because home ownership is not just a great way to build economic security – it underpins every desirable social outcome you could hope to have. Studies have shown high levels of home ownership create safer communities, increase participation in elections and local clubs, and help children do better at school and in life. The same goes for having a job, of course. You might wonder why many young Australians can’t get an apprenticeship or find themselves needing to go back to uni straight after graduation just to enter the workforce. We’re choking off job creation through poor tax incentives that favour investing in housing above all else. Currently, six out of every ten dollars lent by our banks goes to the housing market – a figure roughly double of other comparable economies. That leaves just four dollars for job creators – those trying to create new or expand job creating industries. You can’t blame investors or even the banks. Putting money into anything other than housing in Australia makes little sense (for now). Young people struggling to buy a house should be furious that we have a tax system that favours the highly paid who already own their own home to buy up multiple properties and choke job creating off investment, all while reducing their own tax bills and straining the budget.

Fixing the problem is hard, but not impossible.

“Our approach to housing is on the verge of radically reshaping Australian society, wealth creation, social justice and the deal between young people and old people...”
It’s pretty much economic consensus that the twin gorillas most responsible for our house price explosion – negative gearing and capital gains tax deductions – need to go or should be wound back considerably. This is ground zero for reform. There is no way of addressing the affordability crisis without winding back excessive negative gearing and capital gains tax deductions. The data clearly shows that investors are crowding out the aspirational first homeowner. Go to a property auction on any given Saturday and see for yourself. The issue we have in this context is that having one property helps you acquire another. If you buy an additional property you help bid up the overall price of houses in the market, which in turn gives you the increased housing wealth to buy more. This is a merry little system of Aussie wealth creation – unless you don’t have that first property. We need to prevent this daisy-chaining.

APRA has recently been making noises about the amount of interest only mortgages being written. Interest only mortgages are particularly attractive when they can be combined with negative gearing and capital gains deductions. In a rising market, the net risk to an investor is minimised. Countries such as Britain place strict limits on interest only loans. Australia could consider banning these kinds of loans all together. One way of reducing the attractiveness of property investing is reducing the amount of rent that the property will return. Like Germany, Australia could introduce limits on how much rent can increase in a given year or 5 year period. A limit of 10% above a market average could be put in place. While ‘rental control’ mechanisms can have mixed results the purpose of this would be to cool not so much the rental market, but send signal to investors that returns will not be as strong.

Given young people are starting from so far behind, it’s time to consider whether we should aim to level the field a little. One way would be giving every 25-year-old, on a means tested basis, $50,000 in public money on his or her birthday to invest as they please – be it in property, equities or a business. Progressive estate and land taxes on older, wealthier generations could be used to pay for this, as would the growth dividend. Access to capital would help ensure we retain equity within and between generations when it comes to home ownership. It would also free up money for job creation by funding youngsters only too willing to back their ideas and create industries and employment for themselves and others.

Have you heard of the Baugruppen? I’m guessing not, but its German for ‘building group’. They are effectively a self-made city where all the owners, who probably couldn’t buy on their own in expensive markets, pitch in to get a large, affordable housing precinct built. Most are well-designed, efficient and well-served by amenities and some of these properties sell for 20 per cent, less than the average price of a home in that city. In Berlin, one in ten properties are now built using this model. A 2015 study by Melbourne’s Swinburne University of Technology found apartment buyers could save up to 30 per cent by collectively developing themselves. Wouldn’t work here? It is, in Fremantle. Mehr bitte!

Our nation has a housing addiction – we’ve enjoyed too much of a good thing. Like any addiction it’s hurting those we love. Our approach to housing is on the verge of radically reshaping Australian society, wealth creation, social justice and the deal between young people and old people – that those in charge will leave something better behind than what they inherited. Left unchecked, Australia’s property market will remake our country as we know it. We need to ask ourselves – what is the purpose of our housing market? Is it to help every Aussie own their own home? Is it a wealth creation vehicle for investors? Both?

Do we want to be a big sandpit of iron ore, coal and gas with some nice harbour-side property? Is this really the extent of our national vision in the twenty-first century? In a world where jobs are disappearing faster than they are being created, in a country where wages are flat and youth unemployment is at historic highs – are we happy with our present allocation of scarce capital? We are a smart people. We pride ourselves on how hard we work. But we are also a society that sticks together and doesn’t leave people behind. We can do better than this. In fact, based on all available evidence and predictions, we need to do better – before it’s too late. What we’ve got here isn’t a dream; it’s a stupor and for too many of us it is becoming a nightmare. It’s time we woke up.

Misha Zelinsky is the Assistant National Secretary of the Australian Workers Union and a Director of Cbus super.
New challenges require old values, writes Janet McCalman.

