**Ideas and Society**

**Labor and the Greens**

**Andrew Leigh and Adam Bandt**

**5 September 2012**

**John Scott Meeting House**

**Robert Manne**

I’d like to thank you all very much for coming. It’s actually great to see so many students in the audience and that’s always my hope – that there’s a good balance between students and staff.

I really would like to welcome our two guests. I’ll just say something very briefly about them. Andrew Leigh is the Labor member for Fraser in the ACT. He studied law first, worked with Michael Kirby at a frighteningly young age, was a Professor at the ANU and in 2010, I think, was elected to the House of Representatives for the Labor Party.

Adam Bandt, and I’m now relying a bit on something he said privately to me. Adam was a lawyer in the Labor firm, Slater & Gordon, and I think it’s true to say that because of the concern with climate change above all other things, Adam left Slater & Gordon, completed a doctorate at Monash in social theory, and is the first Greens at a general election, the first member of the Greens at a general election, to win a seat, the seat of Melbourne.

I thought very hard about this event, including who I would invite, and the two people I most wanted to come are two extremely thoughtful members of two parties of left or left-centre and also a particular joy for me is that they are something which we don’t normally have here, which I certainly don’t possess, they are young, and I sometimes think that students must get sick of seeing people in their 60s talking at these events, so it’s lovely to have people who are not my age.

The event is slightly … I thought about it carefully for once, and the event is slightly unusual, in that I deliberately asked Andrew and Adam not to prepare anything. So they’re not going to speak with set speeches at all, even short ones. The thought behind the event is this – that it seems to me anyhow, that if there is to be a future for a parliamentary left in Australia, that future will rest I think inevitably on the kind of relationship there is between the Labor Party and the Greens, I have to say both parties, for which I have a lot of respect in different ways. Anyhow I do think that the future of what we might think of as progressive politics or the left rests on the kind of relationship that will develop between Labor and the Greens. I’m not saying that either Andrew or Adam agree with me, but that’s my view. And there has been considerable sort of attempt by my favourite people in the Murdoch press to suggest that Labor should break all relations with the Greens and that the Greens should be destroyed at the ballot box in the words of an *Australian* editorial. And I don’t myself think there’s been nearly enough discussion of the kind of difficult relationship that will exist between Labor and the Greens.

The way I’ve put the problem is this. In systems of politics based on proportional representation, European systems, parties of both the left and the right are used to a particular kind of relationship which is both co-operative and competitive. There are elements of both co-operation and competition. In systems of politics of the kind we’re more familiar with in Australia and also elsewhere, say the United Kingdom, outright competition is the norm, and that kind of balance between co-operation and competition is less part of the political culture. However, I’m going to try and suggest in questioning that maybe we have to begin to question that kind of political culture in Australia, in that I can’t at the moment see there to be much future for the left in Australia in the parliamentary sense, which is for me, and I think for both of you, the most important forum for politics, if a kind of relationship doesn’t emerge between Labor and the Greens. So that’s my purpose here, to try and just start a debate, or a discussion on the left of centre, which I think Australia needs to have and which won’t be supported by the News Limited newspapers that are trying to have another sort of debate, about why Labor should cut its links and if possible destroy the Greens.

And so, I’m sorry for being so sort of forceful in what I begin with, but that’s why I’ve wanted to just begin this discussion, to see what happens. So for a while, I’m going to be asking a lot of questions and getting both Adam and Andrew to respond, and then open it up to the audience. I think there will be a lot of people here who are sympathetic either to Labor or to the Greens, and I think the questions might be interesting.

All right, so, can I begin? I’ve even got a Kerry O’Brien clipboard with me, which I’ve always wanted. Where I want to begin is asking you both how well you think the Labor-Greens relationship since the election of the Gillard government has gone. Andrew, I’ll start with you.

**Andrew Leigh**

I think it’s a useful relationship, in order to pass legislation, but I wouldn’t see it as anything like a coalition arrangement like the Liberal and National Parties have. I would see it more as a useful way of formalising a whole lot of legislation passing through. And I would see us as having perhaps as close a relationship with the Greens than John Howard had with the Democrats, but not that much closer, and that’s been useful for passing legislation, but I see some pretty big differences around attitudes to markets, around some of the issues such as asylum seeker policy, and those sorts of policies, which I think will mark us out as pretty different parties. And ultimately I don’t see the future for the Labor Party as becoming a meld of the two political parties.

**Robert Manne**

Can I say on those issues … I’m going to come to asylum seeker policy and attitude to economic policy and so on. So, we’ll leave plenty of time to go into that in some detail. But Adam, can I ask you the same question? How important has it been for the Greens not to be just in opposition, and with a position in the Senate of a significant kind, holding the balance, but also I know you have weekly meetings with the Prime Minister, that was negotiated at the beginning of the Gillard government. Just how important do you think, has it been for the Greens as a party to have that relationship since 2010?

**Adam Bandt**

I think it’s been important. I think it’s been a professional relationship. As Andrew said, it’s not a coalition relationship but we are, the Gillard government is there because we are supporting them on matters of confidence and supply. The written agreement that we have doesn’t talk in general about how we’ll behave in the Senate. It’s primarily about confidence and supply. It has meant though, in this parliament, this is the first ever of these written agreements and it’s something the Democrats never had, with any other party, and it’s enabled us to not only have what I think is a good working professional relationship between the parties, but it’s enabled us to get things done that wouldn’t otherwise have got done. So the price on pollution, getting dental into Medicare, are the two key policy things that are in that written agreement that we’ve managed to work on and deliver. And I think it’s brought an element of stability to the parliament, unlike other members of the cross bench, we’ve never run around threatening to bring the government down. We’ve said we’ll sign up for an agreement for three years and we’ll stick to it for that three years, and I think that’s been good, not only for us, but for Australia.

**Robert Manne**

Yes, and Andrew, perhaps the most senior political journalist in the country, Paul Kelly, has argued that it was a disaster for Labor, to sign this agreement that Adam’s been talking about, and that with the signature of that agreement, somehow Labor lost its way or sold its soul or whatever cliché Paul uses. Are you sympathetic to Paul Kelly’s analysis, that somehow Labor, by signing that agreement, made a strategic mistake?

**Andrew Leigh**

I, like you, admire some of the historical … broad sweep of history in Paul Kelly’s writings, but on this I don’t think he’s right Robert. I think fundamentally this is … the significance of the written agreement can be overblown. It’s not about melding the two parties together – it’s just about making sure we have what Adam called a good professional relationship. And it’s less substantial, and I’m sure all of your students in the room will be highly focused on the ACT election that’s currently on foot. And the ACT voters will go to the polls on the 20th of October and there’s a much more formal arrangement between Labor and the Greens in the ACT than exists at a federal level. So I guess …

**Adam Bandt**

And Tasmania …

**Andrew Leigh**

And Tasmania, you’re right. So I guess as a federal rep from the ACT, I look at the federal agreement and say, well, what’s the big deal.

**Robert Manne**

If I can push on with that. Do you think the way in which the Labor, you know, it’s called by News Limited newspapers the Labor-Greens Alliance which is clearly a mis-description, but do you think that’s done harm to Labor? I mean, we’re living in a situation where Labor has been polling very badly in primary voting over the last year or so. Do you think that description of Labor as being in an alliance with the Greens has been a liability in electoral terms over the last year or so?

