

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

What are we talking about this afternoon? Ladies and gentlemen, we've assembled a terrific panel to have a discussion about democracy, particularly democracy in Australia in 2018. So let's start by introducing the panel, ladies and gentlemen, Nicholas Gruen or Ruby-Rose O'Halloran, and John Keane. And let's go berserk and give it up please. Slowly

Speaker 2 ([00:32](#)):

[Inaudible] let's

Speaker 1 ([00:33](#)):

Just quickly go through. So you get a better idea of who these people are. Nicholas, where are you from? What do you do?

Nicholas Gruen ([00:40](#)):

I've never really been able to answer that question for easily, but

Speaker 1 ([00:45](#)):

Would you like to answer as an interpretive dance? Maybe? Well, that's what I was doing.

John Keane ([00:52](#)):

But no, I run a company called lateral economics and have been around the political and policy making arena for a long time and Ruby.

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([01:07](#)):

I am, yes, I am a senior democracy campaigner get up. I'm also get ups, only democracy campaign. I do something here, the junior,

Speaker 5 ([01:16](#)):

Also the junior, John, where are you from? What are

John Keane ([01:19](#)):

You up to? I was born at the end of the Adelaide airport runway on a farm. It's true. And I had a very sad life. I did nothing but write about broadcast, do public events on the past present and future of democracy, sad life,

Speaker 1 ([01:41](#)):

As we're about to find out ladies and gentlemen we had a discussion before this session and we decided that if it's okay with you guys, the best way to have this discussion is if you have a question as proceedings unfolding, please raise your hand and we will take your question. As we go along, please keep it relevant to what's being discussed, no stipends from the floor, or I'll have to do a Tony Jones and shut you down, but please do join in. And if you do have a relevant question, please raise your hand and we can deal with it as they occur. So thinking about Australian democracy, you are, I think this discussion was going to be divided into three blocks. Are there problems with Australian democracy as it stands and as it operates today and what are those problems? I think then we need to think about the

consequences of those problems and then we can round out with, well, what are we going to do? Is there a better way for us to proceed as a democracy? So starting on my left, Nicholas, what do you think are the major problems with democracy in Australia today?

John Keane ([02:54](#)):

Well, I'm going to go fairly deep. And I'm going to say that the major with democracy is that over the last 200 years, we've worked ourselves into a frame for democracy in which, sorry, just need to hold on. Sorry. Yeah, that's better. Isn't it? Yeah. Sorry. I could hear perfectly. Okay. We've worked ourselves into a frame for democracy in which is a largely like we're consumers in a shop. We have the, the purveyors of political goods. They're called politicians and they're surrounded by journalists and so on. And we're in the shop and we're progressively more and more unhappy with what's been served up to us, but we're not in a shop where in a society and the whole metaphor is wrong, but of course we're, it's highly, it's now not only highly acculturated, but highly structured into the process. So if you want to be your own politician, which is what you could have been in Athens you, it that's, you have to professionalize yourself.

John Keane ([04:07](#)):

You have to work at it for the next 10 years to become a politician. And by the end, you will have had to have abided by the central rules of political warmaking. And by that stage, you won't really be the same kind of person. If you are the same, the sort of person, an ordinary person, you weren't that's not how it works. You have to show discipline and so on. So I think we've got a huge problem. Because we've all got the wrong metaphor. And the other thing we do is that we say, well, where are the good guys? Where the people it's these politicians who are lying to us, but we vote for the politicians and you can't bring all out of that one by saying, well, the choices aren't very good because the choices got the way they got, because we vote the way we vote. And as prime minister prime minister hacker says to burn it in the great in the great program. Yes, prime minister Bernard, it seems that the civil service exists sit merely to prevent politicians from implementing the sacred promises they've made to the people and burn. It says, well, somebody has to, so that's the situation that we're in and we're responsible for that situation, even though we'd love to blame somebody else.

Speaker 1 ([05:39](#)):

Okay. So really what, what problems do you identify with our democracy? Well, I'm glad that you actually how's that volume.

Speaker 5 ([05:48](#)):

Good.

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([05:50](#)):

Those are so I'm glad you got us started on the conversation about metaphors, because I love talking about the right metaphors you use when you're talking about democracy, because it really bothers me. People often talk about democracy as being a true democracy or a healthy democracy. And I think that that is ultimately misrepresentative and leads people to be quite implicated in the way that they approach their dealings with trying to improve our democracy. My preferred metaphor for a democracy is that it is a very, very complicated machine. It's a manufacturing machine and it's something that we need to maintain and repair and fix damage that is subsequently done to it. But also that we need to

improve and keep up with the times, you know, as things change, we need to improve that machine and make it better for us. And it takes a lot of work to get it, to be what it needs to be.

