20th DON DUNSTAN ORATION

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The Courage Party?
Climbing out of the political abyss.

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Australia is in a political abyss. How do we climb out of it? Do we need a 'Courage Party' to address major long term issues, such as refugees, climate change and taxation?

Barry Jones

Don Dunstan, his times and his causes

I am deeply touched to have been invited to deliver the 20th Don Dunstan Oration.

I first met Don Dunstan in King William Street in August 1954, just before his election to the South Australian Parliament, and kept in touch until his death in February 1999. I was not part of his inner circle, but we shared common interests, and common enemies, his rather more serious than mine.

Gough Whitlam and Don Dunstan both took fourteen years to win the Leadership. Dunstan was a Renaissance man – lawyer, politician, writer, performer, restaurateur, cook, champion of the downcast.

He became Attorney General when Labor unexpectedly defeated Sir Thomas Playford's Government in 1965 after twenty-seven years, began a comprehensive program of legal reform, and in 1965 made himself a QC,

although he rarely appeared in court. When the ageing Frank Walsh was pushed out as Premier and Leader of the South Australian Labor Party, Dunstan succeeded him, serving as Premier 1967-68 and 1970-79.

Dunstan was one of the most attractive figures the ALP ever produced. No other State Premier, even Jack Lang, had such a national impact on policy. He helped to promote many issues on the national agenda.

Far ahead of his time, he endured a torrent of vindictive personal attack for years. However, when he retired as Premier in 1979 due, in part, to the devastating impact of migraine his stature was widely recognised. If he had chosen to enter Federal politics, the Prime Ministership might have been within his grasp.

During the Cain Government, Don accepted a surprising appointment as Chair of the Victorian Tourism Commission and I often talked to him in his years in Melbourne, from 1982 to 1986. His second wife, Adele Koh, had died of cancer, and he always seemed lonely. He then returned to Adelaide after spending some time in Italy, became a restaurateur and published books on cooking and an autobiography. He outed himself as a homosexual with great dignity and courage and made some powerfully argued television programs.

After he died from cancer, the Don Dunstan Foundation was created to promote policies he had worked for and I became a foundation Director.

Where have all the issues gone?

Gough Whitlam, Lionel Murphy, Jim Cairns, and at the state level Don Dunstan, Neville Wran, John Cain all had enthusiasms and eloquence on causes other than the narrowly economic – many of them great moral issues. They were powerful agents for change and they succeed in transforming the political agenda. Just consider the range of issues involved:

White Australia
The Arts
Law Reform
Divorce law reform
Homosexual decriminalisation
Death Penalty
Censorship
Affirmative action
Aboriginal causes
Independent foreign policy

Rational attitudes to China
Opposition to Vietnam War and conscription
An Australian republic
Expanding universities
Needs based educational reforms
Protecting the environment
Land use planning
Promoting World Heritage
Freedom of Information
Consumer protection

In several of these issues – not many – there were liberal Liberals who played a part, Harold Holt on White Australia and Aboriginal recognition, John Gorton on the arts, Dick Hamer on the arts, death penalty and environment, Don Chipp on censorship, and Menzies was an enthusiast for expansion of universities. But it was Labor which set the agenda and ran with the debate. As T S Eliot and I used to say, 'All this was a long time ago, I remember.' Where are comparable issues now? Who are the current equivalents of Whitlam, Hawke, Keating or Dunstan?

Reflect that in 1983, the campaign to save the Tasmanian wilderness area was a major vote changer in the election that brought Hawke to power. Is it possible that a comparable issue could have been central to the elections of 2013 or 2016? The short answer is 'No' because preserving the environment/ the biota would be seen as contrary to the prevailing mantra of 'Jobs and Growth.'

I am deeply troubled by the paradox that as levels of education rise, and information is readily available on an almost infinite number of issues, debate becomes infantilised and reduced to the narrowly economic and person. There is an inverse relationship between available knowledge and the operation of political systems. This is certainly happening in Australia, in most of Europe and the United States.

1860 and 2016

We should not give up on Australia yet. By comparison with the United States our political system/ dialogue is working relatively well.

In 1860 Abraham Lincoln became the first Republican Party nominee to be elected President of the United States. In that year, the access to education was rather primitive, especially outside the great cities of the east coast and Chicago, with extremely limited communication: by railways, roads, canals, telegraph,

newspapers, postal services. Nevertheless, the quality of political debate was sophisticated.

Lincoln's views, published on broadsheets, were extremely subtle and nuanced, without bitterness, personal attack or exaggeration. He could always see the other side of an argument and often set it out, fairly. He appealed, we might say, to the Highest Common Denominator (HCD.) He was widely read, and kept his religion (if any) to himself.

In 2016, 156 years later, Donald Trump won the Presidential nomination of Lincoln's Party. America had been transformed by the IT revolution, with capacity for instant retrieval of the world's knowledge. Americans had universal access to education of varying kinds. The U. S. had the world's best universities (and some of the worst), it was No. 1 in Nobel Prizes for chemistry, physics and medicine and also first in technological development. And yet to describe its quality of political discourse as appalling is actually to overpraise it. Candidates for public office felt obliged to declare their religious faith (although this was Trump's only cautious area), were shifty on key questions like the age of the earth, hostile to Darwin's theory of evolution. There is serious doubt about whether Trump has ever read a book, even those with his name on the title page. His campaign was surreal, aggressive, misogynist, demonstrating entry to a post-truth era. There was no argument, just assertion after assertion, with a strident appeal to the Lowest Common Multiple (LCM).

