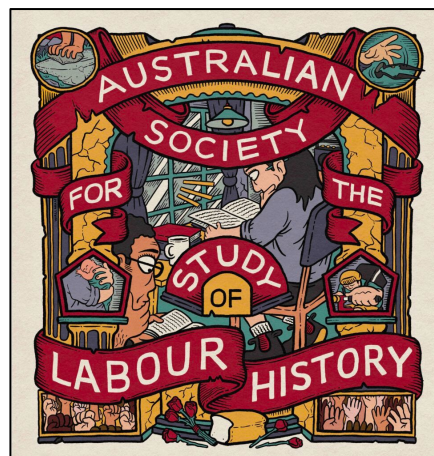


LHSSA LABOUR HISTORY NEWS Autumn 2026

Perhaps in time the so-called Dark Ages will be thought of as including our own.

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799) was a German physicist, satirist, and Anglophile.



CONTENTS

LHSSA NOTICES

- Tom Sheridan scholarship
- 2026 Oral History - Biennial Conference
- IPAN National Conference
- Earth's Greatest Enemy – the environmental cost of empire (Film)
- LHSSA Executive Committee

AUSTRALIA

- Aboriginal Anzacs fought for Australia - but returned home to racism: John Maynard
- The migrant dream: Sami Shah
- The Making of One Nation (*Podcast*)
- Immigration – Facts over Fear (Democracy Alliance)
- The Eureka Flag Fights Racism and Fascism
- How to stop Australian democracy going the way of the US: Jim Lo Scalzo
- Are 'left' and 'right' useful anymore?: Bernard Keane

WORLD

- Voters no longer want managers – they want fighters: Kos Samaras
- What actually is 'civilisation'? The dark and loaded history behind Trump's threat against Iran: Bruce Buchan (*extract only – with link to full article*)

THE REST IS HISTORY

- Pits, picket lines and pop music – the 1984-5 UK Miners' Strike (*Podcast*)
- The US-Iran war, the crisis of globalisation and problems confronting the oil industry: Richard Stone
- History's Wisdom, Democracy's Future: Stewart Sweeney
- Traditional Labor policies dumped in South Australia: the 2025 Deputy Premier issue and the 2018 Mt Gambier byelection: Chris Sumner

A membership form for LHSSA is attached on the last page of this newsletter

Tom Sheridan Scholarship 2026

Each year the Labour History Society (South Australia) offers the Tom Sheridan Scholarship to support an honours or postgraduate student in their research and to encourage new work in labour and social history. The scholarship is named in honour of Tom Sheridan, a founding member of the South Australian Branch and a significant contributor to labour history in the state. Valued at up to \$1,000, the award includes a year's membership of the Branch.

Applications

The Sheridan scholarship is awarded annually to an applicant who best demonstrates their capacity or potential to make a significant contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the history of the Australian working class.

Applicants must be postgraduate students currently enrolled at a public university in South Australia. Disciplines of study may include economic, political, social or cultural history, political economy, gender, minorities or media studies, or any other field of study which contributes to the purpose of the award outlined above.

Applications must include the name, address, contact details (email address and phone number), university of affiliation, details of a registered postgraduate award and research topic, a short statement (max 100 words) in support of the application along with the names and contact details of two referees. It must also include evidence of the applicant's research capacity, such as the research proposal accepted by the applicant's registered institution, chapter(s) of a thesis or book, a long-form essay, or a journal article.

In assessing the applications, the Society may also consider the degree of innovation evident in the research techniques or methodology; the practicality of the project's objectives; and the referee reports.

The successful applicant will be announced at the Annual General Meeting of the Society.

Applications must be submitted by email to the Labour History Society of South Australia Executive by 5pm, Monday 1 June 2026.

labourhistorysa@gmail.com

2026 Oral History – Biennial Conference

The 2026 Oral History Australia Biennial Conference will be held in Adelaide from 3-6 December. Proposals for presentations are now being accepted with a deadline of 11 May.

This year's conference theme, 'Human voices, modern technology: Oral history & authenticity' is particularly timely. The keynote address will be given by Professor Doug Boyd, a world renowned expert on oral history and new technology. Prof. Boyd presented La Trobe University's [Bernard Bailyn Lecture in North American History](#) in 2023. His lecture on that occasion was on oral history and artificial intelligence and there has been much development in this space since then.

For more information go to:

- OHA Biennial Conference website – <https://oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/biennial-conference-2026/>
- the Call for Presentations – <https://oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/biennial-conference-2026/cfp/>.

IPAN National Conference July 24-26, Old Stock Exchange, Adelaide

Book now with this link



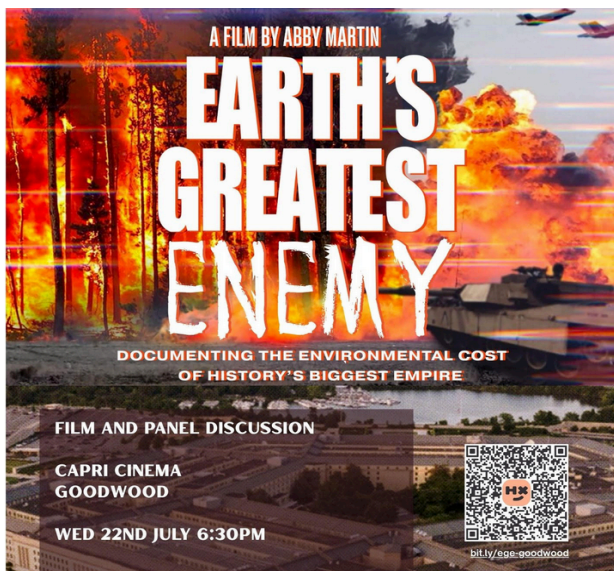
IPAN NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2026
SPEAKERS | FORUMS | WORKSHOPS | NETWORKING

TIME TO BREAK FREE FROM THE US
Adelaide July 24 - 26

INCLUDES: CLIMATE CRISIS • INDIGENOUS RIGHTS • AUKUS • PALESTINE • WORLD ORDER


IPAN
Independent and Peaceful Australia Network

SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER
US journalist and filmmaker
ABBY MARTIN
EARTH'S GREATEST ENEMY
More speakers to be announced



A FILM BY ABBY MARTIN
EARTH'S GREATEST ENEMY
DOCUMENTING THE ENVIRONMENTAL COST OF HISTORY'S BIGGEST EMPIRE

FILM AND PANEL DISCUSSION
CAPRI CINEMA
GOODWOOD
WED 22ND JULY 6:30PM


bit.ly/egge-goodwood

And for the early birds....



**Odeon Star Cinema,
Semaphore
7pm Friday 5th June**

LHSSA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2025

The 2025-26 LHSSA Executive Committee is:

President: Ron Slee

Vice-President: Vini Ciccarello

Vice-President: Jim Phillips

Secretary: Roz Averis

Treasurer: Kevin Kaeding

Elected members: Nix Herriot, Liam Horwood, Habibah Jaghoori

Co-opted members: Doug Melvin, Ralph Clarke

Trade Union Liaison Officer: Doug Melvin

Branch Representative on National Executive of ASSSLH: Doug Melvin

Editorial Collective: Ron Slee, Ken Bridge, Roz Averis, Habibah Jaghoori, Doug Melvin

LHSSA representative on History Council of South Australia: Ron Slee

Aboriginal Anzacs fought for Australia, but returned home to racism. It fuelled their activism John Maynard, Director of Aboriginal History, University of Newcastle: *The Conversation: April 24, 2026* (Edited extracts: for full article [click here](#))

Historians [estimate](#) more than 1,000 Aboriginal Australians served in the first world war. After the war, [many expressed](#) their disappointment that “fighting for our King and country” had not resulted in any improvement in Aboriginal rights or living conditions. Unlike white soldiers, they were not feted as heroes. Instead, they faced racism and discrimination. The fight for Aboriginal rights and justice during the 1920s was driven by this tension between Aboriginal servicemen’s expectations of war and their subsequent disillusionment. It was crucial for the rise of organised Aboriginal political activism during the 1920s.

The Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association was founded in 1924. Led by my grandfather, **Fred Maynard**, it is recognised today as Australia’s first united all-Aboriginal political organisation. Two key organisers, Fred Maynard’s close friend **Dick Johnson** and **Edward Walker**, had both served in the first world war. Another significant member, **Tom Lacey**, (another close friend of Maynard) was the father of two soldiers who served. Their exposure to international conflict helped them connect racism in Australia with an international struggle for black liberation. In a 1927 letter to New South Wales Premier Jack Lang, my grandfather referenced the key values of Anzac, emphasising the “loyalty, fidelity and bravery” of Aboriginal men “when conditions have called for the exercise of such virtues”. In the letter, he unleashed his anger at the NSW government’s draconian policies, shocking mistreatment and severe control over Aboriginal lives.



*The author’s grandfather
Fred Maynard, and sister
Emma*

Aboriginal Australian servicemen

Until May 1917, Aboriginal Australians were prohibited from volunteering for the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). The [Defence Act of 1909](#) precluded from service men who were “not substantially of European descent”. Instructions for enlisting officers at approved military recruiting depots issued in 1916 [stated](#) that “Aboriginals, half-castes, or men with Asiatic blood are not to be enlisted – this applies to all coloured men”. Official barriers to Aboriginal enlistment were relaxed in the latter years of war as the need for volunteers became acute. But discretion remained in the hands of authorities, and overt racism prevented some Aboriginal men from serving. In 1917, 16 Aboriginal volunteers were [suddenly discharged](#) from a training camp in Queensland because “white men have an objection to a ‘blackfella’ being associated with them at the camp”. Despite this racist legislation and attitudes within the military, many Aboriginal men still tried to volunteer.

Why did Aboriginal soldiers join to fight for a country that discriminated against them? While they shared some of the same reasons as white soldiers – such as the opportunity for pay and the excitement of adventure – Aboriginal soldiers may also have been motivated by the hope for “equal rights during and after the war”. [Some said](#) they were “willing to fight to a man if they were accepted by the military authorities”. In [some cases](#), “joining the military was one of the few acts Aboriginal men living under the Protection Acts could undertake” without asking permission from the authorities. Some managed to convince the medical authorities, which vetted recruitment, to allow them to join, their Aboriginal appearance notwithstanding.

Activist roots in service

Dick Johnson was one. A Yuin Aboriginal man, born at Batemans Bay, I, in 1886, he married Mabel Stewart from Wallaga Lake Mission in 1914. Dick worked at the Bawley Point and Kioloa sawmills. Tragedy followed when Mabel died after delivering their stillborn son. Devastated and grieving, [Dick enlisted](#) in the first world war in June 1916, presumably to escape the trauma and heartache of his loss. He was one of 20 Aboriginal men from the Ulladulla region who served in the war. **Dick** left Australia onboard HMAT Ceramic on October 7 1916 and arrived in Plymouth on November 21. On February 15, 1917 he was shipped to France and arrived in Étapes to witness “immense concentrations of Commonwealth reinforcement camps and hospitals”. [By 1917](#), there were 100,000 troops camped there. Johnson joined the 13th Battalion, which was soon involved in some of the heaviest fighting on the western front at Bullecourt.

