



History on the Hill

The Use and Abuse of History in the Political Process

5 September 2018

Museum of Australian Democracy, Old Parliament House, Canberra



Image: Andrew Merry

9:00am-9.30am—Introduction

Daryl Karp: Welcome

Dr Carolyn Holbrook: Outline of Australian Policy and History and Aims of Workshop

Professor James Walter: Bridging the Gap between Academic Research and Policy Practitioners and Politicians

9.30am-11am—The Use and Abuse of the 1980s

Panel Discussion

This session will discuss the reform era of the 1980s and how it is remembered, and often reified, in contemporary politics, as an era in which the political system worked well. Is this an accurate means of remembering the 1980s? What can we learn from the 1980s to help us now? Why has policy reform become difficult?

Professor Frank Bongiorno (chair)

Professor Meredith Edwards

Emily Millane

James Button

Dr Dennis Glover

11am-11.30am—Morning Tea

11.30am-12.30pm—Policy History Case Studies

Presentations

Professor Nicholas Brown (chair)

Professor Peter Whiteford: Retrenchment, Retreat or Refurbishment? The Trajectories of Australian Social Security Policy after Whitlam

This paper discusses this contradictory picture of ‘one step forward, one step backward’ in social security policy since 1975. It particularly focuses on what is known about the distributional consequences of tax and transfer changes in the ‘reform period’ of the 1980s, and discusses the expansions and contractions of social security under the Howard government and during the Rudd-Gillard government. The period since 2013 may be characterised as one of ‘attempted retrenchment’. The paper argues that the continuation

of current policies can only lead to the increasing impoverishment of the unemployed and the re-emergence of concerns about child poverty, suggesting ongoing instability in policy direction.

Michael Dillon: Indigenous Policy and Blue Mud Bay: The Tides of History

This presentation reflects on a series of historical vignettes recounting Indigenous policy events or issues associated with Blue Mud Bay on the eastern coast of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, and the national policy response or reaction to those events, and their impact on the lives of the Yolngu people of Blue Mud Bay. Provisional conclusions highlight how local political issues can emerge onto national policy and political agendas and thus provide a partial antidote to the hegemony of more rational and linear conceptions of policy development.

12.30pm-1.30pm—Lunch

1.30pm-2.15pm—The Lessons of History in Defence and Immigration Policy

Speech and Q&A

Dr Carolyn Holbrook (chair)

Michael Pezzullo

2.15pm-3.15pm—History and the Policy Process: Bridging the Gap

Panel Discussion

Why do we need to bridge the academic-policy maker gap? For one thing, a perennial issue for policy practitioners is that few collective action problems are unique: core community concerns (equitable resource distribution; provision of housing; energy supply; livable cities; welfare provision; immigrant incorporation; settler-Indigenous relations, etc) recur and continually have to be renegotiated. In other words, in all such instances, there is a history which should be taken into account. How attentive, then, are policy makers to history—and how engaged should historians be with the policy domain? For another, while collective action problems may be subject to technical or expert determination, many of them must address public behavior, which again may be interpreted through an historical lens. Is what policy makers propose congruent with current public expectations and the circumstances that formed these? Does it instead involve ‘nudging’ some sort of adaptation in contemporary behavior—and what does history tell us about previous attempts to institute such change?

The panel will be a round table discussion about questions such as these, with attention to particular cases.

Professor James Walter (chair)

Professor Nick Brown

Professor Mark Evans

Professor Tim Rowse

3.15pm-3.45pm—Afternoon Tea

3.45pm-4.45pm— How History is used in Parliament House

Panel Discussion

This panel discussion will centre around the ways that history is requested, researched, written about and used by staff, journalists and politicians in Australia’s Parliament House. It will look at how and why historical perspectives on different issues are sought by MPs, where they go to find information, who provides it, and how they use it. Journalists, too, turn to history at strategic moments to make sense of the present, and we will discuss how this process works within the hothouse 24-hour news cycle. We will try to answer the question: is history being used, or abused, in the house on the Hill, and how can historians help?