**Andrew Leigh**

I think people will always try and take the most extreme member of your grouping and use your views against you. So, we’re currently doing that with Barnaby Joyce and his somewhat whacky views on foreign investment, and it’s certainly true that people might well try and do the same thing with the arrangement that we have with Adam, whose views I think on many issues, would sit to the left of people in the Labor caucus. That doesn’t mean it’s wrong overall though for the stability that it brings to the government, but it does place a bigger onus on us to talk about what we as a Labor Party believe, and how that differs from what Adam believes.

**Robert Manne**

And can I reverse the question for Adam – whether or not amongst your members there’s a feeling that working closely with the Labor government, you might have, as it were, sold the purity of your positions on various issues?

**Adam Bandt**

I don’t get a really strong sense of that. I think that I’m in this, we’re in this, to advance our policy positions and to get things done and I think people, our supporters, understand that this at the moment was one of the best opportunities we had to get reforms on the things that matter to us. Now, as part of that, yes, there’s been some … a lot of I guess one could say compromises along the way, but it’s never been part of the agreement that we change our policies. We’ve always reserved the right to have different political positions. Now, from an operational perspective, of the three hundred-odd bits of legislation that have passed, we don’t agree with every clause in every bit of that legislation, our role is not to … is to improve it where we can, and if not, then we respect that the government’s got a desire to legislate and so they get on with it. But, there will be those one or two times where, or one or two percent of times, where we clash, and where we can’t support the government, and I think the fact that we’ve retained the right to vote differently in the arrangement, has been critical for us.

**Andrew Leigh**

And there’s actually been a number of votes in the parliament in which it has been the entire parliament against Adam and sometimes you get Andrew Wilkie, sometimes Bob Katter, sometimes some of the other Independents, the optics of it are kind of strange. Think of this parliament with 150 people, all of us pile in and go on one side, there’s not even enough seats for all of us, and there’s Adam and someone else on the other side. And so he’s taken that stance on a number of issues.

**Robert Manne**

Andrew, can I just see whether you agree with something I want to say now. Do you think it would be fair to say that in present circumstances, not long term but present circumstances, the Labor Party is reliant on the Greens for hope for victory at the next election? Or for having a successful government if they were victorious at the next election, and I mean in two ways. Reliant firstly, that if the Greens decided not to deliver, or not to advise their voters to preference you in the House of Representatives, it would be very hard to get enough Labor members elected, and secondly, whether to have an effective government, if the Greens retained the balance of power in the Senate after the next election, that wouldn’t give you the possibility of a successful legislative and progressive program? How do you respond to my idea that in some ways you find yourself reliant on the Greens?

**Andrew Leigh**

I think people often place too much emphasis on what the parties put on their how-to-vote cards. Fundamentally I don’t think many voters look at a how-to-vote card and say that they’ll do exactly what it says, and so the notion that Greens voters are all a group of sheep who could be handed a bit of paper and told that they had to vote 1 Greens, 2 Liberal, 3 National, 4 Katter Party, 5 Australian Labor Party. You know, most Greens voters I think would look at that and say, well, that’s all fine and well, but my views are that if I can’t have a Greens representative, I want a Labor representative. So I don’t think how-to-votes matter as much as …

**Robert Manne**

I wonder if there’s real political science on that question. I should know, and I don’t.

**Andrew Leigh**

We ought to I guess, from the … there’s an occasional, the flip ticket, the flip how-to-votes. The Democrats do it, I thought the Greens occasionally do it, don’t they Adam?

**Adam Bandt**

We’ve run open tickets in the past, where we just say, vote 1 Greens and the rest is up to you. And, the analysis that I’ve seen suggests that in some federal seats, that could be worth several hundred, if not more, votes. And I don’t know that necessarily the members sitting in marginal seats share Andrew’s cavalier attitude towards our how-to-vote cards. And I mean, it brings up an interesting point, because in the past, we’ve tended to produce how-to-vote cards, it’s a matter for the party. The party’s tended to produce how-to-vote cards that recommend usually a vote for Labor, or on some rare occasions, open tickets. Now, at our … a couple of national conferences ago, our party, which is run by the members, decided that our default position would be open tickets and that we would say, vote 1 Greens, the rest of it’s up to you. And we had the authority to change that closer to an election, or the party does, but they would do that, and one of the consequences I think of the recent attacks from the Labor Party on the Greens and the likes of Tony Marr saying, Labor needs to turn on the Greens and destroy them and then the Labor apparatchiks with Sam Dastyari and so on, getting behind it, is that every time one of those people get up and say that, it strengthens the voices within our party, the members, who say, well why should we recommend preferences at all. If they’re both now going to turn on us and say, destroy us, then it’s not up to us to recommend preferences. Now, I don’t necessarily share that view, but that’s the way it’s going, and that’s a consequence of … that’s what the likes of Sam Dastyari are doing to their marginal seat holders.

**Andrew Leigh**

The one area in which how-to-votes must surely matter is where … is in Adam’s seat, where Liberal Party voters are told, vote 1 Liberal, and don’t go next to the party that sits next across the ideological spectrum, instead vote 2 Greens. If the Liberal Party changed their how-to-votes in Melbourne, that also certainly changes the result. Adam must be right, there could be other contests where how-to-votes would change things but if it’s a couple of hundred votes in a 100,000 people, then you’re suggesting that it’s only a few percent of Greens voters who are swayed by the how-to-vote.

**Robert Manne**

And could I take the other part of that, about the Senate. Would you agree with the proposition that if Labor is to have a successful, say progressive legislative program, it’s a great advantage to have the balance of power held by the Greens, rather than to have, as might happen, theoretically it could happen after the next election, with well, I won’t say that, but just the simple question. Do people in your party see it now as an advantage that the Greens hold the balance of power in the Senate?

**Andrew Leigh**

It makes it more straightforward for some parts of our agenda, and more difficult for other parts of our agenda.

**Robert Manne**

Can you say a little bit about which? Obviously asylum seekers …

**Andrew Leigh**

Asylum seekers, more difficult for asylum seekers. More straightforward for say, a minerals resource rent tax.

**Robert Manne**

Adam, if I could put the question again, to you, in a slightly different way. Would it be a perception amongst members of your party, both the parliamentary part, but also just the members of your party, just the rank and file, but it’s a kind of advantage to you to have Labor in office, and that you have some way of thinking about that as being important, as well as advancing the interests of the Greens?

**Adam Bandt**

I think certainly historically that’s been the case, and it’s I think, people who would have thought, especially at the moment, that we’ve been able to achieve things by working with Labor, but those instances that Andrew talks about, about where we find ourselves sitting on one side of the parliament, and Labor and the Coalition are over on the other, are growing. And on some key social issues that are of core importance to us, like the Northern Territory intervention, like not cutting payments to single parents in order to reach a surplus. On asylum seekers. It’s Labor and the Coalition who are now finding that they have got more in common with each other on that than us.

**Robert Manne**

Does that mean that there’s a decline in the perception that it’s to the advantage of the Greens for Labor to be in office, and that it would almost make no difference if Tony Abbott was Prime Minister, rather than Julia Gillard?

**Adam Bandt**

No, I think it would make a difference. I think, I mean, I was very clear going to the last election that I wouldn’t support Tony Abbott as Prime Minister, and there’s … I don’t … whatever our difficulties with Labor, I don’t regret that decision for a moment. I think Tony Abbott would be a really significant threat to the things that matter to us and to our voters. Action on climate change, and … look, whatever disagreements we have with Labor, and there are several, the Coalition’s the party of razor wire and children overboard, and so I don’t look to them for solutions on asylum seekers.

**Robert Manne**

Now, this is the overwhelming question, not the last question by any means, but the biggest question I’m going to ask both of you, which is, to give an outline of what you think to be the major philosophical or ideological differences between Labor and the Greens. Andrew, if I can start with you?

