

**POPULISTS, DEMAGOGUES AND CELEBRITIES –**  
**CHALLENGES TO PROGRESSIVE CAMPAIGNING IN**  
**THE AGE OF TRUMP**

Speech by Bruce Hawker to the 2018 Annual Frank Walker Memorial Lecture  
of the New South Wales Society of Labor Lawyers

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At the outset I would like to thank the NSW Society of Labor Lawyers, particularly Lewis Hamilton, Tom Kelly, Janai Tabbernor and Eliot Olivier for inviting me to speak this evening. I also thank Bill Hawker for his research and his very significant work in devising the questions in the poll I will discuss tonight.

My main reason for speaking about populism tonight is because it is an internationally ascendant political phenomenon - one that deserves our close attention here in Australia. My second purpose though, is that it allows me to contrast populism with the values that underpinned and drove Frank Walker's reform agenda.

And to be clear from the outset, my beef is not with the people who populists - especially the hardliners - try to attract. It's with the manipulators - the ones you see and the ones you don't. The great sham, in my opinion, about demagogues is that they don't actually have any fixed values or principles underpinning their politics. They practice the politics of expedience - exploiting fear and legitimising prejudice. This is the antithesis of everything Frank Walker stood for.

I knew Frank Walker and Frank Walker was no populist. In fact, his reforms were directed squarely at helping the people certain populist leaders seek to pillory and isolate. If there is a common denominator to the reforms Frank introduced it is that they were aimed at improving the lot of the men, women and children in our society who are least able to defend themselves - the dispossessed and marginalised minorities. The very people who Donald Trump targets, defames and demonises.

In all my years in politics, I cannot recall another state politician with such a consistently strong record of empowering the powerless. And this conviction made Frank a difficult person for his own cabinet colleagues to handle. There weren't many votes to be garnered introducing the first state based land rights legislation in Australia. Or repealing laws that had criminalised, prostitution and truancy. Nor did he spark a popular chorus of approval when he gave legal protections to young offenders, wards of the state and the mentally and physically infirm. But I would argue that it is these types of groundbreaking reforms which gave that Labor administration a special character. When elected in 1976 it was seen as a youthful, socially progressive government, whose premier, Neville Wran QC, was prepared to take on vested interests - including corrupt cops.

Mind you, the Wran slide election victories of 1978 and 1981 and the solid win in 1984, were proof that it was also a remarkably popular government. In very large part that was because Neville Wran and his senior group of ministers understood that a mix of both the popular measures and the harder reforms - the ones that Frank

usually sponsored - was necessary to satisfy a broad spectrum of voters and Labor values. They were willing to lose some support with the tough changes because they knew they had a deep well of goodwill from which to draw. And it's telling that so many of Frank's reforms, controversial as they were back then, have stood the test of time. Land rights, criminal law reform, child welfare, juvenile justice and adult guardianship laws have in large part endured.

Like many of you here tonight, I was a friend of Frank. But more than that, I was lucky to be a member of his staff when he was Attorney-General and in his other portfolios, including youth and community services and housing. I have to say, it was a great start in politics.

Over the last thirty-five years I've been privileged to have worked and campaigned with some of the most impressive people in the modern Labor Party – two prime ministers, twenty-one premiers and chief ministers and I can't remember how many opposition leaders. And it all started with Frank Walker in 1982.

With the benefit of hindsight, I have to say that he, above all others, was the enduring influence on my subsequent career as an adviser and Labor campaigner. Frank taught me that what counts is the long game and now, having played my own very long game in politics, I understand how right he was. Diatribes against the enemy of the day, tweeted at three o'clock in the morning are not the long game – they are the daily distraction.

But I also understand what Frank told me so many years ago – that the reforms worth losing skin over, the ones that promote fairness and equity and go to the core of Labor values, will come under constant attack. In a sense, it is an incredibly long game - because there is no end to that contest – it goes on and on.

The other important lesson Frank Walker taught me was that progressives must be pragmatic. Sometimes we must compromise in order to keep moving forward. I will return to this point later, but suffice it to say, there are a lot of ex-Labor voters these days - and as progressives we need to increase our engagement with this group.

Frank also showed me that to succeed we need to work harder than those who just want to defend the status quo. So what did that mean in practice for him and those he worked with? Within government it meant that we had to be well organised and work together to provide him with the arguments to see off attempts to slow or reverse reform. So, Frank insisted on a large personal staff. In fact, it was suggested that his policy unit was larger than the Tasmanian public service. It also meant

cooperating closely with ministers like Bob Debus, Ken Gabb and their staffs to present a solid front in cabinet. One of my jobs, for example, was to ensure that Frank and likeminded ministers had comprehensive briefing notes and suggested positions on every significant cabinet submission. This ensured that the compromises usually came from the other people around the cabinet table.

As a sidebar, years later when Bob Carr, a stalwart of the Labor Right, was recruiting staff for opposition, he focused on people from the left – precisely because of Frank’s dominance of the cabinet debate. Bob wanted advisers who could come up with policy. Kris Neal, David Britton, Steve Lyndon, Rob Griggs and I had all come out of the left.

Frank always used his position as Attorney-General to full effect. The Attorney-General, as a matter of course, received early notice of every significant policy proposal – it was the ultimate ‘access all areas’ pass. So I and others would be routinely despatched to represent him on any number of committees – youth and community services, health, education, police and corrective services, his position took us anywhere and everywhere. That was where some of the most important policy work was done. For example, the child sexual assault taskforce, chaired by Helen L’Orange, who headed the pioneering women’s coordination unit in the Premier’s department, was responsible for a groundbreaking rewrite of our sexual assault laws.