Lincoln was reflective, self-doubting and he talked in testable propositions, evidence based, with sentences, paragraphs, chapters. He appealed to 'the better angels of our nature'. He never used his own name in a speech.

Trump is unreflective, posturing in a way that may conceal deep insecurity, narcissistic, always personalising issues (the hero v. the devil), talking – shouting really – in slogans, endlessly repeated with no evidentiary base. He appeals to fear, anger, envy and conspiracy theories.

Don Dunstan was a visionary and he was courageous.

The current generation of political leaders might regard 'courageous' as a term of abuse, something they would never be accused of in their super-cautious pursuit of office.

'The Courage Party'

Malcolm Fraser, in his controversial period as Prime Minister from 1975 to 1983, was often seen as rigid and remote (although always good on race and

refugees). After leaving Parliament in 1983 he became increasingly progressive, resigning from the Liberal Party in 2009. On some issues, such as the Republican referendum of 1999, he formed an unlikely alliance with Gough Whitlam, and collaborated in campaigns.

Malcolm thought that both parties had become corrupted and timid, looking for immediate advantage, adopting a narrow focus on economics, as if humans could be defined as consumers only, as *homo economicus*, that the goals of life were entirely material, and that great long term issues, involving the fate of the planet and non-commercial values could be ignored.

This was during Tony Abbott's Prime Ministership when morale in the political class was particularly low.

This problem was not confined to Australia. There seemed to be a crisis of confidence in democratic practice, and the quality of leadership, in the United States (despite Barack Obama's eight principled years as President), in the United Kingdom, Germany (where Angela Merkel's courage on refugees was being punished by voters), France, Italy, many other European states, Russia, most of South America, Asia and virtually all of Africa. (Justin Trudeau in Canada emerged as an interesting new model of leadership, well informed, courageous and a brilliant communicator.) The global scene was marked by the rise of authoritarian rule, corrupted elections, the emergence of kleptocratic rulers, suppression of free speech, suspension of the rule of law, resort to violence and adoption of the surveillance state. On the Corruption Perception Index produced by Transparency International, Australia ranked equal No.13 in 2015. But in 2012 it had ranked as No. 5.

Malcolm and I often discussed Australia's political health with our mutual friend Mike Richards. I was then, and still am, an uneasy member of the Australian Labor Party. Malcolm hypothesised that a new political force could emerge out of the ashes of the two major parties. I was doubtful: our crisis was not big enough to break or change the existing system. We did not have an Algeria, nor a de Gaulle.

But we agreed on the issues that a potential new — but so far nameless — party would have to address. At first, I called it the 'Tackling the Abyss Party' but the mixed metaphor would not work.

Later I proposed 'The Courage Party' as a working title, although Malcolm had his doubts.

It would not have been a 'centre party' which explored the policy differences between the major parties — when any could be found — then split the difference, opting for something safe, in the middle, offending nobody. It would have been radical, more so on most issues than other parties, dedicated, to quote Leszek Kołakowski, 'to a number of basic values, hard knowledge and rational calculation'.

The problem for me is: how is an 84-year-old radical to vote if he wants to reform the world and get answers to basic questions, such as: how many submarines does Australia need? And how do we challenge a military culture? And plan for a post-carbon future? And protect the environment?

And preserve the rule of law? And entrench support for research, CSIRO, the ABC and the Bureau of Meteorology? And recognise the growing needs of an ageing population? And have a root-and-branch reform of the tax system? And put creativity and greater opportunity into the school system? And move towards a Republic? And tackle reform on issues ranging from sexuality to urban land management (bad here, good in England)? And challenge the obsession that growth is an end in itself?

You tell me.

Tackling complex problems such as refugees and climate change will demand complex solutions. These cannot be reduced to parroting a few simple slogans ('turn back the boats', 'stop this toxic tax'). 'Retail politics', sometimes called 'transactional politics', where policies are adopted not because they are right but because they can be sold, is a dangerous development and should be rejected.

Malcolm Fraser speculated that when the time was right, Malcolm Turnbull might lead progressives out of the Liberal Party and head the new group.

Malcolm Fraser – 'Big Malcolm' – used his formidable networking skills to ask experts in foreign policy, taxation, defence, environment, science, health, education and law reform, including drug laws, if they would prepare detailed position papers, analysing evidence, proposing long term solutions to intractable problems. They all agreed. Each of the experts was dismayed by the failure of both Government and Opposition to act courageously on the great issues of our time.

Then in 2015 came two dramatic changes.

In March, Malcolm Fraser died, unexpectedly, after what was thought to be relatively minor elective surgery. In September, Malcolm Turnbull displaced Tony Abbott to become Prime Minister, after a Faustian bargain with elements of the right inside the Liberal Party, and the National Party, trading support in return for a promise of inaction on contentious issues, such as climate change and the Republic, that he had advocated in his first period as Liberal Leader. To succeed in 2015 meant adopting most of Tony Abbott's policies (as Abbott quickly pointed out).