**Andrew Leigh**

So, I tend to think of Labor’s legacy as being in two strands. It’s a strand of egalitarianism, which means making sure that you have a strong social safety net and a fair income taxation system. And then it’s a strand of small “l” liberalism, and that’s the bit about tradition. We don’t talk about quite as much, but being the party of the Sex Discrimination Act and the Racial Discrimination Act, and also being the party that believes that markets are a pretty effective way of dealing with social problems, so whether that’s using markets to tackle climate change, using water buy-backs to help deal with desalination and the Murray-Darling Basin. And I see that social liberal strain in the Greens. I don’t see the market liberal strain.

**Robert Manne**

That’s interesting.

**Andrew Leigh**

I don’t see the … I see much more discomfort, for example, with foreign investment, and with the sort of open market reforms that characterised the Hawke-Keating period. In some sense, this small “l” liberal tradition used to be much stronger in the Liberal Party, but the Liberal Party is really now just a party of capital “c” conservatives.

**Robert Manne**

And Malcolm Turnbull.

**Andrew Leigh**

Exactly. And you know, the shift away from small “l” liberalism happens first under Howard, but then even more strongly under Tony Abbott. And they’re now really a party of reaction and opposition, which means, I think, that there’s more scope for the Labor Party to take on that kind of Deakin-ite mantle that we didn’t grab in 1909, but might now consider taking on.

**Robert Manne**

I know you’ve been writing recently about the way in which you can be the inheritors of the Deakin-ite tradition. Adam, can I ask you the same question? Where you think the great divide is between Labor and the Greens.

**Adam Bandt**

I think it was Guy Pearce, it might have been someone else who said that the Greens are more small “l” labor than Labor, more small “l” liberal than the Liberals, and unsurprisingly, far more green than both. And I’ll come back to Andrew’s point about liberalism, but I think that’s right. I think that Labor and the Coalition are fundamentally stuck in a 19th, 20th century view about how to organise an economy, how to organise a society, and how people relate to nature, and we’ve thought for two centuries that you can continue to plunder the earth infinitely, that you can have infinite energy consumption and that it comes at no cost, and we’ve now realised that that is completely unsustainable. And faced with this massive, now, existential challenge of how do we turn the planet around in a couple of decades’ time, I think only the Greens are positioned to have the answer to that. We saw an example of that today, with the Resources Minister, Martin Ferguson reneging on a promise to close the equivalent of Hazelwood Power Station, 2000 megawatts. Now, that desire for government to be the midwife (???) of a clean energy economy is something I think only the Greens are poised to deliver.

I think on the equality point, I think that whilst Labor might have previously believed in it, I don’t think that’s as much a high order priority for Labor at the moment, and I think we’ve taken on the mantle for believing that. And on the small “l” liberalism point, it’s us that are defending internet freedom, it’s us that stood alone in opposing John Howard’s abrogation of basic rights to silence and the like under terrorism legislation, and I think those basic principles of rule of law and small “l” liberalism are now taken up by the Greens.

**Robert Manne**

Did you want to respond to …

**Andrew Leigh**

Well, I think on the question of growth, I think that if you want to deal with poverty, you have to both be committed to making sure that people have a fair share of resources, but also to having substantial economic growth. It’s economic growth that underpins rising living standards for people at the bottom of the distribution, that allows us to be more generous domestically, to give more foreign aid overseas. And I do see a pretty powerful stand within the Greens of a sort of anti-growth philosophy, which misses the fact that most of our growth is not in digging up more stuff and producing more things, but it’s actually in the service sector. It’s in things like what happens at La Trobe University, it’s in health care …

**Robert Manne**

Or doesn’t happen …

**Andrew Leigh**

It’s this knowledge economy. That physical weight of the US economy is no larger now than it was a hundred years ago. So the notion that it’s growth that causing environmental harm, misses the fact that you can have economic growth, and environmental outcomes if you have the right policy framework in place.

**Adam Bandt**

I agree with that, but you can only do it if you de-couple economic growth from energy use, and Germany has recently achieved that. Last year its GDP went up and its energy consumption went down, and that’s in large part, you referenced the European model there before, they’ve had Greens in government in some form for a good fifteen, twenty years, and it’s the principles around driving the transformation in the energy sector that has meant that last year they produced 20% of their energy from renewable sources, of their electricity from renewable sources. Now, it’s those kind of significant reforms that I think that unless you have Greens in parliament, you don’t drive it.

**Andrew Leigh**

But this is kind of the elephant in the room. So in 2009 there were enough votes in the Senate, thanks to two Liberals crossing the floor, to get a price on carbon pollution. The Greens vote down a price on carbon pollution in 2009. The result of that is there’s a two year delay. In those two years, we have ten million tonnes of carbon produced that would not have been produced if we’d got a price on carbon pollution two years earlier. And frankly, the program that we have at the moment, there are many similarities when you look back to the CPRS in 2009. Not least, neither contained a floor price.

**Robert Manne**

You’ve come to fisticuffs earlier than I’d planned.

**Adam Bandt**

But let’s focus there, because it’s important to focus on the issues. There’s one … is about a relationship issue and the other is about the specifics of that issue itself. Labor chose the Coalition as its dancing partner on the climate change legislation the first time around. They never sat down and had … they didn’t even have one meeting with the Greens, to discuss a proposal to put a price on pollution. They never attempted to meet with the Greens and these two Liberals who might cross the floor. They chose the Coalition as their dancing partner, mixed metaphors, they got left standing at the altar, and then came to the Greens and said, well, pass it or nothing. Now, this scheme would have put an effective cap on our ambitions and our approach as the Greens is, we accept that we may not always get what we want, but we’re not going to pass something that puts a ceiling on ambition. We’ll pass something that can be a platform and a start, but then we’ve got to go up from there, and what we’ve ended up now with is a scheme that we’ve got 80% pollution target by 2050, whereas the old target was 60%. We’ve seen ten billion dollars going into a clean energy finance corporation, that we never saw before, and a three billion dollar energy agency set up, and the thing that I’m most pleased about is that this scheme, unlike the last one, has got an architecture in place that I hope will survive changes of government so that in the future, as we just saw with the UK a couple of years ago, when the Climate Change Authority says, we’ve got to cut our pollution in half over the next couple of decades, you might even get a Liberal government agreeing with it.

None of that happened before, so I think it’s a little bit cute to say, oh, you should have come and talked with us. Well, why didn’t you call?

**Andrew Leigh**

The question is, was that worth the equivalent of the annual emissions of five million cars?

**Adam Bandt**

Yes, absolutely, because if we’d have locked in long term pollution caps over the next ten, fifteen years, which your scheme negotiated … I mean, there was a reason the Coalition was prepared to pass it. It was because it was pretty appalling. If we’d have locked that in, we’d be in enormous trouble, whereas now we have left open the gateway and put in place the mechanisms to do what the Climate Commission has told us, which we need to do, which is de-carbonise the economy by 2030, by 2040. It was a real fork in the road, and the Labor-Liberal scheme would have taken us one way, whereas now the Labor-Greens scheme is taking us another way, so I don’t regret it for a second.

**Andrew Leigh**

We would have gotten to the same spot by 2020, the question is really we ought to pat ourselves on the back for different outcomes in the post-2020 period. I guess my feeling is politics isn’t forever, and if you have a scheme which can get to the same place by 2020, with less carbon emissions along the way, because the later you start, the more carbon you put up in the atmosphere, then you ought to have passed it …

**Adam Bandt**

Well, I think if you crunch the numbers, then you’ll show that the planet’s going to be much better off with the scheme that we’ve negotiated this time as opposed to the scheme that was negotiated with the Resource Minister under the Coalition.