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([06:43](#)):

And I think the one that machine is functioning as well as it possibly can be the way I would define a democracy that's working for the people is that political decisions are being made and they're being made in a way that services, services, the genuine wants and interests of everyday people over the interest of corporate money or career politicians or vested interests who have too much influence in parliament. And I think if I were to assess the state of Australian democracy today, I would say that the machine is working, but only just a, and there are a lot of threats that are facing it, and we really need to come together at the moment and work out how we can fight that as people powered movement,

Speaker 1 ([07:28](#)):

John, your problems with the machinery of government in Australia.

John Keane ([07:33](#)):

Well, I I have, I have sympathy for Nicholas, I think is a bit too Greek, but we'll talk about that in a moment. And, and Ruby rose, I, I very much share this. I'm not sure about the metaphor of the machine. I mean, I think two things are worth saying there was no such sort of stir up the discussion once upon a time in this country it was noted by lots of overseas observers that this was a lively, innovative democracy and representative parliamentary form. And a lot of things happened here in the 19th century that were nearly first by world standards. The secret ballot the voting in of constitutions, it happened in south Australia in the early 1850s by adult male suffrage. It's very rare that democracies democratically institute themselves, it's one of the great paradoxes and it's true.

John Keane ([08:38](#)):

Half the population was excluded women. We were the first to grant after a long struggle women, the right to vote and the right to stand do not listen to the Kiwis if they tell you they did it first, because it happened first here in south Australia New Zealand does, did not extend the right of women to stand. You know, you can have the vote that you can't be trusted to be a representative. We produced a constitution sort of compound federal constitution. That's pretty interesting. We were, we had the first national labor government in the world. We had an arbitration system to deal with industrial conflicts. And so, and I'd say that by comparison, we're now in a period it's been developing for a couple of decades of sloppiness laziness, parochialism, complacency, and generally a lack of democratic imagination about the reforms. I have a slogan, I have a slogan for either of our political major political parties to adopt. It's been satisfactory about the last 20 years. Yeah. Now is the time for complacency

Speaker 2 ([09:55](#)):

And yeah. And then

John Keane ([09:59](#)):

The problems we've already heard a couple, I mean, I think the disappearance of maybe 200,000 young people off the electoral roll is a problem. And that as happened in a system where, of course we have compulsory voting, but the levels of disaffection arising and they are sometimes of Russian standards. If you really want to be shocked and not sleep for a few nights, have a look at the museum of Australian

democracies reports on the level of disaffection, you know, over 90% of us. I actually think politicians always lie. I mean, this is really not good to say the least we have a precarious developing. We didn't have much discussion about that in your last couple of days, you know, the so-called gig economy, mainly young people who are unsure about their super, they don't know about what kind of care they will have when they grow older. And so on. I think the failure of the Uluru statement we haven't, you know, it's stalled. We have, we, we haven't extended the democratic principle to peoples whom we annihilated almost that is

Speaker 2 ([11:13](#)):

Unfinished business. [inaudible]

John Keane ([11:18](#)):

Historian of democracy. And I'm just about to publish a new book on the future of democracy. One of the really unusual things about time of this generation is the financialization of markets of capitalist economies. We tend to think of democratically elected governments as in charge of revenues, you know, through taxation and so on. And what in fact has been happening for since roughly 1970, is that the grip of the banks and credit institutions on all actually existing have been growing to the point where money supply well, over 90% of money supply in this country is not controlled by state. It's actually controlled by credit and banking institutions. And if you allow them to supervise themselves, it's a bit like allowing goats to look after the garden. And as you know, this government, the federal government was very reticent about a Royal commission.

John Keane ([12:16](#)):

It was forced into Royal commission. And we now witness, you know, scenes of bankers passing out into ambulances as they, as they come out from testimony. These are the kinds of issues that I think this, you know, complacent democracy and I'm deeply responsible for this. I feel it these are the kinds of issues that it seems to me need addressing, and I don't know how to do it. I think it's probably got to come from below. It has to be get off. It has to be Nicholas ruins making the case against representative democracy and using cities and states as leverage. That's often how reforms happened to this country. That's all on the democratic agenda. I think that's my campaign speech for democracy.