Frank was an incorrigible meddler in other ministers’ portfolios. On one occasion he despatched Laurie Patton, who is here tonight, and another adviser to Terrania Creek in far north NSW to report on what was happening with the felling of old growth forest up there. It was looking like becoming an early manifestation of the greenie versus timber worker conflict and threatened to cause serious internal ructions. Based on Laurie’s report, Frank pushed through cabinet a proposal to compensate and retrain displaced timber workers. Not only were those trees spared, but an internal war was avoided. On his resignation, Neville Wran cited saving the rainforests as his greatest achievement.

Years later, one of Bob Carr’s most talented advisers, Graeme Wedderburn, would work with Bob Debus, Mark Aarons, environment groups and the CFMEU to ensure that those native forest agreements were completed through negotiation rather than confrontation. And that raises an important issue I will discuss tonight. How was it that in the 1980s and 90s Labor at a state and federal level was able to keep Green supporters and blue collar workers in the tent and yet we can’t do it today? We need to learn from that experience.

In those days, the Attorney-General's department was brimming with talent. And for good reason - talent attracts talent. The late Doctor Sandra Egger ran the Bureau of Crime Statistics – a vital cog in the evidentiary machinery required to support and defend the repeal of the *Summary Offences Act*. That act had been used for years as a means of personal enrichment by crooked police, of whom there was an oversupply, as we now know from the Carr government's Wood Royal Commission into the NSW Police. Similarly, Doctor Greg Woods QC was both a public defender and director of the criminal law review division, producing a conveyor belt of reforms to the criminal statutes. And when we needed the Solicitor-General's advice, it was just a lift ride in the now demolished Goodsell building from the 20<sup>th</sup> floor down to the chambers of Mary Gaudron QC. In about three sentences Mary would sort out a problem everyone else had wasted reams discussing.

It's hard to describe how exciting – no, how exhilarating – it was to work for Frank Walker. Better to be apprenticed to him than Trump, any day. I'll just mention in passing the Friday nights which started at the Wentworth Hotel and then meandered through the inner city, stopping at watering holes like the criterion and the taxi club, collecting fellow travellers as we went – maybe Albo and a Young Labor crew. Until stumps were drawn some time after midnight.

I could spend more time talking about working with Frank and those remarkable people, like Tom Kelly, in those days the Public Solicitor of NSW, otherwise known today as Legal Aid NSW. Tom was later appointed president of the Psychosurgery Review Board. Now, if there was ever a man you'd want to keep on side, it's the chairman of the Psychosurgery Review Board. And Hans Heilpern who went on to head the Department of Youth and Community Services. And Michael Eysers, recruited from the private legal profession to run the Department of Housing. And Dick Persson, Frank's housing adviser who went on to have a remarkable career in housing, health and local government. And the unflappable Pam, who always exuded an air of calm - even on the most desperately busy day. And Roy the driver, the huge former PNG cop who once single handedly held off about fifty tenants union demonstrators trying to occupy our office. For months the seven nightly news opened with Roy, like a front row forward, packing down at the door to our office against the protesters, before finally disappearing beneath a tide of humanity. And there were others – many others – whose work at the political and policy coalface has never really been acknowledged.

In 1988 Labor finally lost and I went to work for Bob Carr in opposition. Even then Frank helped me - and in a very significant way. He took the time to instruct me in the rudimentaries of opposition research - the investigative work of oppositions. The task of holding the government to account and exposing the corrupt and sometimes criminal conduct of ministers. That tutelage was invaluable for us in opposition. And it continues today - the remarkable investigative research by Jennifer O'Hare for Labor over many years can be traced back to Frank's guiding hand 30 years ago. But Frank is only part of the story I want to discuss tonight.

The question that keeps me awake at night is how do progressives counter something as appealing as populism, which, in a single tweet, can mutate into something more virulent? One way is just to wait for it to burn itself out – like a bushfire, or disco music. Or we can try to understand it and then go into battle for the support of all those good people who are drawn to it. In fact, I would argue that many, but by no means all, of the ideas that some populists embrace are shared by progressives. Although first coined in the 1890s, the challenge of creating an exact and concise definition of populism is one that continues today. In their 2017 book 'Populism: A Very Short Introduction', Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser provide what many consider to be the most successful definition to date. To them, populism is:

*An ideology that considers society to be separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite”, and argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.*

They strongly contrast populism with pluralism, which accepts the legitimacy of many different groups and peoples within our society. They also argue that populism is a thin ideology, that can be attached to all sorts of “thick” ideologies with more moving parts, such as socialism, nationalism, anti-imperialism or racism, in order to explain the world and justify specific agendas.

So, it's not so much populism that's the problem - although authoritarian populism certainly is - rather, it's the people who seek to exploit populism. The demagogues. As early as 1833, American writer James Fenimore Cooper provided this description of demagogues:

*They differ from other leaders in that they present themselves as being of the people in stark opposition to the elites. They have a direct, non-rational link to their supporters which goes well beyond a mere popular leader. They manipulate this connection to advance their own interests and ambition. They also violate the usual accepted rules of conduct, attack institutions and sometimes break the law.*

These days they also have huge social media followings and can effectively by pass the mainstream media. In that regard, I would also note that Trump started out as a celebrity candidate and morphed into a populist. It's not surprising therefore, that speculation on his main rivals for the presidency have been celebrities with even bigger social media footprints - Kanye West and Oprah Winfrey. And, as we've seen with Trump, demagogues are likely to have "bromances" with other demagogues - even traditional adversaries. Hence Trump's strange admiration for Vladimir Putin.