Labor is an old party. That gives us deep values, loyal supporters, and long experience to draw on. But as we watch the fate of other old parties of the left and centre-left around the world, we must not take our past and our base for granted. If we allow Labor to wither, there is nothing to protect our people – working people, people without capital, people without homes, people without robust health, people without families to care for them, and people without regular work to fund their lives. One of the things we know from the past, is that the so-called dangerous new class – the Precariat – is in fact the return of an old class. The precariat are trapped in the casual, irregular economy, going from gig to gig, armed only with an ABN, hawking their bodies and brains – only this time it includes people with PhDs and advanced skills that took time and money to acquire. We have a shortage of secure work across the full spectrum of education and ability. It will get worse if we don’t develop Labor narratives, policies and institutions to protect people.

The old precariat comprised those with only their physical strength or manual dexterity to sell. Industrialisation was a long, agonising process where skilled artisanal work was progressively ‘diluted’ into semi-skilled and then unskilled tasks so that cheap workers: juniors and especially women, could replace them. Skilled people were reduced to the ranks of the unskilled, fighting each other over a day’s work here, or an hour’s work there. Men found themselves replaced by their wives on a third of the pay. Weavers transported as convicts, dying half a century after their industrial dispossession, still appeared on their Australian death certificates as weavers. It was their identity and it had been stolen.

Before the industrial revolution, however, there was a structure of social support. From 1601 in England, the Poor Law had secularised Christian obligation to charity so that the civil parish, funded by a tax, became the first welfare state, charged with caring for those without funds or family to care for them in orphanhood, old age and sickness. This worked well in small communities and before the modern rise in population that took off in the second half of the 18th century. Rapid urbanisation and industrialisation were too much for the Old Poor Law, but we need to remember that the welfare state is part of our DNA, part of our religious tradition, and from the beginning, at the heart of the British and Australian labour movements.

The gold miners in Victoria built their own version of the Old Poor law, with hospitals in every town and benevolent asylums to house the destitute and aged poor. These did not criminalise poverty like the New Poor Law in Britain. The gold rush generation brought mechanisms of mutual help: friendly societies to provide insurance against unemployment and sickness, funeral benefit societies, and housing societies. And they brought trade unions, winning the 8-hour day in Melbourne in 1856 and, in Victoria the same year, the world’s first manhood suffrage.

The fall of Marvellous Melbourne in the 1890s’ bank crash, when all the banks failed, chastened the middle class and impoverished the poor for a generation and more. In the 1920s in Australia the precariat were to be found around the docks, waiting to be taken on for the day, around building sites, on country work gangs, even in the railways. Men disappeared from the big cities to the bush when the
harvesting and shearing were on and reappeared in the off-season. It was normal and it was terrible for both the workers and their families. They died earlier, were more likely to become addicted to alcohol, drawn into crime; their kids never learnt much because constant moonlight flits to avoid rent arrears meant they changed schools too often. Their wives, as they always had, made a few bob doing outwork for clothing and textile factories and cleaning. Girls were often the best family earners getting seasonal work on the fruit in the canneries or in the confectionary factories. The 1930s Depression for many was an extension of normal.

When the Depression began to lift, there was suddenly a shortage of skilled labour because Australian workers were so poorly educated and trained. They were unemployable—that is until the war came, when if they didn’t join the armed forces, they could receive on the job skills training, good pay, lots of overtime and for the men, a future after the war. My mother and her brother jumped the rattler and left the family farm in north Queensland to work for the war effort. My uncle was trained in the Newport workshops as a fitter and turner and worked as one for the rest of his life; my mother was trained as a sheet metal worker class 2 in the Government Aircraft Factory and as a shop steward, was involved in getting the women 90% of the male rate. “I felt like Rockefeller’, one of her friends said. This was the first great investment in human capital since the limited Repatriation program for the soldiers of World War One. And that would be expanded with the Post-War Reconstruction Scheme developed by John Curtin, Ben Chifley, John Dedman, with HC ‘Nugget’ Coombes and a team of bright young economists in Canberra.

When we talk about the transformation of the Australian economy after World War Two, we tend to focus on the expansion of manufacturing. And it was important, especially in the development of large enterprises where unions could protect workers. But what people don’t talk about is the expansion of government, because we have been so conditioned to see the expansion of the state as regressive. But in fact, it was the expansion of government—federal, state and local—and the building and servicing of infrastructure using full-time workers that abolished the precariat. For the first time in Australia’s history, unskilled men could get a permanent job, be effectively unionised, have a training structure both for themselves and their children, and a secure, imaginable future.