The major issues that disturbed Fraser, Richards and me remained unresolved.

These included Australia taking a leading role in setting high targets in tackling global warming, phasing out coal, rethinking our foreign and defence policies, along the lines set out in Fraser's book *Dangerous Allies* (2014); a radical change in our treatment of asylum seekers generally, giving them names, faces, identities and access to the law; becoming a Republic; a thorough revision of the taxation system; a Bill of Rights.

Institutional failures

Two major elements in British settlement of Australia after 1788 were the convict system and the dispossession of Indigenes. They contributed to an authoritarian strain in the Australian system, which remained, although there was a more liberal, open, democratic, sometimes larrikin national narrative as well.

In recent decades authoritarianism was justified by the explanation, 'we are doing it for their own good', a rigidity, harshness, cruelty, even sadism in institutions — armed forces, churches, schools, orphanages. Political parties, Parliaments, the media, elements in the police, gambling, liquor, tobacco and junk food corporations, all provoke community disquiet, with histories of corruption, suppression, secrecy and, in some cases, violence. The current Royal Commission about institutionalised child sexual abuse presents evidence with a horrifying consistency. Treatment of asylum seekers shows unconscionable (but bipartisan) harshness. Vested interest is far easier to promote and secure than community interest.

There were horrors inflicted during wartime, for example the executions by the Australian Army of more than 100 Indigenes in Papua New Guinea, which defy rational explanation, where evidence was suppressed and has now been destroyed.

In the Victorian Parliament's 2012 apology over forced adoptions (a practice involving about 250,000 infants in Australia from the 1950s to the 1970s), then Premier Ted Baillieu referred to 'moral arrogance, the flawed justification and the heartless approach of authorities in institutions'.

There are exceptions: public service, mostly, the courts, universities, medicine, emergency relief.

'Wicked problems'

The democratic system has demonstrated a striking incapacity to address sets of major issues, which have been described as 'wicked problems'.

The American sociologists Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber (1973) defined 'wicked problems' as being messy, circular or aggressive, in contrast to relatively simple or tame problems in, say, mathematics or chess.

They argued that 'wicked problems have incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements; and solutions to them are often difficult to recognise as such because of complex interdependencies. While attempting to solve a wicked problem, the solution of one of its aspects may reveal or create other, even more complex, problems'.

Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem. There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem. Wicked problems have no 'stopping rule'.

A 'wicked problem' can be explained in numerous ways and the choice of explanation determines how the problem will be resolved (if at all).

The complexity of wicked problems is a challenge to linear thinking, reductionism and much professional education.

Foreign policy provides some striking examples of wicked problems. Current 'wicked problems' include:

- Terrorism and security issues
- The clash of civilisations updated
- Telling the truth and winning elections
- Evidence v. opinion: the attack on scientific method
- Information or entertainment: speeding up through media
- Climate change paralysis
- Dumbing down of political debate

- The policy abyss
- Recruitment of political elites
- Institutional failures — churches, welfare groups, sporting clubs, armed forces, political parties
- Corruption. Vested interest v. community interest. Lobbyists
- Foreign and defence policies. ANZAC revisited. How many universities could a submarine buy?
- Tackling Budget deficits by emphasising (i) cuts, (ii) asset sales and (iii) borrowing, while largely ignoring revenue (i.e. tax adjustment).

'Don't mention the war.' Issues that we never talk about.
A code of silence (*omertà*) has been adopted in Australian politics which the Sicilian Mafia would feel very comfortable with. These issues are ignored or suppressed by the major parties.

Class and its implications for health and education. Health has been discussed in the ABC's 2016 Boyer Lecture series *Fair Australia: Social Justice and the Health Gap* delivered by Sir Michael Marmot. The implications for life expectancy are very significant — but 'class' is a word that cannot be mentioned in election cycles because it is attacked as raising the spectacle of 'class warfare'. Obesity and smoking are strongly related to class. Australia's education is more divided on class lines than most OECD countries: only 65% of pupils attend government schools, while in the UK the figure is 93%, contrary to what might have been expected.

Problem gambling and its links to drugs, crime and suicide. The international survey by *The Economist* ranks Australia as having the highest rate of gambling *per capita* in the world. Governments have become gambling addicts because casinos and other gaming sites have become essential sources of revenue and States cannot afford to lose the money. The lobbying capacity of the gambling industry is formidable and neither major party will touch the issue.

The influence of lobbyists and pressure groups on the major parties.
Both parties are very coy about revealing their connections with lobby groups, including property developers, or trade unions. Vested interests are more concentrated and effective in recruiting support than general community interests. There has been strong opposition, however, to setting up a Federal equivalent of the New South Wales Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) because it can lead to politicians being named and shamed, and sometimes jailed.

Labor's opposition to a Federal ICAC is weakening, due to noble efforts by Chris Bowen and Mark Dreyfus, but there is a long way to go.

Is 'growth' an end in itself? Is all growth good? Growth and consumption are seen as ends in themselves. But why? The subject is never discussed. Obesity and gambling are growing, almost exponentially. Is that to be welcomed? Is investment in research a contribution to growth (and welcomed)? Or a cost (and deplored)? How do we classify infrastructure — capital asset, or a debt? Waste is a bi-product of growth.