Fortunately, Australia doesn't have any demagogues right now, unlike say the United States, Russia, the Philippines, Venezuela and a disturbing number of European countries. But there's no guarantee that this will remain the case, especially as populism continues to grow in popularity in the wake of the GFC and the refugee crises that engulfed Europe. Now, it is true that in recent elections in Queensland and then South Australia, right and centrist populists did worse than had been expected. But, both One Nation and the Nick Xenophon team still managed to garner up to 54.8% and 45.4% of the 2pp vote respectively in some seats.

But that was in a benign economic environment - 27 years and counting of uninterrupted growth. Imagine how they would go if we really hit troubled waters as we've seen in Europe and the states. And if there is one thing that growing older has told me, it's that the social, economic and political landscape can change quickly - very quickly. Tampa is a case in point.

In 2009 I was in Greece working with the Greek socialist party, Pasok, in their successful election campaign that saw George Papandreu elected Prime Minister. Every day I would stop for a coffee in Syntagma Square, a beautiful park bordered by the Parliament in the centre of Athens. It was always a happy meeting place. But, over the next three years, as the Greek economy and its government imploded, that square became the scene of several pitched battles between right and left activists that saw people die horrible deaths. I still struggle to reconcile those conflicting images.

My work has also taken me to Washington on the day Barack Obama was elected and to New York eight years later when Donald Trump had his amazing

victory. The mood in those two cities could not have been more different. In 2008 Washington was a scene of jubilation and spontaneous partying. In 2016 New Yorkers were stunned and largely in disbelief. And among minorities there was a perceptible rise in anxiety. Elsewhere, of course, there was rejoicing, as Trump supporters thought they had a leader who would finally listen to the people.

Whether or not Trump is listening to the people, it is a message politicians will ignore at their peril. And as a campaigner, it's something I have to keep reminding myself to do. A few weeks ago – after I'd agreed to speak tonight – I had to come into the city for a meeting. I was running late, so I decided to drive.

I located a car park I'd never used before and found myself driving deeper and deeper into the bowels of the building. When I reached the bottom level I was greeted by a friendly attendant who showed me where to leave my car. He looked to be in his fifties. He opened the car door as a courtesy and as he did, a look of recognition appeared on his face. "I know you, don't I? Don't tell me. You're...you're...on TV."

I chose not to help out, but nodded and smiled, hopefully not coyly. "Yes", he said, "you're a sportsman right?" In an instant I was transformed – my soft belly was rock hard. Should I play along? Reveal my five set victory over Ken Rosewall at Wimbledon? I could feel my inner Walter Mitty taking over. But I couldn't do it. So I said, "no, but I do comment on politics." For a moment we were both crestfallen. Then he said, "well there's a lot we could discuss." Now alarm bells started ringing. He clearly had time on his hands and I didn't. So I made an excuse and headed for the lift.

On my return though, he was waiting, having remembered where he'd seen me. "do you have a minute?" he asked. Reluctantly, I said "sure." He launched straight in. "I think it's a mistake to get rid of our base load power stations." I wasn't going to let this go unchallenged: "Well we do have to move to renewables, but South Australia is proof you do need a backup capacity." He nodded. I was still keen to leave, but I was sitting in the driver's seat and he was holding the door open and showed no interest in closing it. Then he said, "the problem is that governments don't want to listen to the people."

'The people'. It dawned on me that this was a conversation worth having. I shouldn't be trying to shake this man off, I should be listening to him. So I asked, "what do you think should happen?" He responded, "We need a third party - one that responds to the people." Again, 'the people'. "How would you change things?" He replied: "I'd stop the flow of jobs out of Australia. I was a factory worker for thirty-



five years. Then the jobs dried up. I'd worked all my life in manufacturing and I was just thrown on the scrapheap. That's wrong." I said, "but it's cheaper to manufacture virtually everything overseas. That's just a fact of life." He nodded, then said, "they don't care what happens to me and people like me. I'm a parking attendant. I've been left behind." I wanted to push him a bit: "would you be prepared to pay more for products made here?" He wasn't sure, but insisted that something had to be done. Now my inner pollster was asserting itself. I asked him, "tell me, how have you voted over the years?" "I started out voting Labor and then I became a swinging voter, sometimes Labor, sometimes Liberal. But now I don't support either. They are the same." One of Howard's battlers I thought and disillusioned with Turnbull.

For the next thirty minutes we canvassed the issues and I probed him on his views. He didn't think much of One Nation, thought Trump says the right things but questioned whether he had any real desire for change. Jackie Lambie was more his cup of tea. Interestingly, he didn't think there were too many migrants, rather that some recent arrivals appeared to receive preferential treatment. His words were "we aren't all treated equally." Then he cited the case of his daughter who had to go through hoops to receive 'new start' payments, but a friend of hers with a Muslim and Greek background didn't have to do the same thing. He didn't begrudge his daughter's friend getting the dole - it was the fact that they were treated differently that offended him.