The expansion of government created work for another group in Australian society: a new educated middle class, now able to finish secondary school because state governments started playing catch-up with the building of high and technical schools. They could attend university with Commonwealth Scholarships and Teaching Studentships. The expanding state provided careers for a class that before World War Two had struggled to find work outside banking and insurance and business. Apart from medicine, the professions had always been small. The Bar was tiny given the work on offer. Engineers mostly came through higher technical colleges and had to find a career in industry. Secondary school teachers were few because there were so few state secondary schools in Victoria. Nursing provided a career only for those who remained single.

But today by shrinking the state we are shrinking the middle class, especially for those starting their careers. We are excluding educated young people just as we have excluded potential trades and skilled workers from structured employment and training. We produce thousands of people with PhDs, but our own graduates are uncompetitive with those trained in American universities. Universities are the big users of 457 visas. Our graduates move from short-term job to short-term job. They do not get to develop their skills and experience, nor build a stable career.

Globalisation and technology are now destroying the professions. The entry-level legal work that
enabled law graduates to get their feet in the door, has been outsourced overseas or is automated. Much analysis of pathology results and imaging is done overseas as is a vast amount of engineering design. Computer engineering is done online. Any white supremacist illusion that a country like Australia could keep its place as the brains of Asia has been consigned to the dustbin of colonialism. There are millions and millions of bright, highly educated people in India and China, and soon everywhere else, who, sitting at the end of a computer, can do it all for us for less. I am waiting for university marking to be outsourced overseas.

The precariat has returned, but in a new formation that crosses class lines and Labor needs to find both a language and a series of remedies to connect with them and to connect them with each other. Young people don’t connect with the language of class; workers are insecure, involuntarily mobile, afraid and alone. Labor values are so simple that we take them for granted and fail to talk about them in language that can resonate with people outside our tribe. Labor values are founded on the golden rule, found in all the great world religions and most societies. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you: the gift relationship that recognises reciprocity—I do this for you and I know, that should I need it, you would do the same for me—living for others, caring for strangers.

Labor values are about relationships: great, universal, life-enhancing values that make human life possible through creating a society. But Labor is political. It recognises that there is a fundamental conflict between making money and being employed by others to make them money. We, unlike the Greens, begin from a class analysis. Our foundational knowledge is about the imbalance of power between Capital and Labour. And being political means that values of reciprocity, service and mutual support need to be institutionalised, turned into law rather than merely custom. Labor’s task is to institutionalise fairness, because the playing field is inherently rocky, full of pot holes and mountains and we cannot play alone.

Here are three ideas to help mobilise the precariat:
1) The regulation of work has never been more important and must apply to workers on salaries, short-term contracts and even as ABN holders; 2) We need to change public narrative about the role of the state into a story of good, of our common wealth. Take the state’s role in public health: we accept an invasion of our personal liberty without question in the assurance that we are protected from disease. 3) We need to find a way with the unions and industry superannuation funds to offer insecure workers new forms of income insurance to tide them over between contracts, to provide security for mortgages, and all the legal and social services that unions offer.

The first Industrial Revolution in England took nearly two hundred years, including two world wars and a global depression, to redistribute its material gains. Every inch of the way, people struggled for those gains—in politics, unions, in the community.

In Australia, we got off to a better start but, as elsewhere, the forces of wealth are cashed-up and terrifyingly powerful. Labor has had to fight off direct bullying, lies and its own self-destructive tendencies. We now have to fight a false narrative about the state. We have to reach people who never have identified with those in different socio-economic classes. We have to bridge the terrible educational-cultural divide that bifurcates our society. We have to build the mass support to raise much greater tax revenue from those who can afford it, negotiate strategic free trade that benefits our own people, and build a civil society that includes everyone. To do all that we have to re-educate young people about social insurance, the benevolent state, mutuality, Labor ideas and that politics without power means very little. Our potential constituency is growing all the time, but we have to offer them more than words or feel-good slogans. We need the collective to protect us because we cannot do that on our own. Otherwise it is going to get very ugly indeed.

Professor Janet McCalman is a distinguished historian and JCRC advisory board member. This is an extract of Janet’s presentation to the John Curtin Research Centre’s fringe event at the Victorian ALP state conference, 21 May.
TO be a Labor candidate in a marginal Liberal-held seat in a close election has its own variety of adrenaline. One moment on polling day in 2016 comes back to me with especial clarity. I had received some excellent advice from an experienced marginal seat campaigner. Rather than tour the polling booths, I ought instead to stay in one place – in the biggest of the polling booths and greet people as they came to vote. Accordingly, I stationed myself at the second-largest polling booth in the seat. I stood at the gate all day, unless called away by one form of necessity or another. I was the last person people saw in the press of paper-thrusting booth workers.

Some people were hostile; many indifferent; others were glad to see me, giving me the thumbs up, shaking my hand, even hugging me. One stood out. It was the youngish man, clean-shaven and in a cloth cap, who assured me that he would be voting for me. But then he hesitated, asking “If I vote for you, do I get your invisible friend too?”