**Andrew Leigh**

Not by 2020.

**Robert Manne**

Order. I’m going to move it on. I’m going to raise other policy issues. As I said, I was planning to do that later, but you’ve pre-empted me.

I sometimes think political analysis is based upon the least misleading generalisation that one can come to. In reality it’s so difficult to do. But my political analysis is that since maybe the end of Hawke and Keating, maybe even earlier, there have been what used … the constituency that once voted for Labor has begun to divide, between what I would call the inner-city professionals and students, often, and what my colleague once called the moral middle class, what some other people call doctors’ wives. But that constituency which I think Whitlam helped put together for Labor, has moved I think increasingly to the Greens. And I suspect if I took a vote amongst my students, many of whom I’m pleased to say are here, the Greens might win the election, you know, if there was a seat for La Trobe, as there used to be for Oxford.

**Adam Bandt**

Are you thinking of standing?

**Robert Manne**

No. On the other hand it seems to me that Labor is vital for both the old working class and the new working class elements, and also large parts of the struggling middle class. I just wonder, partly, whether you think that kind of generalisation, the coming apart of the Whitlam Hawke Keating Coalition is true? And then the second part of the question, if it’s roughly true, is whether, I suppose, Andrew, you think that Labor can re-win students, inner-city professionals, doctors’ wives, and Adam, whether you think you can make real inroads into let’s call it, new working class, old working class, middle class, middle Australia? But if I can, perhaps, Andrew, you begin, and then Adam … Is the question too complicated?

**Andrew Leigh**

No, not at all. So I think it has always been a challenge for Labor to combine the sort of inner city ideas, grouping with a more traditional working class base. The genius of someone like Mick Young is the former shearer who’s able to deliver a graduation address. And that’s something, when Labor is at its best, that we always manage to do, to have the industrial and the kind of intelligentsia wing of the parties, kind of singing in harmony. And we’ve always had parties to the left, whether that’s the Nuclear Disarmament Party, the Democrats, the Greens – they haven’t distracted from I think the main challenge for the big oldest party in Australia, the major party of the centre left, which is combining liberalism and egalitarianism. We shouldn’t get distracted by what the Greens are doing, from that kind of overall message. Now some of that will be different. Mick Young is talking about what we do about tariffs, we’re now talking about what we do about foreign investment and engagement with China, but all of it is in some sense an old challenge.

**Robert Manne**

But just to be precise. You think that Labor can return as the party of the ideas people of the inner city, at some point in the future?

**Andrew Leigh**

Absolutely. And I think it’s this grabbing with both hands of the Deakin-ite small “l”, the sort of social liberal philosophy, that notion that the Liberal Party is now not a party of markets any longer, and the natural party for somebody who is working in a small business which is exporting architecture services to China, ought to be the party that first open up relations with China, the party that is fundamentally committed, not just to multi-culturalism, but also to markets. The Greens might be committed to multi-culturalism, I don’t think they’re committed to markets.

**Robert Manne**

I’ll get to Adam in a minute. But you don’t think, let’s say that many people here amongst the students, would care about the things that Adam’s talked about – radical climate change action, Northern Territory intervention, asylum seekers, gay marriage, which I’ll come to. I would have thought the difficulty for Labor is that the 1.5 million people or so that vote on such matters, or care about such matters as part of the way that vote, that if Labor began to win that group back, they would lose so much of the conservative, so much of the vote that they now have, to the conservative parties, or to the Coalition. Isn’t that a sort of incredibly big problem for Labor at the moment, that if you move in a direction that would attract the voters of Melbourne, you lose the voters of the outer suburbs?

**Andrew Leigh**

I guess I don’t have a one dimensional view of politics, Robert. I think of politics as being multi-dimensional and it’s about speaking to multiple audiences, and that’s why the kind of strength of that Mick Young legacy is there, or if you like, the strength of the Paul Keating Prime Ministership, which is an opening up of Australia, not just opening up to the … in an economic sense, with lowering the tariff barriers, but also opening up in an intellectual sense, to being a republic, to multi-culturalism, to thinking of ourselves as very much a part of the Asian region, and having …

**Robert Manne**

That’s my argument – they came at him with baseball bats when he moved from economic reform to the symbolic reforms, by ’96.

**Andrew Leigh**

I would think of ’96 as having a lot to do with the long … the recession and the very slow recovery as well. And also 13 years in office.

**Robert Manne**

Adam, my question to you is the other way. I know Christine Milne says the Greens can make inroads into rural parts of Australia and also I imagine the Greens aspire to win middle Australia, as well as having, if I’m right, the inner city professionals and doctors’ wives. Do you say something about that?

**Adam Bandt**

As I mentioned, the second … aside from climate change, price on pollution, the second biggest reform that we got as part of support for this government, is around dental care. Making the argument for a universal health system, including dental in it. A really key reform, because we think it’s important, and reflects values and in some ways we would like people to look at that and go, right, I see that that’s the sort of things the Greens care for, care about. And hopefully that’s what people think when they look at it.

But, I mean, a couple of other things happened in that time frame that you’re talking about. The first reports about climate change started being released, and environmental consciousness grew, and social movements grew. It’s not just a matter of higher levels of education. It’s about people saying, well, we want things to be done differently, we recognise the current way of doing it is not sustainable. And the other is, I think, you’ve heard a good exposition from Andrew on Labor happily embraced neo-liberalism. And a good thirty-odd years ago, Labor and the Coalition decided that on fundamental economic questions, there weren’t going to be the stark lines of difference that there used to be. And I think, if you look at the cross-benches in the House of Reps at the moment, we are all coming from differing places, but you’ve got Greens on the one hand, and you’ve got conservative country MPs on the other, who are all saying, well, hang on, this economic and social policy that you forced down our throats for the last thirty years, maybe it’s not that crash hot for us. And I think in the context of all of that too, I mean, you talked about the working class. The working class and workers in Australia have changed. Like, there’s many more women in the workforce, we’ve got a service-based economy, and increasingly people who are working in that area, look at what we have to say and say, yes, I agree with all of those things. It’s the only logical conclusion to come to. And I think as the environmental imperatives press over time, as Labor moves further to the right on those economic questions, I think more and more people will look to us, and say, yes, you do have mainstream values that we’ll vote for.

**Robert Manne**

I’d like to go through some policy areas … one we’ve done enough on, I think, which is the climate change one, which I was going to ask, but there are three or four others which I really would like to get the Labor and the Greens perspective on. The one that I find most interesting is something that I think in theory, Andrew has done incredibly interesting work on equality in Australia. And Adam, who is, I think, a natural social democrat as well as a Green, I think would agree on. That is, that there are gaps in the Australian welfare state which need to be addressed. I’ve been extremely pleased to see the Gillard government has made announcements in the area of disability insurance, and we had a very good seminar on it a year or so ago, and also just a couple of days ago, making a commitment in principle to the Gonski reforms which are about educational equality and standards. OK.

My problem is this, and this is really to Andrew first. It seems to me that Labor, and I notice this in your own writing, Labor is committed on the one hand to these really quite dramatic social welfare reforms, and also you praised in a recent thing you wrote, Hawke and Keating governments for lowering tax. Isn’t the big problem for you in these areas, that as no-one wants to go into … to have programs which take us into debt on a permanent basis, that Labor’s big problem is, it doesn’t know how to raise the money, the revenue, the tax, which would provide the basis for, as it were, ambitious and progressive social welfare reforms.

