

Social Reform in Melbourne: Past, Present and Future

The Salvation Army Melbourne Project 614

Level 1, 69 Bourke Street, Melbourne

Presentations and Biographies

Kim Carr | Is Social Democracy Finished? Democracy, Inequality and the Battle for Australia's Future

Synopsis

Kim Carr argues that the rise of One Nation, the collapse of traditional political loyalties and growing voter distrust are symptoms of a deeper crisis caused by the exhaustion of the neoliberal economic model and the breakdown of the post-war social democratic settlement. Drawing on recent polling and international trends, it contends that Australia is fragmenting into distinct political and economic blocs shaped by inequality, housing insecurity, regional decline and declining living standards. Kim Carr maintains that the Coalition's electoral base has fractured structurally, leaving Labor as the only political force capable of building a broad popular majority against the growing challenge of right-wing populist and authoritarian movements. He concludes that the future of social democracy depends on rebuilding a democratic economy that restores economic security, social cohesion, public trust and confidence that government can improve the lives of ordinary Australians.

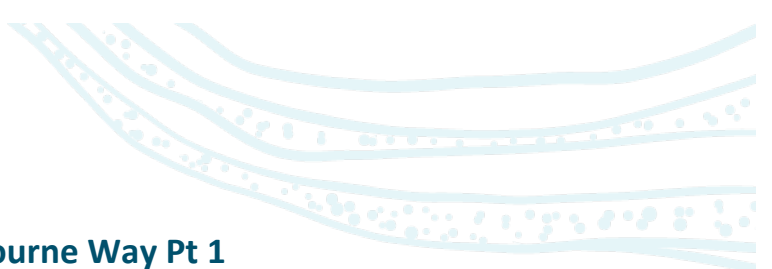
Biography

The Honourable Kim Carr FAHA FTSE is a former Minister for Higher Education, Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, and served as Senator for Victoria for over 29 years.

He made a significant national contribution in these policy areas.

He was an active interlocutor at Senate Estimates and a key member of many Senate Inquiries into Australia's Innovation system. He is widely regarded as a staunch champion of Australia's universities, publicly funded research agencies and Australian Manufacturing. He is currently a board member of the Made in Australia Campaign Ltd.

Most recently he was Vice Chancellor's Professorial Fellow at Monash University (2022-2025). He was awarded the Academy of Science Medal in 2022 – only the second politician, following Bob Hawke in 1990, to be so honoured.



John Cleary | The Salvation Army - The Melbourne Way Pt 1

Synopsis

The Salvation Army's links to Melbourne precede its arrival in Australia, going back to the very origins of the colony. These links were threefold – physical, philosophical and theological – relating to the foundational character of the city of Melbourne. A particular focus will be the 1880s and 1890s with the work of James and Alice Barker in the development of Salvation Army social services in Melbourne and worldwide. Some attention will also be given to the Federation debates and 'White Australia'. The paper will conclude in the 1920s with the division of the Salvation Army into two Australian Territories, one in Melbourne and the other in Sydney, and the move of Federal Parliament to Canberra.

Biography

Retired veteran ABC Radio and Television broadcaster John Cleary is best known as a specialist commentator on Religion. During his almost 40 years with the national broadcaster he also became known as an advocate for public broadcasting, serving as both President of the ABC Staff Union, and later as Staff Elected Director on the ABC Board of Directors. John grew up as a member of the Salvation Army Corps at Brunswick in Melbourne, a corps where, some years before, at the turn of the 20th century, a young man named John Curtin was for a short period, also a member. In 1992 John's book '*Salvo!*' was awarded Christian Book of the Year.

Graeme Davison | 'I was a stranger and you took me in': Social Christianity and Housing Reform in Melbourne

Synopsis

A distinctive tradition of social reform in Melbourne is associated with the efforts of Christian churches to offer shelter for the poor and marginalised. What were the theological and social imperatives that drew Christians to this form of social outreach? How has their focus changed since the days of Oswald Barnett's slum clearance campaigns in the 1930s to the community housing projects launched by individual churches in the 1970s and later? What were the strengths and weaknesses of this tradition? And what lessons does their experience offer for current policy?

Biography

Graeme Davison is an emeritus professor of history at Monash University with a special interest in urban history including the history of housing. His books include *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, *City Dreamers: The Urban Imagination in Australia* and as co-author *Trendyville: The Struggle for Australia's Inner Cities*. Growing up in a Methodist family, he was familiar with the story of Oswald Barnett and once heard him speak. For over a decade he chaired the management committee of a small social housing organisation based on three churches in Melbourne's eastern suburbs.