About 30% of the food we buy is wasted. The rational goal of 'sustainability' is a challenge to the philosophy that growth is good: no waste = no growth.

Junk food and the need to curb sugar consumption. The major supermarket chains are generous donors to both the Coalition and Labor. Laws to discourage smoking have had significant success, but there are no signs of action to curb sugar consumption. (Worldwide, more sugar is produced than wheat. One is addictive and has negative health implications, the other provides nutrition.) Politically the sugar issue is sensitive because — like coal — there are seats in Queensland that depend on it.

Human Rights. This fell off the political agenda in 2001, the year of *Tampa* and al-Qaeda's attack on the Twin Towers, and has never been restored. Major parties are cool — or cold — about a Bill of Rights.

Environment. Preservation of the Tasmanian wilderness was a central issue in the 1983 election, but since 2009 Environment has rarely been regarded as a major issue. The 'jobs and growth' mantra emphasised consumption and higher resource use, not conservation and preservation.

Defence, foreign policy, surveillance state, immigration detention, even trade deals, going to war — all kept secret. Australia has become a relatively closed society even compared to the US or the UK. It is impossible to imagine an Australian equivalent of the Chilcot Report about reasons for entering the Iraq War in 2003. How many submarines does Australia need? Twelve? Why twelve? Why not ten? Or fourteen? The budget implications are enormous and yet we are not told why decisions are made — it's just 'take it …'

Even the details of the 2015 Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) were kept secret — and they could only be revealed, to a limited degree, after Australia had signed up.

One of the worst features of adopting a bipartisan policy on 'turn backs' for boats carrying refugees/ asylum seekers, is that it kills debate on the issue. The treatment of refugees is described as 'operational', coded language for saying that the subject cannot be discussed. Neither of the two political oligarchies competing to form government will open up debate on the subject — so that evidence or statistical analysis is not just suppressed, it is treated as irrelevant. Politics, short term electoral advantage, and opportunism drives decision making. This is 'retail politics' at its worst.

'Turn back' is not identical with 'refoulement' — forcibly returning refugees to the country they fled from, but it is morally bankrupt.

The Government makes the obscene assertion that with asylum seekers arriving by boat the only alternatives on offer are (i) the high risk of drowning or (ii) harsh, dehumanising and degrading offshore detention, without access to the law. We apply harsh measures to victims who have endured a situation beyond our understanding, experience or compassion, without recognising our common humanity. There has been no recognition that the number of refugees attempting to reach Australia is only a small fraction of those attempting to enter Europe through the Mediterranean. But cruelty seems to be popular, with bipartisan support. Australia should take a moral lead in working out practical solutions, involving regional cooperation (unlike the spectacular failure of the absurd Cambodian option).

In Canada, Justin Trudeau, having won an election, has agreed to take far more Syrian refugees than the US.

Journalists are excluded from Manus Island and Nauru, from fear that their reporting might humanise detainees, giving them names, faces and identities. Lying about conditions there has become standard practice. There was a bleak reassurance from Peter Dutton that conditions on Manus Island and Nauru were superior to refugee camps outside Syria.

Labor's moral nadir was its support of the Australian Border Force Act 2015 which provided jail terms for whistle blowers– doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers – who observed cases of neglect or abuse of refugees held as prisoners on Nauru or Manus Island and went public with their observations.

Labor abjectly voted with the Abbott Government to pass the legislation. In practice, it has not silenced whistle blowers who have horror stories to report

and it is hard to imagine an Australian jury convicting them, or a judge sending them to jail. So Labor lost moral credibility.

At present, Australia is ruled by a corrosive Grand Alliance which refuses to engage in serious examination of, say, climate change, planning for a post carbon economy, education reform, rethinking foreign policy, securing an appropriate revenue base for an ageing society with increasingly sophisticated health needs and the shadow of Alzheimer's.

A central failure in the current political debacle has been the pursuit of populism, fearful of serious analysis of the major ongoing problems which face societies like ours. Both the Coalition and the Opposition are at fault in this.

There are inbuilt tensions between the nature of major challenges and attempts to understand them or address them.

- Our political cycles are short term (a three year Parliament for the Commonwealth, three or four year Parliaments for the States);

- Media cycles are very short term (news editors get very tired of a story after 24 hours or so);

- Digital media is even shorter (turnaround time measured in hours and minutes);

   •Social media is shorter still (with messages often having a half-life in seconds). Understanding complex issues is outside the range of social media where the emphasis, for example with tweeting, is on immediate reaction, in 140 characters or less.

Steve Biddulph wrote that 'it has been said that we have palaeolithic bodies, neolithic brains, medieval institutions and modern problems'. I suspect that this is a half-remembered variant of Harvard biologist E O Wilson's conclusion that humans have 'Palaeolithic emotions, medieval institutions and God-like technologies'.

A fundamental mistake was made by many writers, myself included, about the impact of the IT revolution. We assumed that access to new technology would open people up to the world — that people would be seeking out the universal and long term. Instead, technologies such as the iPhone have reinforced the realm of the personal, as exhibited in social media, with its emphasis on the immediate and the personal, concentrating on family and

close friends, reinforcing existing views. The iPhone has changed social relationships perhaps more than any other single technology (even the car) and has become the new best friend, the last thing seen and touched at night, the first thing seen and touched in the morning.