We talked for quite a while. He is 52 and lives in western Sydney. He is a decent man who takes pride in doing a good job. And I'm glad I resisted my initial urge to dismiss his views, because that attitude is precisely what people who feel ignored hate about people like me. And we ignore such people at our political peril. Because, he is, in fact, an old style Labor man.

And we have somehow lost him.

Now, we might be able to win him back, but only if we start acknowledging that he has some legitimate concerns. To that end, I would argue that many populist pronouncements and the prejudices that underpinned them, were, up until about half a century ago, mainstream Labor policies. And that includes support for protectionist trade policies and a restrictive, race based immigration program. Thankfully, much of that was swept away by successive Labor governments, starting with Whitlam and peaking with Keating. But in introducing these reforms, aimed at making Australia a modern member of the international community, there were economic and cultural

casualties. It was the groups who saw their jobs disappearing and struggled to come to terms with a changing, multicultural Australia that started peeling away from Labor.

The first manifestations, in modern times, of this reaction came with the rise of Pauline Hanson in the 1996 federal election that saw Labor defeated for the first time in thirteen years. In the upshot, it was Howard who first saw the threat of Hansonite populism to the Liberals and with Tampa was able to mainstream much of what she stood for, or more accurately - stood against. The task was harder for Labor and arguably, it didn't really deal with it head on at all. Rather, it waited for One Nation to all but self-destruct after Hanson's failure to capitalise on early successes in the 1998 Queensland state elections. And now they're back. But unlike the United States and Europe, where the rise of populism is linked to the global financial crisis, we managed to avoid a recession here.

To me Australian populism isn't so much a response to cataclysmic events, it's more like metal fatigue - the slow reactive process of breaking down resistance until something gives. So why, despite their relatively poor outcomes in recent elections, do Australian populists still have significant currency? Australian populism has to be understood and progressives need to engage with and tailor policy to meet the legitimate (and I emphasise the word legitimate) concerns of people who are drawn to it.

In fact, some of what is described as populist when coming from Donald Trump's mouth cannot be rejected by reference to his uglier prejudices. For example, his stated desire to protect American jobs is a mainstream union issue and has bipartisan support in the United States. And in this country the same concerns operate with respect to Australian jobs. Witness for example, the ACTU and Labor campaigns around 457 visas.

So, we need to go deeper and look to the motives behind populist rhetoric as well as the actual policy prescription. Only by doing that do we get a clearer picture of the phenomenon. And that's why I commissioned some polling which I will share with you tonight.

But first I think we need to understand populism's broad political spectrum. Consider its depth and range.

Nearly 63 million Americans voted for Trump in 2016. In the last round of European elections 55 million votes were cast for populist candidates. That's one in five voters.

And ten of the thirty-three elected governments in Europe rely on the support of populist parties to govern. At the extreme left are groups like Italy's 'five star movement' which gained the most seats in the recent Italian elections and Syriza, which now holds 36% of the seats in the Greek parliament. Jeremy Corbyn's resurgent Labour Party had a phenomenal campaign in 2017 running Theresa May's Tories to the wire.

And in the Democratic primaries, the self-proclaimed socialist, Bernie Sanders, ran a populist campaign to seriously challenge Hillary Clinton. In fact, on my visits to the states in 2016 I was struck by how many people were considering voting for Sanders and when he lost to Clinton, either abstained or voted for Trump. Both of these left populist candidates capitalised on a growing discontent in the left with centrist establishment parties.

Moving along the spectrum, past centrist populists like Nick Xenophon, we then get to the really worrying parties and personalities – One Nation, Trump and the European authoritarian populists such as Hungary's Fidesz Party and Poland's PiS Party. But similar parties are growing in strength in Scandinavia, Germany, France, Italy, Greece, Switzerland and Austria - to name just some. In fact, populist parties have been particularly ascendant in Europe since the global financial crisis and the 2015 refugee influx from North Africa and the Middle East. And in a bizarre development in Italy, we are about to see the hard left five star movement form a government in coalition with Lega, the far right party committed to mass deportations of refugees. Proof positive that populism is more about outsiders versus insiders than left versus right.

Among the European authoritarian populists, the common denominators are opposition to immigration and Islam, deep skepticism with the European Union and any state institutions, particularly the judiciary, that are seen to protect minorities and freedom of the press. The most extreme manifestations of this can be found in Hungary where in April Prime minister Viktor Orban's Fidesz party was re-elected for a third term winning 67% of the seats after receiving 49% of the vote. The next largest party, Jobbik, the political arm of a now outlawed militia that terrorised Roma communities, is even further to the right. Meanwhile, the social democrats could only muster 12% of the popular vote.

Since taking office in 2010, Orban has continued to tighten his grip on power. The parliament offers no real resistance, with laws often being passed within one week of introduction. Orban also appoints the media regulators and in 2016 had a

group of oligarchs buy out the main opposition newspaper then promptly close it down. Appointments to the constitutional court and the lower courts are also in his gift. He has gerrymandered electoral boundaries, entrenching his majority even when his vote has dropped. Orban has also run publicly funded media campaigns promoting the state as the sole line of defence against the millions of Muslim immigrants he claims are entering Europe. He has also declared Hungarian born Jewish philanthropist, George Soros to be an enemy of the state and has banned Soros from financing independent civil society programs, including the Central European University.

I won't labour the point any further - authoritarian populism unchecked by democratic institutions is an ugly creature. In fact, Madeleine Albright, recently wrote in the *New York Times* that fascism is a bigger threat in Europe today than any time since the second world war.

