

Step one: Change the Government!

The Activists Guide to the 2022 Election



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April 2022

Introduction

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Welcome to the SEARCH Foundation Activists Guide to the 2022 Federal Election!

This guide has been created by SEARCH members to provide a resource for socialist and progressive activists who will be involved in fighting for change at the 2022 election.

The people that have worked on it come from different parts of the continent, different generations and diverse personal, activist, academic and professional backgrounds. Some are members of political parties, some are not.

All of them are socialists committed to working across the divisions in progressive politics to create real, radical change.

As you read it, and as you work on whatever campaigns and issues you're involved in at the 2022 Election, we hope you'll also be inspired to work as broadly as possible with other socialists and progressives to win the changes we so desperately need. To win a Constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament, action on climate change, workers and women's rights, and peace and international solidarity, we will need to keep the pressure up, no matter who wins the election.

In this guide you will find analysis and arguments for many of those necessary changes. While we hope it is comprehensive, it is not an exhaustive list of everything that needs fixing. If you are passionate about a cause that we haven't

mentioned, or think we've made errors, we invite you to comment on our website or social media in response.

Equally, if you find anything in this Guide useful, we ask that you pass it on to at least one other activist with your recommendation. In our view, Australia needs a bigger, stronger left, and that can only be built by creating more connections between left activists working together, discussing and exchanging ideas, and in doing so, developing broader, stronger mass movements for change.

Elections change nations, and we need to make sure we change the current government, but that is just one step in the struggle for a truly democratic, socialist, ecologically sustainable, peaceful world. 

CONTENTS

2. *Guide overview*
4. *First Nations policy: Voice! Treaty! Truth!*
6. *Climate emergency: radical action needed*
8. *Women's rights: combatting harassment and misogyny*
10. *Equality and wellbeing*
12. *Wages and fairness*
14. *Pay equity between the sexes*
16. *Foreign policy for a safer world*
18. *Housing and inequality*
20. *Making jobs secure*
22. *Deepening democracy*
24. *Sources and further reading*

Defeat the Liberal National Coalition, and build social movements for a sustainable, secure, fair, just, and more democratic Australia



SEARCH Committee

On 21 May, Australians will vote for a new federal parliament, amid deep uncertainty highlighted by the unrelenting and accelerating pace of extreme weather events driven by global heating; war in Europe exacerbating the threats of a great-power conflagration by design or accident; recurring economic uncertainties and job insecurities for many; the COVID-19 pandemic; health and aged-care workers and systems under extreme stress; and continuing economic and social injustices based on class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and age.

The election ought to be about the big-picture issues that will determine our future: catastrophic climate change, increasing wealth and income inequality, First Nations people's demands for 'Voice Treaty Truth', environmental degradation and widespread species extinction, the need for a tax system where the wealthy pay their share, adequate and effective public services, restoring tertiary education which has lost 40,000 jobs, making sure public schools are funded according to the full Gonski model, an independent foreign policy, and avoiding the dangers of war.

Crucially, it should be about putting people's well-being and a healthy environment before systemic and dominating corporate power and the unsustainable thirst for economic growth in the interests of profits and wealth.

The election should not revolve simply around specific policies, important though some of these are, still less about 'gotcha moments' and the campaign performances of leaders. It is not about a few pieces of the jigsaw puzzle but how those fit together to make a coherent vision for the future.

This Handbook identifies some key policies that

challenge the status quo and entrenched power elites – policies that SEARCH members and supporters can promote and fight for during, and especially after, the election. It helps lay foundations for achieving our shared vision of a democratic, ecological socialist society in major policy areas: First Nations, women, climate change, jobs, wages and wealth, democracy, equality and sustainability, housing, and a progressive independent foreign policy.

Australians and the global community urgently need governments and political representatives with courage to reduce the power of media and other corporate monopolies, and challenge the military-industrial complex and foreign powers that drag us into conflict and war. We need governments to promote an ecologically-grounded economy that does not depend on endless growth, fossil fuels, and consumerism.

The interrelated crises facing all humanity demand bold and fearless long-term policy and actions, not just by governments and parliaments, but also by communities and civil-society organisations, unions, and progressive institutions and movements.

The Liberal National Coalition government has made life worse for the majority and actively opposes policies to create a sustainable, secure, and more democratic future for Australians. Morrison and the Coalition only won a two-seat majority in 2019. We can and must defeat them in 2022.

Protests over COVID-19 vaccine mandates shows a Trump-like polarisation of Australian society, with a revolt against 'politicians' and denial of scientific facts now widespread. These far-right political movements threaten our common future. They can and should be countered by strong

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grassroots community movements that advocate progressive alternatives to corporate power and limited, often self-serving, parliamentary politics.

Labor is pitching simpler, more focused messages than in 2019, including on jobs, wages, working conditions, implementing the Uluru Statement, child-care, aged care and higher targets for cutting greenhouse emissions. The Greens have stronger climate policies than Labor and the looming climate catastrophe require these.

Progressive political activists and parties, including the ALP and The Greens, should work with each other inside and outside the next parliament – failure to do so can only help conservative and reactionary forces. Progressive movements should push for better dialogue, cooperation and solidarity between progressive activists, politicians, and parties.

We need the biggest possible progressive majority in the parliament – Labor, The Greens and progressive independents; maximum unity of that progressive majority; and, above all, united and mobilised independent movements outside parliament, actively mobilising for progressive reforms. If the Coalition loses, we can be sure that it and other conservative and reactionary forces, including big business and the media, will mobilise to undermine and block even the mildest reforms of a progressive government, as they did during the Rudd-Gillard governments.

SEARCH looks beyond the forthcoming election and emphasises the need for action over the long term. We must do more than just get rid of the Coalition. We need and deserve governments with radical ideas that empower people and are accountable and transparent. We need long-



SEARCH members at Sydney May Day 2019

term governments that have the imagination and capacity to advance progressive and radical change. We must avoid a repeat of 2007–2013 where a government elected after massive campaigns by workers and unions, then splintered and let the Coalition back into power.

Grassroots community movements for progressive and democratic change are essential if Australians are to have a safe, fair, sustainable future. Only determined work at all levels, before, during and after the election, can shift the public debate towards decisive change, win key reforms, and create a new generation of genuinely progressive political representatives who reject the neoliberalism of the last 40 years. We need more democracy and more democratic collective action at every level if we are going to save our world and save our future.

SEARCH Committee – April 2022



The Uluru Statement from the Heart positions this moment as “an historic opportunity to reimagine our nation. It is our chance to come together to deliver real change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so they can take their rightful place in our nation.”

In the words of Pat Anderson AO, Alyawarra Elder and Co-Convenor of the Uluru Constitutional Convention, “Now is our moment to act.”

The key First Nations’ issue in this election is support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart proposal for a Referendum on a constitutionally-enshrined VOICE to Parliament. The Uluru Statement has been endorsed by the majority of national and state-based First Nations organisations. A First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution will provide a permanent, representative, and authoritative voice that is not subject to removal by political whim.

SEARCH Foundation members are called on to make this a major focus of our election work, continuing the long tradition of socialist support for First Nations’ sovereignty, land rights and self-determination.