Speaker 1 ([13:11](#)):

Terrific. I'll let you get off the stump. Just for a moment. We have a question from the audience between

John Keane ([13:16](#)):

Me putting my hand up and you finishing speaking, you may have answered it, but what's the cause cause you go two decades. Well, that takes us back to John Howard. I mean, is he, is, is it all his fault or is it all, or, and it's probably unpopular in this audience, is it all for and Keating because they're the ones that introduced the economic rationalization or are we talking global trends? We're talking growth global trends. So we're talking the collapse of social democracy in the seventies. The coming of neo-liberalism is that no, I'm not, I'm not. So I'm my frame for this is fast food. Okay. Fast food. Why am I talking about fast food? Because fast food comes about from people competing to minimize the cost and maximize the profit of harvesting certain human appetites for salt, for fat, for sugar, and, and that doesn't trigger the disgust in a reflex that's fast food. Okay. And what we've got is a commoditized political landscape in which everything is optimized to within an inch of its life. Now, I think that lots of the campaigns that get up run I agree with them, but they're all optimized as well. They're they'll test 20

phrases and they'll test which ones get clicked on first and they're running a shadow data stream, which is like in some senses,

Speaker 2 ([15:06](#)):

Cambridge Analytica.

John Keane ([15:07](#)):

Now we think it's less spooky. I it's it's if I was trying to campaign on any of these things, I'd do the same thing. Just as if I was trying to make as much money as I possibly could out of food, I would do the same thing as fast food fast food vendors. So what we've got is a system which has been optimized over the last few decades, but starting a couple of hundred years ago, which had a culture, which was a kind of, well, I mean, you know, it was a racist culture, it was a sexist culture. There were all kinds of things about that culture, but it kind of knew itself. And it was a culture of every day life. And that's sort of slowly gone and that's, and this is where we are

Speaker 1 ([16:02](#)):

Ruby. It looks like you want to jump in.

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([16:05](#)):

I think that might be a question for us.

Speaker 1 ([16:08](#)):

No, I'd like to hear your response first and then we can go to the question at the back.

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([16:13](#)):

Oh, wow. Where to begin. So the implication that the way that get up runs digital campaigns is anything like the shadowy stuff that happens on Facebook, Cambridge Analytica it's we progressive campaign outfit. We have a million members across Australia who we've tried to speak to, but more importantly so I was saying the implication that get up is anything like any of the shadowy things that are happening in the Facebook, Cambridge Analytica sphere of the world is completely absurd. We are a campaigning organization. We are, we have a million members across Australia. We primarily communicate with our members on digital channels. And the thing that's really crucial to understand is we're trying to speak to all of our members, but more importantly, we're trying to listen to all of our members and, you know, as a very small team of campaigners who are centralized mostly in Sydney and Melbourne, the only way that we can truly listen to what our members are trying to say is to look at the data that they are giving us.

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([17:14](#)):

So, you know, you say that we tested 20 different things as if that's a bad thing and then go with the best one. But what we're actually doing is putting 20 different things out to our membership and seeing what makes people excited and seeing what campaigns people want to get behind and what campaigns people want to try and make impact on. And so we actually have a saying, get up. We say, if you're not looking at your data, you're not listening to your members. And if you're not listening to your members, you're a. So that's, that is why we have such a data focused organization. And which I actually think is ultimately a good thing, not just for democracy, but also for the democracy of the way that getup is run

as an organization. And then just finally, I'd say you speak as if the comparison between fast food and saying that they're trying to make as much money as we can, as they can. And comparing that to get up, get up, isn't trying to make money, get up, is trying to make progressive social change. Yes, exactly. Which is a good thing. I think that anyone here who supports get ups campaigns, as you said, that you do would say that us maximizing our impact is a good thing. Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([18:19](#)):

It's wonderful that there is an organization

Speaker 2 ([18:21](#)):

That is one of the demographics.

Speaker 1 ([18:24](#)):

Now let's, let's go to the question that, that the lady at the back of it, so

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([18:29](#)):

What to continue on this conversation around democracy and technology, but look at it in a more positive light as we started going towards what you were saying, how can, and should technology be helping democracy in terms of like constituents getting in touch with the like NPS and all that kind of stuff. How can technology actively positively help democracy?

Speaker 1 ([18:48](#)):

Yeah. Can't we bring democracy into the digital age, John

John Keane ([18:53](#)):

I was hoping that really, we need to reveal in a moment I want to hear from you. I wanted to go back a little bit before it goes straight into that question. Because I, I think that Nicholas with the greatest respect and I really admire the guts that goes into your large complaint against representative democracy. I think, I think you're throwing away a tool that's really vital for the constraint of power and transformation of institutions. And I think the history of representative democracy is not right. And I think you, by calling an aristocracy as you did yesterday, I think this is, this is actually misrepresentation. And I think that in Australia as elsewhere, one of the really basic radical reforms that's needed, Bernie Sanders spoke about a political revolution. I'm kind of in that frame of mind at the moment is to rejuvenate electoral represent to div politics.