Mark Thompson in *Enough Said: What's Gone Wrong with the Language of Politics* (2016) wrote that IT has given political actors the capacity to reach more people more of the time in more places than at any stage of human history. But are the messages accurate? Are they based on evidence? How can they be tested? In a post-truth era in politics and public discourse, the accuracy of a statement ('Barack Obama is a Muslim') is barely relevant, as Donald Trump has demonstrated.

The demand for instant responses through social media, where most of our information about the world is now received, has weakened our sense of, or empathy with, 'the Other', the remote, the unfamiliar, and all but destroyed our sense of community, being members of a group. Now individualism is not just the primary motivator, but the only one.

Political discourse no longer depends on reasoned argument and evidence.

The word 'meme' is a useful coinage (1976) by Richard Dawkins, defined as 'an idea, behaviour, or style that spreads rapidly from person to person within a culture'. Memes are self-replicating, like genes in biology, fragmentary, easy to disseminate by writing, cartoon, poster, speech or gesture, a wave, wink or smirk, propagated widely by social media, defying analysis, emphasising clichés and slogans. They are integral to brand identification, sporting or tribal loyalties, styles (selfies; football colours; logos; tattoos; slashed jeans; dark glasses) or politics ('free speech'; 'political correctness'; 'elites'; 'feminism').

'Memes' (sometimes called 'thought bubbles') are often incoherent or disconnected, but powerful within particular age, ethnic, regional or social cohorts.

A particularly serious 'wicked problem' in Australia is the potential conflict of multiculturalism in a monolingual society.

 'I disagree with your opinions and that gives me the moral right — perhaps even an obligation — to kill you.' This is a radical reaction against the slow journey in Western society towards tolerance and pluralism. And yet not only in the Middle East but in the US, Britain, Europe, Canada

and Australia this view is spreading among an alienated and angry minority, most born and educated a continent away from the area of their fury.

In Australia, which model do we want to adopt about points of view that are remote from our experience?

Do we want to be tolerant and pluralistic? Or cohesive and convergent? Is it possible to be both?

One can see the case for both, and yet – taken to their ultimate, the implications are horrifying.

Tolerance and pluralism, taken to their limits, might mean a breakdown in shared experience, common language, shared values. In the electorate of Lalor, which I represented for more than 20 years, there is a private religious school, in receipt of public funding, in which the principal banned girls from riding bicycles on the grounds that it would make them incapable of bearing children. Was there any evidence to support this notion? Well, no, but it was his opinion and he was in a position to impose it on others.

Should the authorities have intervened to stop him? There's the dilemma. If we have a commitment to free speech and diversity of opinion, can we stop people from expressing a view which we find incomprehensible? Can we limit the right to free speech and to hold opinions, however repugnant to us, which do not impinge directly on our lives?

But the goal of cohesion and convergence, however admirable if based on co-operation, collaboration and a generous inclusiveness and applied flexibly, can become rigid, dogmatic, authoritarian — and taken to extremes, xenophobic and punitive. 'We're all Australians around here, we all speak the same language and if people who live here must conform to uniform values, differences in football codes, perhaps, excepted.'

We must redefine politics — and grasp its importance, not just at election times. Here is my attempt: it doesn't exactly roll off the tongue but I think it captures the essence.

> **Politics is the fault line between tectonic plates in society and the electoral struggle is an expression of, or a metaphor for, unresolved, often unspoken, divisions within society — race, class, gender, religion, region, language, education, sexuality, consumption patterns and time use, self-definition and the expression of individual differences/ aspirations (both positive and negative), offering a choice between different moral universes.**

'Political correctness', originally a coinage by the Stalinist far Left in the 1940s, has been high-jacked by the populist Right to produce a false antithesis, that 'elites' are denying citizens their capacity to make choices, by arguing that some attention should be paid to evidence or expert opinion. In the United States the Trump phenomenon fed on concerns about 'political correctness' and in Australia the issue has been taken up by the Hanson Party and other protest groups. So, essentially dissident voters have been asking: 'What would the Bureau of Meteorology know about climate change?', 'What would doctors know about vaccination?', 'What would lawyers know about human rights?', 'What gives experts the right to tell me how to run my life? They have evidence, but we have strong opinions'.

Both major parties talk about 'taxpayers' as if they were a group with no function other than paying tax. In reality, they are people passing through a variety of changing roles, with higher or lower needs depending on what part of life they are in —once they were babies (earning nothing, paying no tax, but with many needs), but then children, students, consumers, workers, spouses, parents, community activists, later patients and welfare dependents.

Problems with party structures

Party discipline in the Australian Parliament is applied with an almost North Korean rigidity. It is rare for Coalition MPs to cross the floor, or abstain, on an issue they feel strongly about, and unknown with the ALP. Conscience votes are extremely uncommon. In the House of Commons, debate is superior because the outcome of votes can be uncertain, depending on the quality of debate. Jeremy Corbyn, now Labour's leader, voted against his party in the House of Commons 482 times as a back-bench MP. Blair lost votes on Iraq and Cameron on Syria, but their Governments survived.

I used to be an enthusiast for Australia's system of compulsory registration and voting and for the public funding of election campaigns, but now I have doubts about both.