The Coalition’s Record

A decade of LNP government has seen minimal progress for First Nations peoples, despite its proclaimed commitment to Closing the Gap. The Morrison government has continued to impose the Basics Card, the Cashless Welfare Card, Stronger Futures and the super-harsh Community Development Program on First Nations peoples. It refused to endorse the constitutionally-enshrined Voice, and attempted to derail the process by consulting on a legislated option.

Labor Policy

Labor’s Platform has been thoroughly changed through the effort of its Indigenous Caucus, led by Senators Patrick Dodson and Malarndirri McCarthy and Linda Burney MP. Labor promises to hold the referendum on the Voice to Parliament in their first term, and is committed to the entire Statement from the Heart. Labor promises to:

- Implement the Uluru Statement in full – Voice, Treaty and Truth.
- Work towards Closing the Gap.
- Abolish the punitive Community Development Program.
- Turn the tide on incarceration and deaths in custody through landmark justice reinvestment funding.
- Improve housing in remote Indigenous communities.
- Invest in First Nations management of land and waters.
- Strengthen First Nations economic and job opportunities.
- Get rid of the privatised Cashless Debit Card.

Australian Greens

The Greens Election Platform for Treaty and First Nations Justice prioritises Treaty and Truth, but not a constitutionally-enshrined Voice. Greens policy begins by proposing a national Truth and Justice Commission, “to lay the foundations” for developing a Treaty or Treaties with First Nations people.

Though the policy does not mention the Uluru Statement from the Heart, this echoes the Uluru Statement’s call for a Makarrata Commission “to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history”.

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SEARCH considers that The Greens risk jeopardising the success of the invitation made to the Australian people by First Nations people in the Uluru Statement of Voice, Treaty, Truth. The clear position of the Statement is that the priority is for a constitutionally-enshrined Voice to Parliament to come before a Makarrata Commission is legislated, so that there is a nationally-representative body in place to advise the Parliament on this and other legislation affecting First Nations peoples.



SEARCH members campaigning for VTT, early 2020

Other elements of The Greens First Nations policy deserve support, including:

- \$1.4 billion in funding for community-controlled health services and new healing centres
- Their substantial compensation and support program for the Stolen Generations
- Strong laws to protect First Nations cultural heritage, knowledge and intellectual property
- Expansion of Indigenous Protected Areas and First Nations Rangers programs
- Major justice-system reforms, including by implementing in full the recommendations of Royal Commissions and other key inquiries and reports.

Building the Movement

A continuing task for SEARCH members and supporters – during the election and after – is to build the alliances and relationships of trust to empower First Nations community-driven initiatives, including supporting the First Nations Workers Alliance campaign to replace the CDP with real jobs in programs managed by their communities, and supporting the growing networks of First Nations community-controlled organisations including health services, land councils, legal services, community education

providers, language centres and media organisations.

But we must start with the Uluru Statement from the Heart and specifically a referendum to enshrine the Voice in the Constitution. We call on all our members and supporters to approach their local MP and all the candidates, Labor, Greens, LNP and independents, to seek their public endorsement of the proposal to hold this referendum in the next term of parliament. When this referendum is passed, as it surely will be, it will represent a permanent change and a significant shift in power. In the words of Thomas Mayor, a Torres Strait Islander man born on Larrakia country in Darwin and a SEARCH member:

A constitutionally enshrined Voice is the answer to the question of Australia's identity – how we mature as a nation – and how we should celebrate it. By amending the Australian constitution to include First Nations voices, we will be including 60,000 years of continuous culture in what constitutes us as Australians. And further, when we have established a First Nations representative body, the Voice, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will have gained the ability to choose our own representatives, constitutionally guaranteeing us the ability to have the discussion with the Australian people, in a proper way, about when and how we should celebrate. ∞

Climate Emergency: Radical & urgent action needed to avoid ecological, social & economic catastrophe



Humanity faces an existential challenge: to preserve the ecosystems of Planet Earth against the catastrophic threats of climate change. Our ecosystems, and the civilisations that depend on them, face catastrophic collapse unless we make radical change to our economic and social relations – there will be no civilisation on a dead planet.

Climate change is a social and economic justice issue. The harshest impacts of climate change fall on those least responsible for carbon emissions, but who are most vulnerable due to living in precarious environments, poverty and political marginalisation. These communities include First Nations, Pacific Islanders, and low-income communities. Climate change threatens mass displacement of people within and between countries.

Australia's catastrophic 2019-20 fire season, this year's disastrous East Coast floods, more frequent and severe heat waves, and loss of biodiversity and ecosystem health, prove that climate change is a current emergency, no longer 'an issue for the future'. The costs of **not** acting are now a stark reality for Australians.

Globally, the March 2022 report of the IPCC expert panel called 'code red':

The cumulative scientific evidence is unequivocal: Climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health. Any further delay in concerted anticipatory global action on adaptation and mitigation will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all.

Yet governments are still slow to act. Despite significant gains at last year's COP26, the policy responses do not yet meet the ever-more-pressing need to avoid irreversible damage from climate

change. Australia has the highest per capita greenhouse gas emissions from coal power in the world according to data from COP.

A recent estimate put the total losses to Australia of unmitigated climate change as nearly \$2.7 trillion. Against this, the cost of meeting the Paris Target is \$122 billion, 'a more than a 20 to 1 ratio of the damages from climate change to the costs of emissions reduction'.

Blocking the way to the urgently needed radical social change is a powerful alliance of fossil-fuel interests that have stalled and sabotaged actions to avoid dangerous climate change. As a result, actions in Australia and globally have fallen well short of what is required to avert catastrophe. This country is a global outlier and laggard on climate action.

The challenge is to achieve a rapid and just social and economic transition to a zero-carbon economy while protecting the legitimate interests of workers, communities and businesses whose wellbeing and livelihoods suffer from unavoidable changes. A 'just transition' to a carbon-neutral economy, advocated by unions, environment and community groups, and progressive businesses and governments, is critical. So is building energy democracy through public and community control over energy systems, and energy security with particular support for low-income households and families.

The interests and power of people and Nature must be asserted over those who wish to exploit fossil fuels and carbon-intensive industrial production for profit and wealth.

The 2014 Paris Conference, while a significant breakthrough in global climate policymaking, nonetheless tabulated reduction targets that, in total, would result in 2.7°C of global heating. The Glasgow Climate Pact of 2021 registered stronger

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commitments to emissions reductions and increased pressure on laggard nations like Australia, but key points were watered down to appease fossil-fuel interests.

The Climate Targets Panel (CTP), independent Australian climate scientists and policymakers who aim for targets informed by sound science, has found that for Australia to contribute fairly to keeping global heating below 1.5°C, it needs targets of 74% below 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2035.

The next Federal government must adopt these targets as the basis of Australia's climate policies, and to implement economic, energy and employment policies consistent with achieving them. Even more stringent targets to limit global heating may be necessary.



School Strike for Climate, 2019

Policies to achieve net zero emissions by 2035 or sooner will centre on science-based targets, strong regulations, incentives for investments in renewable-energy technologies, technology transfer, and energy markets that put a price on pollution with no exemptions for polluting industries or offsets that are only 'on paper' reductions. Appropriate support, including compensation, should be provided to vulnerable groups affected by the changes.