It's impossible not to notice disturbing similarities in European populists to Donald Trump, particularly in his attacks on the courts, independent law enforcement agencies such as the FBI and special investigator, Mueller. And of course his unrelenting attacks on the mainstream media are driven by the same urge - to vilify and deny the facts - even when they are self-evident - through conspiracy type responses like 'fake news' and social media outlets such as *Breitbart*.

But is the threat of this uglier side of populism real in Australia or, as with most of our politics, is it more benign here? This is where my polling comes in: the survey was conducted online by Online Research Unit, between the 24<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April 2018. It contains a nationally representative sample of 527 Australian adults over the age of 18. The participants were selected on three key criteria:

1. Those who indicated they had traditionally supported a major party but there was a fair chance they could vote for another new party;
2. Those who indicated they were planning on supporting a minor party, including the Greens;
3. Those who indicated they did not regard themselves as being tied to supporting any one party.

Our aim in isolating these disaffected voters was to identify their opinions on major issues and to test what it would take to win them back. In generating this sample, we found that 47% of all those contacted fell into these three categories, that is 47% of all Australians we initially surveyed are actively considering or have already left the major parties. Of this group, 41.5% reported that they are not currently working. Based on the ages of the respondents, we believe that around 11% of our total group are retired, meaning that around 30% are unemployed. Based on further demographic data collected in the polling, we can say that 54% of the sample were between the ages of 30-59; 46% are earning under \$70,000 per year and 59% were either currently or last worked in the private sector. And over two thirds live in a major city with a population of more than 100,000 people.

The first key question we asked the 47% who identified as disaffected was to select their three most important political issues (see **Appendix A**). As you can see, 5 of the top 6 are core Labor issues. Two issues stood out - cost of living and health and Medicare. Cost of living was the only issue that was selected by a majority of respondents, with 51% identifying it in their top three. Health and Medicare at 42% was the next most identified, some 20% higher than housing affordability in third place.

With the exception of Greens voters, cost of living and health were also the top two issues across all party groupings. Green voters were the only group that listed the environment in their top three issues. But what was shocking was that it was only selected by 50.5% of the group. Therefore more than 49% of those who identified as supporting the Greens, failed to select the environment in their top three key issues.

While immigration was in the top three for Liberal leaning and other voters, it was only mentioned by 28% of members from both of these respective groups. Next, the poll asked respondents to answer forty-two agree/disagree statements about the current nature of politics in Australia (see **Appendix B**). Some of the results clearly indicated that these disaffected voters are drawn to populist critiques of mainstream Australian politics. These included the fact that:

1. 81% of those surveyed agreed that the rich are getting richer while the rest of the country is being left behind;
2. 78% of those surveyed stated the Liberal and Labor parties are failing Australia;

3. 75% of those surveyed believe Canberra is a cosy club where governments change but little else does; and
4. And 59% see no real difference between the Labor and Liberal parties.

Additionally,

5. Only 28% believe Australia is on the right track;
6. Only 22% feel that Labor represent people like them;
7. Only 20% see the Liberals as representing them; and
8. Only 15% agree the federal government cares about people like them.

It's not all bad news though, 62% were concerned about climate change. This did drop to 56% when Greens voters were removed but still greater than the 38% who are not concerned. Only 36% think we are moving too quickly to renewables. When Greens voters were removed this did increase to 42%, but still not a great win for climate change deniers.

The fundamental question though, was how far along the populist spectrum this group was prepared to go in rejecting democratic institutions. When asked if they were prepared for democracy to be weakened in order for government to get things done, as we have seen in Europe in recent years, a clear majority (47%) were opposed to any reduction. While there was some support for the proposition (30%) it's clear that even amongst this largely disaffected group support for our democratic institutions remains strong. Interestingly, this group also believes it's in our national interest to reduce tensions with China even if it means distancing ourselves somewhat from the Americans. And a majority does not support spending more on defence.

So, what does this disaffected group want from our politicians? An overwhelming 87% believe Australia needs a strong leader who will govern for everyone. It's encouraging that many of the issues that concern them are also key Labor issues. For example:

1. A majority want to see government spend more on health, pensions and education;
2. They are highly critical of big business, especially banks and multinationals;
3. They are concerned that jobs are becoming less secure, and worried that their standard of living is going backwards;
4. A majority are also strongly opposed to private ownership of essential assets such as the electricity network.

Then there are the issues which are contested within the Labor Party:

1. They believe we spend too much on foreign aid and unemployment benefits;
2. They strongly consider that governments are too soft on crime;
3. That our major cities are full; and
4. That free trade deals and foreign workers are destroying Australian jobs.

Then there are the issues where they are at odds with Labor:

1. They believe that immigration needs to be reduced.
2. 55% consider minorities are getting special treatment (although only 45% see indigenous Australians as receiving preferential treatment).

They also see both Labor and the Coalition being equally complicit in putting special interests, unions and big business respectively, ahead of families and small businesses.

But when it comes to a solution for their problems there was confusion in their responses. And that shouldn't come as surprise since the political class has the same problem. For example, they overwhelmingly believe manufacturing should be

supported, but equally that Australia can't return to the good old days and therefore needs to focus on fostering innovative industries.

It seems to me that in this group the head is in direct conflict with the heart. This is borne out to some extent about whether they were prepared to pay higher taxes in order to support Australian jobs. The respondents were almost evenly split for and against this proposition.