In most nations, political parties have to be heavily engaged with the community in order to activate passive supporters and ensure that they turn up to vote. But in Australia, people are used to turning up, taking a how-to-vote card without complaint, then voting. And the parties receive $2.62 for every vote recorded. In theory both these elements of the Australian electoral system were intended as reforms, but in practice they have not reduced the power/ influence of vested interests — and indeed, with less reliance on community support through chook raffles and the like, it creates a gap

between parties and the communities they purport to serve. Some party organisers would not recognise a voter if they fell over one.

Party membership for both the Liberal and Labor Parties has become small and sclerotic. But public funding and compulsory voting are bomb shelters that protect existing parties and make reform much harder, perhaps impossible.

Most voters are (so far) loyal to the major parties on polling day but many cast their vote with pegs on their noses — and they have no interest in joining. Our major parties are claimed to have a total membership (on paper anyway) of about 80,000 – that is about 0.6% of voters. In reality, it is more likely to be less than 30,000, not all of whom will know that they hold party tickets.

By contrast, total membership of sporting, especially football, clubs would be somewhere north of 800,000 — a differentiation of 1:10 (or 1:26).

In the 1970s trade union membership accounted for more than half the Australian labour force. The figure stood at 46% in 1986 and has fallen in 2015 to 15% in 2015, according to the ABS, 17% according to the ACTU. The aggregate figures are in the band 1.6 > 1.8 million.

It is striking to note the difference in professional backgrounds of the Ministers in the Whitlam Government, the first Hawke Government and the current Shorten Opposition. The factional system, once essentially based on state differences, became organised nationally in the late 1980s and 'non-aligned' MPs were squeezed out.

There can be little doubt that Whitlam, Hayden, Blewett, Button, Duffy, Evans, Kerin, John Cain or Barry Jones could not have won pre-selection under the existing factional system.

The creation of nation-wide factions in the late 1980s led to the 'privatisation' of the Party in which faction leaders became traders and 'conviction politics' was replaced by 'retail politics'or 'transactional politics'.

The central question about policy was no longer 'Is it right?' but 'Will it sell?' The factions are essentially executive placement agencies — and the members of each owe their primary allegiance to the faction or sub-faction. (That sounds like 21st century feudalism.)

It would have been a reasonable assumption that as membership of trade unions contracted, its share of positions would have fallen. Not at all. There is, in fact, an inverse relationship. And, as party membership becomes ageing and vestigial, one might expect that the role of party and union officials would be less dominant. But it is greater. Odd, that.

In some unions, for example, the Health Services Union (HSU) and the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association (SDA or 'Shoppies'), the core business changed from being the protection of their own members' rights to jockeying for position, patronage and policy influence within the ALP. This was bad news for the union members. Union officials (and Conference delegates) were not recruited from the work force, but professionals (often highly educated) were brought in to head office to act as factional operatives. The proportion of trade unionists actually carrying the tools who joined party branches was spectacularly low — less than 1%.

Robert Ray, formerly a Senator from Victoria and an excellent Minister, with expert knowledge of factions wrote: 'A whole production line of soulless apparatchiks has emerged: highly proficient and professional, but with no Labor soul; control freaks with tunnel vision; ruthless leakers in their self-interest; individuals who would rather the party lose an election than that they lose their place in the pecking order.' (2006)

With the Liberal Party there are, in effect, factions, but based essentially around personalities. Membership is contracting and ageing. Attempts to 'democratise' the party by increasing branch membership is advocated by the far Right who seem attracted to the Labor model of branch stacking, where a group such as a Ruritanian soccer club can be signed up, en bloc, and faithfully deliver votes in a pre-selection. Paradoxically, it is the conservatives who argue for 'democracy', the moderates and self-described progressives resist it.

Money paid through the Free Enterprise Foundation by, for example, property developers, the gaming and coal industries, can be 'laundered' and then used to pay Liberal Party debts, avoiding scrutiny and breach of the law. (This resembles the operations of Political Action Committees (PACs) in the US.)

Voter revenge

In the election of 2 July 2016, Malcolm Turnbull had a very narrow win (76 seats to the Coalition), but his is the first government to be re-elected **with a majority** since 2004. We have had a rapid churn in Australia — in the

eleven years 2006- 16 there have been 6 Prime Ministerships and 5 Prime Ministers – with three removed by their own parties.

There is massive disenchantment with national institutions generally, all of which have had their dark undersides exposed. Advice to voters given by the Murdoch and Fairfax papers, and by the shock jocks, had no effect. Urgings by the Business Council of Australia (BCA) for electors to think corporate were counter-productive.

There was a striking paradox about the public opinion polls.
Both Newspoll and Ipsos (Fairfax) had the 2PP ('two party preferred') vote very close to the aggregate result, but the disaggregated figures were quite unreliable in predicting outcomes state by state.

In the 2013 Commonwealth election exactly 80% of voters for the House of Representatives gave their first preference votes to the Coalition or the ALP. (In the last six elections in Australia since 2013, Commonwealth and State, votes for the two major parties in the lower house have been in the band 79-81%.

However, there has been a substantial fall since the 2007 election in which votes for the two major parties totalled 85.5%, and in 2010 81.7%.)