Australia will also need policies including:

- Interventionist industry policies to accelerate a just, secure-job transition to a zero-carbon economy, and harness the potential for new jobs, including research, training, and investment in renewable-energy technologies, energy efficiency technologies, green metals processing, sustainable transport options and water systems, biomaterials, green buildings, waste minimisation and recycling systems.
- Reformed and democratic urban and regional planning to achieve sustainable human settlements, supported by massive expansion

of public transport.

- Reform of urban and rural land use, including stronger restrictions on land clearing and an end to ineffective and frequently corrupt 'offset' schemes.
- No new fossil-fuel extraction and production projects.
- An end to all forms of subsidy, both overt and hidden, to fossil-fuel-based industries.
- Investment in climate adaptation and resilience to vulnerable communities, including protection of ecosystems, affordable climate-safe housing, water and energy security, and support to people displaced by climate impacts on their homes.

While radical reforms towards a just transition are essential right now, such reforms can also help build both the basis of and broad support for more far-reaching changes towards a democratic, ecological, socialist society based on the needs of people and nature, not on profit and wealth. ∞

Women's rights: the imperative of combating harassment and misogyny



“What needs to happen for you to recognise the inequality, bias and dangers that women face?”

The very fact the above question needed to be asked of Scott Morrison in March 2022 indicates the calamity of the Coalition's approach to the treatment of women, especially since 2019 during Morrison's term as Prime Minister. Misogyny and lack of respect have been almost normal.

Sexual harassment in the workplace

Harassment, discrimination, misogyny, and lack of respect are systematic issues in Australia: in our families, in our workplaces, in our parliaments. The publicity surrounding the alleged rape of Brittany Higgins led to Set the Standard, an Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces undertaken by the Australian Human Rights Commission, released in November 2021. This report is clear about the very high incidence of harassment:

Over half (51%) of all people currently in Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces (CPW) have experienced at least one incident of bullying, sexual harassment or actual or attempted sexual assault in a CPW.

In 2016, Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins began to conduct a National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces, which reported in 2020. The report, *Respect@Work*, cites the AHRC 2018 survey: “One in three people experienced sexual harassment at work in the past five years”. Furthermore, the harassment is “gendered and intersectional”: almost two in five women (39%) and 53% of Indigenous

people have experienced sexual harassment. The Commissioner writes:

Workplace sexual harassment is prevalent and pervasive: it occurs in every industry, in every location and at every level, in Australian workplaces. Australians, across the country, are suffering the financial, social, emotional, physical and psychological harm associated with sexual harassment. This is particularly so for women.

According to *Respect@Work*, “the current legal and regulatory system is simply no longer fit for purpose”. The report makes fifty-five recommendations for a new regulatory model, which recognises that the right of workers to be free from sexual harassment is a human right, a workplace right and a safety right.

This principle should be the basis for urgent and comprehensive action to ensure everyone has a safe workplace where they are treated with respect. Instead, the Coalition has been, at best, half-hearted. Initially it claimed to have agreed to (in full, in-principle, or in-part) or noted all fifty-five recommendations in the *Respect@Work* Report. But when amendments were proposed to Parliament that would enact these recommendations, the Government failed to put responsibility onto employers. The burden of addressing workplace harassment and violence still falls on the shoulders of individual women.

COVID-19

A lack of safety and respect for women, First Nations people, and others subordinated by class and identity, are systematic social and cultural issues and a consequence of wider inequality. In turn, these issues reinforce and intensify material, social, and political inequality. This has been particularly salient through the COVID

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pandemic, during which, for example, lockdowns and stay-at-home orders forced many women to stay at home and, for some, to work from home, which exposed women to additional harm if they were locked down with their abusers and increased the risk of domestic violence. COVID also increased wage inequality, as women are much more likely than men to be in precarious and casualised work, thus a higher proportion of women did not qualify for JobKeeper. Women were also more likely to carry the brunt of responsibility for care work, lack of childcare, and COVID-induced home learning.



Women's march for justice, Brisbane, March 2021

Safety, Respect, Equity

“Every woman in Australia deserves access to a safe place to work, a safe place to live, fair and equal pay, quality free early learning and care, and a justice system that works for survivors.”

In March 2022, a group of prominent Australian women launched the **Safety, Respect, Equity campaign**. The campaign's demands are as follows:

- Preventing sexual harassment and bullying. (Implement all fifty-five recommendations in the Respect@Work report including a positive duty on employers.)
- Ten days paid family and domestic violence leave.
- Acting on the National Plan for First Nations Women and Girls. (Support and fund the

seven recommendations in the 2020 Wiyi Yani U Thangani Report.)

- Ensuring effective employment programs for women with disability.
- Stronger, consistent child sexual assault laws.
- Eliminating the gender pay gap including necessary legal reform.
- Free, accessible and quality early childhood education and care.
- Expanding paid parental leave.
- Embedding respectful relationships and consent education everywhere, including schools, universities, workplaces and homes.

As part of its election policy, the Labor Party have committed to enacting all fifty-five recommendations of the Respect@Work report, and consulting widely to “finalise and implement stronger laws as a matter of priority”. While we have a long way to go when it comes to combating systemic sexism, misogyny, and harassment of women in Australian society, a change in federal government would be a step in the right direction.



Equality and well-being

Inequality is a systemic feature of Australia and of similar societies and economies. Inequality is a product of the capitalist market system where wealth is transmitted through families.

ACOSS, among others, [charts income and wealth inequalities](#) in Australia and shows:

- The highest 20% income group has six times the income of those in the lowest 20% income group.
- Those in the highest 20% wealth group have 90 times the wealth of those in the lowest 20% wealth group.
- People in the highest 20% income group receive 42% of all national income, which is more than the share of the lowest 60% combined.
- The average wealth of a household in the highest 20% wealth group, at \$3.25 million, is over ninety times times that of the lowest 20% wealth group, at \$36,000.
- The average wealth of the highest 5% wealth group is \$6,795,000.

Wealth is distributed more unequally than income and almost half of all wealth is owned by the richest 10%. The total wealth of this group is nearly three times that of the 'bottom' 60% of the population. The three most important forms of wealth are housing, superannuation and shares and investment. The richest 10% own

considerably more of these, with the ownership of shares and investments the most concentrated.

Inheritances go disproportionately to those who are wealthy. This is especially so with shares and investments. Moreover, those with higher incomes and more wealth can save and invest more and take greater advantage of tax benefits linked to superannuation, negative gearing and capital gains.

Why inequality matters

As Christopher Sheil [writes](#) in 2021 of

... the growing volume of evidence that increasing economic inequality inhibits economic growth, destroys social cohesion, undermines democracy, and exacerbates myriad social problems — including the management of COVID-19 and other health problems.

Or as Bernard Crick [wrote](#) in 1987

... without a sincere desire to achieve an egalitarian society, any democratic socialist movement loses its dynamic and lapses back into a directionless pragmatism.

Relative and absolute issues

Income and wealth inequalities are relative matters; the concern is to limit the gap between top and bottom and ensure that no one is excluded from decent living standards.