During the campaign, I had neither hidden nor emphasised my religious beliefs but made them plain in the interests of full disclosure. On one hand, I was pleased that someone knew enough about me to ask the question. On the other, it was clear that the question emerged from a kind of perplexity that a person could be simultaneously be a Christian and an endorsed candidate of a left-of-centre political party.

There is a general mistrust of religion among many whose views have been entirely formed by the secular enlightenment. For them, concepts like the existence of God and the authenticity of faith-based views are consciously dismissed as products and tools of an archaic, oppressive political and social structure. Federal Labor leader Bill Shorten, like me a confessing Anglican, remarked in his own manifesto, For the Common Good: “There is much sensitivity in the political world – and parts of the wider community – about how much religious faith should be acknowledged, much less discussed by politicians. To some degree, that's understandable: faith is intensely personal. Many political players judge that it's best to steer clear of religion altogether. It's fair to say that this view is more prevalent on my side of politics...There's also a view on the progressive side of politics that religion is the preserve of social and political conservatives...”

But if religious concepts and language have been good servants of oppressive structures, they have also been bad ones. For as long as there have been Christian communities, they have posed a challenge – sometimes a most subversive one – to unjust authority. It is necessary, from time to time to remind ourselves of this rich history of Christian oppositional activism. There have always been Christian activists who have challenged the status quo and, often enough, paid a heavy price for that. These are people too easily forgotten, set aside or ‘contextualised’ into irrelevance. It is exactly this forgetting and the suspicion that arises from it that has prompted my intervention.

There may be cogent reasons for such a suspicion that go deeper than simple discomfort and a partial historical memory. There are people who are genuinely hostile to the Christian faith (and others) and sometimes with good reason. Much of the
positive mission and message of the church has been blunted and compromised by the toxin of child-abuse. The inadequacy of responses by churches to individual complaints, the resort to legalism, victim-blaming and cover-ups is a shameful commentary on human frailty and provides those who wish to use it with a powerful language with which to condemn all of those who continue to identify with historic faiths.

Another and powerful motive for suspicion is the role of religious identities as sources of division and discord. There is a powerful temptation, both for those of religious faith, and for those who seek to manipulate that of others, to define religious communities along tribal lines. Historically, this has led to bitter conflicts justified by sectarian identity. Most frequently, the Crusades are invoked or the savage internecine wars of the reformation in Europe.

Most recently, Pauline Hanson, in her (second) first speech has again sought to define Australia as a “predominantly … Christian country” with a secular government. For Hanson, as for many political conservatives, Christianity is much less about devotion or church-going or piety than it is about an historic tribal identity. Moreover, there are also those whose objections to any faith whatsoever is firmly grounded in their own rejection of it: humanists and intellectual atheists, who have drawn upon the arguments of Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, A.C. Grayling et al. in constructing a worldview devoid of the divine and opposing those who do not. This was the approach taken by my polling booth interlocutor. His pejorative expression ‘invisible friend’ makes that clear.

Whatever the reason – discomfort, anger, hostility – there is a deeper and less explicit reason for this suspicion. Political activists are all, to some degree, utopians. There is an objective: to construct a better world, a better society, even the best one. For all of their many faults and flaws, the churches have been consistent agents of the same kind of social intervention. The consequence of this is a perennial dissatisfaction with any state of affairs. Christians must mistrust any human polity, and utopianism in general, including their own.

History has shown time and again that, like religious tribalism, secular utopianism is flawed and that the roads to its various projected goals run with rivers of blood. It is a sad fact of human history that, although human beings are capable of stupendous feats of engineering, breathtaking works of arts, extraordinary technological achievements, there is no equivalent masterpiece in the world of politics and statecraft.

Christians who involve themselves in political life face all sorts of difficult ethical choices, all of which, at their heart, are the same choice. How best do they serve? In every situation, Christians can either remain outside the political process as protestors and witnesses for a difficult truth, or as players within it, making compromises and striking deals in order to find solutions. Either way, they are idealists, always looking beyond the now to something better. We must never fall into the Stalinist trap of asking people to share the same motivation as well as the same objectives. People vote for, work towards and even campaign for social democracy and workers’ advancement for all sorts of reasons, both religious and secular.

“We must never fall into the Stalinist trap of asking people to share the same motivation as well as the same objectives. People vote for, work towards and even campaign for social democracy and workers’ advancement for all sorts of reasons, both religious and secular.”

Dr Bill Leadbetter is a former Member of the Western Australian Legislative Council, Perth Cathedral Scholar and JCRC advisory board member.
THE challenges for a modern Labor Government to deliver opportunity for all its citizens are clear. Readers of The Tocsin will know that we must always strive to better the lives of all whom we represent, wherever they reside, whatever their socioeconomic status. The Andrews Labor Government, of which I’m a proud member, has delivered a budget true to the traditional social democratic values that this publication and our party hold dear.