John Keane ([20:03](#)):

And the only way it can be done, it will not happen through the parties. And it will not happen through parliament and governments. It's got to come from outside. And in that sense our years feel to me a bit like the 1830s or 1840s, hardly any trade unions friendly societies and cooperatives try to keep alive public spirit disenfranchisement of people, great gap between rich and poor. It took most of the 19th century in the early years of the 20th century to breathe life into the principle of the universal franchise. So I think way up to that about technology, I mean, I sat through yesterday a very interesting session here on media and I, and I think I would hope that we have a discussion about before we leave at quarter to five or 10 to five, because I think this is, you know, this is the domain in which the technology question is really, really important.

John Keane ([21:01](#)):

And I wrote a lot about this. There's a communications revolution going on. It's not finished. It has its dark sides. We're beginning to see. It's not only, you know, the, the birth of big conglomerates and it's not only the China model where you harness the internet revolution for the sake of the strong governmental rule. It's also the politics of algorithms. We've been beginning to learn those dark sides, but the, the positive, constructive democratizing effects are still with us. And we've still got lots of opportunities in this country. I think what, what concretely it means is not only the defense of the ABC but also nobody claps.

Speaker 2 ([21:45](#)):

That's sad [inaudible]

John Keane ([21:50](#)):

But I think experimenting with platforms that take advantage of new digital network information flows I'd say that, get up, does this, I would say the conversation for which I've written a lot is an Australian first, and it's a, it's a public service platform that gets academics onto their bunkers. The, the, the development of a much more complex ecology of news and information platforms is a really important thing for democracy because to come to basics and I'll stop, you know, what is democracy it's self-government of the people I would say through their representatives, but have you ever thought that democracy is common ownership of the means of decision-making from the household, you know, through to the battlefield, that is what democracy historically was all about, that it, that, that the privatization of power by tyrants or by aristocrats is not cool. And so what we're losing, I think is that basic sense.

John Keane ([22:57](#)):

And the regaining of it has got to include, I think, this new, more complicated ecology of state-of-the-art digital technologies that, that can defend platforms that and public views about what is the public good. And a lot of this will happen outside the party and parliamentary system. I've no doubt that that's going on. All of these platforms are underfunded. They're all struggling. As Peter phrase said yesterday for new business models. I don't agree with him that the bead that the ABC should be made to start thinking about, you know, paying for the ABC. I think that's giving, that's giving the keys away to the James a while. Anyway, it's my rent

Speaker 2 ([23:48](#)):

[Inaudible]

John Keane ([23:48](#)):

So look, I should try and just clarify something that John said about my view of representative democracy or elections I'm for them just by the way. And so what I'm suggesting is that just as the 19th and 20th, sorry, just as the 18th and 19th century were about building constitutions with checks and balances between elections by the people in elections, by the property classes, which is what the legislative council was here until quite recently, that the 21st century should be about setting up checks and balances between the people's representatives chosen by election and the people's representative chosen by lot as we do in juries. So in my model, we have an upper house. I don't mind if we have three

houses, I don't have anything against the upper houses houses we have now, certainly the Senate, as far as I'm concerned, does more good than harm.

John Keane ([24:47](#)):

But I would like to see a citizens chamber with as many Australians chosen by lot in that chamber. And here's a power I would give it if there was a super majority of that chamber, about 60% or more to make it clear that it wasn't just the random selection that produced the majority, then it could impose a secret ballot on another house with which it disagreed. And we would not have abolished carbon pricing if we, if it had had that power. So that's the sort of thing that I'm talking about. I'm talking about revved up democracy and how damaging it is. I'm talking about the difference between the will of the people, which we hear a lot about and the considered will of the people. If you hold a citizens jury in the United Kingdom before the people going in we'll vote about 50 50 for Brexit and the people coming out or vote about 60, 40 against Brexit, I'm going with the considered will of the people.

John Keane ([25:55](#)):

And I think that's the last best hope for democracy. When we look around at the way, I've how sick our democracy is. And John calls for a richer ecology. That's one of the things that makes the Swiss democracy so strong because it has a very strong information or ecology behind things like citizens initiated referendums. And so on the way I see electoral democracy, the endless hoopla, the endless razzmatazz, the endless arousal of our resentments is that it's actually harming the it's actively harming the, the richness of our ecology. And if you think about media 30 years ago, and now you get some idea of that on technology the great risk with technology, and I've seen this happen again, and again, is that people love, or they, until about five years ago, almost everybody loved what Silicon valley had done to so many areas.