In early June 1917, Johnson was admitted to hospital with an injury to his right heel. He rejoined his unit on July 14. [For the remainder](#) of 1917, the battalion was in Belgium advancing on the Hindenburg Line. In June 1918, Johnson was wounded again. Eventually, he was invalided back to Plymouth with a knee injury. Convalescing in the United Kingdom, he met a Scottish woman, Thomasina Douglas, and they were married on January 4, 1919, in Edinburgh. The couple returned to Australia on SS City of Exeter eight days later. Thomasina clearly helped Johnson heal from the pain of the loss of his first wife. They would be together for the rest of their lives.

Edward Walker was one of a set of Aboriginal brothers who enlisted in the war. A Yuin man from the south coast of I, Edward [was born](#) in Kiama in 1893. At the time of enlisting, he was working as a horse breaker at Casino. His brother, **Tom Walker**, was the first to join up in 1916 and served on the western front. Edward then enlisted and was shipped to England onboard the Medic alongside several Aboriginal men from Queensland. He joined the 25th Battalion in January 1918 at Neuve Eglise in Belgium. Tom was in the same battalion but in a different company. **Edward**, seven months after arriving in France, was wounded in action in July 1918, then shipped to England for treatment at the Southern General Hospital in Plymouth. From there, he wrote a concerned letter to the Red Cross seeking information on his brother Tom, who he had heard had been killed in action.



Sadly, it was confirmed Tom had been killed on August 11 1918 at Bayonvillers (see photo below). A low-flying German plane had dropped a bomb directly onto the trench, killing him instantly. Tom left behind his wife, Lily, and two young children, living on the Aboriginal reserve at Ulgundahi Island on the Clarence River.

Months after the loss of his brother, **Edward** was released from hospital – only to contract Spanish influenza. The impact of the **epidemic**, which the returning soldiers brought back to Australia, was devastating, with an estimated 15,000 people dying during the pandemic. **Edward** survived, but “was deemed no longer fit for active service”. Just after the Armistice was signed in November 1918, he sailed back to Australia onboard HMAT Bakara. He returned to Ulgundahi Island and lived with his family there.

Battles at home



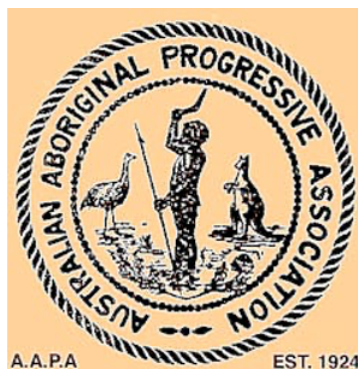
At war’s end, men of the AIF suffered physical and psychological wounds. Aboriginal soldiers did not have the same level of support that many returned soldiers enjoyed. Only a handful of Indigenous soldiers were successful in their applications under the soldier resettlement scheme. One Aboriginal man was granted a block near Forbes in western NSW, but his application for a loan to develop the land [was rejected](#) by an inspector: “This case is unsatisfactory ... the holder is a blackman ... altogether the wrong sort of man.” At least three other Aboriginal men faced overt discrimination that blocked their claims.

While Aboriginal soldiers were entitled to repatriation benefits, the policy [was likely not](#) “applied equally across the board”, with “sporadic complaints about discrimination against Aboriginal war veterans during the 1920s and 1930s”. Aboriginal soldiers had the additional burden of facing continued racism and prejudice when they returned home. **Edward Walker’s** postwar experiences starkly illustrate this. In 1919 he was forced to appear in court when a publican was charged with serving liquor to him and two friends in I. Edward was summoned to the trial, where [the defence argued](#) the publican should be let off because Edward was a returned soldier and it was unclear whether he was Aboriginal.

No white soldier was hauled to court for drinking a beer in a pub. Four years later **Edward** was back in court, this time “charged with assault against Allan Cameron, manager of the Aborigines settlement on Ulgundahi Island”. A witness corroborated that Cameron was the aggressor and had the “defendant down and bumping his head on the ground, but the police magistrate decided to convict Edward on both charges, fined and bound to good behaviour for three months. Instead of being celebrated as a war hero, Edward Walker discovered he was a pariah – and not even a second-class citizen back in his own country.

Postwar activism

In the early 20th century, Aboriginal political mobilisation was catalysed by the revocation of Aboriginal independent farms, and the escalation in Aboriginal child removal by the I Aborigines Protection Board.



Aboriginal soldiers returning home [faced](#) the devastating news that some of their families had been forced from their independent farms by the Aborigines Protection Board. Some of these men [also learned](#) that during their absence fighting for their country, their children had been removed from their wives’ care and placed into government institutions. The [Aboriginal community response](#) to the establishment of the **Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association**, six years after the end of the war, was staggering. Within six months it had opened offices in Crown Street, Sydney, with a membership of more than 600 across 13 branches and four sub-branches around the state.

As a wharf labourer in Sydney, my grandfather Fred **Maynard** was a part of the Waterside Workers Union, which opposed conscription for overseas service, so he didn’t serve. But he carried a deep awareness of international events from his time on the Sydney waterfront. He and other Aboriginal dockworkers had developed close connections with visiting international black merchant sailors. He was [particularly influenced](#) by Marcus Garvey’s [Universal Negro Improvement Association](#) (1920–24, with its message of racial, cultural and historical pride. An Australian chapter was established in 1920.

At the first Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association conference at St David’s Church and Hall in Sydney in April 1925, with more than 200 Aboriginal people in attendance, Dick **Johnson** referenced Aboriginal military service and loyalty during the war. Months later, at the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association’s first half-year meeting, he [was reported](#) in the press as a man “who wears the returned soldier’s badge”. He was elected secretary of the Association’s Central Branch. Johnson remains one of the many important, but overlooked, Aboriginal political activists of the 20th century.

A fervent fighter for justice

Tom Lacey, father of Ernest and Louis, likely carried the trauma of his sons’ experiences with him. He assumed the position of treasurer when the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association was formed, inspired by the surge for self-determination by oppressed peoples across the globe. When he passed away in 1930, the press described Tom as “one of the most forceful advocates of the cause of his people – the Australian Aborigines [...] His death is a distinct loss to his people, and he will be sadly missed.”

As for the **Walker brothers**, it was **Edward** who carried his experience of war into activism. Suffering serious wounds, he should have returned to a hero's welcome. Instead, he was greeted by the severe restrictions and blatant racism of continuing discrimination against Aboriginal Australians. He would become the secretary of the Clarence River branch of the organisation. A fervent fighter for Aboriginal rights and justice, he joined the organisation only a year after he was assaulted and racially vilified. Edward was a prominent figure in 1925 and 1926. Alas, press reports tell us little more than his name. He died in 1976, aged 82.

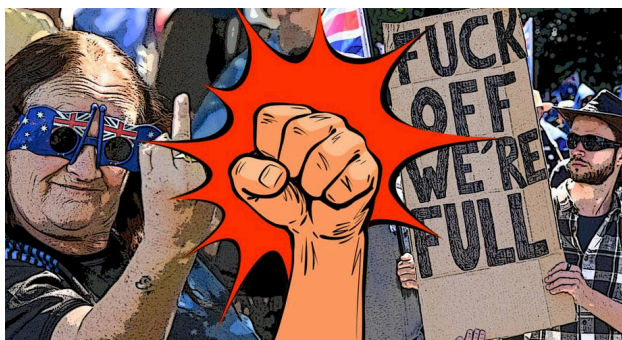
Aboriginal veterans and Anzac

The motives of the Aboriginal men who joined the AIF in 1914–18 were not recorded in any official capacity. But surely they anticipated their service on behalf of Australia would enhance their claims to full citizenship rights on their return. Instead, they confronted deeply embedded racism.

This continued in Australian military service. In the second world war, for example, Private Russell Amato went AWOL three times from three different units, because he “couldn't stand the other soldiers making derogatory remarks about Aboriginal people, particularly women, about whom the talk was sexual”. In Amato's court-martial, the defending officer reported that Aboriginal soldiers routinely faced such discrimination: “it appears that there is a certain element in the camps that brings up the colour bar against such men”. The marginalisation of Aboriginal soldiers from the mainstream Anzac narrative was only addressed from the 1990s, with a concerted effort to draw attention to the service of Indigenous soldiers in the prelude to the centenary in the 2010s.

The Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association disappeared from public view after 1929, harassed, hounded and smashed out of existence by a coalition of the Aborigines Protection Board, the missionaries and the police. However, its legacy continued as its members remained active in pressing for Aboriginal rights.

The migrant dream: Sami Shah, Crikey Mon 27



The migrant dream: arrive, succeed - and then explain why everyone arriving after you is a threat to civilisation

Sami Shah is a multi-award-winning journalist, author and comedian based in Melbourne. He lectures in journalism at the University of Melbourne's Centre For Advancing Journalism and hosts the satirical news podcast News Weakly.

I think of him at least once a week – Deboo Chatterjee, an Indian immigrant and real estate business manager – who stood up at Brisbane's March for Australia anti-immigration rally last year and tried to explain to a crowd of people angry about migrants that he, a migrant, was one of the good ones. He told them he was “a brown man” and “an immigrant from India”, but that he had come here “for the right reasons”. Other immigrants, he argued, were not protecting Australian freedom; they were twisting it.

It was a brave attempt at ideological pole vaulting. Unfortunately, racism's gravity remains undefeated. Mr Chatterjee's speech was booed, then a man dapperly clad in a flag jumped on stage, shoved him and began yelling, “Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, we're sick of this bullshit.” Deboo was then pushed off the stage entirely, discovering in real time that racism is not a customer loyalty program. You do not get a free “you're one of the good ones!” after your tenth denunciation of people who look like you.

I think about him because few images capture Australian conservatism more perfectly: an immigrant trying to join an anti-immigrant movement, only to be physically reminded that the movement does not have a VIP entrance for well-spoken brown property professionals. I've thought about him even more recently, as I've noticed – anecdotally, before anyone from the Bureau of Statistics starts clearing their throat – more immigrants voicing support for Pauline Hanson. (In my own circles, a surprising number seem to be Turkish.) I don't want to overstate that into a sociological finding because “some friends I've seen on Facebook” is not research. But it's become common enough to be politically interesting. **You see, Hanson's pitch is no longer just landing with the people you would expect. It is finding ears among people whose families were once the punchline of the same national paranoia. That is not new, exactly. This is the immigrant ladder-puller. The person who gets through the door, turns around, bolts it, then writes a social media post about the importance of doors.**

It would be comforting to pretend "his 's simply hypocrisy, but that's too simple. Hypocrisy suggests people are violating their own values. Often they are not; many genuinely believe their migration was legitimate, disciplined and enriching, while other people's migration is chaotic, parasitic and suspicious. Their family came with values. Everyone else came with begging bowls. They contributed. Everyone else takes. They assimilated. Everyone else clusters, complains, prays, protests, wears the wrong thing, smells the wrong way.