The final question was open ended and asked was what it would take for those to return to supporting a major party. Interestingly, this showed that for the most part voters were looking for positive improvements, and for the major parties to give these disaffected voters a reason to return to them. Verbatim responses contained in the category of acting in the public interest included statements such as 'care about the little people'.

Those looking for stronger leadership sought politicians who would 'Act like adults and not like primary school children,' asking them to see the big picture of all Australians and not just themselves. Many were seeking leaders who would 'listen to the people, instead of dictating what they (politicians) want. Freedom of speech for everyone, [the] majority of people are good honest workers, and deserve to be heard.'

Views such as 'stop lying. Stop bedding with big business. Support farmers. Support small business' reflected the desire for more honesty and accountability.

As mentioned above, tighter immigration is undoubtedly an issue for some, and they want those in Canberra to 'select the right people that are allowed to come to Australia.' (I'd argue that this is a veiled reference to Muslim and African immigrants and refugees). Greater cooperation between the parties was also nominated, as was an end to 'infantile negativity on all others' ideas.'

One particular respondent's advice was particularly noteworthy. They felt that the major parties needed to stop worrying about what those interviewed in opinion polls thought.

So, how does this polling help us? Well, for starters, it shows that many of those surveyed have a lot in common with my friend the car park attendant. On key indicators - age, salary, voting history and place of residence he was almost the typical respondent to the survey. And like my friend, the issues that mainly concerned this group were ones that are front and centre for Labor – health, cost of living, housing, jobs, crime and the environment. But there is no doubt that immigration is a significant, though not dominant, factor in their disillusionment with the modern Australia and I suspect, Labor in particular.



And knowing what we do, how can progressives respond? Well, I don't pretend to have all the answers. But here are some thoughts.

Rule one is that there is no one rule. Populism is too fluid and adaptive for that. But, we know from this polling and elsewhere, that these voters respect strong leaders.

We know too, that great, popular leaders like Franklin Delano Roosevelt have emerged at critical moments in history and captured the public's imagination when social disintegration threatens. Roosevelt was a patrician insider. But like Trump, he presented himself as the outsider, championing a 'new deal' against the political and industrial elites who had failed the American people so badly. And it's unsurprising that his greatest rival for the hearts and minds of the dispossessed and displaced was Louisiana Senator, Huey Long, a populist and until Trump, probably the greatest demagogue in American history. He attacked Roosevelt's 'new deal' from the left with his 'share our wealth' tax plan aimed at the wealthy and spread his influence across the country with 27,000 'share our wealth' clubs whose membership reached 7,500,000.

Here in NSW, Jack Lang, the archetypal Labor strong man, championed the victims of the depression and saw off the new guard. My mother, who is here tonight, was told by her mother to kneel down every night and thank god for Jack Lang. She and Paul Keating are probably the last of the Langites.

Strength can manifest itself in different ways. The most challenging election I have ever worked on was the 1998 Queensland campaign which saw Pauline Hanson storm into contention, especially in the regions. Not surprisingly, Opposition Leader Peter Beattie was under pressure from within Labor to accommodate Hanson with a reciprocal preference deal. But Beattie stood his ground, put them last and declared he would not govern with their support.

By the way, the only time we ever had trouble with the 'put One Nation last' approach was when we found a Nazi running in the Whitsundays.

The upshot of that campaign was seats lost in the bush and an equal number gained from the Liberals in Brisbane who were punished for preferencing One Nation. In the end, Labor won with the support of a progressive independent. In that campaign we had to throw the old play books out the window.

And that is another lesson for campaigning against populists - the usual rules of engagement, as Trump showed, do not apply - for you or for them. For example, in the lead up to that 1998 campaign I was despatched to Bondi by Queensland Labor Party Secretary, Mike Kaiser. The man I met there was Michael Caton, who had just

had a runaway success as the main character, Daryl Kerrigan, in ‘The Castle’. You’ll recall that Caton played an Aussie battler, fighting the legal, business and bureaucratic elites in defence of his home. My job was to convince Michael, like me a displaced Queenslander from the Bjelke-Petersen era, to join the campaign. His role, which he accepted, was to travel the length of the state telling would be One Nation voters that if Daryl Kerrigan was voting Labor, they should too. And as for Pauline, “tell her she’s dreaming”. I don’t know how many votes Michael swung, but it was a lot of fun.

I would also argue that Labor needs to keep engaging directly with voters.

In South Australia, Mike Tann conducted 150 Labor Listens meetings in opposition and followed up with regular community cabinets in government. They were a direct engagement with voters - an unfiltered reality check that kept him in touch with a diverse electorate. Of course, when he enacted some of their demands, for example, no more privatisations, he was accused by his critics of being poll driven.

But it didn’t bother the electors who, in a 2002 Adelaide advertiser poll, gave him a 94% approval rating. For a while Mike was up there with Kim Jong-un.

In more recent times opponents of populism have adopted different tactics. Some mainstream European parties have attempted to co-opt parts of the authoritarian populist agenda. For example, in 2017 the governing Dutch People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy’, partially banned the burqa and took a hard line on immigration. In the United States the Democrats, who are effectively leaderless in their fight with Trump, have nevertheless had a number of by-election victories. The most recent and significant of those was in the House of Representatives seat in Pennsylvania, a state that swung hard towards Trump in 2016. The successful Democrat candidate, Conor Lamb, supported the second amendment right to bear arms, spoke up for the coal industry, backed fracking and though publicly pro-choice, made it clear he was personally opposed to abortion. American politics is loose enough to allow this level of policy flexibility. But I couldn’t see it happening any time soon here with either of the major parties.