But, as Crick wrote, life expectancy should be an absolute matter to end the different rates of mortality between social classes and ensure equality of life and death.

Equality of life and death has not been achieved in Australia in the 2020s. [The target](#) to close the life

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Average wealth ownership per person		
	In Bottom 60%	In Top 10%
Total wealth	277,000	4,754,000
Home	120,000	1,413,000
Superannuation	56,000	897,000
Shares & investments	28,000	1,441,000
Data for 2020 from ACOSS		

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expectancy gap of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by 2031 is not on track. The life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females born in 2015–2017 is 75.6 years compared with 83.4 years for non-Indigenous females. For males the difference is 71.6 years compared with 80.2.

“Wealth is distributed more unequally than income and almost half of all wealth is owned by the richest 10%.”

In contemporary Australia, life expectancy is clearly linked to socioeconomic status. On 2017–18 data, average life expectancy in the electorate of Bradfield was 86.3 years; this was the highest of any federal electorate. By contrast, life expectancy in Lingiari, the lowest, was 75.5 years. 84 per cent of the variation in divisional life expectancy can be explained by

socioeconomic and Indigenous status. It is shown in figure 1 (below).

The necessary policies

- A social security system that keeps people out of poverty.
- Safe, secure and affordable housing for all.
- Properly funded policies for ‘closing the gap’ that are agreed with First Nations’ people.
- Jobs for all and the end of under-employment.
- Alter the tax system to remove biases against women and people on low incomes and that favour those with substantial wealth.
- Curb tax avoidance and evasion by individuals and corporations.
- Increase public revenue and public spending to provide universal welfare, health services, child and aged care, without user-pays. ∞

Life Expectancy and Socio-economic status

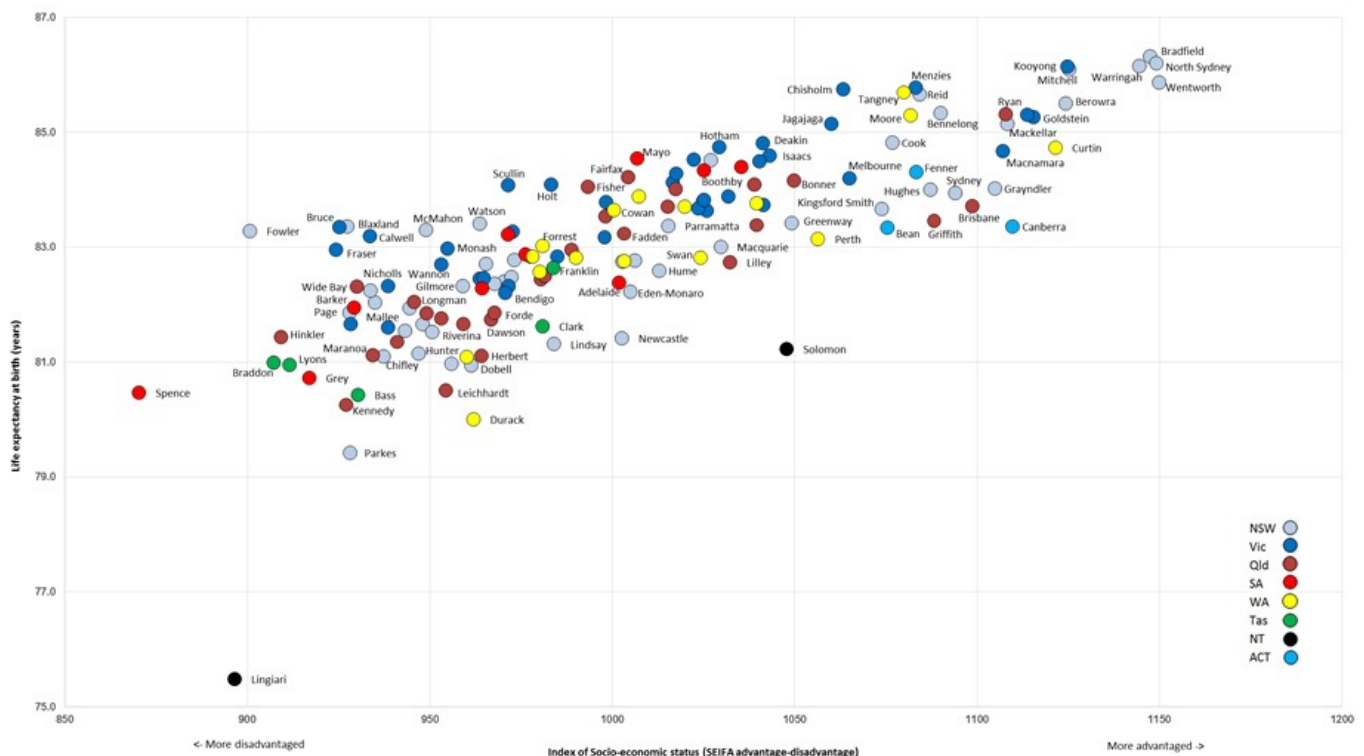


Fig 1. Life Expectancy and Socio-economic status

Source: https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1920/LifeExpectancyAustraliasCommonwealth

Wages and Fairness

In the coming election, there are three big issues when it comes to wages and fairness:

- The living standards of Australian workers have been falling under the Coalition Governments.
- National income has been going to profits and not to wages.
- The inequality between low- and high-income earners has been increasing.

In the entire eight years from the election of the Abbott government in 2013 to the end of 2021, private sector wages only increased 1.4% above inflation. In 2021 alone, wages rose just 2.3%, but inflation increased by 3.5%.

Wage increases are not keeping up with productivity improvement, and employers are taking a larger share of national income instead

of paying workers more. The Centre for Future Work graphic shows the labour share fell just over 11 percentage points between 1975 and 2018 costing workers an average of \$16,800 a year.

The fall in the wages share is fundamentally because of the loss in workers' industrial bargaining power. Workers and unions are weaker because of:

- 'Enterprise by enterprise' bargaining.
- Successful efforts by employers to avoid unions and collective agreements.
- Legal changes which allow employers to get out of agreements and make it difficult for workers and unions to organise, bargain and take industrial action.
- More workers have been pushed on to minimum rates of awards while precarious work and increasing use of workers on temporary visas has made 'wage theft' almost standard practice.

Increasing wage inequality

On the most recent comparative information, wage inequality in Australia is the most extreme of the OECD countries. The top 10% of wage earners in Australia get 26 times more than the bottom 10%.

Australia has the double whammy – all workers are doing badly because the total labour share of national income is falling and poorly paid workers are doing badly compared with the well paid. Widening inequality is occurring because of the very high 'wage' payments made to executives and managers which have spread from the private financial sector to the corporatised 'public' sector and to universities.