This is where **Kash Patel** comes in. The FBI director is [suing *The Atlantic*](#) for US\$250 million over allegations about his conduct, including alleged excessive drinking and absences. Patel is a public official in America, where he faces the much-higher-than-Australia defamation threshold of proving actual malice, not merely “they said something mean about me”. In America, this is called the First Amendment. (In Australia, it is called “Yes, but what if powerful people get their feelings hurt?”) The lawsuit is as boring as any other in the Trumpian war on media. But Patel himself is more interesting as part of a broader class: the right-wing diaspora overachiever. The migrant, or child of migrants, who rises through liberal democratic institutions and then devotes considerable energy to making those institutions harsher, narrower and less forgiving.

In Britain, the pattern is even clearer. Rishi Sunak became [the UK's first British-Asian prime minister](#), which was historically significant right up until his government continued the Conservative tradition of treating asylum seekers like a biohazard. Priti Patel, the daughter of Ugandan-Indian migrants, became one of the [great enthusiasts of punitive border theatre](#). [Suella Braverman](#), of Indian-origin and Mauritian/Kenyan heritage, somehow made Patel look like a Care Bear with a “refugees are human” placard.

Now, this does not mean “Indian migrants are conservative”. Indian diaspora politics, just like any other diaspora, is fractured by class, caste, religion, region, generation, education and host country. Indian Americans still lean Democratic overall. British Indians remain politically mixed. But there is a visible pattern among certain successful Indian-origin conservatives in the West. And it makes sense when you look at the migration pathway. Many Indian migrants to the US, UK, Canada and Australia arrived through skilled migration systems. They were selected by states because they were useful: doctors, engineers, IT workers, business owners, academics, finance people. They came with degrees, English, ambition and a justifiable belief in meritocracy. When the system works for you, it is very easy to decide that the system is fair. When a country lets you in because you are useful, you can mistake utility for acceptance.

-

The Immigrant conservative thinks they have been accepted because they are praised as exceptional. But exceptional is one of exclusion's favourite tools. You are allowed in precisely because you are held up against others. “You're one of the good ones” is not a compliment; it's a job offer from the racism department. This is what Deboo Chatterjee found out on stage. You can say the lines. You can wear the right shirt. You can praise the culture, denounce the newcomers, contribute to the economy and insist

you came for the correct reasons. But sooner or later, someone in the crowd will look at you and remember the part you hoped they'd forget – that you are still brown. That you are still foreign enough. That the ladder you pulled up was never yours. And that the people cheering you only liked you when you were useful against someone else. **The migrant dream, it turns out, isn't to just arrive, survive and build something better. Sometimes it's to arrive, succeed, and then explain why everyone arriving after you is a threat to civilisation. Right up until someone shoves you off the stage.**



Pauline Hanson is the original anti-politician politician and wields a political power few ever anticipated. But who really is Hanson? And how has One Nation survived, and thrived?

[The making of One Nation: Pauline explained](#)

Click above for the **PODCAST** from The Conversation Digital Team

MIGRATION: FACTS OVER FEAR

What One Nation won't tell you about immigration in Australia

This pamphlet was issued by Democracy Alliance Australia (Adelaide)

Australia has long been a nation built by migration. Today, right-wing politicians — particularly Pauline Hanson's One Nation — are spreading fear and misinformation about our migrant communities. This pamphlet sets the record straight with facts from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the OECD, the IMF, and independent researchers.

KEY FACTS ABOUT MIGRATION IN AUSTRALIA

30%

of Australia's population was born overseas — yet our social cohesion score has remained high and stable for 17 consecutive years. (OECD / ANU)

\$124M

in economic benefit is generated for every 1,000 migrants who come to Australia each year. (Business Council of Australia)

+1.2%

increase in economic output occurs within five years of a migration intake boost — confirmed by the IMF in 2024.

306,000

net overseas migrants in 2024–25 — down 29% from the post-COVID peak of 429,000 the year before. Migration is already falling. (ABS, 2025)

40%

of Australia's aged care workforce is made up of migrant workers. Without them, our elderly would go without care. (Lowy Institute)

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: MYTH VS FACT

One Nation consistently misrepresents migration data. Here is what the experts actually say:

✗ ONE NATION CLAIMS

"Record immigration is destroying Australia — we need to cut to 130,000 per year."

✓ THE FACTS

Net migration has already fallen to 306,000 in 2024–25 — down from the post-COVID peak. ANU researchers found that media and politicians are using inflated figures (PLT data) that overstate migration by up to 120,000 people. (ABS, ANU 2025)

✗ ONE NATION CLAIMS

"Migrants are the main cause of the housing crisis."

✓ THE FACTS

ANU's Emeritus Professor of Demography Peter McDonald says immigration has had little impact on housing costs. The housing crisis stems from structural supply failures — a lack of building — not migration. Any migration effect is marginal. (SBS News)

✗ ONE NATION CLAIMS

"Migrants take jobs and drive down wages."

✓ THE FACTS

OECD research confirms migration boosts employment for Australian-born workers at all skill levels, ages and genders. There is no evidence migrants suppress wages. In fact, migrants earn more on average than Australian-born workers.

✗ ONE NATION CLAIMS

"Migration is an invasion by a globalist agenda."

✓ THE FACTS

This is inflammatory language used to dehumanise people. anti-migrant "spot the Westerner" video by a One Nation official was condemned by Multicultural Affairs Minister Anne Aly as "un-Australian." (ABC, Feb 2026)

✗ ONE NATION CLAIMS

"We should ban migration from Muslim-majority nations for security."

✓ THE FACTS

The Bondi attack perpetrator's father was from India — not on any ban list. One Nation's "Trump list" model has no basis in Australian law and would be unlawful under the Racial Discrimination Act. (Independent Australia, 2026)



The Eureka Flag Fights Racism and Fascism

For 171 years the flag of the Eureka Rebellion has flown proudly across the country in many working class struggles for justice, democratic rights and an independent Australia. The Eureka flag is a powerful inspiration and a symbol of unity, equality and solidarity of all working people fighting against exploitation and injustice.

At Eureka, the rebels called for the Eureka Flag to be the refuge of all the oppressed from all countries on earth. This is miles from trying to defame Eureka with racism and fascism in anti-immigrant marches and its use by Nazis. Raffaello Carboni, one of the arrested rebel leaders, addressed a monster meeting of miners at Bakery Hill on November 29, 1854 and called on them, “irrespective of nationality, religion and colour, to salute the *Southern Cross* as the refuge of all the oppressed from all countries on earth.” The applause was universal”. The following day, as the flag was again raised, Carboni referred to the miners as “armed men, sturdy **gold-diggers of all languages and colours**”.The Eureka Rebellion united Australian-born and immigrant miners against British colonial authority. The rebels pledged solidarity to each other. They swore the famous Eureka oath “to stand truly by each other, and fight to defend our rights and liberties”. Of the 14 miners killed at the Stockade, only one was Australian-born; the rest were immigrants.

This flag does not belong at anti-immigration marches and must not be used by racists and Nazis. Their racism relies upon on their ignorance of the history of the flag and the Eureka rebellion. The Eureka flag belongs to working people, the unions, republicans, anti-racists and refugee advocates. It can only be a symbol of hatred and division so long as Nazis and racists are allowed to carry it unchallenged as to its symbolism and multicultural origins. The Eureka flag should be reclaimed from the racists and fascists and carried proudly by striking workers and all who “stand together” – not divided by colour or religion – “to defend our rights and liberties”.



“...Irrespective of nationality, religion or colour to salute the Southern Cross as a refuge of all the oppressed from all countries on Earth.”

Raffaello Carboni Eureka Rebel Leader 1854

www.spiritofeureka.org



To stop Australian democracy going the way of the US, here’s what we need to do: Jim Lo Scalzo/EPA, *The Conversation* April 13, 2026 ([click here](#))



Around the world, democracy as a system of government is backsliding. After more than 50 years of liberal democracy in ascendancy, democratic progress plateaued around the turn of the century and is now [going backwards](#).

In 2025, there were only 31 liberal democracies out of 179 countries [assessed](#). And the United States – once the poster-child for democracy – was downgraded from “liberal democracy” to “electoral democracy” because of declining checks and balances on power, freedom of expression and civil rights and equality before the law. Australia is one of the few remaining liberal democracies, and a [leading one](#) at that. But we are not immune to anti-democratic forces or the fraying international rules-based order. **A new Grattan Institute report, [For the people: Future-proofing Australia’s democracy](#)**, identifies the main vulnerabilities for Australia’s democracy and opportunities to build a better, more resilient democratic system.

A bright light in a dark landscape

Australia comes from a place of strength. We are one of the world's leading democracies, consistently [ranking highly](#) on [international measures](#) of democratic health, as well as on a suite of economic and social measures – including [life expectancy](#), [human development](#), [employment](#), and [GDP \(gross domestic product\) per capita](#). This is no coincidence. Our democracy underpins our prosperity and safeguards our rights and freedoms. [International evidence](#) shows democracy supports peace and economic growth, while delivering longer lives and more education. Social trust matters too. Countries with higher [interpersonal trust](#) – like Australia – tend to have higher economic growth and lower income inequality, which in turn support democratic resilience. But the world order in which Australia has flourished is now being seriously tested. These are more turbulent times not just for our economy or standard of living, but for liberal democracies themselves.

Fuel for discontent is building

[Our report](#) takes stock of Australia's greatest asset: the health of our democracy.

- **The good news** is that Australians' support for democracy has been consistently strong – even [growing over time](#). Only a small share of the population is discontent or disengaged with the system, and the data do not suggest either have been spreading.
- **The bad news** is that our social compact is under pressure. This is showing up in growing [economic pessimism](#), [worry for future generations](#), concern about [unfairness](#), declining [sense of belonging](#), and low trust in [political actors](#).

While support for democracy remains high in Australia, satisfaction with how our democracy actually works is [more fragile](#). Satisfaction with democracy is typically lower among groups who are [less well served](#) by the status quo.