It is key to our mission as a government to keep the promises we make and to deliver the things that really matter to Victorians. The Victorian Budget 2017/18 reinforces this Labor Government’s track record of strong financial management. We will deliver a surplus of $1.2 billion in 17/18, surpluses averaging $2.4 billion over the forward estimates, and lower net debt than inherited from the previous Liberal government.

As Victoria’s economic growth continues, with forecast growth of 2.75% in 2017-18, jobs are at the forefront of this government’s agenda. After the previous Liberal Government allowed Victoria’s unemployment to rise to nearly 7%, our government has created more than 200,000 jobs since our election in 2014. In fact, we’ve created more jobs than the rest of the country combined in the past year and tackling job creation across the state, and in many areas. Transport infrastructure investment is one of the key planks in our plan for our rapidly growing state and it is creating jobs in the process. This budget invests another $2 billion in better roads across our state, including the $300 million Mordialloc Bypass, and $100 million to prepare for a North East Link. We’re also investing $500 million to build more trains and trams that will be built in Victoria and continuing our level crossing removal project – our infrastructure investment for 2017/18 will be more than $10 billion.

In my own small business portfolio, we’re reducing payroll tax for small businesses and implementing an Australia-first regional tax cut to drive job creation and business growth in regional Victoria. We’re also increasing the payroll tax-free threshold over the next two years which will save businesses millions. In trade, the Budget will provide $2 million to strengthen Victoria’s presence in the fast growing Asian markets, including bolstering our global network of trade and investment offices – 11 of which are currently based in Asia. This year’s funding comes on top of a record $100 million already committed to strengthening Victoria’s trade capabilities and initiatives that are focussed on driving exports and creating jobs across the state. Under International Education, we’ve announced $3.75 million for international student travel discounts and extending the public transport discount scheme that supports Victoria’s largest service export industry.

In this short summary, I can barely touch on all the areas we’re proudly investing in, but $1.9 billion to tackle the national emergency that is family violence is certainly one worth highlighting. With are strongly implementing every recommendation from the Royal Commission into Family Violence because we want to save lives. In wider healthcare, we’re investing $2.9 billion into the sector which includes major upgrades to our busiest hospitals, boosted funding to our ambulance services and reducing surgery waiting lists. The Andrews Labor Government believes every child deserves the best start in life so we’re putting another $1.3 billion directly into our schools, including an extra $685 million to build and upgrade schools across Victoria. We’re also investing heavily in regional connectivity. $1.45 million Regional Rail Revival package will upgrade every major commuter rail line in regional Victoria and $45 million for the Connecting Regional Communities Program (CRCP) will improve digital infrastructure in our regional communities. This is just some of the ways we’re ensuring regional Victoria continues to thrive and grow.

These are just some of the areas our budget is tackling, but they give you a picture of the kinds of investments good Labor governments make to provide the best possible future for all Victorians. We’ll do all this to ensure, as one of own, John Curtin, put it, “that a better and more decent way of life can be given to all.”

The Hon. Philip Dalidakis is a Labor member of the Victorian Legislative Council, having represented Southern Metropolitan Region since 2014, and a JCRC advisory board member.
When Gough Whitlam died on 21 October 2014 at the age of 98, there was a consensus that he was one of the giants of twentieth-century Australian history. You did not have to have been one of his supporters to accept as much. Like Robert Menzies before him, Whitlam had come to stand for a political tradition, a generation experience, and even a whole era.

That Whitlam’s time in office had been so short – a mere three years – only seemed to make his remarkable status in Australian history the more difficult to fathom. Once accused of trying to too much too quickly, there was now a sense of awe that his government had managed to achieve so much in so short a time. With the passage of time, the failures had come to be overshadowed in collective memory by the legacies and the sheer largeness and longevity of the man.

This year – the 8 February – saw the fiftieth anniversary of Whitlam’s election as opposition leader. Whitlam, as deputy leader since 1960, was the obvious successor to the aged Arthur Calwell, but he had to contest a ballot with Jim Cairns, Frank Crean, Fred Daly and Kim Beazley Senior. The anniversary attracted little attention. Perhaps it should be surprising if it had; it is the Whitlam Government’s election, and more particularly its dismissal, that have aroused media interest over the years. Yet Whitlam’s period in opposition, which extended over almost six years, was as significant in its way as his time in government.

This was the period in which the party developed the policies that it would take to the voters in 1972. These were not stitched together in the ad hoc way so familiar from past elections. Whitlam drew on all the available expertise, in and beyond the party. He sought the advice of experts across the fields of government activity so that when ‘The Program’ went to voters in 1972, it looked like a vision for the country’s future and not the result of recent focus group research or public opinion polling.