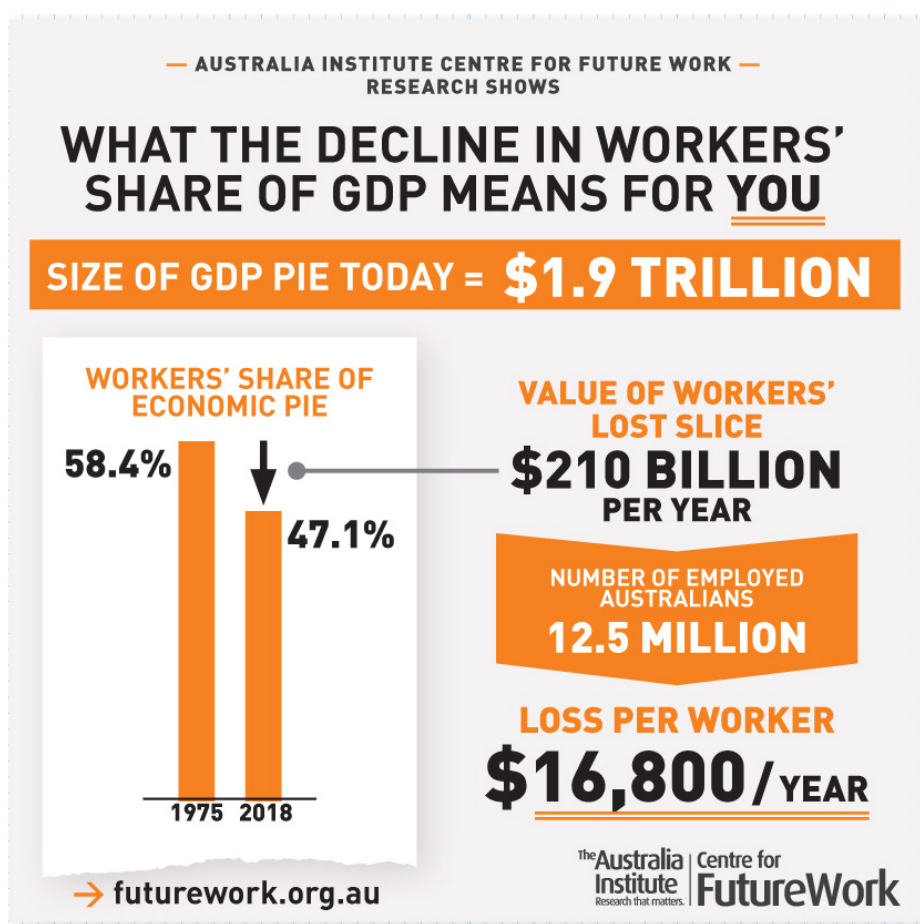


Fig 3. (Source: Centre for Future Work website)

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New policies are needed

1. Improved bargaining and wage-fixation

- Move to industry and occupational-wide bargaining.
- Remove all limits on bargaining claims and agendas and on taking industrial action.
- Make awards relevant to actual industry standards rather than as safety nets.
- The minimum wage to be set as a living wage.

2. Direct measures to reduce wage inequality

- Strengthen all gender pay equity measures and amend the Fair Work Act to empower the Fair Work Commission to make orders ensuring pay equity in awards and enterprise agreements.
- Require the FWC to use gender-inclusive methodology and criteria for job evaluation and classification schemes.
- Develop and apply measures equivalent to gender pay equity for NESB and less-abled workers.
- Legislate a mandatory ratio (initially at say 12:1) between the person with the highest and the person with the lowest earnings in an enterprise or organisation.

3. Action against wage theft

- A consistent system of investigation, wage recovery and enforcement, including criminal prosecution for perpetrators.
- Ensure unions have adequate powers to access and inspect employer records and take actions against employers.
- Better resource the Fair Work Ombudsman to ensure compliance with award pay rates.

4. Measures to build and sustain collective organisations

- End the conservative assault on unions and support unions in legitimate industrial and political action and activities.
- Explicit and effective protection for accredited union workplace representatives.
- A legislative code of rights and protections for workplace union representatives,

including involvement in formal dialogue with management about investment, staffing and operation of the enterprise.

- Resource backing for union education and training for existing and prospective members and for innovative schemes to involve young workers, including students, in unions.

“Employers are taking a larger share of national income instead of paying workers more”

Conclusion

Little can be expected from the Coalition except further pain for workers.

The Greens currently have the most comprehensive and progressive policies on wages including a living wage and bargaining at whatever level is appropriate (workplace, firm, sector) and with the right to take industrial action unrestricted by bargaining periods.

The ALP is committed to wage theft laws, limits on sham contracting, and improving job security. They also advocate (as do The Greens) measures on the gender pay gap and ten days paid family and domestic-violence leave. At this stage they have no explicit policies on industry bargaining, right to strike or the living wage.

The Greens and ALP policies will lead to improvements for workers, especially the job security of the precarious workforce, preventing wage theft and reducing the gender pay gap. Union access to workplaces will be improved and this should make unionisation easier.

However both parties need to do more about three other things: the structure of bargaining, reducing the inequality in earnings between the top and bottom of the workforce, and protecting union delegates and activists in the workplace. These are imperative and not add-ons. In particular, they require the ALP, and perhaps even some unions, to consider their strategic framework and priorities. 

Pay equity between the sexes

Australian women have still not achieved pay equity. This is unfinished business that should be an imperative for the incoming government after the 2022 election.

‘Equal pay for equal work’ was introduced in 1969; ‘equal pay for work of equal value’ in 1972, and a female minimum wage in 1974. But ABS data for November 2021, shows the gender pay gap for full-time workers was \$255.30 per week or 13.8%. Including part-time workers, the gap was \$483.30 per week or 30.6%.

Systemic causes

The gender pay gap is the result of the social and economic factors that combine to reduce women’s earning capacity over a lifetime. Women earn less than men on an hourly, weekly, annual and lifetime basis, and have less superannuation when they retire. Women are more likely to be employed in less well-paid occupations and are more likely than men to have a disrupted working life due to child-bearing and family-caring responsibilities. The gender pay disparity persists even though girls are now more likely than boys to complete Year 12 at school and women are more likely than men to complete tertiary studies.

A 50-year campaign

50 years after The Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value Principle was adopted there is still overwhelming evidence of a large disparity in men’s and women’s earnings. The Equal Pay for Equal Work decision of 1969 was fully implemented, with uniform rates introduced for men and women doing exactly the same jobs but there was a failure to implement the 1972 Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value Principle. Work value was not adequately examined and appropriate comparisons with better-paid male occupations were not made.

The National Pay Equity Coalition (NPEC) became the key player in the campaign for gender pay equity. Emerging from the 1987 Socialist Feminist Conference, between 1988 and 2011 it led the key demand to get award wages in female-dominated industries increased so as to fairly reflect the wages of men for work of comparable value. NPEC’s work from 1988 to 2011 has left an ongoing legacy – one that needs to be built on by the next generation of strategists and activists.

Comparable worth

The NPEC’s legacy includes a solution to the problem of defining inequality on the basis of work value comparisons between male- and female-dominated job classifications in a labour market with deep occupational segregation. This means establishing equal or comparable worth for work that is not of the same or similar nature. NPEC members, liaising with international colleagues, worked systematically to develop a methodology and criteria for a gender-inclusive approach to job evaluation.

The NSW & Queensland Principles

Another legacy of NPEC has been the breakthrough concept of historical undervaluation, which establishes the undervaluation of predominantly female classifications without reference to a male comparator and without the need to establish discrimination. It was first enunciated in the NSW Equal Remuneration Principle (ERP) 2000. In 2019, 17,500 public school administrative and learning support staff employed by NSW Department of Education were awarded an immediate 11% pay increase and a further 8% to be phased in, a decision based explicitly on the gender-based undervaluation methodology.