Libby Stewart (chair)

Dr Joy McCann

Michelle Grattan

Hon Gai Brodtmann MP

4.45pm-5.15pm—Concluding Remarks and Discussion

Led by Professor Frank Bongiorno

List of Participants

Hon Gai Brodtmann MP

Gai Brodtmann is the Federal Labor Member for Canberra and the Shadow Assistant Minister for Cyber Security and Defence Personnel. Prior to entering parliament, Gai was a small business woman and public servant, primarily with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Attorney-General's Department. She is a Fellow of the Public Relations Institute of Australia and a Member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Professor Nicholas Brown—nicholas.brown@anu.edu.au

Nick Brown is a professor of history at ANU, with particular interests in twentieth century social, policy, environmental and biographical history. He has worked previously in the Australian Public Service and acted as Visiting Cabinet Historian at the Australian National Archives between 2014-2017. Nick chairs the Canberra Museum and Gallery Advisory Committee and sits on the ACT Heritage Council and. His many publications include *A History of Canberra* (2014) and *Governing Prosperity: Social Analysis and Social Change in Australia* (1995).

Professor Frank Bongiorno—frank.bongiorno@anu.edu.au

Frank Bongiorno is a professor of history at ANU, with particular interests in Australian political, labour and cultural history. Previously, he has held lecturing positions at King's College London, the University of New England and Griffith University. He has been an Australian Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow and was Smuts Visiting Fellow in Commonwealth Studies. Frank's many publications include *The Sex Lives of Australians: A History* (2012) and *The Eighties: The Decade That Transformed Australia* (2015).

James Button—james.button@gmail.com

James Button is the Communications Manager at the Grattan Institute and a former journalist and speechwriter for Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. He was a journalist at the *Age* for twenty years, including three years as Europe correspondent, during which time he won two Walkley Awards for feature writing. He wrote the book *Speechless: A Year in my Father's Business* (2009) about his experience of working for Kevin Rudd and in the Australian Public Service. His most recent book is *Comeback: The Fall and Rise of Geelong* (2016).

Michael Dillon—michael.dillon@anu.edu.au

Michael Dillon is a graduate in economics and public policy. Early in his career he worked for Indigenous organisations in the East Kimberley and Central Australia. He has worked for three federal Ministers for Indigenous Affairs, and been a senior bureaucrat in both the Commonwealth and Northern Territory. He is the author with Neil Westbury of *Beyond Humbug: Transforming Government Engagement with Indigenous Australia*, (2007). He is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU. Michael's irregular blog on Indigenous policy issues can be accessed at www.refragabledelusions.blogspot.com.

Professor Meredith Edwards AM—meredith.edwards@canberra.edu.au

Meredith Edwards is an Emeritus Professor at the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra. From 1983 to 1997, she advised on major social policy, education and labour market issues in the Commonwealth Public Service, including in the role of Deputy Secretary in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. She is a Fellow of the Institute of Public Administration Australia, the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia and ANZSOG. Among Meredith's many publications are *Social Policy, Public Policy: From Problem to Practice* (2001), and the co-authored *Not Yet 50/50: Barriers to the Progress of Senior Women in the Australian Public Service* (2014).

Professor Mark Evans—mark.evans@canberra.edu.au

Mark Evans is director the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra, where he is a professor of governance. He was formerly Director of the Worldwide Universities Public Policy Network and Vice President of the Joint University Council for the Applied Social Sciences. Mark has managed research and evaluation projects in over 26 countries, the European Union, United Nations and the World Bank. He is the editor of the international journal *Policy Studies*.

Dr Dennis Glover—dennis.glover@bigpond.com

Dennis Glover is a freelance writer and novelist. He has a history PhD from King's College, Cambridge and has worked for two and a half decades as an academic, newspaper columnist, policy adviser and speechwriter to politicians including Kim Beazley, Simon Crean, Mark Latham, Julia Gillard and Wayne Swan. His books include *An Economy is not a Society* – about the effects of economic disruption on his home town of Doveton, *The Art of Great Speeches* – on the classical origins of modern political oratory, and *Orwell's Australia*. His 2017 debut novel *The Last Man in Europe* tells the story of how George Orwell wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Michelle Grattan AO—michelle.grattan@theconversation.com

Political journalist Michelle Grattan is a household name, whose reputation for accuracy and professionalism is unrivalled. She has been a member of the Canberra parliamentary press gallery since 1971, working for publications including the *Age*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian Financial Review*. Michelle became the first female editor of an Australian daily newspaper when she edited the *Canberra Times* between 1993-1995. She is currently chief political correspondent at the *Conversation* and professorial fellow at the University of Canberra.