Alexandra Dellios | Migrants, Multiculturalism and Melbourne

Synopsis

We can trace several multicultural services—and their underpinning philosophies—to the work and advocacy undertaken by migrant rights groups and ethnic welfare agencies in the 1970s. Responding to the dire needs of post-WWII migrant-background communities in the inner-city industrial suburbs of Melbourne, activists and



welfare workers with a migrant-background (working within organisations like the Ecumenical Migrant Centre in Richmond, the Centre for Urban Research and Action in Fitzroy, or the newly formed Australian Greek Welfare Society), advocated for structural change to social services by challenging Anglo-centric biases within health, law, and welfare, and offered new pluralist models of access and equity. This paper will explore their political vision of social care within multicultural Australia, and its resonances today.

Biography

Alexandra Dellios is a historian and Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies at the Australian National University. Her research considers the public and oral history of migrant and refugee communities, and their experiences of working and family life in twentieth century Australia. She is the author of *Heritage Making and Migrant Subjects in the Deindustrialising Region of the Latrobe Valley* (Cambridge University Press: 2022) and *Histories of Controversy: Bonegilla Migrant Centre* (Melbourne University Publishing: 2017), co-author (with A Pieris et al) of *Immigrant Industry: Building Postwar Australia* (Berghahn: 2024).

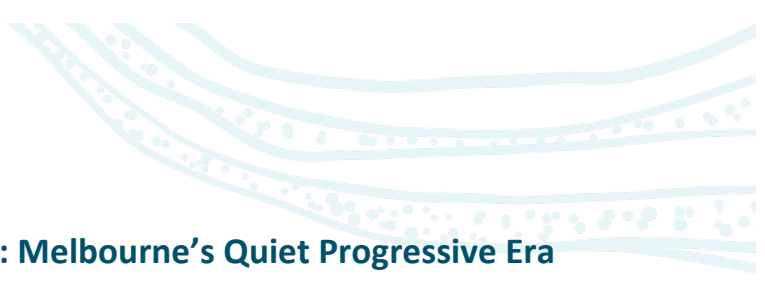
Nick Dyrenfurth | Labourism and the Common Good: The Colonial Labour Movement as Australia's Democratic Post-Liberal Tradition

Synopsis

Recent interest in post-liberalism has revived debate about the common good, the moral limits of markets and the social foundations of democratic life, yet this paper argues that Australia possesses an older and distinctly local tradition that anticipated many of these concerns: colonial labourism. Rather than viewing the nineteenth-century labour movement simply as an industrial project, it reinterprets labourism as a moral and political tradition that rejected both laissez-faire individualism and political revolution in favour of a democratic politics grounded in the dignity of work, mutual obligation, civic equality and national progress. Drawing on the writings of labour pioneers such as William Guthrie Spence, together with the history of unions, friendly societies and the early Labor parties, the paper explores how Nonconformist Protestantism, Christian socialism and civic republicanism shaped labourism's conception of the common good. It contends that recovering this intellectual inheritance offers a new interpretation of Australian labour history by recognising colonial labourism not merely as the foundation of Australian social democracy but as one of the nation's earliest and most distinctive democratic post-liberal traditions.

Biography

Dr Nick Dyrenfurth is Executive Director of the John Curtin Research Centre. He is the author or editor of twelve books on Australian politics, labour history and national identity, including *Mateship: A Very Australian History*, *A Little History of the Australian Labor Party* (with Frank Bongiorno) and *A Powerful Influence on Australian Affairs: A New History of the AWU*. His latest book, *Gutsy Politics: Why Being Right is Not Enough for the Left*, will be published by Melbourne University Publishing in 2027. An Adjunct Research Fellow at Monash University, he is a regular media commentator on Australian politics, public policy and political history.



Andrew May | By-Laws and Better Behaviour: Melbourne's Quiet Progressive Era

Synopsis

Since the time of municipal incorporation in the 1840s, a quiet reform agenda was being written into municipal by-laws, licensing regimes and public infrastructure — from safety regulations in public space, street-stall licensing, and the provision of sanitary facilities to public health education. This talk touches on that municipal progressive tradition, asking where its ideas came from, who they served and excluded, and how we might think of the fine and often contested line between civic improvement and the nanny state. Reading Melbourne's ordinary regulatory history this way reveals reform as something enacted through everyday governance as much as through protest and legislation.