Equally critical was party reform. In the 1960s the Victorian branch of the party was dominated by a small number of union and party officials. Winning elections had ceased to be its major priority. Whitlam had addressed the branch’s annual conference soon after he became leader, famously suggesting that their purity had come at expense of their potency.

By 1970, following the near miss of the 1969 federal election, he had sufficient support to intervene in the branch and make it more democratic. This was critical in getting Labor over the line on 2 December 1972. The sense of this day as a landmark in Australian political history belies the narrowness of that victory over William McMahon’s faltering coalition government.

During the Hawke-Keating era and for some time afterwards, Whitlam and his government had a rather poor reputation. There was a sense that for all
his nobility, Gough had stuffed it up. Paul Keating once called the government ‘amateur hour’. The Hawke Government especially sought to put a fair amount of daylight between itself and the Whitlam Government.

Now, in an era of national policy stasis, it is easier to see the achievements of the Whitlam government as well as the continuities with all that came later. The Hawke government’s victories and stability owed much to the party reforms of the Whitlam era. Medicare was a more successful re-run of Medibank. The Sex Discrimination Act built on the Whitlam government’s support for women’s rights. The reduction in industry protection began under Whitlam, with the 1973 tariff cuts. Whitlam was no less preoccupied with recasting Australia’s relationships with Asia than Hawke and Keating.

Much also changed in the 1980s because the times had changed as had the possibilities for a social-democratic government in a developed western nation such as Australia. Similarly, a future Labor government would do well to avoid imagining that it might simply re-run any of the Whitlam, Hawke and Keating years. The challenges of our own times are different from and no less knotty than those faced by these governments. But history provides us with a sense of both the possibilities, and the obstacles, to progressive change in Australia. Whitlam wasn’t wrong when he called the way of the reformer in Australia a hard one.

Frank Bongiorno is Professor of History at the Australian National University and author or co-author of four books, including A Little History of the Australian Labor Party (NewSouth, 2011, with Nick Dyrenfurth).
Nick Dyrenfurth’s critique in The Monthly (11.5.2017) of the Turnbull government’s so-called Labor-lite budget.

Nick Dyrenfurth’s The Monthly piece on Malcolm Turnbull’s big new policy fetish (5.5.2017).

Misha Zelinsky’s JCRC housing policy essay was extracted in the Huffington Post (9.5.2017).

Nick Dyrenfurth for The Monthly on how John Howard’s policy chickens have come home to roost (21.4.2017).


Dr Bill Leadbetter in The Spectator looks at the anti-Semitism row engulfing U.K. Labour (7.4.2017).

Nick Dyrenfurth was interviewed by ABC Radio (7.4.2017) on the transformation of Mark Latham.


Nick Dyrenfurth’s The Monthly piece on how the Liberal Party has betrayed mainstream conservatism (23.3.2017).


Pauline is no friend of working class Australians, writes Nick Dyrenfurth for The Monthly (7.3.2017).

Nick Dyrenfurth for The Monthly on why the Coalition’s lack of a mandate is the real problem (21.2.2017).


Nick Dyrenfurth puts forward a new plan to tackle excessive CEO pay for the Guardian (17.1.2017).

Fairfax coverage (25.1.2017) of Bill Shorten’s speech at the launch of the JCRC.

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Getting to know...

John Curtin Research Centre
Deputy Chair, Rebekka Power

Why did you join the ALP?

I joined the ALP in 1996 because I wanted to work on the re-election of the Keating Labor Government. I was really inspired by Paul Keating from the time he first unsuccessfully challenged Bob Hawke in 1991, his breadth and depth of vision and understanding of where Australia should be heading and how we needed to get there. It showed how great politics could be when it’s done by great people.

Tell us about your work life to date

My qualifications are in history (something I think more aspiring political types should study – it’s much easier not to “forget the past” and be “condemned to repeat it” if you have a real understanding of the past). I have both an undergraduate degree and a Masters of History from Monash [the editor approves of this]. But it hasn’t been the primary focus of my career. I started off in IT, spent nearly a decade at Deloitte with a focus on writing and editing, dabbled in some campaign work for Brumby Victorian Labor Government, then made the full-time move to politics. I worked in the Communications team in Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s office, and then worked for Stephen Conroy (and never would have left his office if he hadn’t resigned from the ministry). I was lucky enough to end up in a strategy role at Vision Super, an industry super fund, and despite a brief foray back into state politics, that’s where I am still.

Why did you get involved in the JCRC?

I was flattered to be asked to be part of the JCRC Committee of Management, because I think the more thoughtful policy work is done in Labor and the labour movement more broadly, the better we are when in government. Politics should be about telling a convincing story about where we’re headed and how we’re going to get there, and that starts with solid policy work.