These two examples however, do highlight a very important political point - that it is essentially quixotic to clash heads with voters on issues they are heavily focused on. Matt Browne, senior fellow at the Centre of American Progress, and others recently published an excellent article entitled ‘Europe’s Populist Challenge - Origins, Supporters and Responses’. In it they wrote, quote:

*‘one may very well disagree with the plurality of voters on the subject of immigration and*

*deplore how the topic has been hijacked by extremists and the tabloid press, but it is impossible to ignore - much less pretend that the public is agnostic about it.'*

I would add that it is possible to address these concerns about perceived special treatment for migrants and refugees and still have a fair immigration and refugee policy. Why should unemployed Australians have to go through so many hoops to get unemployment benefits? In other words, rather than acquiescing to populists by punishing migrants with more restrictive benefits, why don't we improve everyone's access? Why don't we put all unemployed people on a better but equal footing? By approaching the issue that way, we are addressing a key concern of people like my friend the car park attendant and not further disadvantaging migrants.

It may cost more, but a hike in unemployment benefits must be overdue when John Howard is calling for it.

My more general point here is that we are on a fool's errand if in addressing one disadvantaged group's problems we simultaneously create resentment among another part of society that's doing it tough.

Another area that must be considered is the rise and rise of social media. There is no doubt that social media has provided everyone, extreme populists included, with a voice that wasn't there twenty years ago. One by-product of this incredible phenomenon has been the echo chamber effect created by algorithms that relentlessly direct the reader to stories, whether accurate or not, intended to reinforce existing views and prejudices. As Browne and others have observed, quote:

*'social media have helped to erode the shared narrative that once bound societies together.'*

Just as we are now seeing the nefarious activities of platforms like Facebook coming under scrutiny for the misuse of private information, I believe legislators here need to follow the European commission's lead and hold a public inquiry into the impact of social media on public discourse.

And then there is our voting system. It has one very important inbuilt advantage that Australian centrists have over their international counterparts - compulsory voting. We don't have to win elections by inflaming the anxieties and passions of our base as, in its most extreme form, we saw with Trump in 2016. Compulsory voting means that the major parties are focused on winning over the undecided voters in the middle. But, as our polling shows, it is still no guarantee that there will always be a

sizable middle to appeal to.

Much of my focus tonight has been on the right end of the populist spectrum. But the challenges for progressives don't just come from the right. As I said earlier, Labor was once able to champion both jobs and environmental concerns. But since the emergence of the Greens that has changed. There is a real populist appeal for some voters in the purity of their policy prescriptions.

Sometimes, of course that purity leads to unwelcome environmental outcomes - like when they combined in the senate with Tony Abbott's coalition to block the Rudd government's carbon trading scheme. And why? Because it didn't go far enough for them.

Now that I've got that off my chest, I'd suggest that we need to adopt their slogan. 'think globally and act locally'. The Greens have been effective local activists, particularly in the inner city, winning once safe Labor seats. But a small group in the ALP - 'Local Labor' - are working to turn that around. I think that Labor can renew its engagement with many of the disconnected voters I've identified tonight by turning their attention much more heavily towards local issues. By way of example, in 2011 and 2012, when NSW and federal Labor were in a hole, Darcy Byrne, Bill Hawker and a small team of Labor activists started campaigning around the inner west for better services and facilities. This involved going head to head with the Greens over issues of concern to local families, for example, more active sporting facilities at Callan Park and saving Leichhardt Oval. And importantly for young voters especially - fighting to save live music venues, often in opposition to the Greens. The outcome of these successful campaigns was a strong swing to Labor at the Leichhardt council election in 2012 and the election of Byrne as mayor. More recently, that success has been parlayed into Darcy being elected mayor of the larger inner west council following council amalgamations last year.

Those are the building blocks on which successful, progressive administrations can be established. My final suggestion is that we must always avoid the temptation to ignore, demonise or patronise any part of society.

I certainly don't have all the answers and, like most people, I spend a lot of time in a bubble. And while that can be personally comfortable, it's a politically dangerous place to be. It was a mistake I nearly made with my friend in the car park. He reminded me that it's important to step outside and walk and breath in a different atmosphere. As our survey shows, progressives have more in common with him than we perhaps realised. We will never win back that man's support unless we are

prepared to listen and engage. And I'm pretty sure that Frank Walker would have agreed, because as I mentioned earlier, his politics always had a pragmatic tinge. He wasn't an outsider in the Cabinet, but he was in a minority. He knew better than most, that compromise doesn't have to be a dirty word, provided you don't forsake core values - and he never did that.

I miss Frank Walker - his cheerful smile, his acerbic observations and his clearheaded views on right and wrong. But I count myself lucky to have known him and learned from him. And though he's no longer with us, his legacy survives in our statutes, our courtrooms and our collective memory.

Thank you - it was a privilege to be here tonight.