John Keane ([27:04](#)):

And I do too. I mean, there's all sorts of toxic things going on, but I love Twitter. I love Facebook. I love the connectedness of it. And what they did was they used these new platforms to lower transactions costs to, to make everything travel lightning fast. What if that's actually not a good thing for democracy? What if democracy relies upon bringing the considered will out of the will the clickbait and so on? So the one piece of technology, which where, when I predict my years about the internet was it was a discussion website called your view, it's now in mothballs. But this was an exciting thing. And what was it? Well, what happened on your view was that it was you, you would debate various live political issues as we are now, and people would vote and they'd vote people up and down, but in the background or algorithms trying to work out whose voice mattered to other people, and it used various various methods to do that. And of course they would be transparent to anyone who wants to interrogate that. But let me tell you one of the rules to give you an idea of what was going on. Can you do it really quickly? That's what I was about to do. That was what I was about to do. The person gets voted up with a high credibility score. If what they say is rated well by people they disagree with, okay, now that's what our democracy needs. It needs that. And that's what I'm focused on. Okay. Now question it's in the floor

Speaker 1 ([28:47](#)):

Before we come to you, sir. There is something I want to say, and I, I think you've all missed the main problems with our democracy. Our main problems is that not only for our democracy, but certainly in the United States and several other countries is that it has been reduced to a popularity contest. And



the people who are standing for office are, do not have to have any demonstrable qualifications or ability to actually run the country. They just have to be more popular than the other candidates. And an added problem in Australia is we have compulsory voting and much of the populous are probably ineligible to vote from the point of view of an understanding of what is required for the governance of the nation. Not like us, of course, no. Well, no, I, I'm not reducing it to an us and them situation, but I can remember, I can remember going to the, the polling booth the first time to Peter Garrison for the Senate. And I had people my age coming to me wanting to know where midnight oil was on the voting ballot. Now, if, if people don't have a basic working knowledge of what is going on in politics then surely why should we compel them to vote?

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([30:18](#)):

I would like to make a direct retort to that. And also to the argument that you made around the considered will of the people. I think that first of all, Australia's compulsory voting system is actually actually an extraordinary thing for our democracy because you look around the world and you see societies where voting is not compulsory and you know, who doesn't vote, marginalized people, women don't vote. Low-income people don't vote people of color. Don't vote. People who live far away from urban centers are the ones who don't vote. So we're extremely lucky in Australia that we are actually forced to go to the polls, even though it might be annoying. It's a really, really, really good thing. And then [inaudible],

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([31:05](#)):

And I also want to say that I find the argument that some people are eligible to vote to vote, and the argument that there needs to be this considered will of the people. I think that it puts the onus on to everyday people and it makes the problems with how democracy, their fault. And I think that that is both misleading and fundamentally unfair because if you want to see what the real problem in our democracy is, it is the big money that he's, that is affecting political decisions that are coming out of there. Yeah. Democracy is the money and the career politicians who have made their career off that money. And to imply that it is people, people, a lot of whom wouldn't have had an education, a lot of whom don't have the same privileges that we have to imply that they in any way have a lesser right to vote is to me fundamentally anti-democratic and I think the other thing, yeah, well,

John Keane ([32:04](#)):

Leave me out of that because I've talked about it considered we'll have the people not qualified people. So I that's got nothing to do. I

Speaker 1 ([32:11](#)):

Agree with what you were saying, sort of qualified competent people. [inaudible]

Speaker 2 ([32:17](#)):

I tell anyone

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([32:17](#)):

Whether they're competent to vote or not everyone has the right to vote, and it doesn't matter what your level of political literacy is. It doesn't matter if you don't understand policy, everyone should be able to tell the basic difference between a policy that he's good at a policy that he's bad, because it's not

about any kind of wonky details. It's about the impact that it has on people's lives. It's about right and wrong. It's a really fundamental moral question. And it's up to as political communicators to be able to convey that, well, let's move,

Speaker 1 ([32:45](#)):

Let's move the conversation along to the consequences of the failings of our democracy at the moment. And there was a really interesting paper, came out in nature last week where they reviewed 16 emergency environmental programs that were effected across China. I mean, we're talking three hundred and seventy five, eight \$0.5 billion was put into this. It covered an area of 624 million hectares. There were half a billion people involved and basically they were addressing fundamental environmental problems that were destroying the country. The point was made here that you can only do that in China, because if you have a look at the article that came out in the conversation about Australia's worst ranked worst in the world on climate action, a lot of that comes down to the political system has got in the way of us being able to make decisive headway on that issue. If you look at the way that the Murray darling basin has been, squalled because of the conflict of the democracies within the states and across the nation. If you look at the fact that we are still not addressing land clearing so these ultimately come down to a failure of the political system of being able to act in the best interest of the nation.