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Canberra Women's March

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The Queensland Principle 2002 and subsequent state legislation was even stronger. This is explicit that a male comparator is not required to proceed with a case about gender equity. Moreover, and going further than NSW, the Commission can consider enterprise bargaining rates as well as awards.

The poverty of the Federal system

The state industrial jurisdictions are increasingly restricted to public servants and employees of some state enterprises. All other workers – private sector, some local government, universities, most NGOs – are under the Federal Fair Work Act. Other than the 2011 award of significant pay increases to social and community services workers (SACS award), outcomes in the Fair Work Commission have been extremely limited. This is aptly summarised by Fiona Macdonald and Sara Charlesworth that ‘equal pay has been marginalised in the operation of the Fair Work Act’. As Robyn Layton, Meg Smith and Andrew Stewart put it: ‘... addressing and resolving matters of gender-based undervaluation, within the framework of the Fair Work Act, is neither automatic nor straightforward’.

Even the SACS decision did not establish principles and precedents and is ‘a narrower representation of the problem of gender pay inequity by FWA than in state-based equal pay cases’. Moreover, the President of the Fair Work Commission, Ian Ross, has made it very clear that he does not see a legal framework in the Fair Work Act 2009 that will enable the Fair Work Commission to deal with pay equity claims.

Change the Fair Work Act

Currently the Fair Work Act is a block to gender pay equity. It must be amended if pay equity is to be achieved. In particular, changes are required to:

- Empower the FWC to make orders ensuring pay equity.
- Ensure the use of gender-inclusive methodology and criteria for job evaluation and classification schemes.
- Require the FWC to consider enterprise bargaining rates as well as award rates in assessing an equal remuneration case. ∞

For an independent foreign policy that contributes to a safer world



As a ‘middle power’ situated in the Asia-Pacific region, Australia could play a significant role to promote and work for peace and international cooperation to address the many crises, inequalities and injustices that confront the global community. Australia could best play that role with an independent and non-aligned foreign policy based on key principles and values, including:

- Recognition that climate change and other ecological disasters threaten all humanity and require urgent, large-scale cooperation to preserve rather than destroy our common home.
- An end to the arms race and militarisation, with major steps towards disarmament, especially eliminating weapons of mass destruction.
- The peaceful resolution of disputes through agreed international and multilateral institutions.
- Respect for democracy, human rights and the right of all nations to self-determination.
- Opposition to great power domination, ‘spheres of influence’, and the use or threat of military invasions and other forms of violence and coercion to enforce these.
- A generous foreign aid program that delivers effectively and efficiently to those who need it most.
- Solidarity with peoples and movements struggling for self-determination and for the above principles and rights in their own societies.
- Fair trade and investment agreements based on respect for local conditions and fair regulatory standards, decided through democratically accountable processes. World Trade Organisation intellectual property rules must be suspended during global pandemics such as COVID-19, to ensure vaccines and treatments for all.

Many major issues that face all nations are global, such as climate change and biodiversity loss, food and energy security, treatment of refugees, peace and disarmament. There is no path to separate security or peace, only joint global action to address and resolve the problems.

An independent, non-aligned and peaceful foreign policy would best serve the interests of Australians, our immediate region and the world, rather than lining up with former imperial and colonial powers through arrangements such as AUKUS.

Cuts to funding for overseas aid, and an over-reliance on aid programs that do not build capacity in local communities, often serve the interests of wealthy and powerful elites rather than the people they are meant to serve, and can be counter-productive.

Similarly counter-productive are trade policies and trade agreements that give priority to the flow of goods, services, investment and finance at the expense of local development, protection of the environment, and human rights.

“There is no path to separate security or peace, only joint global action to address and resolve the problems.”

Foreign Affairs and Defence

Mainstream political debate on ‘foreign affairs and defence’ is too often held on narrow terrain, dominated by claims of ‘external threats’. It is dominated by a small, self-appointed cabal of ‘defence and foreign affairs experts’ in government, universities and right-wing think tanks. The conservatives also jump at any chance to turn the debate into a ‘khaki election’ where they can wrap themselves in the flag, and claim

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the mantle of ‘patriot’, that ‘last refuge of a scoundrel’.

Left and progressive forces have a proud record in providing alternative voices on peace and international solidarity, often proved correct such as in opposing the wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq, and must continue efforts to democratise debate on foreign policy, trade and international relations.

Many issues that drive Australia’s domestic debate are actually international or transnational. None more so than climate change, as well as issues around the pandemic, refugees and immigration, trade, and economic security. Addressing and resolving those issues requires international partnerships, engagement and solidarity.

Climate change is a prime example. Action by Australia to limit emissions, both here and created by our fossil-fuel exports, would make an important contribution and prove our credentials.

An independent and peaceful Australia, with

solidarity as a core value, can play a genuinely helpful role in addressing these global issues. But it will take a major push from grassroots activists inside and outside parties, parliaments and governments to change the narrow focus of Australian foreign affairs from dependence on the US alliance, AUKUS, ‘the Quad’, etc, to a broader independent role as a ‘global citizen’.

Aid and development assistance

Cuts to foreign aid, and aid that serves the interests of Australian companies rather than local communities, have been a hallmark of the last decade of Coalition government.

After repeated cuts and freezes, the level of overseas development aid (ODA) as a proportion of government expenditure fell from 1.32 per cent in 2012–13 (and a high of 2.43 per cent in 1971–72) to 0.62 per cent in 2020–21. As of 2020, Australia ranks 21st among 29 OECD member countries on this measure. AidWatch, Australia’s only independent aid monitoring group, says: ‘Since the closure of AusAID in 2013, Australian aid has been increasingly directed towards national interests and private finance over developing countries’ humanitarian and development needs for real aid.’

The record low levels of aid, and its misdirection into private finance, has trashed our international reputation and cruelled Australia’s ability to negotiate in good faith for climate action. In particular, our Pacific Island neighbours have grown angrier over our aid failures and climate-change inaction. ∞

Housing and inequality

Inequality is most evident and distressing in regard to housing. As Tone Wheeler says, ‘The rich get richer with even more houses; the poor get rent stress or homelessness.’

Housing availability and affordability are central to inequality. ABS data show that home-ownership rates for people aged under 40 are declining with a widening of intergenerational inequality. The Grattan Institute notes that the share of Australians who own their homes is expected to fall sharply in the decades ahead.

Housing and speculation

Housing in Australian is now almost as much about financial speculation as about acquiring a home and shelter. There is a strong argument that the housing market operates so as to concentrate wealth and make the rich, richer.

There has been a rapid increase in house purchases for speculative purposes and a long-term increase in the ratio of the value of homes

relative to household income. The unregulated housing market is fully integrated into the finance market and is a generator of inequality. The changes in the Australian housing situation are relatively unique in the OECD, especially the high proportion of housing finance accounted for by investors.

National Shelter shows the impact of such speculation on low-income households and document how:

the impact of the capital gains discount combined with negative gearing has dramatically increased the number of investors who compete with homeowners for available property, and also kept more households out of home ownership and trapping them in the rental market.