Biography

Andrew J. May is Professor of History in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne where he has been a faculty member since 2000. He directed *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne* project and was historian member on the Heritage Council of Victoria 2015-2023. His books include *Melbourne Street Life* (1998), *Espresso! Melbourne Coffee Stories* (2001), *Federation Square* (2003, co-author), *Welsh Missionaries and British imperialism: The Empire of Clouds in North-East India* (2012), and *The Story of Melbourne Lanes* (2024, co-author). He is currently writing a cultural history of skin cancer in Australia, a social history of the Indian hill station Shillong, and co-editing a history of Government House Victoria in this its sesquicentenary year.

Brendan Nottle | The Salvation Army - The Melbourne Way Pt 2

Biography

Major Brendan Nottle has been a Salvation Army officer for over 30 years. He has served as the chaplain of the Mighty Collingwood Football Club since 2000.

Together with his wife and mission partner, Major Sandra Nottle, Brendan runs the Salvos' operations in the City of Melbourne, from TSA Melbourne Project 614's historic site at 69 Bourke Street. They have done so since 2003. The Nottles have worked with Melbourne's most vulnerable and marginalised people for decades.

In 2020 Brendan was asked to be the face and voice of the Salvos' annual national Red Shield Appeal, which raised millions for their social and community work across Australia. Brendan's 614 team raised a record \$190,000.

In 2019 Brendan was nominated as a finalist for the 2020 Australian of the Year (Victoria), alongside journalist Adele Ferguson, AFL champion and MND awareness advocate Neale Daniher, and musician Archie Roach.

In 2017 Brendan walked to Canberra to highlight the issue of homelessness, and to call on federal politicians to develop a multi-partisan, national plan to solve Australia's homelessness and housing crises. His 40-day walk traversed 703 km and included an icy swim across the Murray River. (He was happy to fly home afterwards.)

During his trek, Brendan spoke to thousands of Australians at public events, raised more than \$123,000, and gathered more than 9,340 signatures on a homelessness petition he presented to Prime Minister Turnbull. The Walk to Canberra received more than 400 media hits nationally, estimated to be worth more than \$2 million, and reached more than 20 million Australians.

In 2013 Brendan was the Melburnian of the Year and was also crowned as one of the Moomba monarchs in Melbourne's annual community festival.



Brendan was a member of the Premier's Ice Action Taskforce and the Housing Minister's Rough Sleeping Round Table. He sits on the Victoria Police Chief Commissioner's Corporate Advisory Group and is a board member of the Australian Intercultural Society. He is a much sought-after speaker across Australasia and overseas.

Brendan and Sandra have three daughters and a granddaughter. Brendan treasures spending time with his family, and enjoys reading, watching movies and TV and walking.

Lynette Russell | Truth-Telling Before 1770

Synopsis

When we talk about truth-telling in Australia, we usually mean one thing. We mean a reckoning with what happened after 1788. The frontier. The massacres. The stolen children, the stolen wages, the stolen land. And that reckoning is essential. Nothing I say tonight is an alternative to it, or a softer version of it. But I want to suggest that there is a truth we need to tell first — or at least alongside. Because the deepest lie in Australian history is not a lie about an event. It is a lie about a starting point. You know the story. Australian history begins in 1770, when Cook sails up the east coast. Or perhaps 1788, when the First Fleet arrives. Everything before that is prologue — timeless, unchanging, sealed off from the world. An island continent, waiting. For more than five years, I've led a research project called Global Encounters and First Nations Peoples: a thousand years of Australian history. It has involved historians, archaeologists, linguists, botanists, artists, and — most importantly — Aboriginal communities across northern Australia and colleagues in Indonesia. And what that project shows, over and over again, is that the story of the waiting continent is not just incomplete.

It is false.

Biography

Professor Lynette Russell AM is Sir John Monash Distinguished Professor at Monash University, in the Monash Indigenous Studies Centre. An anthropological historian, she specialises in Australian Indigenous history, particularly colonial encounters and the representation of Aboriginal people in archives, museums, and popular culture. She leads Global Encounters, an ARC Laureate Fellowship project examining interactions between Australia's Indigenous peoples and maritime voyagers across a millennium. Elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Australian Academies of the Humanities and Social Sciences, she was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia in 2019 for services to higher education and Indigenous histories. Her Aboriginal ancestors were born on Wotjobaluk country.