John Keane ([34:23](#)):

We voted in the last election and the people voted for a government that had torn up car pricing. So we're responsible. There, we can blame them. That's good. I don't like them either, but we're responsible. So why are we reaching your, why aren't we reaching out for bags? We voted for that. We voted for it in 2013, they'd promise to abolish carbon pricing. We voted again in 2016 and they squeaked over the line with the majority of the two party preferred boat. So there you are. I think that if ordinary people, in fact, I can tell you that in Texas, in a citizens jury, they asked people, would you be prepared to pay a little bit more on your electricity bill to fund more renewable energy and lower emissions going into the citizens jury? 54% of people said yes, coming out of it, 84% of people said, yes. So as long as it's not very much, well, that's honest and that's enough. It doesn't have to be very much. So what we've got is a democracy that's completely paralyzed by the ability to get us linked, get that link by going get people, revved up, get people thinking that other people are picking on them. That it's, it's that they're the good guys and we're B it's called divide. Okay. And it's a disaster. Okay. May I say that? Or just let

Speaker 1 ([35:57](#)):

John John's comment and then we'll come to your

John Keane ([36:00](#)):

Pull has a certain fascination with the China model because that's the Chinese argument against representative democracy and Nicholas, you know, the Greek wants a return to deliberative assemblies. Where's my time. I think that if, if, if, if this bit of the conversation depresses you about democracies slowness the foolishness of majority's and government's inaction, you should read David Robinson's book. It's it's I know no other work like it it's, it's it's a short history of crises and the way democracy is handled and the good news coming from that is the pattern is typical in the 20th century. I think it continues to be the same, a lot of slope, you know, foot dragging and slow motion and so on. But when push comes to shove, democracies are incredibly good at solving problems. And they're one advantage

over technocratic solutions, Chinese communist party instructions to shut down heavy industry and so on and, and accelerate the shift to post carbon.

John Keane ([37:16](#)):

The one great advantage of democracy is that multiple opinions fed in and when the decision is taken and it sticks, it has great legitimacy. One symbol of this, a metaphor, if you like, of how democracies have to handle the, the greening of politics problem and our flank outfit, the China model is the decision that governor Jerry Brown took. When Trump said off to Paris a few days later, you may know that governor Jerry Brown got on a plane to Beijing, and he went and did a multi-billion us dollar deal with Xi Jinping about the greening of the California and Chinese economies. That's how democracies need to behave. And they can do this. It's just that at the moment, we're in a rotten period where, you know, the denialists are still in the saddle. There's no great initiatives. Adani is a sort of, you know, I mean, it's a shameful symbol of our moment because elsewhere things are happening and especially at the city level. And if you don't think democracies are capable of acting under pressure, have a look at cities because cities democratic cities, Copenhagen, and so on are beginning to be the new laboratories of the revival of democracy and the greening of our daily life. I think. So you've been very patient. I'm just wondering why

Speaker 6 ([38:45](#)):

We need a third house of parliament. Why don't we just select the current house of parliament by locked? It has several advantages. You imagine half of the politicians would then be women and you'd have less lawyers there. [inaudible]

Speaker 2 ([39:02](#)):

Random. Okay. Over to you guys.

John Keane ([39:08](#)):

Yeah. Well, I, I, I, we don't know what would happen. So I'm a conservative in that sense. I want to move boldly, but hanging on to what we've got you know, 250 years ago, we were all at subsistence. We weren't at the university of south Australia at the festival of ideas. So but it, it may, well, once people see the, the people's chamber inaction, once people have been in a citizens jury, I can tell you that about 90% of people coming out of citizens' juries happy with the experience or extremely happy with the experience or life-changing we happy with the experience, roughly a third, a third, a third people realize that the, that ordinary people rise to the occasion, that people who don't know what they're talking about. Most of them listen to other people who do know what they're talking about.