And the proportion of renters in housing stress (spending more than 30% of their income on housing) is increasing.

Homelessness and Older Women

Women who are fifty-five and older are the fastest growing group of homeless people. The complex

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Mural by Christopher Statton and Megan Wilson, 2015. (Source: Ponderosa Templeton, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons)

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reasons include low incomes, unemployment, retiring with low superannuation, relationship breakdown and domestic violence, unaffordable rents, and insufficient public and community housing. Such homelessness is intensified by Covid and by the systematic inequalities shown by Respect@Work and other reports.

ALP Housing Policy

Labor proposes a \$10 billion off-budget Housing Australia Future Fund to build 20,000 social housing properties and 10,000 affordable housing properties for frontline workers over five years. 4,000 of the 20,000 social housing properties will be allocated for women and children fleeing domestic and family violence, and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness.

Labor has also announced a Regional First Home Buyer Support Scheme which they state will help 10,000 first home buyers a year in regional Australia to buy a home. This will provide a government guarantee of up to 15 per cent for eligible first-home buyers, so locals with a 5 per cent deposit can avoid paying mortgage insurance. It will operate like the current scheme of the Federal Government but will be triple the number of people assisted.

The Greens

The Greens policy is to significantly increase the proportion of public housing in Australia's housing system including:

- Ending the privatisation and sale of public housing stock.
- Phasing-out negative gearing and abolishing property-related capital gains tax discounts and exemptions.
- Public and community housing to cost residents no more than 25% of household income.
- A significant increase in Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

A commentary

The ALP has not continued with its 2019 policies to curtail negative gearing to new homes and to reduce the capital gains tax exemption for housing to 25%. These policies were explicitly linked to housing affordability and reducing inequality.

Numerous, credible, studies show the need for more social housing. A net increase of 15,000 units a year is needed just to keep pace with 'normal' population growth and halt the decline in social rental as a share of all housing. The ALP Housing Australia Future Fund offers 6,000 new social housing units per year – well short of the requirement to keep pace with let alone make significant improvements for all those with housing needs.

A much more comprehensive approach to housing is required including:

- A guarantee of decent and affordable housing as a universal right.
- Controlling speculation by curtailing negative gearing and eliminating or reducing the capital gains tax exemption.
- Expanding social housing through a non-market housing system, akin to the way public healthcare provides a non-market medical system.

As Cameron Murray shows, Australia has enough housing supply: there are more houses than households, with second (holiday) homes among the fastest growing sector. We cannot rely on the private land market to meet the needs of renters and first-home buyers. It is a mistaken belief that increasing land supply by 'reforming planning schemes' will solve the affordability problems.

Active public policy must tackle our grossly unbalanced housing tax settings, boost renters' rights and diversify the available choice of quality housing for everyone. 

Precarious work

In 2022, around 40 per cent (2 in every 5) of Australian workers are in precarious work. This includes casual employment, fixed-term contracts, labour hire and sham contracting.

All types of precarious work are impermanent and unprotected by laws and industrial arrangements. People have limited job and income security and very little protection from arbitrary actions by employers.

The level of casual work in Australia is the third highest of the OECD countries. In August 2021, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2.4 million employees (23% of all employees) were casuals and not entitled to paid leave. Their pay and hours worked varied from week to week without any guarantee of a minimum amount of work.

Casual workers earn less than permanent workers – casual workers with full-time hours average just over three-quarters of what full-time permanent workers get. Casual part-time workers get just over a half of permanent part-time workers.

What needs to be done

A new and comprehensive set of employment rights is needed to give all workers real security. This requires either a new employment law and/or very substantial changes to the current ‘Fair Work Act’. The basis should include:

- All types of employment to be treated as ongoing with unrestricted application of all employment rights including unfair dismissal.
- The default position that employees have ongoing employment with leave, defined working hours and termination only with notice and for statutory reasons.
- Exceptional circumstances for temporary employment to be limited to situations such

as temporary replacement of a named worker in a defined job, or to do an explicit ‘one-off’ task, or in emergencies and extremis.

- As a minimum, equivalent standards to those in the EU Directive on Platform Work 2021 to be applied in Australia, with a legal presumption that an ongoing employment relationship exists between the digital labour platform and a person performing platform work.
- All workers to have access to portable leave arrangements covering all types of accrued leave including sick, personal and long service leave.
- Revise unfair dismissal provisions to apply to all workers without qualifying periods and extend them to the failure of employers to provide permanent employment.
- In all unfair dismissal matters, proof of fairness and due process to be on the employer. Workers found to be unfairly dismissed must be offered the option of reinstatement.
- Adequately resource the Fair Work Commission and other relevant tribunals to ensure that unfair-dismissal matters are handled expeditiously.

***“In 2022, around
40 per cent of
Australian workers
are in precarious
work.”***

Job Security

The current legislative regime under the Fair Work Act protects managerial prerogatives over restructuring and redundancy. The bargaining regime is structurally weighted against workers. Workers and unions are required to advance all their claims during the bargaining period and unmet claims are dormant for the life of the agreement.

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Bargaining operates in a different way for employers even though, formally, they also cannot take protected action outside a bargaining period. However employers are free, among other things, to restructure, contract-out, out-source, declare redundancies and reduce the hours of casuals at any time during the life of an enterprise agreement.

The best way to restore balance is to legislate that significant restructuring is undertaken only according to a negotiated agreement. The negotiation should cover the scale and scope of change and job losses and the implementation of change including the criteria to apply in the event of any redundancies. To remove any doubt, the Fair Work Act should require that significant restructuring cannot occur other than under a scheme of arrangement that has been certified by the Fair Work Commission. In turn, the Act should require that restructuring is implemented with maximum retention of workers, no increase in casualisation, out-sourcing or contracting-out, and a demonstrated preference for retraining over redundancy.

The necessary balance between employers and workers in restructuring and redundancies will

also require two other changes. First, that the parties in negotiations over major restructuring would be able to apply for bargaining orders and take protected action on exactly the same basis as for the making of a new agreement. Second, that the Fair Work Commission would be able to arbitrate on the substantive matters including but not limited to the scale and scope of job losses, criteria for redundancy and retraining arrangements.

Political party positions

The ACTU developed in 2018 a detailed policy: “Australia’s insecure work crisis: Fixing it for the future”. The ALP has a strong policy of making job security ‘a core focus for the Fair Work Commission’s decisions’; extending the FWC powers so it can set standards for app-based gig work; legislating for casuals to have a path to permanent work, and limiting the number of fixed-term contracts. They will also adopt stronger measures on wage theft and requiring labour-hire workers to get the same conditions as direct workers.

The Greens have a comprehensive policy based on presumption that all employment must be ongoing unless there is a case for genuine casual employment.

While both parties deal with precarious work neither really gives workers and unions the means of dealing with managerial prerogatives to dismiss almost at will on grounds of redundancy.



Deepening Democracy – Constitutional and Electoral Reform

Expanding and deepening democracy must be an important part of socialist and progressive policy. Growing cynicism about corruption and politics in general, in Australia and elsewhere, feeds the far right and forces of reaction. Deepening democracy requires better electoral and representative systems, meaningful industrial and economic democracy, and participatory mechanisms to involve citizens in policy debates and decisions. It also means redressing the historical injustices and lack of diversity in our parliaments and in positions of economic and social power.