Tell our readers an unusual fact about yourself

I have been on more than twenty visits to Disney theme parks. My life’s ambition is to get one built in Australia. It’s all about jobs - they employ over 20,000 permanent employees and create many more during the construction phase, to say nothing of flow-on effects to other tourism-related businesses. Don’t let anyone tell you we don’t have the tourism numbers to support such an endeavour – in the immortal words of Kevin Costner – “if you build it, they will come”!
Getting to know…

Deputy Chair,
Rebekka Power

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Any advice for young Laborites?
Don’t go straight from studying politics and being involved in Young Labor, or a university Labor club, to an electorate office, to a ministerial office, to trying to get preselected. You will have a broader perspective and much better skills if you study other subjects and have work experience outside politics – and you need to have friends outside of politics. I saw a lot of staffers in their 20s who had no outside experience when I worked in Canberra, and they get stuck in “the bubble” – where they don’t relate to the concerns of everyday Australians because their own concerns are too far removed, and they’ve got no friends in the wider world to pull them up when they start spouting nonsense, so it just produces one great ‘echo chamber’. And finally be a decent person – even if you are as clever as you think you are, there’s absolutely no excuse for acting arrogantly and treating others badly.

What is your role at Vision Super?
My role at Vision Super is in strategy and communications. We’ve done some great stuff over the past few years, including launching Australia’s lowest cost sustainable super option. It’s fantastic to work. I love the fact that it’s an industry fund, and that looking after our members is at the centre of everything we do. Like working in politics, you feel like your job has a positive impact on people’s lives.

Tell our readers an unusual fact about yourself
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What do you like to get up to outside of work?
When I’m not working, you’ll find me wrangling pugs, walking on the beach while wrangling pugs, cooking while tending off pugs, or reading a book with a pug or two trying to get between me and the book.
AS much of the political class move from one niche issue to the next, the smell of deep heat still permeates through suburban change rooms on weeknights; 185,000 Australian kids front up for Auskick each Saturday morning. Sport is a constant within Australian society unmoved by the seasons: the footballing codes dominate the agenda when the cold sets in and the sounds of cricket and tennis occupy the airwaves in the summer months. Racing and short-form cricket fill in the gaps. As Gideon Haigh observes, “sport in Australia has just seemed to happen, with fans cheerfully oblivious to goings-on in the inner sanctums” of executive boardrooms.

Yet it is increasingly hard to ignore community concerns that sport is drifting away from its roots. Sporting fans sense a gradual shift in direction – particularly from the nation’s most powerful governing body, the Australian Football League – away from a model of supporter codetermination towards one where financial prerogatives dominate decision-making. The AFL has taken for granted loyal supporters. Ticket-price increases in recent years, despite windfall revenues, have coincided with a 3 per cent decrease in total AFL match day attendance compared to 2008 figures, despite a significant rise in population in Melbourne during this period. Decisions made to expand the AFL to areas with limited interest in the indigenous game have crippled traditional heartland clubs in Melbourne by stacking the odds in favour of the start-up clubs. Player payment disputes have dominated the sporting agenda in recent times; sectional interests stubbornly fight for a larger share of the lucrative pie.

Grand corporatisation of the AFL has occurred alongside incremental but equally damaging small-scale changes to the game that erode its unique aspects: the impending move to a twilight grand final; continuous tinkering with the rules to the annoyance of fans; and the deregulation of player movement which undermines the tribalism key to the game’s popularity. Yet the drift towards corporatisation is not inevitable. Politics can play a role in fostering a common good between sporting bodies and supporters, underpinning the success of our codes in the 21st century.

The political scientist Robert Putnam identifies sport as one of the main drivers of social capital in modern societies: “networks, norms and trust … that enable participants to act together to pursue shared objectives”. It has often been said that AFL bridges the class divide – to the extent that it exists in Australia – better than other sports. Whereas rugby codes are segmented largely on postcode; Aussie Rules is attended by all and sundry. Former ACTU Secretary Bill Kelty – the ‘back pocket’ of the AFL Commission – calls AFL “the great social integrator”. Our First Peoples are more engaged with the AFL than perhaps any other organisation in public life. Women play the game in large numbers; club memberships dwarf those of political parties. None of this can be taken for granted. It is imperative that the AFL looks toward alternative models of sports governance such as enshrining codetermination with its supporter base, as is the case in Germany’s largest football (soccer) organisation.

Codetermination, or Mitbestimmung, is deeply rooted in German corporate governance. The law, in place since the mid-1970s in its present form, mandates 50 per cent worker representation on company’s supervisory boards and explicit
cooperation between management and workers in the future direction of companies. It pairs economic efficiency with social responsibility. Joint decision making eliminates the adversarial industrial culture that pervades other countries. In the words of Labour life peer Maurice Glasman, for the “market mechanism to be the sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment, indeed, even of the amount and use of their purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society.” Just as the unregulated market economy damages society, allowing free market forces to guide the decision-making of sporting codes has a debilitating effect on sports’ role as a builder of the common good.