John Keane ([40:10](#)):

And when people who don't know what they're talking about, talk about it anyway. Other people quietly hush them up and so on. So, so that's a mechanism, but the idea that we should talk about, wouldn't it be terrible if we had a political system in which people who don't know what they're talking about, talk about it. Well, I'm, I'm thinking, I know I'm quite familiar with that situation. As, as John Stuart mill one of the [inaudible] south Australia said in the middle of the 19th century, that's exactly Mill's argument that local government, small scale assemblies are where people learn public affairs. I was going to say that, you know, to be, I think it's, I think it's got a snowball's chance in hell of getting off the ground unless there's some sort of uprising and its favor, but I do think that the scalability problem with Nicholas's vision of democracy as assembly democracy is a serious issue. And I do think in the last 12

months we've had an option put on the table. It's the Boolaroo statement. It was snapped. It's not dead. It, it must not be allowed to die because the proposal was that we indigenous peoples have no mechanisms of representation in national affairs. What kind of a democracy is

Speaker 2 ([41:34](#)):

Therefore

John Keane ([41:35](#)):

Building an agreement, which they work very hard at and institutionalizing. It, it's a very clever, compromised document that it, but, but the basic proposal is to have a new mechanism of representation of indigenous peoples interests and concerns, and that this, you know, this would feed into the federal parliament. I think that's unfinished business, and I hope it doesn't go away. This, we are in a marooned period. Nothing has happened since the apology.

Speaker 1 ([42:08](#)):

We do have another question to go to. And just before we get there, isn't a symbol of the fact that we are broken as a as a democracy. The fact that both major political parties are supporting Australian offshore concentration camps in defiance of international law. No argument. Okay. Fine

Speaker 6 ([42:33](#)):

Point was made earlier that there's inaction. And I think the response from Nick to that was, well, we met, there's a mandate for the decisions that are made because we vote for the individuals on the platform, which they go to the polls on. Isn't the real problem though, that we don't vote for policies. We vote for parties and parties have multiple policies, and it's impossible to vote on each individual policy that they stand for. So we're forced with this terrible decision of having to pick the party that has the most policies that you're happy with, perhaps compared to the party that has less of the policies that you're happy with.

John Keane ([43:05](#)):

Yeah. I may have say that if we didn't have compulsory voting, I have no doubt that what's happening in practically every actually existing democracy, the cartel party system is as the political scientists call it, you know, and all I gobbly would collapse. It would collapse in this country. There are extreme cases now where democracies, Italy is a case in point Greece, Germany is feeling the pinch, the UK, the United States, you know, party systems are collapsing because for nearly two thirds of a generation, the trend you've just described took root with, with hardly any membership of political parties where like Coles and, and so on, you know, came to resemble each other. And one of the reasons why the disaffection and the disrespectful politics and politicians and parliaments is rising rapidly in this country and elsewhere is because of that system. It's renewal, Nicholas wants to well says what would like to revive it. But I think you would like to turn your back on it. Rosie wants to hammer it from outside I'm much. [inaudible] Well, I just don't know what you're talking about. I want to preserve it because of the way you speak about representative democracy is [inaudible].

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([44:35](#)):

I mean, I think that the shorter answer to your question is yes, obviously it's a huge problem, but I think even more significant to the, than the fact that you have to sign up to a party's entire agenda when you

choose to vote for them is also the extreme lack of choice that we have in the Australian political system. We have two major parties who are both to, no matter what side of the political spectrum you come from, they're extremely dissatisfactory. And then we have this whole host of minor parties. A lot of whom are really extreme in their views or dysfunctional to the point where people don't necessarily feel that they would be confident having them in a position of power. And so I think this is the other issue that I take when people put the onus back on to voters and say, well, you voted them in it's your fault when you haven't been given options before you, that you're happy with.

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([45:23](#)):

And when you haven't been presented, I don't know if I'm speaking for everyone else in the room, but you know, I on very, very few occasions in my life have ever felt inspired by Australian politics. There've been very few moments where I've looked more shocking. I know. But yeah, I think that the answer is we definitely do need to think about ways around that kind of the issue of signing up to a party's entire platform. But more importantly, we need some like real political leadership in this country, and we need to be able to tell the difference between parties that we're voting for.

Speaker 1 ([45:58](#)):

I'm afraid. We're almost there time. We have time for one last question.

Speaker 6 ([46:02](#)):

So I think this discussion has been skirting around something that I want to make explicit with my question. Do you think there's a problem that as a society, we view democracy as the be all and end all that may be instead in 200 years time, we should look back on democracy itself. The same way we look back on feudalism, and that we should really be trying to design an aim for a system that is different from democracy. That's not what we know now, but which is designed so that it can't devolve into a popularity contest so that it can't be taken over by commercial interests. If democracy is the worst system, apart from all the others, maybe it's time to try something else.