**Andrew Leigh**

I guess one of the big mistakes that progressives have made over the last generation or so, is to think that social policy is all measured in how much you spend and that you get a big tick if you increase the dollar sign on what you spend. And increasingly, we’re learning that on areas like health and education, how you spend the money is just as important. In the area of social welfare, one of the good things I think we’ve done, is to take away social welfare programs from those who don’t need it. There were complaints from the conservatives about us playing the politics of envy when we said that if you earn more than $150,000 a year, you shouldn’t get the baby bonus. But I think the means testing of the baby bonus, the family tax benefit part B, the various other of these programs, is important in making the government budget go further, and then I think in an area like education, what you’ve seen is the PM very strongly focus on how we spend the money, a recognition that the overall relationship between school outcomes and spending is fairly weak, and really what you want to think about, is how you manage to raise teacher quality, how you attract and retain the best teachers in Australian schools. So the quality of spending, I think, is absolutely critical, but you know, we’ve cut … we’ve means tested and we’ve also introduced things like a minerals resources rent tax, which is just a profits-based tax on commodities. It’s basically a more efficient way of taxing commodities, so we’ve got more revenue out of that.

**Robert Manne**

But Andrew, I mean, the Productivity Commission was the place from which the Disability Insurance Scheme came. Gonski is no wild radical, and he suggests, his committee suggests, is it five or six billion dollars a year required to bring our standards and reasonable equality into the education system. So even those who would agree with you entirely, that you need to spend money well, think that a lot more money is needed in those two areas, and there are other like mental health which one could mention. Don’t you think there’s something in what I say, that Labor’s a bit paralysed by its twin commitments to low tax and to progressive social reform?

**Andrew Leigh**

Ah, less than you think Robert, because I think a lot of progressive social reform is not about how much you spend, but about how you spend it. And I think we’re much more focused on that, now, for example, than say, the Hawke government was. I think the Hawke government was a terrific reforming government, but we’ve had a lot of recognition that the quality of spending is absolutely vital.

**Adam Bandt**

I think this is the key issue, that we need to debate over the next year for the sake of the next fifteen, twenty years. I hear Labor ministers get up in parliament, and talk proudly about how tax revenue as a proportion of GDP under John Howard was around 24%. They’ve now reduced it to 22%, and they get up and they boast about it. For me, that’s not a boast, it’s a problem, because it means, on those figures, we’ve got twenty-four billion dollars a year less than we had just under John Howard, to spend. The cave-in on the mining tax has meant that we lost a hundred billion over the space of a decade, so on average, ten billion dollars a year. There’s your money to fund these key important reforms, that we think are important as well.

And this is part of the problem, where I think economically we differ, and I’m proud of it, because I think if you … and still on top of that, Labor announces it wants to cut the company tax rate for big business by a per cent. Which is going to cost us another couple of billion dollars a year. Now I think we need to have the debate as a society, about whether what we think is the appropriate level for our tax base, and how we’re going to fund the services with it. And I think it’s no surprise that every announcement now, is, yes, we’ll fund the Gonski reforms, but we’ll start it in 2020. Yes, we’ll start the NDIS but we’ll put I think 250 million dollars a year into it when the price tag is much higher. Until we grapple with that, and we’ve been trying to push this for a while, until we grapple with securing the revenue base in this country, we are heading for a crisis, and we’re in a tough spot.

**Andrew Leigh**

John Howard had a higher tax to GDP ratio than the current government does. But for example, let’s just take one program where you were eligible to receive the baby bonus if you were earning half a million dollars a year. Now, if you’re on half a million dollars a year, your tax rate has just gone down a smidgeon, so you pay less tax, and the welfare benefits that you get have gone down as well. That lowers the tax to GDP and the spend to GDP ratios, and I think that’s not a bad trade-off. I think this sort of churn of welfare going to the very richest is just a bad way of running a government. And the machine that John Howard set up, I think, was an inefficient machine, that overall made Australia a little poorer.

**Adam Bandt**

I agree with that. And that’s why we’ve supported the government’s move to means testing some of these benefits, and winding some of them back and having a real hard look at things like the private health insurance rebate, and we actually felt the government should have gone further, but we thought they were good steps in the right direction. And of course there’s lots of other places in the budget where we’d say, let’s stop giving accelerated depreciation write-offs to big mining projects. They don’t need it. It’s costing us billions of dollars a year. Yes, there’s other places we can look here and there, to save the money, but there’s a bigger picture question about … you can’t continually run to say on the one hand, we’re going to cut the big business tax rate, and on the other hand we’re going to deliver all these services. And I think if you ask people what they would prefer, they would prefer that we fund Gonski by axing the proposed big business company tax rate, stopping the subsidies to miners, and let’s put it into schools instead. But that requires a bit of courage.

**Andrew Leigh**

As to company taxes, there’s only three sources of taxation – there’s land, there’s labour and there’s capital. And most of the evidence we have is that the company tax is not paid by land, it’s not paid by capital, it’s paid by labour. It’s a tax that fundamentally falls on employees. And so, while it might be rhetorically lovely to talk about this as a big business tax cut, as though it’s paid by some entities that have nothing to do with the rest of us, fundamentally this is a tax that falls on employees. That’s why we’ve argued for cutting it, because cutting it boosts wages and boosts employment.

**Robert Manne**

Now I’m going to raise difficult questions, things that seem to me to be really fundamental differences between the two parties. We haven’t so far discussed anything to do with foreign policy and given that time is limited, I only want to raise one big question, and that is the question of the preferable relationship Australia should have with the United States. I just wonder if we could have, Andrew, a brief account of why you think our relationship with the United States is fundamental, which is Labor’s position, no less than the Coalition’s, and perhaps Adam, if you could present a view of a different kind of foreign policy, which I think is implicit in what the Greens believe. Andrew?

**Andrew Leigh**

I’m slightly conflicted in this, Robert, being married to an American. But I think that our relationship with the US ought to be a little more distant than that. I think that the …

**Robert Manne**

Not in bed …

**Andrew Leigh**

Exactly. Good friends, perhaps, but not in bed. And I think the relationship with the US has in general meant that Australia is able to spend less on defence for the same level of security than we would have gotten otherwise. Having a military that works in with the US military is I think just sensible foreign policy.

Hugh White’s essay on the rise of China raises a bunch of provocative questions, but I think Hugh kind of underplays the soft power dimension to US power. I don’t think it’s just … it’s going to sound strange from an economist, I don’t think it’s just about numbers. I think there’s going to be some magical point where Chinese GDP passes US GDP, and that switches world geo-politics. Fundamentally, we have a great deal in common with the United States. We can maintain that relationship while maintaining good trade, interpersonal strategic relations with Asia, so I think we should remain interoperable with the US military, but have a whole lot more kids speaking Mandarin. That’s entirely consistent.

**Robert Manne**

Do you think there are any aspects of the relationship between Australia and the United States which are too close, which are not … Australia doesn’t have sufficient independence or capacity for criticism.

**Andrew Leigh**

I think we need to be careful on trade deals, to make sure we don’t end up giving away important aspects of our intellectual property, or our health care system. So, you saw that in the US free trade agreement struck under the Howard government. That’s always the challenge, right? The American trade negotiators are now intellectual property negotiators, to all intents and purposes. We need to be careful on that issue.

**Robert Manne**

On the US-Australia relationship, what’s the Greens’ general position?