- Most obviously, our institutions have persistently failed [First Nations Australians](#), and don't fully support [new migrants](#).
- Lower-income Australians and those with [financial concerns](#) tend to report lower [trust](#) and [satisfaction with democracy](#).
- Renters are [less satisfied](#) than homeowners, and people in regional areas tend to be [less satisfied](#) than people in cities.
- Migrants are an interesting [exception](#) here. Migrants (except for those from the United Kingdom) are typically more satisfied than people born in Australia with the way democracy works here, despite the disadvantages they often face living here. This may, at least in part, be due to direct experience with other systems.

Everyone needs confidence that the system can work for them, even if it doesn't always. Groups who persistently lack security, opportunity, or solidarity under the current system cannot reasonably be expected to trust or defend it.

3 big risks

Where there is fuel for discontent, there is increasing risk that global challenges could spark a blaze. Three inter-related global risks are particularly testing for democracies.

- First, the decline in traditional news media and the rise of online and social news sources are fragmenting our fact base, and making misinformation and extreme views more salient in people's daily lives.
- Second, global political tensions and the rise of anti-democratic forces overseas are testing Australia's social cohesion at home.
- And third, the heightened probability of economic, social, and environmental [shocks](#) increases the challenges democratic governments face to deliver better outcomes for their people.

These are risks – not eventualities. The resilience of our democracy is in its capacity to recognise challenges and collectively respond.

And 5 ways forward

Our research and consultation identified five priorities for Australia to build a better and more resilient democracy:

1. Make the most of our parliament

Our elected federal parliament sits at the centre of Australia's democracy. An independent review should consider how to make it more representative and better functioning – to rebuild trust in politics, improve administration of government and enable better long-term decision-making.

2. Nurture belonging and engagement

We need more ways to have a say and be heard and clearer pathways to citizenship. Our public sector leaders should also be actively stitching public engagement into the fabric of our existing institutions.

3. Protect our public sphere

A healthier public sphere requires ensuring the sustainability of our news media and investing in institutions that produce trusted information. We should also experiment with responses to misinformation, to work out which approaches are effective at scale.

4. Tackle the known policy challenges

In a democracy, process matters, but so do outcomes. Australians need confidence that our system of government can work for them and build something better than the status quo.

5. Prepare for the future

Crises are the moments that build trust, or lose it, and the future will almost certainly be more volatile. Governments can prepare by reducing our vulnerability to known risks, building fiscal buffers and calibrating expectations about what governments can reasonably do to cushion the blow.

Governments can and should lead on this. But we mustn't forget that in a democracy, we govern ourselves. This is a task for all of us.

Are 'left' and 'right' useful anymore or do we need a new political alignment? Bernard Keane, Crikey Mar 24, 2026



With the South Australian election serving up hard evidence of the fragmentation of what used to be called the right, and a shift of working-class support from Labor to One Nation — albeit not big enough to stop Labor from amassing a huge victory — is our traditional shorthand for political division useful anymore?

“Left” and “right” have been on life support as easy descriptions of political distinctions for some time now. What is labelled “right-wing populism” combines elements of pre-neoliberal, left-wing economic thinking with reactionary culture warring; sections of the far left bend neatly around to the far right (witness the likes of Jeremy Corbyn and the late John Pilger aligning with Tucker Carlson to criticise support for Ukraine's resistance against Russian imperialism). But the unravelling extends to governments. The ostensibly Labor South Australian government of Peter Malinauskas — a product of the sometimes aggressive, reactionary SDA union that wields such power in that state branch — is pro-business, pro-Israel and socially conservative, and more right-wing than its Liberal predecessor.

And Anthony Albanese has abandoned pretty much every article of faith from his days as a left-wing firebrand, now leading a deliberately centrist government that is the most relentlessly and expensively pro-American in the nation's history. Major party criticism of the United States under the Trump regime is now to be found on the Coalition side from Andrew Hastie, while Labor MPs are cowed into silence, too scared to even suggest the Iran war is illegal. Some aspects of the ongoing fragmentation are nothing new: blue-collar support for conservative leaders is hardly novel — witness the support for

Nixon against anti-war protesters, or Reagan Democrats, or, briefly, “Howard’s battlers”. But such shifts have usually been within the major party framework (as blue-collar support for Trump is now). For the first time here, we’re seeing that shift driving a non-major right-wing party, and at levels sufficient to pose an existential threat to the incumbent conservative force. In the case of the Liberal Party, that movement has already been crippled by the flight of traditional Liberal voters to community independents who are more accurate reflections of the “liberal” core of the Liberal Party than the party itself has been for some decades.

The fragmentation of the traditional political spectrum is best examined through the prism of demographic differences, which are more substantial now in terms of their political effect than at any time in recent memory. Age is now a key variable. Under-35s are strongly progressive: according to both the Roy Morgan and DemosAU polls, around a quarter of under-35s support the Greens, not far short of the ~28% support for Labor. One Nation support is weakest among younger voters (15% in Morgan; 19% in Demos). One reason is that, compared to all voters, younger voters are far more likely to have degrees — around 50% of young women and 40%+ of young men have degrees. Support for One Nation declines, and support for the Greens and Labor rises, with educational levels. Indeed, not finishing Year 12 is a strong indicator of support for One Nation. Senior voters are more likely to back the Coalition. The Morgan poll breaks out support among over-65s, and shows persistently higher levels of support for the Coalition, not just over Labor — that’s a given — but over One Nation as well — Hanson and co. poll nearly ten points lower among over-65s than 55-65 year olds. It’s as if, having grown up with Menzies and Gough, boomers won’t ever surrender the idea that politics is about Liberal and Labor.

One Nation’s support is thus very much among the middle-aged: according to the last couple of Morgan polls, support for Hanson among 35-49 year olds is around 10% higher than among under-35s; among 50-64 year olds, it’s 3-8 points higher again. Gender also plays an important role in One Nation support — both Morgan and Demos suggest men are several points more likely to support One Nation than women, which might link back to the slightly higher level of education among women. Support for the Greens is also persistently, though not massively, higher among women. And as is well-known, location is crucial, too: distance from the GPO is a reliable guide to voting intention — the closer you are, the more likely you are to vote Green or Labor, the further away, the more likely to vote One Nation (and the stronger that link between education and One Nation support becomes). Interestingly, the most recent [Demos poll](#) suggests that the Coalition, once the main beneficiary of this distance effect, is now missing out on it almost entirely. Its vote is stuck at 20% no matter where you go. But income, traditionally a strong determinant of voting intention, is seemingly less reliable as a guide. Being on over \$200,000 a year means you’re much more likely to be a Coalition voter, but, at least according to [Demos](#), **income** otherwise has surprisingly little effect on party support.

It’s not merely voting intention that divides Australians. Age, sex, location and other factors like education dramatically affect how people view the world. The Lowy Institute’s [long-running annual polling](#) shows the marked degree to which Australians have different perspectives. Younger people, women and people in urban areas are significantly less trusting of the United States, and more trusting of China, than older people, men and regional Australians, who are much more likely to think the alliance with the United States is important. Younger people and urban Australians are more likely to view China as an economic partner than a security threat (men and women are evenly divided). Young people, women and urban Australians are more supportive of immigration. They are much more likely to regard the climate crisis as a serious challenge requiring action. Young people and urban Australians are significantly less supportive of manufacturing in Australia. These differences have little to do with the traditional left-right divide; younger urban progressives might be more green and prioritise the climate crisis, but they have less interest in propping up manufacturing, a left-wing shibboleth now embraced by the Nostalgia Right as a path back to twentieth-century certainties. But if not left and right, what kind of political spectrum should we now be thinking about?

Voters no longer want managers – they want fighters: Kos Samaras, Pearls and Irritations, April 15, 2026

Republished from [Redbridge Intel](#) 10 April 2026



Across Western democracies, voters are abandoning consensus politics in favour of leaders willing to fight, name enemies and prosecute a cause – a shift now reshaping both left and right

There is a word that gets used a lot in political commentary right now – realignment – and like most words deployed too frequently it is beginning to lose its edge. That would be a mistake. What is happening across western democracies is not a normal cyclical correction. It is not voters punishing an incumbent before resetting. It is something structurally different, and the pace of it is unlike anything the post-war order has produced. The last time politics moved this fast, this violently, the 1930s remade the ideological map of the developed world in under a decade. Parties that had governed for generations collapsed. New formations, some democratic, some emphatically not, rose to fill the void. What connected the leaders who survived and flourished in that moment was not policy sophistication or administrative competence. It was **combatancy**. The willingness to name an enemy, offer a cause, and fight for it without apology.

We have spent 80 years constructing a political culture that was, in many ways, a deliberate response to that era. The long-settled period from 1945 to the COVID19 pandemic produced institutions designed to smooth edges, build consensus, and reward management over confrontation. It produced a leadership culture that prized the ability to govern from the centre, to absorb competing interests, to project calm. That culture served a purpose. For a long time, it worked. It is now a liability.

Voters across the democratic world are not, in the main, looking for administrators. They are looking for combatants. Not performers (that distinction matters) but genuine fighters who are visibly willing to absorb hostility in defence of a position, who can prosecute an argument rather than triangulate around it, and who treat politics as something worth fighting over. The managers and the consensus-seekers are being punished not simply because their specific policies are wrong, but because they are seen as the custodians of an economic policy framework that has produced a generation of declining living standards, entrenched asset inequality, and structured financial stress. Their competence is not in question. Their loyalty is and voters have concluded it is not to them.

Within the Australian centre-right, almost nobody has grasped this. The Coalition's default mode remains transactional and managerial, calibrated for an electorate that no longer exists in the proportions that made that approach viable. The party's instinct, when confronted with the rise of One Nation and the structural haemorrhage of its base to harder-edged alternatives, has been to offer policy mimicry rather than authentic contest. That doesn't work. Voters who want **combatancy** can spot an imitation of it immediately.

There are exceptions. Matt Canavan and Andrew Hastie are both, in different registers, genuine articles. Hastie is prepared to name the economic villains of deindustrialisation, the financialisation of the economy, and the managed decline of industrial communities, in a way that most of his colleagues find

professionally uncomfortable. Canavan in many ways is similar. Both possess something rare in contemporary centre-right politics, the capacity to hold ground under pressure, to absorb the social cost of being ideologically legible.

In 2026, that quality may be the only thing that matters on the Right. One Nation is not winning votes simply because of its policy positions. It is winning them because it offers an emotional register, grievance dignified, enemies named, cause prosecuted, that the Coalition has systematically abandoned. The party that can match that register authentically, rather than simulate it awkwardly, will determine the medium-term shape of the Australian right.

But to analyse this purely as a right-wing phenomenon is to miss half the story, and arguably the more consequential half. The same forces producing combatant politics on the right are building, more slowly, but unmistakably, an equivalent pressure on the left. And the evidence for it is no longer theoretical. It is arriving in election results across multiple democracies, in forms that the institutional centre-left has not yet seriously grappled with.