Speaker 1 ([46:38](#)):

Perhaps perhaps what we say is what are you throwing

Speaker 6 ([46:40](#)):

The idea out there for lots of people that think about it, the most saying, I have

Speaker 1 ([46:43](#)):

I rephrase that as we've identified the problems, what are the solutions? What is the way forward?

John Keane ([46:50](#)):

I, at the risk of being I'm told I'm even more Greek

Speaker 1 ([46:56](#)):

Because grillin Swedish, isn't it terribly terror,

John Keane ([47:00](#)):

It's Austrian at the risk of being sort of heading even further down this stigmatized spectrum of Greekness. The Athenians actually built that they're the only democracy that understood their democracy to be in a visceral struggle with our oligarchy. That's why they peppered the entire system with selection by lot. They, if you, if you go to the internet and type in the word, I think it starts with a K clip, a teary on, and John can correct me. It is they invented a machine that everybody could watch a bit like our tats, lot of bubble machine that everyone could watch and observe that this was random. In other words, nobody's stinking, myths got on it and distorted it by creating careers for people who followed the career incentives and so on. So that's why I think it's a missing ingredient of our democracy.

John Keane ([48:07](#)):

It's not that I want to tear down what we have of elections and so on, but that, and when we do democracy that way, it becomes highly generative. The people who come out of citizen juries in Melbourne of 42 people, two or three stood for local council, the next opportunity. So they'd discover that this is something that they want and they go out and they enrich that ecosystem. So I'm sort of at a loss to see how I'm see how, how this is somehow undermining the democracy we have. I see it as, as building real antibodies in the democracy we have against the sort of things that people have been talking about Ruby.

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([48:59](#)):

I mean, I think that I would say that I completely agree with you, but I would use different phrasing. As I was sort of trying to explain with the machine metaphor that I think applies to democracy earlier, I think that we need to constantly be looking at ways to improve our democracy and not just improve it, but also make sure that it keeps up with the times that it keeps up with the pace of technological change, that it keeps up with the pace of international political changes. And so I think that I hope in 200 years, we looked back on the system we have now and think that it's incredibly outdated and we're doing so much better. To my mind, I would still use the phrase democracy for me. It would just be a better and more effective democracy, but I think that were probably inferior agreement, just using different words for it. And John

John Keane ([49:41](#)):

Two things, I think the onus is on you. It's an important question. Nothing is forever. Democracy died. As I tried to show in my history of democracy, endless numbers of times, and it may not survive this crisis. I would urge you all of you to think about the analogies between the twenties, 1920s and thirties, and this period, the content different, but what we're witnessing is the emergence of a clear alternative, and it is the Putin art seat in ping. It's the Iranian Saudi alternative. They call themselves people's democracies less so in Saudi, but actually a very they're concentrated forms of arbitrary power. And they're a clear alternative economically. They do very well. And we are at a junction that we haven't seen, I think for since the 1920s and thirties where power sharing constitutional democracies are alien, they're in a palace state mostly.

John Keane ([50:46](#)):

And they are now confronted by a clear alternative, so you can join that. You can join it, but pay attention to it. And the second thing I just wanted to say, I just wanted to read a few lines about democracy and its commitment to the principle of equality. I don't know if you know, but Eby white was a very, was a very famous children's writer in the United States out of the blue, in the July, 1943, got a

letter from the war board of the United States, asking him to define democracy. And this is what he wrote. He said, democracy. It is the line that forms on the right it's the don't in don't shove. It's the dent in the high hat. Democracy is the recurrent suspicion that more than half of the people are right more than half of the time. It's the feeling of privacy in the voting booths, the feeling of communion in the libraries, the feeling of vitality everywhere. Democracy is a letter to the editor. Democracy is the score at the beginning of the ninth. It's an idea which hasn't been disproved yet. A song of the words of which have not gone bad. It's the mustard on the hot dog and the cream and the ration coffee democracy. He concluded is a request from a war board in the middle of the morning, in the middle of a war, wanting to know what democracy. Yeah,

Speaker 1 ([52:20](#)):

Ladies and gentlemen, what an invigorating and fascinating discussion to end the Adelaide festival ideas for 2018. Would you please thank Nicholas Ruby and John [inaudible]

Ruby-Rose O'Halloran ([52:42](#)):

Quickly before you all go as well. I just wanted to say if anyone here is interested in getting involved in any of get-ups democracy campaigning, there is a table of volunteers waiting just outside. You can have a chat to them about getting involved and you can sign a couple of repetitions. If you're interested, ladies and gentlemen, please.