**Adam Bandt**

It needs to be a relationship that’s based on Australia’s independence and capacity to make decisions about what’s in our own short and long term interests. Certainly not what’s happening with Afghanistan at the moment. I mean, when you go through the reasons as to why Australia’s there, it’s clearly not to keep the Taliban out, because they’re now dealing the Taliban back into power. It can’t be to hunt town Al Qaeda because they’d moved out some time ago. It can’t be to bring about democracy. We’re prepared to do deals with people who really don’t care about democracy at all. We’re there because the United States has asked us to be there. And other countries around the world have had genuine legitimate national debates about what’s the appropriate time for them to be there, and they’ve withdrawn their troops according to their own timetable. I don’t see that’s how we’re doing it. So I think that’s one example.

I was genuinely thrilled when Barack Obama came and addressed us in parliament, and he walked in and I was the first person he came and shook hands with. He’d obviously been well briefed as to where to go … Nothing to do with me sitting right up the back. And then I heard him speak, and you know, perhaps I was expecting something inspirational but instead it was, look, just letting you know essentially our policy is to try and contain China, and by the way, thanks for the top half of your country, where we’re going to station more troops, and we’re just letting you know as an afterthought. And I just don’t think that that’s the kind of relationship that we should have. I don’t think that’s good. I think that Hugh White essay – I think there was a lot of important questions there, and I don’t think we’re in a position where we’re debating them independently at the moment. So I think it’s an important relationship, but one that ought to be based on independence. I mean, Britain didn’t follow the United States into the Vietnam war, and you wouldn’t say necessarily that their relationship has suffered as a consequence, and I think that’s the kind of place I would like Australia to get to.

**Robert Manne**

OK. The second area of contention I’d like to hear … I’ll have to limit it to three just so we can have questions from the audience as well. Andrew, how do you think Labor can justify its hostility to gay marriage, given that I think many younger members of the Labor Party, and many of your younger voters would find it baffling, particularly those that don’t come out of a Christian tradition.

**Andrew Leigh**

I’m not sure what you mean by Labor’s hostility to gay marriage, Robert, our platform very clearly says we support gay marriage. But we allow members a conscience vote on it. So, if you were to read the official Labor Party platform, it is a party that supports same sex marriage. Now, as a consequence of the conscience vote, you have this situation where the Prime Minister has chosen to take a different view from the one that I would hold – that I support same sex …

**Robert Manne**

This is the Labor Party program rather than the Cabinet, you mean?

**Andrew Leigh**

Yes, so as a result of the conscience vote, Cabinet members won’t be bound, they will make their individual choices. Then what’s particularly odd about when these bills go to a vote, whether it’s Stephen Jones’ bill, or Adam’s bill, I think there’s another one around as well, is that the Party that has liberal in its name is going to be the least liberal in how it allows its members to vote. So we know people like Simon Birmingham and Malcolm Turnbull would vote in favour of same sex marriage were they allowed a conscience vote, but they won’t be allowed that. I’m comfortable having a conscience vote on this issue. Certainly all the conversations I’ve had with electors lead me to feel pretty comfortable with my own view, which is that same sex marriage threatens the institution of marriage less than the typical Las Vegas shotgun marriage, and that society will continue a little stronger and a little more cohesive once we have same sex marriage.

**Robert Manne**

Just as a matter of interest, what’s the principle in which you decide as a party, what is a conscience vote and what is a party whip vote?

**Andrew Leigh**

Traditionally, these have been issues which have had a religious dimension, so we call them conscience votes, but all of them have been issues which have some religious aspect, such as euthanasia, and abortion, and so on. We don’t for example, have a conscience vote on whether Australian troops should be in Afghanistan, although clearly that raises issues of conscience.

**Robert Manne**

So that really means, where the church is a powerful lobby? From one point of view, many things could have a Christian element. I would have thought a Christian would think that disability insurance was an issue which is connected to religion.

**Andrew Leigh**

You’re right. So one of the … and I guess the origin of the conscience vote, the notion of conscience vote in the Labor Party goes back to the 1950s split, and holding the party together after the split meant having a party where people who had strong religious views could vote with the position that their church took on some small set of issues. But it’s an odd legacy and maybe we have the wrong label attached to it.

**Robert Manne**

Adam, could you make the case for gay marriage. How do the Greens see that issue? As a stand in regard to their world view?

**Adam Bandt**

It’s giving effect to the principles of equality and freedom of choice. I cannot see how a party that believes in equality wouldn’t believe in everyone having … how you could say there are two classes of citizens in this country, some of whom who’s love is more highly regarded than another. And I can’t understand that anyone who values an individual’s freedom of choice to do where the state should only get involved where you’re talking about harm to another person, why they shouldn’t be allowed to marry the person that they love. And I think that the concern … I’m glad that Labor’s kind of had to be dragged to the position of compromise to paper over a split essentially, and yes, their formal position is in support of it, but when you have the Prime Minister saying, I’m going to vote against it, that gives a lot of cover to others – it drags away a sizeable chunk and means we’re unlikely to get reform in this parliament. Until Tony Abbott grants a conscience vote, and I think Andrew’s dead right, that needs to … Tony Abbott should be brought under more pressure about that.

I feel that if the Prime Minister changed her mind on it, as Barack Obama has, that we could actually see reform some time really quite soon. But they’ve got essentially a standing position, which means that a change won’t happen, but allow some of them in the party to feel good.

**Andrew Leigh**

It’s interesting though, because I actually don’t know any of my colleagues whose position on same sex marriage is determined by that of the PM. I’ve had a lot of dinnertime conversations about this, and I ‘m really struck, people seem to be shaped by their own views, their own conversations with constituents, the views of their own electorates. I don’t know anyone who says, I’m voting against same sex marriage because the Prime Minister is voting against it. Which is sort of surprising in some sense.

**Adam Bandt**

I think if the Prime Minister came out tomorrow and said, as Barack Obama, I’ve consulted those closer to me and I can see now the argument for change, and now I urge all of the members of the Labor Party to follow the Labor Party policy, and now it’s time for Tony Abbott to let him MPs have a conscience vote, I reckon we would be in a much stronger position. I could see a change of the law by the end of the year.

**Robert Manne**

Can I now … oh sorry.

**Andrew Leigh**

Those who don’t support same sex marriage in my caucus, feel fairly strongly about it and they’ve come to it, not by sort of waking up in the morning, but through a lot of these difficult conversations. I think anyone who can’t articulate both sides of this debate, hasn’t spoken to enough people.

**Robert Manne**

The final issue I want to raise is, and one I’ve found actually the most difficult, and I’ve changed my mind – asylum seekers. I’m closer on this, strangely enough, even though I’ve played a big part in the debate earlier on, the death of now, maybe 1,200 people at sea has made me think that one needs to try to find an effective way of stopping asylum seeker boats from setting out from Indonesia. And I haven’t been able to think of any way other than offshore processing. So perhaps now, Adam, I know the Greens position has been entirely consistent, and it hasn’t been, as far as I can see, affected in outlook by the incredible number of deaths at sea over particularly, the last couple of years. Could you justify your hostility to offshore processing?