In New York City in 2025, Zohran Mamdani, a democratic socialist, who entered the mayoral race as a decided longshot, won against a field of credentialed, well-resourced centrists. He did not win by moderating. He won by fighting. His platform treated the housing crisis not as a policy challenge requiring managed reform, but as a moral emergency with identifiable authors, landlords, financiers, and the political class that had protected them. His campaign had an enemy, a cause, and a candidate willing to prosecute both without apology. The Democratic establishment of the most powerful city in the world found itself unable to generate a figure capable of matching the emotional register he offered. That result did not happen in a vacuum. It happened because the demand for it had been building for years in precisely the demographic, young, urban, economically locked out, that Australian politics is watching accumulate on the left side of its own ledger.

In the United Kingdom, the 2024 general election produced a result that the headline numbers - a landslide Labour victory - partially obscured. The Greens quadrupled their parliamentary representation, winning four seats on a platform that positioned them explicitly to Labour's left on economic questions, and their national vote share significantly outperformed expectations. More telling than the seats won was where the votes came from: disproportionately young, disproportionately renters, disproportionately concentrated in areas where the cost of living had most visibly outpaced the capacity of institutional politics to respond. These were not protest votes cast in despair. They were directional votes, expressing a preference for a harder-edged, enemy-naming politics that Labour under Keir Starmer, a figure almost perfectly optimised for the managerial consensus mode, was constitutionally incapable of providing. This trend again was repeated at the by-election in Gorton Denton, where in the heart of working class Manchester, the Greens again provided a home for the young and diverse looking for more of the same.

Across Europe the pattern repeats. In Germany, the hard left BSW movement, despite its internal contradictions, drew substantial support from voters, many of them former SPD, who had concluded that the social democratic tradition had become the administrative arm of an economic settlement responsible for their decline. In France, the *La France Insoumise* party under Jean-Luc Mélenchon has consolidated a left-combatant position that, whatever its internal contradictions and the significant toxicity that now attaches to its leader personally, has structurally altered what the French left sounds like. The Socialists' recent recovery under Raphael Glucksmann has challenged LFI's dominance, but it has done so by partially adopting its emotional register, by becoming harder-edged, rather than by returning to the managed centrism of past years. Even LFI's opponents on the left are now fighting on its terrain.

The common thread is not ideology in any precise doctrinal sense. It is temperament. It is the willingness to say that the current economic arrangements have authors, that those authors have names, and that the purpose of political power is to confront them rather than accommodate them. This realignment will not stop at the ballot box. The media class that assumed its capacity to set political agendas remained intact is confronting the uncomfortable reality that the voters now determining electoral outcomes largely do not consume, trust, or respond to them. Corporations accustomed to managing political risk through relationships with centrist governments are facing a world in which the political actors with real momentum regard corporate influence not as a stakeholder consideration but as an adversary. Neither has a ready answer to that problem right now.

The generation driving this pressure in Australia is one that politics has not yet fully reckoned with. Gen Z are the most politically activated cohort to enter the electorate in decades. They are also, as a group, the least attached to the institutional arrangements of the post-war settlement, including Labor, its party machine, and the broad-church Labor tradition that managed the Australian left for a century. They did not grow up with Hawke-Keating as a reference point for what progressive government can accomplish. They grew up with stagnant real wages, asset prices that put home ownership structurally out of reach, and a sense that the people running the country's institutions, regardless of which party nominally controlled them, were optimising for a world that had already passed, and for the generation that had already won.

Right now, Gen Z sits across a mixture of Greens and Labor, with the weight shifting depending on geography and the specific texture of local anger. The Greens capture the more ideologically coherent end, voters who want enemies named (the landlord class, the fossil fuel sector, the corporate capture of government) and are prepared to accept the cost of being in permanent opposition in order to maintain that clarity. Labor captures a portion who remain attached to the idea of actually governing, of operating within rather than against institutional structures. What neither party has yet produced is what the right is beginning to find in figures like Canavan and Hastie: a genuine left combatant of sufficient scale and political skill to synthesise those two impulses, the willingness to name enemies and the ambition to actually win.

This is the defining political vacancy on the Australian left, and it will not remain unfilled indefinitely. Mamdani in New York did not emerge from nowhere. He was the product of years of organised political energy, in housing activism, in unions, in community organising, that eventually crystallised around a figure with the skill to carry it into an electoral contest. The energy equivalent in Australia is present. The crystallisation has not yet occurred. They have no natural home yet. As my [Brahmin Left](#) piece argued, Labor's response to the slow drift of its traditional working-class base was to execute a substitution, replacing the old Anglo-Australian outer-suburban coalition with the multicultural communities of Melbourne's outer west and north-west, communities that brought strong family-based voting patterns and a deep historical attachment to Labor as the party of fairness.

For a time, it worked. But the 2022 Victorian state election showed the seams beginning to split, with the non-major party vote swelling across those same corridors, Werribee, Melton, Broadmeadows, in ways that received almost no serious analysis inside the Labor movement. The Gen Z voter in those communities is not the inner-city Greens voter. They are not looking for the cultural vocabulary of the progressive professional class. They are looking for someone who will fight about the things that are actually making their lives harder – the cost of rent, the length of the commute, the sense that the system is tilted against people who work for wages rather than own assets. The Greens, as currently constituted, cannot reach them. Labor, as currently oriented, is not speaking their language. That is an enormous political vacancy.

This is the deeper significance of what is happening across Western democracies right now. It is not simply that the right has found its combatants and the left has not. It is that the demand for *combatancy*

is structurally symmetrical, it exists with equal force on both sides of the ledger, generated by the same underlying conditions and whichever side of politics figures out how to meet it first, and most authentically, will exercise decisive power over the decade ahead. **On the right**, the race is already underway in Australia. One Nation has established the emotional register; the question is whether the Coalition produces figures who can match it with institutional legitimacy. Canavan and Hastie suggest the talent exists. Whether the party's culture will allow it to flourish is another question entirely. **On the left**, the race has barely started here, but the international results are a leading indicator, not a curiosity. Mamdani in New York, the UK Greens, the broader European left insurgency: these are not isolated local events. Early data point to a pattern that will eventually arrive with full force in Australian politics.

Gen Z is an enormous political energy in search of a political form. The party or figure that builds the architecture to contain and direct that energy, that finds a way to speak the language of genuine contest without the cultural exclusions that limit the Greens' reach, will not be a minor player on the Australian left. They will be its future. The 1930s rewrote the political map not because the institutional parties of the centre were incompetent managers, or that their loyalty to the economic status quo was not in doubt. That was precisely the problem, they were too slow to recognise what the electorate was demanding. The smart money is on history being unkind to those who make the same mistake twice.

What actually is 'civilisation'? The dark and loaded history behind Trump's threat against Iran: Bruce Buchan, *The Conversation*, April 10, 2026 (Extract)

In the midst of a war of his own choosing, the president of the United States, Donald Trump, recently tried to threaten his way out of it. On April 7, he posted on Truth Social that unless Iran buckled to his will, "a whole civilization will die tonight". He presumably meant to amplify his [earlier claim](#) that he intended to bomb Iran back to "the stone age". Trump's words are rarely to be taken at face value. Yet his recent [incitement to war crimes](#) proved shocking, even by his standards. But what actually is "civilisation"? And why has Trump's threat [struck a nerve](#) in even his most ardent loyalists?



The word "civilisation" is a creation of the age of Enlightenment in the 18th century. It was coined to describe a social order that [European philosophers and writers](#) then believed was coming into being in parts of Western Europe. The word derived from older terms in Europe's lexicon. To be "civil" denoted politeness, and "civility" a code of peaceful conduct essential to [city life](#). One of the first people to use the word was French political economist [Victor de Riqueti](#), Marquis de Mirabeau (1715–89). In his work *L'ami des Hommes, ou, Traité de la Population* (The Friend of Man, or Treatise on Population) (1756), civilisation implied three things. Mirabeau described the historical role of Christianity as the "primary driving force of civilisation". What he meant was Christianity curbed human violence and turned Europeans by slow degrees over time toward amity and friendship. In other words, the civilised knew God and acted with divine purpose – or at the very least, were less violent and cruel than the "uncivilised". Mirabeau also employed the word to describe the "natural cycle of barbarism and [...] civilisation". Here, he implied all peoples were located somewhere along a pathway in time between the condition of mere barbarians, and the exalted heights occupied by the civilised. Not all may scale the heights, but those who do must take care to avoid falling. The civilised could see more, know more and have more. That "more", Mirabeau suggested, was the evidence of their civilisation. The barbarian by contrast, simply lacks. Finally, Mirabeau used the word to warn of a "return of barbarism and oppression" that would destroy "civilisation and liberty", endangering "humanity in general". Civilisation needed defence, especially from the so-called "barbarians", who he warned may be among us, rather than threatening hordes beyond the city gates. [For the full article click here](#)

THE REST IS HISTORY



Pits, picket lines and pop music – the 1984-5 UK miners' strike

ABC Radio National: The Music Show, 29 Mar 2026

Brought to you by ABC Radio National, Presented by

[Andrew Ford](#)

We've dug into the archives for a special program looking at the role that music played in the UK miners' strikes: a political, industrial and personal struggle. From Peggy Seeger to Paul Weller, Billy Bragg to brass bands—there's music supporting the striking miners, songs tormenting strike-breakers and tracks referencing National Union of Mineworkers leader Arthur Scargill and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

[Click here](#) for the podcast

The US-Iran war, the crisis of globalisation and problems confronting the oil industry: Richard Stone (independent SA journalist) April 25, 2026



The US-Iran war is best assessed in the context of the crisis confronting contemporary globalisation. The US remains desperate to reassert their traditional hegemonic position after successful challenges from other countries and trade blocs. Globalisation, based in free market economics of deregulation and privatisation, was composed of four key elements which were specifically designed for the furthering of the US-led **Monroe Doctrine**:

- the economic supremacy of the United States and their military-industrial complex;
- US hegemony at the centre of the global economy;
- the exploitation of developing countries, where profits were high and labour was cheap;
- US control of global energy and mineral resources.

The lofty ideals of the Monroe Doctrine subsequently proved a spectacular failure for the US as they used the so-called New World Order during the 1990s to flood countries of the South with a deluge of finance capital funnelled through international financial institutions over which they had control. As their failure became recognisable the US resorted to a second Cold War.