The concept of the social market has been embraced by Germany’s sports administrators, whereby decision-making is made for the benefit of its supporter base. The Bundesliga, the nation’s top-tier football competition, is the envy of European football. It averages over 6,000 more attendees to each game than the world famous English Premier League. Despite recording revenues less than a third of the EPL, its clubs set ticket prices at a far lower rate. Clubs restrict season ticket holders to 10 per cent to ensure wealthier supporters cannot price out those with less capital. The Bundesliga’s average cheapest match day ticket is almost three times cheaper than that of the EPL. Bundesliga CEO Christian Seifert says that the competition’s social licence is permanently front of mind: “our core values dictate this - the clubs don’t ask for more money. It is not in the clubs’ culture so much [to raise prices]. They are very fan-orientated”.

Contrast this to the AFL’s recent introduction of ‘dynamic ticketing’, which allows clubs to increase prices in the lead-up to certain matches if demand is sufficiently high. In defending the change, AFL Operations Manager Travis Auld suggested the changes might be “favourable” to fans and that the reform was “driven by the clubs themselves”.

The notion that a club who relies on the fans’ membership dues to keep the lights on would slug that same group of people for daring to want to watch a headline game is apparently not far-fetched.

Earlier this year, Essendon increased ticket prices by up to 80 per cent for its ANZAC day match against Collingwood. Supporters who stuck by the club through the supplements saga were subjected to the ignominy of a family of four paying over $200 for reserved seating in the MCG’s upper tier; a decision made of course during a period when wages growth has plateaued to record lows in Australia. Yet the attendance of live sport, as Putnam argues, is of more importance than ever now as a creator of social capital given the fragmented, unequal nature of our society.

The average wealth of Australians in the top 20 per cent of the income earners increased by 28 per cent over the past 8 years, while for the bottom 20 per cent it increased by only 3 per cent. Over the 25 years to 2010, real wages increased by 50 per cent on average, but by 14 per cent for those in the bottom 10 per cent of income earners compared with 72 per cent for those in the top 10 per cent.

The voice of the fans is missing elsewhere. Consider the drawn-out pay dispute between the AFL Players’ Association and ostensibly non-profit AFL Commission. This industrial standoff is often painted as a battle between penny-pinching administrators and the athletes who put on the show. Yet this account fails to recognise the crucial missing voice – that of the fans. Our national game relies on players performing week-in-week-out, and prudent administration, but without the monetary support provided through memberships and millions of viewers who ensure television networks fork out billions of dollars for rights deals, our code would collapse. The supporters’ voice is only missing

“As inequality reaches levels not seen in eight decades it is essential we enshrine the common good and supporter codetermination into our major sporting codes.”
because it is unorganised and unstructured. As remuneration has sky-rocketed for both players and administrators over the last two decades, supporters see their game effectively held to ransom. This situation is untenable.

As inequality reaches levels not seen in eight decades it is essential we enshrine the common good and supporter codetermination into our major sporting codes. Former British Labour leader Ed Miliband pledged to pass legislation to mandate that all Premier League clubs had two supporter representatives on their board, had he won the 2015 General Election. He lost, however policies that embed the role of supporters in the administration of our national game should be taken up by the Australian Labor Party.

Fan representation is theoretically possible at AFL club boards, but directors are largely made up of corporate types and career administrators. The ALP should seek to ensure the proper representation of supporters throughout national governing structures at all levels of decision making, including executive boards. It should also fund work to expand local and national networks of supporters’ groups such as the AFL Fans’ Association, which recently met with AFL CEO Gillon McLachlan and Commercial Operations Manager Darren Birch, an acknowledgement of untapped fan power. The party should also use its grassroots networks in local government and various community groups to advocate for new sporting clubs/associations that will reap social dividend for their regions, such as the Greater Dandenong A-League bid, which has the power to transform a community tackling youth crime and high levels of youth unemployment.

Australia’s unions have a long history of involvement with grassroots working-class sports. Our movement’s past is before us – a modern Labor embrace of the common good that lies at the heart of Australian sport would be a nod to its best traditions and electorally popular with a public increasingly sceptical of mainstream politics.

Paul Sakkal is a member of the ALP. He is a member of the Essendon Football Club and AFL Fans Association. Paul is a former Education Officer at the University of Melbourne Student Union, and is currently a Policy and Business Analyst at Hawker Britton.
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‘The nation looked to Labor, and it did not look in vain.’

- John Curtin, 26 July 1943