## APPENDIX A

<b>Three key issues</b>		
<b>Issue</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Cost of living</b>	270	51.2 %
<b>Health and Medicare</b>	222	42.1 %
<b>Housing affordability</b>	116	22.0 %
<b>Jobs</b>	112	21.3 %
<b>Crime</b>	108	20.5 %
<b>The environment</b>	106	20.1 %
<b>Education</b>	94	17.8 %
<b>Immigration</b>	89	16.9 %
<b>Aged care</b>	79	15.0 %
<b>Climate change</b>	73	13.9 %
<b>Management of the economy</b>	69	13.1 %
<b>Refugees and asylum seekers</b>	67	12.7 %
<b>Taxation</b>	66	12.5 %
<b>Government debt</b>	45	8.5 %
<b>Superannuation</b>	29	5.5 %
<b>Support for regional Australia</b>	25	4.7 %
<b>Defence</b>	11	2.1 %

## APPENDIX B

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure	Total agree	Total disagree
<b>Australia needs a strong leader who will govern for everyone</b>	58%	29%	6%	2%	5%	87%	8%
<b>Spend more on health</b>	38%	46%	8%	3%	6%	84%	11%
<b>Rich are getting richer while the rest of the country is being left behind</b>	48%	33%	8%	2%	8%	81%	10%
<b>Big businesses, especially banks and multinational companies are failing to pay their fair share of taxes</b>	49%	30%	6%	2%	13%	79%	8%
<b>Our major cities are full and we need to develop new policies to support the growth of regional centres</b>	37%	42%	9%	3%	9%	79%	11%
<b>Liberal and Labor parties are failing Australia</b>	44%	34%	8%	1%	13%	78%	9%
<b>Manufacturing industries should be supported</b>	29%	46%	10%	3%	12%	75%	13%
<b>Canberra is a cosy club where governments change but little else does?</b>	42%	33%	9%	2%	13%	75%	12%

<b>Under private ownership electricity prices have soared and we should re-nationalise electricity infrastructure</b>	43%	30%	9%	4%	14%	73%	13%
<b>We will never be able to return to the old days where we were a strong manufacturing economy, so we need to focus on innovative modern industries</b>	29%	44%	11%	3%	13%	73%	14%
<b>Governments across Australia are too soft on crime</b>	47%	26%	13%	5%	9%	73%	18%
<b>Jobs are becoming less secure, so we need to preserve full time employment and push back the growth of casuals</b>	31%	41%	13%	4%	11%	72%	17%
<b>Spend more on education</b>	27%	43%	15%	5%	9%	71%	20%
<b>We need to support Australia's traditional industries like mining and agriculture</b>	29%	41%	13%	4%	13%	70%	17%
<b>Unions increasingly dominate the Labor Party and big business rules the Liberals, at the cost of families and small business owners</b>	28%	39%	10%	3%	20%	67%	13%
<b>Pay too much tax</b>	30%	37%	14%	5%	15%	66%	19%
<b>Spend more on pensions</b>	25%	40%	16%	5%	14%	65%	21%



<b>Reduce the level of immigration</b>	38%	26%	17%	8%	10%	65%	25%
<b>I'm worried about climate change</b>	26%	35%	17%	15%	6%	62%	32%
<b>My standard of living is going backwards</b>	23%	38%	23%	6%	9%	61%	29%
<b>Foreign workers are taking too many jobs that Australians should be performing</b>	33%	28%	21%	10%	9%	60%	30%
<b>There is no real difference between the Labor and Liberal parties</b>	21%	39%	19%	7%	15%	59%	26%
<b>We spend too much on foreign aid</b>	33%	24%	20%	8%	15%	57%	28%
<b>We need to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to keep Australia competitive with other countries</b>	16%	41%	22%	6%	15%	56%	28%
<b>Minorities get special treatment</b>	27%	28%	19%	13%	13%	55%	31%
<b>The nationals just kowtow to the Liberals instead of looking after rural Australians</b>	18%	32%	13%	4%	32%	51%	17%
<b>Free trade deals are taking away Australian jobs</b>	19%	32%	18%	6%	25%	51%	24%
<b>We need to reduce the role of government and maximise the freedom of individuals</b>	15%	34%	23%	9%	19%	49%	32%

<b>Native title protections for aboriginals have gone too far</b>	26%	21%	22%	14%	17%	47%	36%
<b>We need to increase the role of government to reduce inequality amongst Australians</b>	16%	30%	23%	10%	21%	46%	33%
<b>Aboriginals don't deserve special treatment</b>	20%	25%	27%	16%	12%	45%	43%
<b>It's in our national interest to reduce tensions with china even if it means distancing ourselves somewhat from the Americans</b>	13%	32%	22%	8%	25%	45%	30%
<b>I would support an increase of the GST to 11%, which would raise around \$6 billion each year, if it meant that the federal government would invest to keep jobs in Australia</b>	11%	30%	22%	22%	15%	41%	44%
<b>Spend more on defence</b>	10%	29%	31%	16%	15%	38%	47%
<b>Australia is transitioning too quickly from coal-fired power to renewables</b>	18%	18%	21%	23%	19%	36%	44%
<b>Australia should be a republic</b>	16%	17%	16%	24%	27%	34%	40%
<b>Spend more on unemployment benefits</b>	9%	22%	30%	26%	13%	31%	55%
<b>I am prepared to weaken democracy if it that means governments can get things done for me</b>	7%	23%	26%	21%	23%	30%	47%

<b>Australia is on the right track</b>	3%	25%	33%	21%	17%	28%	54%
<b>Labor represents people like me</b>	3%	20%	27%	28%	23%	22%	55%
<b>Liberals represent people like me</b>	3%	17%	28%	28%	23%	20%	57%
<b>Government cares about people like me</b>	2%	13%	33%	39%	14%	15%	72%