A deficient democracy

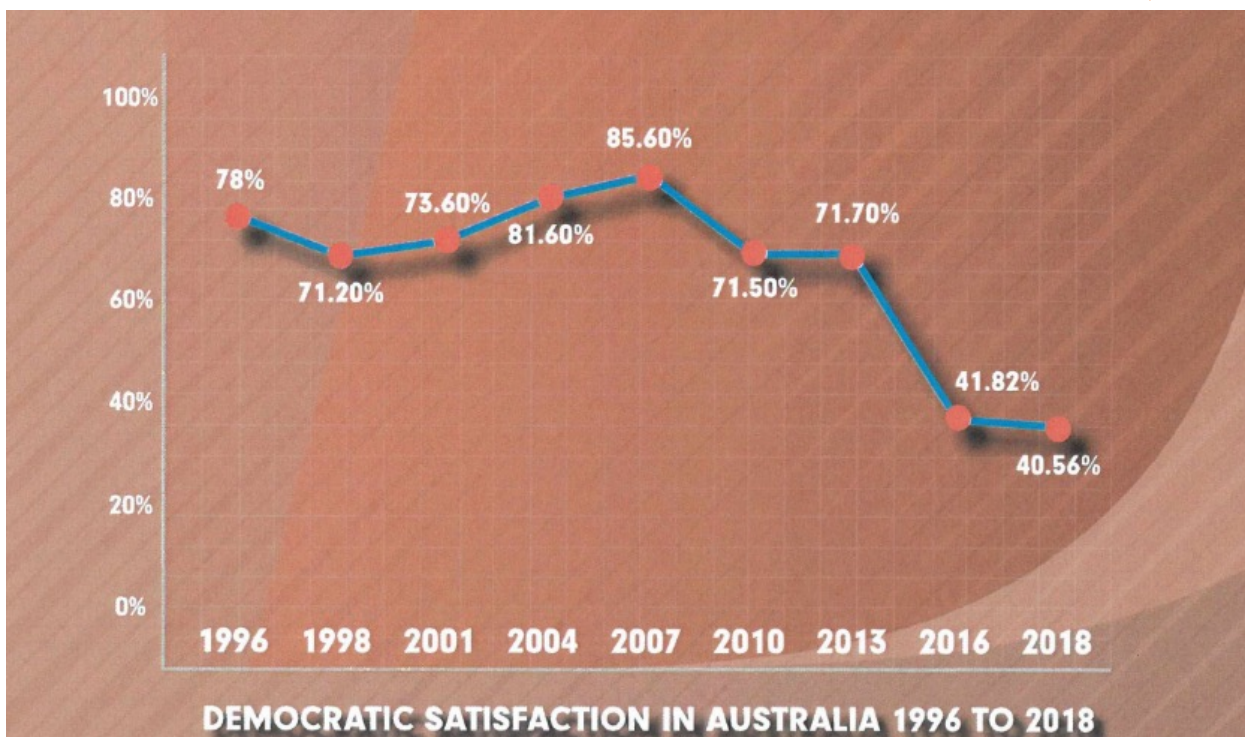
Australians have achieved important democratic rights, including the right to vote, the secret ballot, preferential voting, and compulsory voting. The conduct of Australian elections is largely free, fair, independent and transparent. But voting systems for our lower houses of parliament do not reflect the popular will as accurately as they could, except in Tasmania and ACT, where forms

of Proportional Representation are in use.

The power of money and concentrated media ownership and control also skew elections in favour of parties and candidates that represent corporate interests and private wealth. The obscene amounts that billionaire Clive Palmer has spent on the 2019 and now this current election provides one glaring example. The role of the Murdoch media provides another. Indeed, former Prime Ministers Rudd and Turnbull have called for action against “the pernicious power of Murdoch” and Turnbull has said that News Corp is “the most powerful political actor in Australia”.

Our existing political-economic institutions are therefore far from the highest form of democracy. Elections are not as free and fair as they should be when there are no limits to electoral expenditure, insufficient transparency in the funding of parties and candidates, and little if any restraint on the often-blatant bias of the corporate media. As a result, taxation policies, ‘corporate welfare’, and responses to climate change are just three areas captured by private interests at the expense of wider social interests.

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Levels of trust in government and politicians in Australia are at their lowest levels since data has been available
Image source: democracy2025.gov.au

The lack of diversity and representativeness among politicians and other power holders is another impediment to democracy. Older, white men still dominate politics, corporations, churches and many other organisations. Parliamentarians, holders of public offices and corporate directors lack diversity by class, sex and ethnicity, among other measures.

“Growing cynicism about corruption and politics in general, in Australia and elsewhere, feeds the far right and forces of reaction.”

A radical democratic program for the 2020s

Institutional, constitutional and electoral reforms are needed to expand and deepen democracy in political, social and economic decision-making. Two key aims are to ensure that the make-up of parliamentarians and appointees to public institutions mirrors the Australian population and that politics is not tainted by money and controlled by the wealthy. Some important steps include the following:

- A First Nations Voice to Parliament is a crucial priority for institutional change. It must be enshrined in the Constitution following a Referendum held in the first two years of the next term of Parliament.
- A just republic would be a fitting next goal for progressives to pursue once the Voice for First Nations peoples has been established.
- A federal integrity and anti-corruption body, properly funded and empowered, is essential to expose corruption and hold politicians and bureaucrats accountable. Australia has recently dropped to its worst-ever ranking in Transparency International’s corruption perceptions index.
- A charter of human rights to provide a genuine and enforceable framework to protect rights that would, for example, help tackle systemic and structural racism as evidenced by the continuing deaths in custody of First Nations

people and guard against secret trials as seen in the vindictive prosecutions of lawyer Bernard Collaery and Witness K.

- Campaign finance and donations reform to prevent moneyed interests exerting undue influence over our politics. Rules for political donations and spending should require real-time reporting, far lower reporting limits, tight limits on election spending, prohibition of donations from property developers and lobbyists and an end to practices that hide the true source of donations.
- Introduce proportional representation for the House of Representatives to overcome the distortion produced by single-member electorates. The vivid deficiencies of the current system were shown by the 2019 election: the National Party won 10 seats with 4.5% of the nation-wide first preference votes; the Greens won 1 seat with 10.4%.
- Better representation and more diversity of elected representatives can flow from a proportional representation system. However, other measures are also needed to ensure that our representative bodies reflect the diversity of our society by removing the barriers and structural discriminations that prevent or hinder participation including the obstacles for those who hold dual citizenship.
- Constitutional recognition of local government is needed to build community at a level where everyone can participate. Methods of equalising revenues and services between richer and poorer local government areas should be part of this change.

These are just some measures that would expand, deepen and protect democracy. They can be vital steps towards redressing the power imbalances inherent under capitalism. Such changes can also provide a basis for the even bigger and longer-term challenges of building participatory, economic, and industrial democracy that reflect socialist goals and values. 

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If you'd like to be involved, follow our social media, contact us via our website, send us an email, or simply give us a call.

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