**Adam Bandt**

The central point for us, around which we organise our policy, is protecting refugees and saving lives. And when you look, when you consider that 353 people died on the Siev X, John Howard, with all the harsh deterrent policies that we’re about to see, when you see that even now, this week, we’re seeing boats lost at sea, even under the new arrangements. It drives home the view that unless we make Australia as bad as Afghanistan and unless our government becomes as bad as the Taliban, which we are never going to be, then people will always continue to risk their lives to try and get here. And even if there is offshore processing, even if there are deterrents, what we need to do is put in place a system that minimises that risk. There’s lots of talk about the people smugglers’ business model. I think it’s based on desperation. I think it’s based on people being in camps like in Indonesia, where there’s about 8,000 people at the moment, but 1,100, 1,200 of them have been found to be refugees, by the UNHCR. And yet there’s no orderly processing system to speak of, and so you’ve got people who are stuck in those camps for years, who don’t see a way out. Someone comes along and says, well, give me a bit of money and I’ll put you on a boat, and they do it. And I’d do it as well. So I think the single most important thing that we can do, is to start to minimise people getting on boats, especially from Indonesia, where most of them are coming from, is to start processing more people in the camps, take more people directly from the camps. The advice we’ve got from the people who are working there with those people in the camps, is that once there is a sense of hope, and that the queue exists and is moving, then people will stop getting on boats, because they will see, as long as I stay here for a required period of time, then I’m going to be moved on. At the moment, there’s no movement, so they get on boats. So if we’re really concerned about saving lives, and that’s the primary thing, we need to shift to regional processing I think. So it’s not strict onshore or offshore. It’s regional processing. So that will stop the boats and that will be fairer.

**Robert Manne**

Just, and I say with respect, not in the usual cant way, but meaning it, but with respect, the period from 2002, let’s say, or late 2001 through to the changes in the Rudd government policy, did stop the boats.

**Adam Bandt**

Well, I think you would find … I can’t speak for Andrew, but I think you would find both of us would probably say, and our parties have said publicly, and the experts have said, there was a worldwide dropoff in, you know, in push factors and in people moving at that time, and to simply say it’s because we had a harsh deterrent policy, again, what explains the 353 people on the Siev X.

**Robert Manne**

Oh that was just … there was a rush of boats when Howard changed … anyway, it’s not my business to argue. Andrew, how do you justify …

**Adam Bandt**

My question back then would be, why have we signed the Refugee Convention? If that’s right, then we might as well not bother with the Refugee Convention, because if what we say is, an acceptable solution to people who are coming here is to send them off somewhere else, then we might as well have not signed it.

**Robert Manne**

If the law is everything, then you’re right. But there’s also the question of deaths.

**Adam Bandt**

Well, no, I don’t accept that that’s been … that’s been the rhetorical device that’s been used against us in this debate, is that somehow we’re on the side of law, as opposed to life. I think it’s the other way around. And I think that we are the ones who are talking about genuinely how to protect refugees. The solution of saying, we will send them offshore, we will make it as harsh as possible so that if you come to Australia, you should expect to spend ten years in indefinite detention, or in detention, potentially indefinitely. Well, all that means is that an anywhere else but here approach. People are still going to get on boats – they’ll just drown on the way to New Zealand. They’ll drown on the way to Canada. That’s not a solution that’s actually … this idea that somehow we’re standing on principle and not worrying about lives is the wrong way around. We put protection of people’s lives and stopping them drowning front and centre.

**Robert Manne**

Andrew, how do you justify Labor’s change on offshore processing.

**Andrew Leigh**

So, Robert, you spoke at the start about the drownings. Our best estimates of the death rates are somewhere around 1 in 20. Now there’s not many wars in which we’ve sent our soldiers off to fight in which the death rate’s been as high as 1 in 20. If there was a land bridge connecting us to Indonesia, I would feel entirely differently about this. But the string of awful, awful fatalities, mothers holding their children out of the water before the wave engulfs them, as some of the witnesses at Christmas Island saw, convinced me that stopping those drownings is absolutely critical. I think Australian policy has never been closer to what the Greens optimal migration policy is, over the last year or so, and we’ve seen the sort of tragic results of that.

**Adam Bandt**

Your government’s policy as well.

**Andrew Leigh**

So our challenge was, that we had an arrangement with Malaysia, which we felt would act as an effective deterrent, to people making a dangerous boat journey. But if we want more people processed by the UNHCR, in coming to Australia, as Adam and I both want, I think it is important that we’re able to stop the number of people who are coming by boat, and what the current policy says, is that if there’s two asylum seekers sitting in a camp in Indonesia, the one who has the $10,000 to pay a people smuggler, shouldn’t have preferential access to a humanitarian visa, than the one that doesn’t have the $10,000 to pay a people smuggler. And I think in this we have to work with countries that haven’t signed the Refugee Convention. The Refugee Convention was built to deal with the flood of European refugees post-World War 2. It was not built to deal with the current situation. And so, who’s signed? Well, it’s developed countries with strong borders. Developing countries that don’t attract many refugees, so that’s why Somalia has signed and is happy to be a signatory. But then, who doesn’t sign? Well, it’s developing countries sitting next to potential sending countries. So India doesn’t sign. Pakistan doesn’t sign. Indonesia doesn’t sign. Malaysia doesn’t sign. Not because they’re nasty countries, but because they *cannot* deal with the hundreds of thousands of refugees who they would be obliged by the convention to re-settle.

So if you want a regional approach, you have to deal with non-signatories. And you have to recognise that this is … while we respect international law, that this is a convention that was set up to deal with a different problem than the one we have these days. It wasn’t designed for a world of cheap boats and GPS devices, which have led to such tragic consequences. I’m uncomfortable with the sending of people to Nauru in order to equalise the amount of time it would take, but I can’t see a better way of stopping drownings.

**Adam Bandt**

I guess I think that really the nub of it, I think, is what do you think is going to be … and I’ve thought very deeply about this, and it’s not a case of just sticking to principles and not bending. For me it’s a case of what’s going to be the most effective way to stop someone getting on a boat in Indonesia and deciding to make the journey here. Is it the prospect that they’ll be locked up indefinitely on an island, or is a better way to go to actually make it seem as if the camps and the queues there are moving, and if you just wait long enough, you’ll get there. And I think it’s the latter, and the government’s gone with the former.

**Robert Manne**

I’m going to have to draw a line. I think it’s been a wonderfully instructive and interesting conversation, in a genuine sense. But I do want other people to join. And I’ve gone longer than we should have. So, can we get the microphone moving around, and if anyone would like to ask a question, we’ve got about fifteen minutes. And there are a lot of questions.

**Questioner**

Yeah, on this whole tête-a-tête about human rights, aren’t we going to be internationally perceived as a bunch of hypocrites if we’re grandstanding internationally as being so legalistically purist on the whole asylum seeker question, and tokenistically so, when at home, in our own backyard, we’re systemically discriminatory towards our indigenous people, in fact we’re oppressing our indigenous people more in 2012, than we have in the last decade.

**Andrew Leigh**

So, in terms of asylum seekers, I’m particularly proud of the fact that the asylum seeker intake is up 45% to 20,000. I think that’s something we can be enormously proud of. And there’s Bali process working within Indonesia as the co-chair, has got to be the kind of framework through which countries deal with migration. On indigenous Australians, we have made sure that the policies in the Northern Territory comply with the Racial Discrimination Act. The Howard government had to suspend the Racial Discrimination Act, this is our Act, we don’t want to step around it. And so, the current legislation complies with the Racial Discrimination Act. And the gaps are big, I agree with you. But some are showing signs of closing, and the health gaps, the education gaps, seem to be a little bit more amenable than some of the other gaps, but I think there’s steady progress being made. In some sense the first thing you have to do with alleviating indigenous disadvantage is to measure those gaps. Because once you measure them, you know what the problem is, and you can tell whether your policies are working.