In 2016 that changed — but not by much. The total Coalition primary vote for the House of Representatives was 42.0%, the ALP's was 34.7% — so the aggregate for the two major groups was 76.7%, down 3.3% from the flattened out figure of 80% mentioned earlier. It is a significant change, but not huge. The Greens, oddly, scored better in the House of Representatives (10.2%, an increase of 1.6%) than in the Senate (8.7%, a decrease of 0.6%), with a net loss of one Senate seat, in South Australia.

In the Senate, the aggregate for the two majors fell to 64.9%, 1.7% down from 2013 when the figure was 66.6%.

The Nick Xenophon Team secured an aggregate national vote for the Senate of 3.3%, and three seats were won, all in South Australia. Its national vote in the House of Representatives was 1.9%.

In South Australia the Nick Xenophon Team secured 21.3% for the House of Representatives (with one seat, Mayo, won from the Liberals). The Senate vote in its home state was 21.7%, returning three Senators.

The Pauline Hanson One Nation Party secured 4.3% of the national vote for the Senate, winning four Senate places. Its vote in Queensland was 9.2%, in South Australia 3.0% and Victoria 1.8%.

More serious are the implications of polls indicating that almost half of voters do not think it matters which of the two major party groupings wins the election — that it is like choosing between Coles and Woolworths.

I support our system of preferential voting, but most nations use first past the post. In 2016, the Coalition would have won comfortably on first past the post.

The ALP had 49.6% of the 2PP vote in the election — close to what the polls had predicted. The ALP's good showing in the 2PP vote was due to the Greens loyally directing their preferences to Labor, despite coming under direct attack, and the ALP and Coalition agreeing to swap preferences in seats that the Greens had some chance of winning. The Liberals directed their preferences to Labor and against the Greens in Melbourne, Batman and Wills, and indeed all other seats, although it ran third in only two seats, so its second preferences rarely make a difference.

In the campaign itself, there can be little doubt that the ALP won the debate. Bill Shorten, to the surprise of some, ran rings around Malcolm Turnbull who seemed oddly disengaged. Chris Bowen was far more effective than Scott Morrison. The Coalition policy and mantras were either vacuous or alienating.
Labor was courageous in campaigning to cut back on 'negative gearing', a commonly used means of avoiding taxation by claiming the cost of investing property as a deduction. This was promoted by Chris Bowen, Jim Chalmers and Andrew Leigh.

Labor made the right noises on climate change, but failed to cut through.

Turnbull made a serious mistake in not going for a House of Representatives election in November 2015 which he would have won easily. (One problem would have been that there could not have been a Senate election until the second half of 2016.)

Calling a double dissolution was a disaster for him. Increased numbers for Barnaby Joyce's Nationals and conservative fury inside the Liberals weakens, if not cripples, his capacity to be a reformer. There was a total failure — on both sides — to really engage the community on the issue of

climate change. The universities were mute, CSIRO, the ABC and BOfM were under threat and there was a failure to involve people – millions of them – who knew about climate change from everyday observation: gardeners, farmers, anglers, bushwalkers, bird watchers, beekeepers.

It is important to recognise that in the Coalition, branch members and donors tend to be far to the right of the Parliamentary parties. In the ALP, branch members are generally much further to the left of Caucus.

Paradoxically, we now have the best educated cohort of Australians in our history, with 4.5 million graduates, 15 times more than we had in the 1970s, but in recent years our level of public discourse has fallen abysmally.

Is it possible that the existing political structure will break down and lead to a reconstruction of our political duopoly? It is possible, not very likely — and may not even be desirable.

There are two possible alternative models for a third force:

Model A: This could be **The Courage Party**. It would be significantly based on Australia's 4.5 million graduates, including professionals, teachers, performers, writers, artists, social workers, scientists, doctors, intellectuals and other knowledge workers. It might incorporate the Greens, progressive reformers from Labor and some from the Liberals. Some unions, especially of skilled professionals might affiliate. Its policies would be essentially evidence based and it would emphasise finding solutions to some 'wicked problems': refugees, a new taxation system, climate change, working for long term solutions and ending the toxic political culture.

Model B. We could call this **The Left Behind Party**. Its common elements are identifying victims and denouncing enemies, resentment about rapid change, nostalgia about the past, apprehension about the future and many aspects of modernity, responsiveness to fear about the unfamiliar, especially mixing with other races and cultures, particularly Muslims, finding simple explanations for complex problems. A Model B party has these characteristics: rejection of evidence and reliance on opinion/ feeling/ gut reaction, low levels of formal education, resentment of elites and 'political correctness', seeing the 1960s as a 'golden age of full employment', with a heavy emphasis on 'nativism', as they call it in the US. Many of these voters usedto be with the ALP (and the Democrats in the US) but now are often (but not always accurately) identified with the far Right. Pauline Hanson may be an anomaly and says that a Royal Commission on the banks is now her primary objective and is hostile to the Turnbull ten year tax plan.

The 'Brexit' Referendum in the UK, the rise of Donald Trump in the US and of micro-parties in Australia have common factors: disillusion with the central elements of the free market revolution, globalisation, the decline of manufacturing and other manual employment, and the role of angry white males, led to a sharp reaction against 'jobs and growth', 'innovation' and 'agility'. The advice of elites cuts no ice, and there is mounting hostility to intellectuals, universities, corporations, especially banks, and international institutions — UN, EU, IMF, IPCC, NATO.