Dr Carolyn Holbrook—carolyn.holbrook@deakin.edu.au

Carolyn Holbrook is a historian at Deakin University. Her book about the history of Australian memory of the First World War, *Anzac: The Unauthorised Biography*, was published in 2014. She is presently co-authoring a book about the history of political decision-making with James Walter and writing a book about the history of Australian attitudes towards the federation since 1901. Carolyn has worked previously as a policy adviser in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and is the co-ordinator of the [Australian Policy and History](#) network.

Daryl Karp

Daryl Karp has worked as a senior executive in the broadcast and cultural industries for over 20 years. She has worked as Chief Executive officer and Managing Director of Film Australia, Head of Television Factual Programs at the ABC and is currently the Director of the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House. Daryl's programs have won numerous awards and she is a Fellow in the Institute of the Company Directors.

Dr Joy McCann—joymccann@grapevine.com.au

Joy McCann is an environmental and social historian with research interests in rural landscapes, social memory and place attachment, the culture dimensions of science and technology, and the role of oceans in settler societies. Joy has extensive experience as a public historian in the heritage, museum and library sectors, most recently working as a senior researcher in the Australian Parliamentary Library. She recently published *Wild Sea: A History of the Southern Ocean*.

Emily Millane—emily.millane@anu.edu.au

Emily Millane is a research fellow and PhD candidate at ANU. She worked as the principal research fellow at Per Capita's working on the Longevity and Positive Ageing project and at Demos, a leading UK think tank. Emily has degrees in Arts and Law from the University of Melbourne and received first class honours for her thesis on comparative Australian and New Zealand colonial history. She has practised in commercial law for national law firm Maddocks Lawyers.

Michael Pezzullo

Michael Pezzullo is the Secretary of the Department of Home Affairs and Border Protection. He was previously the Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and Deputy Secretary Strategy in the Department of Defence. Michael was the principal author of the 2009 Defence White Paper.

Libby Stewart—libby.stewart@moadoph.gov.au

Libby Stewart is the senior historian at the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House. She was previously a historian at the Australian War Memorial. Libby has curated exhibitions and publishes in the areas of the representation of women leaders in museums, Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War and Australian nurses in the First World War.

Professor Tim Rowse—t.rowse@westernsydney.edu.au

Tim Rowse is an Emeritus Professor in the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University. His formal training has been in government, anthropology and sociology, though much of what he writes can be described as history. Since the 1980s his research has focused on the relationships between Indigenous and other Australians in central Australia and in the national political sphere. Tim's most recent book, *Indigenous and Other Australians Since 1901* (2017) recounts the fortunes of Indigenous Australians since 1901 within political and policy frameworks.

Professor James Walter—james.a.walter@monash.edu

James Walter is Emeritus Professor of Politics at Monash University with broad interests in Australian politics and history. He is a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and prior to his appointment at Monash was Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Arts) at Griffith University. James' most recent work is a co-authored history of the Australian prime ministership, published in two volumes; *Settling the Office* (2016) and *Pivot of Power* (2017). He is currently working on a history of political decision-making with Carolyn Holbrook.

Professor Peter Whiteford—peter.whiteford@anu.edu.au

Peter Whiteford is a professor in the Crawford School of Public Policy at ANU. He has worked at the Social Policy Research Centre, as a Principal Administrator in the Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs of the OECD in Paris. He has published extensively on aspects of the Australian and international systems of income support. In 2008, he was appointed by the Australian government to the Reference Group for the Harmer Review of the Australian pension system. Peter is an associate investigator with the ARC Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research and an adjunct professor with the Social Policy Research Centre.

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