US control of the globalisation process has now been successfully challenged by serious competitors, including China, **BRICS** & ASEAN. South-South economic co-operation ensured poorer countries made greater and more efficient use of investment capital. While according to IMF data the US has retained nearly 13% of global GDP, it is slowly dropping, China already has 17.9%, BRICs has 44% and ASEAN has 7.4%. [**Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa etc*]

The Trump presidential administration represents the aggressive side of Wall Street, and their central consideration remains the supremacy and control of the Petro-Dollar; however, competitors now tend to use other currencies, with implications for the US economy. The writing is clearly on the wall for the White House. The recent erratic military attacks on Iran by the Trump administration - the outcome of questionable advisors using flawed intelligence - have increasingly proved counter-productive.

Since 1948 the US have relied upon Israel as their main regional hub for US interests, including intelligence-gathering and analysis; the diplomatic relations between the two countries have also become increasingly fraught as Israel has used its leverage to expand its borders into Palestinian lands with settlements to create a Greater Israel. Meanwhile, Israel itself has become increasingly encircled by BRICs members and associates, making it diplomatically isolated and highly vulnerable in the medium to longer term.

Iran, the centre of Shia Islam and a dominant power in the Middle East is a member of BRICS and has challenged US's hegemonic position in the region, with its region has many oil deposits and its logistic centrality to global supply-chains. While many of the oil deposits lie in areas of the region controlled by Sunni Islam administrations, supply-lines remain largely in the hands of Shia administrations. Iran has considerable geo-strategic significance with control of the Straits of Hormuz, for example, which are used as shipping lanes for large numbers of maritime vessels, including oil tankers, for access and egress. Iran's decision to close the Straits has triggered an energy crisis with far-reaching implications for the world economy. Higher prices for basic energy sources and their limited availability have already affected most countries. The longer the war and diplomatic tensions, the greater the effect on the global economy. (International Energy Agency, April 2026)

Decisions taken by previous Liberal administrations in Canberra (PM's Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison) to close six of Australia's eight oil refineries on the basis that it was cheaper to buy oil from elsewhere, have now been shown as typical of globalisation nonsense, marked by their race-to-the-bottom and cost-cutting mentality. Importing refined oil products is now proving very expensive, and Australia has to import over 90% of its oil. The assumptions of level economic playing fields, the Monroe Doctrine and just-in-time supply chains, have now been shown to be severely wanting in common sense. Australia's oil refineries, moreover, do not have high-level productive capacity. The recent fire at the Geelong plant has severely affected production levels, while Ampol's refinery in Queensland is more than sixty years old and in urgent need of upgrading. (*The Australian*, 16/17 April 2026)

It is not difficult to establish certain critical points in Australia and the likely outcome for consumers: trucking companies directly involved in the haulage and logistics of basic foodstuffs have already experienced soaring diesel prices with costs passed onto consumers. Shipping companies, likewise, have already complained about rising costs, and have added extra charges upon containers of between US\$300-700 to the standard charge of US\$2300, with serious implications for imports and exports and the employment prospects for manufacturing workers. The construction industry has also been seriously affected. (*Australian* 14 April 2026)

As the peace talks between the US and Iran continue to stall, a crisis is looming in Australia. It will increasingly dominate political discourse and the budget throughout May, if peace talks fail, as levels of available fuel continue to be scarcer and more expensive. The Albanese government in Canberra is already dealing with four different scenarios from economic analysis and modelling. It has already been noted, from worse case scenarios, that a prolonged war in the Middle East could effectively destroy more than \$42 billion of economic growth, leading to 160,000 job losses. (EY., *Weekend Australian*, 18-19 April 2026)

Stewart Sweeney, History's Wisdom, Democracy's Future - Threats, Challenges and Openings for Democratic Socialism in the 21st Century: LHSSA State Conference, University of Adelaide, Feb 14, 2026

History is always speaking in three tenses: it remembers the past, diagnoses the present, and argues about the future. From that standpoint, two propositions matter here and now: history has not ended—and capitalism is not forever. When people say democracy is in trouble, they usually point to the obvious dangers: demagogues, misinformation, polarisation, foreign interference, the slow corrosion of norms. Those dangers are real. But they are not the deepest threat. The deepest threat is older, more structural, and more enduring. The fundamental threat to democracy always was and now more than ever is capitalism. That is not a slogan. It is a historical diagnosis.

Capitalism begins with a claim rarely stated but relentlessly enforced that the conditions of life can be privately owned, traded, leveraged, and directed for commodification and accumulation. Democracy begins with another claim: people should collectively govern the conditions of their lives. Across the modern era, those two claims have existed in a long, unresolved tension.

Sometimes the tension is softened by compromise. Sometimes it is suppressed by force. Sometimes it erupts in crisis. In the twenty-first century this tension is becoming impossible to ignore—because capitalism has now incorporated the planet so completely that it threatens the planet's viability. Democracy's crisis is no longer merely a crisis of institutions. It is a crisis of the social order those institutions have been asked to contain.

The past: democracy was won – and capitalism was restrained – by struggle

Political democracy did not arrive as a gift from enlightened elites. It arrived through struggle: through the fight to widen political membership and to civilise capitalism. The franchise expanded because workers organised, because women organised, because excluded groups forced their way into citizenship. Public education, public health, industrial rights, welfare states—these were not capitalism's gifts. They were concessions wrested from capital by organised popular movements. At the high point of social democracy and democratic socialism, three ideas were treated as normal—not because they were utopian, but because they were practical tools for making democracy real.

- **Nationalisation and public ownership:** the principle that key infrastructures—energy, transport, communications, sometimes banking, and core public services—are too important to be left to commodification and private extraction.
- **Redistribution:** the principle that markets, left to themselves, produce inequality and insecurity, and that democracy requires deliberate sharing of wealth, income, opportunity, and time.
- **Taxation:** not a necessary evil, but the civilised price of a civilised society—the mechanism by which universal services are funded, rentier power restrained, and private wealth converted into public capacity.

These ideas were not fringe. They were mainstream within labour movements and social-democratic settlements. They were also understood by those with longer horizons as a bridge beyond capitalism, because they shifted power over investment and life conditions from private accumulation toward public purpose.

And here is the deeper historical point: capitalism could tolerate “democracy” most comfortably when democracy was restricted. When the vote belonged to property-owning men, the contradiction between “rule by the people” and “rule by owners” was softened by defining “the people” as owners. As democratic inclusion widened, the contradiction sharpened. Expanded political democracy began

to threaten what capital most wanted to protect: the private control of investment, workplaces, land, and resources.

Capital's resistance is sometimes blunt—strikebreaking, repression, media power, colonial rule, patriarchal constraint. But its most durable power is **structural**: what capital can do simply by shifting investment, moving money, threatening jobs, and manufacturing “confidence crises”. Even when no one makes a phone call, governments learn to anticipate this. They internalise it. They govern in the shadow of markets and property. That is why so many citizens recognise the same infuriating feeling: elections come and go, governments change, but the range of what can be done feels strangely narrow. Formal democracy (elections, parliaments, rights) sits alongside an economic order and constitution: property rights, corporate law, investor protections, central bank orthodoxy, trade and investment rules. When these two constitutions collide, the economic one sets the boundaries of the “possible”.

The present: democracy remains national - capital has become planetary

What has changed is not capitalism's core logic, but its scale and infrastructure. Earlier phases globalised trade and finance. Today capitalism has globalised production itself. Supply chains distribute labour across borders. Firms arbitrage wages, taxes, and regulation. States become competitive platforms. The contemporary dilemma is simple: democracy remains mostly national and episodic; capital is transnational and continuous. Democracy is tied to **territory** - Capital moves across it. That mismatch further narrows the democratic field before anyone has even voted.

Add financialisation - the return of the rentier and the dominance of asset logic. Profits flow increasingly from finance, rent, and capital gains rather than making and doing. Housing becomes an asset class. Infrastructure becomes a revenue stream. Governments are told to govern like households: cut, privatise, “live within your means”.

Then comes the platform era. The public sphere where citizens form judgments, learn, argue, and organise has been outsourced to corporations whose business model is attention, extraction and behavioural prediction. More speech, less deliberation; more noise, less collective capacity to decide. Outrage becomes a resource. Politics becomes segmentation. Shared public reason decays, not only because of ideology and propaganda, but because of the business model of the cloud.

And capitalism's commodifying reach extends further into life itself—especially into care. Capitalism depends on care work to reproduce labour and sustain communities, yet contemporary capitalism intensifies time poverty and squeezes public provision precisely when care needs are rising. When childcare and aged care become profit centres, quality degrades, accountability weakens, workers are squeezed and democratic citizenship is quietly undermined because citizens lose the time, security, and trust required for active civic life. All of this would be serious enough. But then consider the decisive difference of the twenty-first century-global warming. The growth imperative has collided with a finite planet. Climate disruption, biodiversity collapse, water stress, soil depletion, and extreme heat are binding constraints on civilisation.

If democracy cannot impose limits, it becomes ceremonial. If capitalism cannot accept limits, it becomes suicidal. This is why the crisis of democracy cannot be separated from capitalism. Citizens experience a world where housing is unaffordable yet property wealth is protected; where care is praised yet carers are underpaid; where climate emergency is named yet action remains merely incremental; where inequality is lamented yet rentier power deepens. Politics becomes spectacle and paralysis at the same time. In that space, right-wing populism thrives. It takes real grievances and redirects them toward scapegoats while leaving capital largely untouched. Capital, for its part, has no inherent loyalty to democracy. It can live with democratic erosion so long as order, ownership, and accumulation are preserved.

Australia

The case of Australia sharpens this diagnosis because it shows how democratic limits are produced not only by capitalism generally but by national economic structure and location in the world-system. Australia is rich, but semi-peripheral in the capitalist world-system and the danger is not stasis, but decline. We enjoy high living standards, but our economic structure has too often been shaped by extraction and property rather than sustained investment in high value-adding, innovation-rich, complex production—the “core-like” activities that command technology, design, manufacturing capability, and strategic control. And if capital continues its long-term pattern here of preferring quick returns from minerals, land, finance, and monopoly rents over patient investment in complexity then Australia increasingly risks becoming more exposed, more dependent, more squeezed. We drift toward the periphery or, at best, remain in an increasingly crowded and competitive semi-periphery.

The renewed task for social democracy in Australia is not only to argue for fairness within Australia. It is to name the world-system and Australia’s location and role within it and then act to change it. That means campaigning for a national plan to prevent downward drift and lift the character of our economy: expanding the share of “core-like” activity (high value-adding, skilled, export-capable, sustainable, and innovation-rich) so that prosperity becomes resilient rather than accidental. Once you name that goal, the old democratic tools stop looking like separate policies and start looking like one coherent project.

Location, Location, Location

The future cannot be posed as utopia waiting beyond capitalism, nor as incremental repair inside capitalism. It has to be posed as a practical historical task: It requires a combination of dual democratisation plus national uplift - as one project, one direction, one strategy.