We can observe a scaled down mirror image of jihadism, matching fear for fear, ignorance for ignorance.

Trump's capture of the Republican Party has actually trashed some of its key beliefs — globalisation, free markets, the trickle- down effect and American triumphalism. Trump is suspicious of globalisation, welcomed 'Brexit', hates the EU, empathises with Putin, thinks that the US is trailing behind Mexico, trades on fear of Muslims and other ethnic groups, against Obamacare, and concerns about climate change and the gun culture are dismissed out of hand and derided. Trump demonstrates the 'post-truth' era in politics: to him, evidence simply doesn't matter. He will say anything.

Australia has had a long history of racial intolerance, and Indigenes were its earliest victims after 1788. Later, hostility to new settlers has been invariably directed towards the latest wave – Chinese in the Gold Rush, Jews before and after World War II, Italians and Greeks. Then those groups were accepted and hostility was directed towards later waves – many of them victims: Cambodians, Vietnamese, Somalis, and most recently Muslims, who now amount to 2.5% of Australia's population (fewer than the Buddhists). Because of the horrors generated by terrorism in the Middle East, and its export to Europe, North America, Asia and Australia, Muslims are vulnerable to suspicion and attack when antagonists make no distinction between supporters of jihad and its victims/ opponents who have fled here to get away from intolerable suffering.

Senator Hanson's group should be rebadged as the 'Not One Nation Party', because it is essentially exclusionist. Her party elected four Senators. It is socially conservative/ traditional, apprehensive of rapid change, science and some aspects of modernity, but not sympathetic to big capital either. Malcolm Turnbull's emphasis on 'innovation' and 'agility' proved to be completely counterproductive.

The Model B phenomenon is less important in Victoria, but it resonates elsewhere. Unhappily, it is the more likely prospect if the major parties – for all their deficiencies – fail.

Great crises often produce great leaders – Lincoln, Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin too, for all his brutality, but Australia (like most other Western nations) does not have the heroic leadership on offer – instead, we have leaders who are essentially followers, they do not have courage, provide a vision, and then explain, explain, explain to win public support. Instead, they read Newspoll obsessively and say, timidly, 'I am their leader. The people will tell what I must do'.

Despite all the odds against it, and the lack of an obvious leader, we need the Courage Party after all, and need it urgently.

Policy positions on issues by the major parties and 'The Courage Party'

I have made an attempt to calibrate where the two major party groupings stand on policies, and contrast that with positions that would have been advocated by a 'Courage Party', if it existed, along the lines that Malcolm Fraser proposed, and with which I sympathised.

In the following table '1' indicates full support of a policy, '0' complete rejection, and the decimals indicate rankings in between. I acknowledge that this involves some heroic assumptions on my part. Nevertheless, I believe the case that our major parties converge excessively in issues involving conscience, courage and looking ahead, long beyond the political cycle (let alone the media cycle) is indisputable — and deplorable.

Policy positions	Coalition	ALP	'Courage'
'Accountability' defined as 'red tape'	1	0.4	0
Acquiescence in torture (Sri Lanka, US, Saudi Arabia)	0.8	0.3	0
Complete Gonski reforms on needs-based funding of education	0.2	0.6	1
Apply scientific method and statistical analysis in policy formulation	0.2	0.6	1
Appropriate taxation (Ken Henry's report revisited)	0.3	0.7	1

Asserting that all values are economic ('I shop therefore I am')	1	0.3	0
Asylum seeker policy (humane, rational,	0	0	1
Australia as a Republic	0	0.5	1
Climate change (catching up to global effort)	0.3	0.7	1
Defend ABC, CSIRO and BofM	0.2	0.6	1
Emphasis on the rule of law	0	0.5	1

Policy positions	Coalition	ALP	'Courage'
Equal opportunities for women	0	1	1
Full disclosure of roles of lobbyists, pressure groups, factions, trade unions, IPA, property developers	0.2	0.3	1
Independent foreign policy	0.2	0.5	1
Law reform	0	0.4	1
More support for science, research, scientific method	0.2	0.6	1
Preserve World Heritage sites (Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu, Burrup Peninsula)	0	0.4	1
Promoting social diversity (race, colour, religion, culture)	0.2	0.6	1
Promote renewable energy	0.2	0.6	1
Resistance to surveillance state	0	0	1
Tackling difficult problems with Indigenes	0.2	0.5	1
Tackling major social problems, including gambling, obesity, mental illness	0.2	0.4	1
That the national Budget is just like a household budget	1	0.3	0
Transparency in government	0	0.4	1
Universities as trading corporations	0.8	0.5	0
Vested interests over community interests	1	0.4	1

Policy positions	Coalition	ALP	'Courage'
Preparing for a post-carbon economy	0.3	0.6	1
Protection of whistle-blowers	0	0.4	1
Encourage investment in innovation	0.3	0.6	1
Discourage excessive investment in property	0.2	0.7	1
Establishing a Federal ICAC	0	0.4	1
Treating drugs as a medical problem	0.2	0.6	1
'Dying with dignity'	0.2	0.7	1
Bill of Rights	0	0.6	1
Constitutional recognition of Indigenes	0.8	1	1