Sean Scalmer | Shorter Hours: The Long Struggle

Synopsis

Melbourne's eight-hour movement led the world from 1856. This paper will review the trajectory of the movement, summarise its victories, and note its limits. It will also seek to explain why the movement mobilised more effectively in Melbourne than elsewhere and contemplate its lasting place in the city's political culture.

Biography

Sean Scalmer is a Professor of History at the University of Melbourne and a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. He is the author of seven books on political and labour history, including the prize-winning *Gandhi in the West* (2011), *On the Stump* (2017), and most recently, *A Fair Day's Work: The Quest to Win Back Time* (2025). He



is a co-editor of the journal *Moving the Social*, a deputy-editor of *Labour History*, and a co-coordinator of the European Labour History Network working group on 'Histories of Working Time'.

Bill Shorten

Biography

Professor The Hon. Bill Shorten became Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Canberra in January 2025, after a career that included leadership roles with the Australian Workers' Union and 18 years serving in federal politics, including six as Leader of the Opposition.

Since joining the University of Canberra, Professor Shorten has focused on building on its impactful history of practical education, mission-driven research and industry collaboration. He strongly believes that a modern university recognises the unique pressures on today's school leavers and mature students alike and works to widen participation for all who seek an education.

Zoe Smith | Getting equal: Women's rights and reform movements, 1850-1900

Synopsis

When the Salvation Army opened its doors in Melbourne in 1882, it did so during a pivotal period in Australia where masculine public and private behaviour came under mounting scrutiny, and women began to demand greater legal, civic, and economic rights. This paper will briefly explore some of the key nineteenth-century social and legal reforms that sought to improve women's lives and advance gender equality, including those aimed at alleviating women's dependence on and in marriage, the temperance movement, and the campaign for women's suffrage. I'll show the significance of these reforms and developments for women's rights into the twentieth century and speak to how these developments should inform our ongoing social, cultural, and political work towards gender equality today.

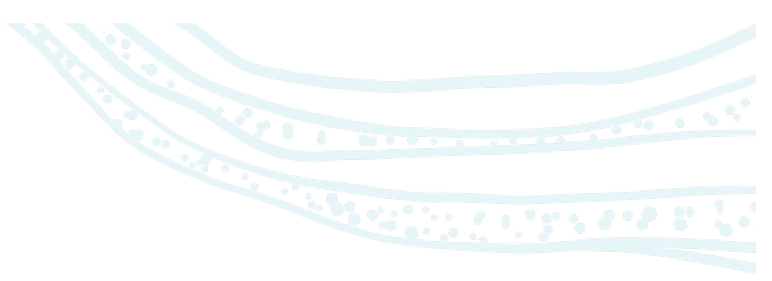
Biography

Dr Zoe Smith is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in History in the School of Humanities and Languages at the University of New South Wales. Her award-winning research sits at the intersection of gender history, cultural history, social history, literary history, and feminist legal history, and has been published in leading academic journals including *History Australia*, *Australian Feminist Studies*, and *Women's History Review*. Her doctoral research, completed at ANU, was a social and cultural history of domestic violence in Australia between 1880 and 1914, and she is now working on the history of coercive control in Australia between 1890 and 1975.

Shurlee Swain | The Problem of Poverty

Synopsis

Melbourne has been a centre for social reform ever since the depression of the 1890s destroyed assumptions that the colony was a place in which poverty did not exist. This paper will discuss a series of social reformers who sought to focus on the structural rather than the personal causes of poverty and the programs they developed in response.



Biography

Shurlee Swain is an Emeritus Professor at Australian Catholic University. A social historian, her research has encompassed urban, religious and women's history focused on the interaction of women and children with the welfare system.

Mark Zirnsak | What does social justice mean now?

Synopsis

Social justice today faces challenges of a weakened civil society dominated by wealthy donors, increased political polarisation and increased financial and political inequality. The possible age of AI may also herald further concentration of wealth and political power. There is a great need to find new paths towards building a socially just society and world, as what worked in the past is largely no longer fit for purpose.

Biography

Mark joined the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania in 1999 as the Social Justice Officer. He became director for social justice in 2004. In 2019, Mark became the Senior Social Justice Advocate. Mark was one of the founders of the Tax Justice Network Australia and is an expert adviser to Transparency International Australia. He is a member of the Attorney General's National Roundtable on Slavery and Human Trafficking, Modern Slavery Expert Advisory Group and civil society co-chair of the Open Government Partnership.