- Dual democratisation means democratising the state *and* democratising the economy—so elections do not merely rotate managers of the status quo while the deep decisions of investment, ownership, and life conditions remain privately governed.
- National uplift means changing Australia’s economic structure and resulting location in the capitalist world-system so we do not slide down the world-system hierarchy—so we expand the share of core-like activity and build a more complex, sustainable, inclusive economy.

These are not two agendas. They are the same agenda from two angles. You cannot lift a semi-peripheral economy by pleading with capital to behave differently. And you cannot deepen democracy if the economy remains dependent on investment decisions made for private accumulation.

So, the hinge of history is investment. Who decides what gets built? Where is capability developed? What industries expand? What industries contract? What infrastructure is prioritised? What skills are funded? What gets decarbonised—and at what pace? The democratic socialist answer is clear: these decisions are too consequential to be left to the invisible hand, because the invisible hand has a visible record of short-termism, rent-seeking, underinvestment in complexity, and ecological denial. A future worth having requires democratic capacity to steer investment: through public planning, public finance, public procurement, mission-driven institutions, and transparent accountability. That is why the old tools must be reintroduced – but updated for the present:

- Public ownership and nationalisation are democratic leverage. Energy grids, essential infrastructures, and parts of the digital commons cannot be governed for private extraction if we are serious about decarbonisation, resilience, affordability, and economic upgrading.
- Redistribution is democratic architecture. If people are drowning in insecurity - housing stress, precarious work, time poverty - they cannot participate in self-government. Redistribution and the social wage - education, health, housing, care, and security - build the human foundations of uplift.
- Taxation is state capacity. Tax reform is how a society increasingly funds transformation, restrains rent-seeking, deflates speculative incentives, and turns private wealth—made possible by public goods—into public capability.

Thus, Public ownership steers. Redistribution sustains. Taxation funds. Together, they make democracy deeper and national uplift possible.

Power beyond elections - the lesson history insists on

One final lesson is strategic - and history is ruthless on this point - elections are necessary, but insufficient. Capital's power is structural and continuous. Democratic power must build beyond elections: in unions, civic coalitions, cooperatives, municipal experiments, public-interest media, political education, and – crucially - administrative capacity to implement change at speed. Otherwise the counterattack arrives on schedule: “confidence crises”, investment strikes, media campaigns, legal blockades, bureaucratic drag, manufactured scarcity narratives. Windows for change do open: contradictions emerge, crises fracture legitimacy; climate shocks force planning; care failures delegitimise markets; housing breakdown destabilises asset politics. The question is whether we are ready when opportunities emerge.

The good O.I.L. and the discipline of hope

This is why the work of revitalising democracy and the road to change starts with organising. We need the good O.I.L.—the “O” of Organising, the “I” of Ideas and the “L” of Leadership.

- Organising that matches the real economy: care, logistics, platforms, housing struggles, climate resilience and the everyday infrastructures of life.
- Ideas that replace market realism with democratic realism; that re-normalise public ownership, redistribution, taxation—and, in Australia's case, the case for national uplift as a matter of democratic survival.
- Leadership that is not just electoral technique or managerial competence, but the building of durable counter-power: capable of governing, capable of holding nerve, capable of acting at emergency speed with legitimacy.

And finally change requires the discipline of hope. Hope is not optimism. It is commitment. It is the decision to imagine, organise, and persist even when outcomes are uncertain. It is grounded in the hardest historical knowledge of all: history never stops - and while capitalism is endlessly adaptive, capitalism is not endless. Capitalism is not forever. The question is whether the next economic and social order is shaped democratically, with justice and ecological sanity or whether it arrives through breakdown, coercion, and control. Democracy has never been a gift. It has always been a struggle. In the planetary age—and in a semi-peripheral country at risk of sliding down the world-system to become peripheral—the struggle for democracy is inseparable from the struggle to civilise, and ultimately supersede, capitalism before capitalism completes the work of hollowing out self-government and destabilising the Earth that makes politics, and life, possible.

Traditional Labor policies dumped in South Australia: the 2025 Deputy Premier issue and the 2018 Mt Gambier byelection: Chris Sumner

Christopher John Sumner AM is a former politician who is the longest serving Attorney-General in the State of [South Australia](#). He was for 19 years a member of the [South Australian Legislative Council](#) for the [Australian Labor Party](#) and led the party in that House in government and opposition.^[1] He served at times as acting Premier. (Wiki)

In the last 12 months in South Australia the Labor Party and Government have overturned two policies previously regarded as fundamental to its core philosophy of enhancing democracy. This has happened without any internal debate or recognition of the significance of the issues.

1 A Deputy Premier being appointed from the Legislative Council

In September 2025, the Deputy Premier Susan Close resigned from her position and did not contest the March 2026 election, and in an unprecedented move her replacement was Kyam Maher, the Attorney-General and Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council. The normal practice between the Right and Left factions of the SA Labor Party is that if the Premier is from the Right, then the Deputy Premier must be from the Left – but although there were several Left Members in the House of Assembly who could have filled the position, Maher from the Legislative Council was preferred by Premier Peter Malinauskis who made a “captain’s pick.” My comments relate to matters of principle not the capacities of the individuals concerned.

No one seems to have given thought to the fact that a Government is formed and Premier appointed because they have the support of a majority of Members in the House of Assembly. The appointment of Kyam Maher as Deputy Premier ignores the conventional constitutional position as well as Labor (and Liberal) rules that a Deputy Premier should come from the Lower House. (While there were four Members of the Legislative Council who held the office of Premier in the period after responsible government in 1857, this has never happened since 1881.)

From its beginning in the late 19th Century the Labor Party had attempted to ensure universal suffrage for elections to the Legislative Council, but It was not until 1975 that all property qualifications were finally removed. There were also battles over the power of the Legislative Council on financial matters – thus Money Bills can now only be introduced in the House of Assembly, and the Legislative Council may only “suggest” amendments to them; and while Council retains the power to defeat regular Supply Bills this has never happened. The first Labor Premier in 1905 Tom Price was at the forefront of these battles. The current constitutional position is that the House of Assembly has primacy in the formation of Governments and the introduction of Money Bills.

In South Australia the formal position of Deputy Premier was not established until 1968 (Des Corcoran under Premier Don Dunstan), and until now – under both Liberal and Labor Governments –the Deputy Premier came from the House of Assembly. While I, as Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council in the 1970-80s, had very short periods as Acting Premier, any proposal that the Deputy Premier should come from the Council would have been laughed out of court – as it would have been with any subsequent Labor Governments until the present one.

Labor’s longstanding traditional policy has been for eventual abolition of the Legislative Council and initially for curtailment of its powers to defeat legislation – similar to those of the House of Lords in the United Kingdom. In 1968 the requirement for a referendum before abolition or alteration of the powers of the Council was agreed to by Don Dunstan and Liberal Premier Steele Hall – to get Hall’s support for removal of all property qualifications*. Despite this concession Labor has been reluctant to give any status to the Council which could help it challenge the policies upon which a Government was elected or to give it enhanced status on consideration of Money Bills which could adversely affect the capacity to govern. It is somewhat ironic that the appointment of a Deputy Premier in the Legislative Council and the consequent enhancement of its status happened in the same year as the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the sacking of the Whitlam Government caused by the Senate blocking Supply Bills.

It could be argued that since the Legislative Council is now democratically elected by proportional representation and full adult franchise, any concern about the enhancement of its status has

dissipated. Since these changes in 1975 the Labor policy has softened on abolition, and it is no longer part of the Labor platform. Even so, it might be thought someone on the Labor side would have tried to emphasise that Governments are made in the Lower House based on policies taken to an election, and appointing a Deputy Premier from there reinforces the point. In fact, however, there was no discussion of the issue and the nomination of Maher for the position was agreed to by Left Ministers in consultation with the Premier – and simply announced to other Left caucus members. The Left and Right nominees for the Ministry were then endorsed by full Caucus without a contest or any comment raised about this issue.

What has happened is unprecedented and reflective of the fact that factional considerations in the ALP are paramount and have trumped Labor tradition and policy. Some might regard what I have to say as pedantic and not reflective of modern reality, as society changes and political parties must reflect these changes to remain relevant. Even if this is the case appointing a Deputy Premier from the Legislative Council is unprecedented, contrary to previous policy and practice and worth recording.

2 *Downgrading democracy - no by-election for the seat of Mt Gambier.*

At the 2014 general election Troy Bell was elected as the Liberal Member for Mt Gambier. In 2017 he was charged with serious fraud offences accused of stealing more than \$430,000 from not-for-profit educational institutions in the period before he was elected to Parliament. He fought the case all the way - including on procedural issues and the powers of ICAC (which were rejected), but was eventually convicted. He was sentenced to five years gaol with two and a half years non-parole period – for what the judge found to be a sustained course of serious offending, arguing there had been a deliberate course of deceptive conduct for which no remorse was shown nor any restitution to the victims made. He left the Liberal Party and won as an Independent in the elections of 2018 and 2022 despite wide publication of the charges against him.

On Thursday 28 August 2025 Bell's appeal against his conviction was rejected by the Court of Appeal and he indicated he would stand down from Parliament. On Monday 1 September he sent an email of formal resignation to the Speaker Leon Bignell. In a statement to Parliament on 2 September Bignell advised receipt of the resignation but that he had decided not to issue a writ for a by-election in Mt Gambier, and the seat would be filled at the general election due on 21 March 2026. The by-election could have been held on Saturday 5 October, so the consequence of Bignell's decision was that the electors of Mt Gambier were deprived of representation for five months. Bignell's reasons require scrutiny.

Firstly, the Electoral Commissioner advised him that the earliest dates for the by-election would be chosen from the Saturdays of 4,11,18 and 25 October. He rejected 4 and 11 October because they included school holidays and because 4 October was part of a long weekend. This left only 18 and 25 October which would mean the new Member would only spend six or eight sitting days in Parliament before the election. These reasons are spurious; the paramount consideration should be the maintenance of democratic representation and whatever the merits of avoiding school holidays or long weekends for a general election they do not have decisive weight here. Furthermore, the assertion that the new Member would only have sat in Parliament for a few days promotes the mistaken view – which politicians usually vigorously contest – that this is the only role parliamentarians perform. Bignell also assumed that the Parliament would not sit on the optional three days set aside in December (correctly as it turned out) and not sit in January or February of 2026. There was no basis for this latter assumption,

indeed the reverse is the case. The failure of the Marshall Liberal Government to sit during these months was strenuously opposed by the Labor Opposition before the March 2022 election, Labor and the Independents on 9 February 2022 staging a mock sitting of the House of Assembly to highlight the lack of accountability of the Liberal Government. Unless there had been a complete about-face by Labor on this issue – which was known to him at the time – Bignell was not entitled to assume there would be no Parliamentary sittings for over three months.