**Adam Bandt**

In that last week of parliament, where the asylum seeker bill went down, I think I mentioned it earlier, two of the things that didn’t get anywhere near as much media coverage – one was Labor and the Coalition voting together to cut payments for single parents, to save some money and the other one was Labor and the Coalition voting together to continue the intervention and that’s something that for us, as the Greens, we will not support any intervention in the Northern Territory. It needs to be based or elsewhere needs to be based on community consent, and at the moment it’s not. And I think that diminishes us as a country.

**Robert Manne**

Next question.

**Questioner**

It was just, again it’s moving away from what you guys were speaking about a minute ago. Nick Bryant, in the *Global Mail* a few weeks ago now, he published an article called The Shrinking Talent Pool. And it referred to a landmark that occurred in parliament recently, where over 50% of parliamentarians are now political professionals, as opposed to traditionally coming from the public pool if you like. He made the claim, Nick Bryant, that Ben Chifley wouldn’t be able to be elected to the Labor Party today in preselection. I was just wondering if you guys had any comment about this creep of political professionals coming in to the Labor Party in particular, the Coalition to some extent less, and I suppose perhaps the Greens, and it’s just interesting, and I’m interested in hearing your thoughts, because you two are people who buck the trend, I suppose, coming from academic backgrounds.

**Adam Bandt**

Look, I worked as a lawyer before going to parliament, which is hardly an unusual apprenticeship. I didn’t come up through the staff ranks. I did something else for a good ten, twelve years after leaving uni. I did break the Greens duck though – up till then we’d been the only party without a lawyer in parliament, which I think was even more important. I do think it’s an issue, and I think that there has been a broad trend towards professionalisation of parliament, and I think anything that we can do to ensure that people from trades backgrounds, can continue to get into parliament, is absolutely critical, but we haven’t noticed a trend within the Greens of people working their way up through the ranks, of being a staffer and then getting elected. People tend to come from social activism and from other areas, before getting into parliament for the Greens.

**Andrew Leigh**

Look, I really enjoyed the article, but I think in terms of the number of political staffers who enter parliament, it is sometimes a mistake to compare with 1970, which was a period which to a first approximation, there were no political staffers, so it’s not that surprising that not many parliamentarians were former political staffers, because no-one was a former political staffer. My own background, I’m a lapsed lawyer, economics professor, but I also spent 18 months working for Senator Peter Cook, so I guess I’m inside that 50%. I found that period really useful, for me learning, getting a better sense of the country. He was from Western Australia. I spent time in WA. I went to communities that were majority indigenous, I went to mining projects, I got to get a better sense of my country, as a result of my time working for Peter Cook, and I think I’m a better pollie for it.

**Questioner**

Thanks for taking my question. And thanks for coming to La Trobe as well. Earlier this year there was an Australian report that found that the war on drugs was a failure. And this was just one of a myriad of reports showing this fact. The policy position on drugs in Australia costs more tax money than it saves, and Andrew, you said the ALP, liked market solutions to problems, and Adam, your party has moved away from its more liberal position on drug policy in the past. Why won’t either party adequately address this topic?

**Adam Bandt**

Well, I don’t think we’ve moved away from it. We continue to advocate it. Richard Di Natale, our health spokesperson who’s worked in the area of public health as a drug and alcohol doctor, in response to that when it came out, said yes, this is exactly the debate that we need to have. From a straight political point of view, when the Greens get up and say that, and start to advocate for it, it almost invariably gets misconstrued, and you end up with, as we did in Tasmania, where I think it was the Labor Party doing robo-calls to people’s homes on the eve of the elections, saying, did you know the Greens want to give heroin to your children? You know, or talk about heroin to your children. Like, until we can have a sensible debate about it, to be frank, it is difficult for us to get up and continue to advocate – we haven’t changed our policies, you’ll see what Richard said, but when we get up and advocate, we’re often a convenient whipping boy, when in fact what we’re saying is what the majority of health professionals would believe.

**Andrew Leigh**

So there’s a group in parliament, Mal Washer, Richard Di Natale, and myself, who sort of meet regularly to talk about these issues as to proper drug regulation. I actually think there’s an awful lot we don’t know about what the world would look like in a highly liberalised context, and so this is an area in which you can argue about current policies, but that doesn’t automatically tell you what you ought to do. That’s particularly true, given that the drug marketers changed substantially in the last decade. This isn’t your mum’s drug market, right? Which was fundamentally about marijuana, cocaine and heroin. This is a market on which entrepreneurs are building new pharmaceutical substances faster than kids in nightclubs can buy them. And regulating that market I think, is pretty tough. But it ought to be harm minimisation, I think the ACT Labor government has made the right decision now on allowing a needle exchange program in the Alexander McConachie Centre, the ACT jail. Probably only in the ACT would you see a government put in place a prison needle exchange program two months out from an election. I think it’s a pretty brave decision. We’ve copped some flak internally from the Public Sector Union, but I think it’s the right thing to do.

**Robert Manne**

We have time for two more questions I think, if they’re pretty brief discussions.

**Questioner**

I want to ask a question about education and its impact on productivity. We see institutions like a Group of Eight making a small contribution over time in terms of the number of graduates going into the economy and the knowledge economy, but increasing concentration of resources around research and access to courses like medicine that unlock access to research, and the economy in broad terms is more reliant on people that are produced from institutions like La Trobe and not Group of Eight. So I just want to get a sense – do you think that’s a good policy outcome? And if not, what can or should be done about it?

**Andrew Leigh**

So, the first, the main thing that you’re doing for Australia’s productivity is through the student output. The student output must dwarf the research output contribution to Australia’s productivity, because everyone you send out has annual earnings 45% higher than they would have had if they’d just finished high school. So adding 45% to people’s productivity, it’s hard to imagine research could match that. But I’m a former researcher, I get that good support for research is important and I think that needs to be done in ways that encourages groups, speciality groups to come together at institutions. I think funnelling a higher share of research funding through a competitive grant system in general makes sense. The notion of compacts I think is a sensible way of encouraging universities to find their comparative advantage rather than to have sort of 40 cookie cutter universities across the country.

**Adam Bandt**

Given the time, I can’t respond in as much detail but I would love someone to do a project of how much universities now, in the competitive era, spend on advertising, across the country, per year, that they didn’t have to spend before. I would like to see a greater re-allocation of resources within universities to allow people to continue to teach and I think that our future, when the rest of the world tells us to stop digging, is going to be highly dependent on research. I think R and D both government and non-government, were somewhere around two and a half per cent of GDP. We need to get it up to three per cent. That includes a boost to universities as well as a boost to the other sectors, but I mean, it is … if we had some good national planning we’d understand that this is going to be a pillar for the economy when the mining bubble bursts. And I’m worried that we’re spending the money on bus ads instead of … to be a bit glib, instead of having a national approach to it.

**Robert Manne**

I said two questions but I’m afraid we’ve reached two, and we can’t have another question. I just want to say this. It seems to me this has been a discussion of really important questions, which is done to our university and indeed to the idea of what universities are about, a discussion which has been both interesting, where there has been both differences, but a lot of commonality and respect. And also sophistication and depth. I’m very grateful to you both. I knew you were the two right people to invite to this, and I do think it shows that the idea that somehow One Nation was the predecessor of the Greens which is what News Limited is saying is an absurdity, and there is a lot in common I think in the world views as well as differences. So my deep hope is that this is the beginning of a discussion which can see a future relationship between the two parties which is both competitive and co-operative, which is what I think it ought to be. That’s what I’m going to go battling for. My main thing is to thank you very much, very sincerely for what’s been a splendid discussion. Thank you.