Secondly, the cost was estimated to be \$950,000, which seems to be an inflated figure but, in any event, begs the question of when the cost of democracy becomes too much. The bias should be in favour of ensuring effective representation.

Thirdly, Bignell said the people of Mt Gambier, at the 2018 and 2022 elections, voted for Bell in full knowledge of the charges he faced and that he could be convicted. There are two serious concerns about this argument - that the electors should have denied Bell the presumption of innocence to which all citizens are entitled and because they voted for Bell in the knowledge of the charges they should be punished by being deprived of representation.

Fourthly, Bignell wrongly said that his decision “is consistent with past practice of former Speakers”. This is not correct, since in all other cases the time between declining to proceed with a by-election and a general election was much shorter. In 1859 a Member of the House of Assembly died, and no writ was issued because of an imminent general election. Sir Jenkin Coles died in December 1911 but no by-election was held because the general election was scheduled for February 1912. On 11 August 1982 Howard O’Neill Labor MP for Florey resigned because of ill health and a by-election which elected Bob Gregory was held on 4 September even though a general election was to be held later that year (in fact on 6 November). This is the clearest precedent ignored by the Speaker.

When the issue of a potential by-election for Mt Gambier arose in August 2017 after Bell was initially charged, the then Labor Speaker Michael Atkinson said he had been advised by the Clerk of the House of Assembly that the only two precedents for not holding a by-election across 186 House of Assembly by-elections held in SA were those of 1859 and 1911. He opined that he might not be obliged to issue a writ for a by-election with a fixed term general election due the following March. He was not called on to decide because Bell did not resign - but he would have been mistaken if he had decided that fixed Parliamentary terms made any difference to the precedents and underlying democratic principles that people are entitled to be represented in Parliament. Sec 47 of the *Electoral Act* 1984 says that in the case of a casual vacancy in the House of Assembly the Speaker “must” issue a writ for a by-election. On the face of it this is a mandatory requirement that should not be ignored. No time within which this needs to occur is specified but the Speaker does not have a discretion to ignore it completely just because a date for a general election is fixed for some months later. The strict precedent in SA which accords with democratic principle is that a by-election should be held as soon as possible after a seat becomes vacant. The exceptions cited above involved very short times between a by-election and a general election. In the case of the seat of Florey and Howard O’Neill in 1982 it was known that there would be an election before the end of the year, as at the time there were three-year terms of Parliament and the previous election was held on 15 September 1979.

It is not known whether the Electoral Commissioner had a view about this issue or whether the estimated cost was a concerning factor for him, but it shouldn’t have been. The independent Electoral Commissioner is responsible for the proper conduct of elections and there was nothing to impede him in undertaking that responsibility by a timely by-election – management inconvenience should not have

been a factor. Bignell did not follow the procedures that might have been expected of an “independent” Speaker. The Parliament of Australia website deals with the issue of Federal by-elections which should be equally applicable to the State. Relevant factors in the Speaker making a decision are the possible date of the next general election (known in this case), the cost of a separate by-election and the period that a constituency may be unrepresented.

As to the procedure to be followed by the Speaker, the website says that the vacancy and the cause of the vacancy should be notified to the House at the earliest opportunity – after which the Electoral Commission is consulted about proposed dates and the proposed dates are forwarded to Party Leaders for comment. Bignell did not do this, at least not formally. Then Liberal Opposition Leader Tarzia said that the decision was outrageous and unprecedented and would leave one of SA’s major regional cities unrepresented. Bignell’s response was that the Liberals should have spoken out earlier and he had received no representations from the Liberal Party nor the Labor Party about the merit of a by-election.

This response is disingenuous; Bell intimated that he was going to resign on Thursday 28 August but did not formally do so until the following Monday 1 September – something Bignell acted on immediately and did not discuss the matter with the Liberals. It would be an interesting inquiry to find out what discussions he had with any one from the Labor Party something about which the Opposition failed to ask. Bignell also responded that for Tarzia to say his actions were unprecedented is incorrect and the Liberals should do their homework before misleading the people of SA. It is obvious from the above that Tarzia was right, there was no valid precedent for what the Speaker did.

Was an electoral advantage given to the Independent?

In a fifth justification of his decision Bignell said the Mt Gambier electoral office would remain open and staffed until after the general election. These staff were able to advocate and follow up inquiries for the constituents of Mt Gambier with government departments, ministers, local government and the private sector. This arrangement provided the Government with the capacity to deal with and take credit for resolving issues without the usual involvement of the local Member. However, there was a democratic deficit with no elected member involvement in the issues of concern.

What Bignell did not tell anyone is that during this time one of the electorate office staff was Travis Fatchen, an Independent candidate who ultimately won the election. Fatchen was a friend of Bell and had been his electorate office manager for over ten years. It is not clear whether at the time he made his decision Bignell was aware that there might be an Independent candidate and that this could be Fatchen (Mt Gambier should be solid Liberal territory but has a history of supporting Independents, one of whom became a Minister in Labor Governments). What is known is that Fatchen declared his candidacy on 17 October 2025 and then (based on what the Speaker advised) had five months as a candidate while being employed and paid while working in the electorate office. The Speaker and the Department of Premier and Cabinet would have been aware of this at least from this time, but it is not clear whether they took any steps to monitor the situation and ensure compliance with probity rules. Fatchen was not entitled to use the facilities of the office for campaign purposes and nor was he entitled to campaign during regular office hours unless he had arranged to take leave. With sitting Members, electorate offices are an important resource for use in a campaign, but this does not apply to staff of a member. It is not known whether Fatchen, even though not elected, took advantage of this in his campaign. This arrangement provided an unfair advantage for Fatchen over other candidates and should not have been permitted.

PostScript: Independent Speaker legislation a farce.

In 2021 issues arose when the Marshall Liberal Government became a minority government due to the defection of Liberal Members. Most importantly this led to the successful passage of a motion of no confidence in the Attorney-General Vickie Chapman for misleading the House of Assembly. Further, the opportunity was taken to make the Speaker “independent” by passage of the *Constitution (Independent Speaker) Amendment Act 2021*. The legislation says that the Speaker cannot “be a member of or actively participate in the votes or proceedings of a registered political party” except during the “relevant election period” which means after 1 July in the year before the general election. This means someone who is elected Speaker after an election must resign from their Party but can rejoin after 1 July in the year before the next election and contest (with the support of the Party that they couldn’t be a member of for most of the Parliament). There is no prohibition on attendance, observing and socialising at any Party meetings or functions, something which Speakers are likely to want to do to maintain contact with the Party that they will be entitled to rejoin. This amendment may seem unbelievable, but it had appealed to the Opposition which was enjoying the discomfort of the Marshall Government.

In 2021 there were genuine independents in the House of Assembly – the Liberal Speaker was ousted and Dan Cregan one of the Independents was elected in his place. He described his election as an historic moment and that an impartial Speaker was a vital improvement to democracy. It turns out that nothing could be further from the truth and the whole business has been revealed as a farce – albeit a very convenient one for the Labor Opposition at the time. Undoubtedly the factional shenanigans within the Liberal Party contributed to the defeat of the Marshall Government. In March 2022 the Labor Party won a convincing majority, but Cregan maintained his position as Speaker. In April 2024 he joined the Malinauskas Cabinet and Bignell took the Speaker’s position after resigning from the Labor Party. Bignell won the seat of Mawson for Labor in 2006, 2010, and 2014 with increased majorities. A redistribution for the 2018 election placed Kangaroo Island in the seat of Mawson. A majority of electors on Kangaroo Island had never previously voted Labor and Mawson became a notional 2.6 percent Liberal seat – but which Bignell narrowly won.

As a ‘retail politician’ Bignell leaves the likes of Barnaby Joyce for dead, and in 2022 he won the seat with 63.8 percent of the two-party preferred vote. He was a Minister in the Weatherill Labor Government from 2013 to 2018. He is rusted-on Labor, and under the 2021 “independent” Speaker changes he could have rejoined the Labor Party to contest the 2026 election but decided not to run again. With the Labor win in 2026 a Labor Member and former Minister Nat Cook has been chosen as Speaker and has resigned from the Labor Party until July of 2029 – when she can rejoin in order to contest the election in March 2030 with the backing of the Labor Party. Bignell was a “Clayton’s” independent Speaker and made no attempt even to go through the motions of consultation about the Mt Gambier by-election. At the time he made his decision he was aware of specialist academic opinion that the by-election should be held. Emeritus Professor of politics Clem McIntyre said that leaving the seat vacant would be “unprecedented in modern times.” He was being generous to Bignell and the Malinauskas Government – there is no precedent at all.

The current provision for an Independent Speaker in the SA House of Assembly when one Party has clear majority is window dressing, does not reflect reality and should be repealed. This position has been confirmed by the Government supporting Nat Cook for the position of Speaker. Four genuine Independents were elected and adherence to the spirit of the Independent Speaker legislation could

have seen one of them elected. There is precedent for an Independent Speaker without previous experience as a Member of the House of Assembly – Ted Connelly after the 1975 election. Geoff Brock, one of the current Independents has been a Member of Parliament since 2009, held Ministerial Office for six years and undoubtedly had the experience and capacity to fill the role. His appointment would have given primacy to the original purpose of the legislation.

Don Dunstan devoted his political life to the enhancement of democracy and the facilitation of all citizens’ right to vote – something continued by the Bannon Government’s changes to the electoral laws in 1985. Recently, however, Labor traditions have been discarded. Most disturbing is that these decisions and particularly that of the Speaker (which was supported by the Government) create new precedents. Bignell’s decision forms part of the practice and customs of the House of Assembly and it could well be used to deprive people of the right to vote for even longer periods.

Labour History Society SA (Inc)

MEMBERSHIP FORM 1/7/2025 – 30/6/2026

Date

Name

Organisation/Union (if applicable).....

Street.....

Suburb Postcode:

Phone Mobile:.....

Email:.....

Comments:

Type of Membership: (please tick where relevant)

Waged - \$30	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unwaged – \$15	<input type="checkbox"/>
Small Organisation - \$50	<input type="checkbox"/>
Large Organisation- \$100	<input type="checkbox"/>

Payment options:

1) Cash at AGM – please tick if already paid

2) Cheque made out to Labour History SA (Inc.)

Postal address for payments and return of forms to:

The Treasurer, Labour History SA (Inc.)
PO Box 520
TORRENSVILLE PLAZA SA 5031

3) Directly to People’s Choice Credit Union A/c No 2313116, BSB No 805 050
stating **Labour History Society (SA)** and **YOUR LAST NAME IN FULL** for payment
identification

Do you require a receipt? Yes No

Office use: Receipt No Amount paid \$.....

Membership No Date

Annual Membership is from July of current year to following 30 June
Enquiries Ron Slee & Email : ron.slee@bigpond.com