

Go Big: How to Fix Our World, Ed Miliband in conversation with Wayne Swan

Ed Miliband

MP and former UK Leader of the Labour Party (2010-2015)

Wayne Swan

National President of the ALP and former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia

Hosted by

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Ebony Bennett [00:00:03] Hello everyone, I'm Ebony Bennett, I'm deputy director at the Australia Institute, and welcome to our webinar series. Thanks so much for coming along tonight. I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I live and work on Ngunnawal and Ngambri country here in Australia. In Canberra. Sorry, sovereignty was never sated. It always was and always will be Aboriginal land. And I pay my respects to the traditional owners and to elders past and present. The Australia Institute does do these webinars, at least weekly, sometimes more than that, but they sometimes do vary. So make sure you head on over to Australia Institute dot org, don't you, for all upcoming webinars and just a few tips before we begin this evening. If you hover over the bottom of your screen, you should be out of the queue and a function where you can ask questions of our panel and upvote questions from other people and make comments on them as well. A reminder to please keep things civil and on topic in the chat or we'll put you out if we have to. And finally, a reminder that this discussion is being recorded and will be posted up on our YouTube channel. That's Australia Institute DOT TV after this, probably within twenty four hours. So you will realise that things have been pretty bleak in the past couple of years, certainly in Australia in twenty twenty at the beginning you might remember we had the black summer bushfires. We had floods here in Canberra. We had hailstorms and record heatwaves and the worst air pollution in the world for several weeks. And this was closely followed by a global pandemic and our first recession in decades. But also on the flip side, for a brief period of time during the pandemic, the federal and state governments lifted hundreds of thousands of people out of poverty by doubling the unemployment benefit and making child care free, even though it was only temporary. That was kind of something that I thought would have been politically impossible if you'd asked me in January last year. So that's why I'm delighted tonight to introduce our guests for this evening, the UK's shadow secretary for State of State for Business, Energy and industry, the member for Doncaster North, and, of course, the former leader of Labour, Ed Miliband, to talk about his new book, *Go Big*. Thanks so much for joining us, Ed.

Ed Miliband [00:02:20] Thanks so much for having me.

Ebony Bennett [00:02:21] Yeah, for the past four years and has been discovering and interviewing brilliant people from all around the world who has successfully tackled tackling some of the world's big problems, transforming communities and pioneering global movements as part of his reasons to be cheerful podcast. And that loosely inspired this book, *Go Big*. It's a really great read.

I'm only kind of partway through it, I will admit, because I've also been listening to the podcast. And so I'm really excited about this conversation with Davnie. And Ed will be in conversation with Wayne Swan. Wayne is the national president of the Australian Labour Party and of course, the former treasurer and deputy prime minister of Australia. And I hear Wayne, the new chair of Industry Super Fund SABIS, is that right?

Ed Miliband [00:03:08] Yes, that's true.

Ebony Bennett [00:03:11] And Wayne, I'll I'll hand over it to you to to kick us off.

Wayne Swan [00:03:15] Well, thanks very much. And thanks to the Australia Institute for putting this on the saving and thanks to it, because I think it was done as little as five just to remind everyone that some of the policy issues we faced are not two and that big policy issues can also be tackled. In fact, if you go back to our experience just during the Great Recession or what we call here the global financial crisis, you know, going to small was a sure way to fail. And I think what we are finding in this pandemic is that we've essentially got permission, if you like, to handle some of the three great challenges on all of the three great challenges that it canvases in the book. Growing income and wealth inequality, for example, is dramatic and it is responsible for an enormous amount of political polarisation. The whole issue of climate change and responses to it and of course, also the loss of faith and trust in democratic norms. I mean, now is a great time to be talking about comprehensive interventions in the economy, particularly by governments, because I think if a pandemic tells us anything, is that very significant transitions in economies have to be led by government action. And so much of that is going along with the neoliberal policy handbook for so many years. So there is a great opportunity now to take some of the lessons of the pandemic and apply them not only to public health, but also to in particular, is that I think points out very. It is both climate change and I did enjoy your reflections on Copenhagen. I know how they how they went down here and the impact it had on our government. But if you just take, for example, our carbon pricing scheme that we put through in 2011, then the clean energy package that proved even in difficult political circumstances, that big policy challenges and big responses could be put in place by governments, even in the teeth of entrenched opposition from powerful interest groups in the community. There's also a lesson in what happened to our carbon pricing scheme and a clean energy package that went through that. Big reforms are always opposed by the small government crowd and then they have a settlement. I know this has probably been the case with health in the UK, the National Health Service reform after the war, like Medicare here and the great reform of Whitlam in the early 70s has always been the challenge from the neo liberals, the small government crowd trying to pull it down. So when big reforms are won, sometimes we in policy wonk land forget that we have to fight to keep them and that not necessarily taken for granted. And I guess to finish off with Medicare here in Australia, what would our response to the pandemic look like if it hadn't been for our public health system? So as a progressive, I take great heart in how many of our cities have saved our countries during these pandemics, but we don't talk enough about that. So that's why I reckon Ed's book is timely and hopefully makes it a bestseller in.

Ed Miliband [00:06:47] Well, thanks one

Ebony Bennett [00:06:48] am and I was going to ask you to just kick us off with how you started the book and kind of was it inspired by that podcast and giving people a bit of hope that the solution that

Ed Miliband [00:07:03] I mean, look, in truth, Ebony Bennett was inspired partly by defeat. If that's if that if that doesn't sound like too much of a contradiction, because I led the Labour Party twenty fifteen, as you said, and I lost the election. And then I started doing this podcast a couple of years later because my co-host is not my co-host approached me and said, look, there are great ideas around the world about the things that can be done. I think there's a real appetite for these some of these ideas. And really the reason to write the book is and I think wavelet incredibly well, if I may say so. I mean, when you I think it's a sort of three part argument, really, when you look at the way the world is. So how can you think to yourself, small tinkering around the edges is the answer. So if you look at the climate crisis or the inequality crisis or the democratic crisis, exactly as Wayne said, you know, we know, for example, on climate, we are literally in the decisive decade. And the decisions we make in this decade, as David Attenborough actually said, will have implications for hundreds, if not thousands of years to come. So we just battled it. So all all the long standing crises of inequality, tinkering around the edges isn't going to do it. Secondly, that and this is really focussed on the British audience, but maybe hopefully helpful to an Australian audience, too. There are actually think of any problem that we face. There are actually solutions around the world and whether it's what they're doing in Vienna to solve the housing still the housing crisis, or to prevent a housing crisis or some of the initiatives to take an example like Alaska and the Permanent Fund dividend, which is a universal payment that goes to all citizens in Alaska and or flexible working. And the way that is done in Scandinavia, fathers leave in Iceland. There's just a plethora of examples around the world that can inspire and and and drive us forward and make us think, well, yeah, well, maybe we could do that. If that country can do it, why can't we? That's the second part. And then the third part of the argument is, is that the last part of the book is really to say to people that. Actually, there's lots of reasons for progressives to feel gloomy, but actually and I look at the different campaigns that have happened are happening. Just take an example. The fight for 15 million, the minimum wage in the US started with 200 fast food workers in New York, now covers 22 million people. Looked outlandish when it was first started a decade ago. So it's also to say to people, look, there is reason for hope, even amongst some gloomy times, and you can be part of the change. And it's not this change. When I say in the book, and I guess I would agree with this, that politics is too important to be left to politicians. It's not just about politicians, it's about what movements achieve and will and movements create the the ground, the soil in which politics is determined. So that's really the argument of the book. And I hope it's some sort of of of interest to not just a British audience, but the audiences elsewhere.

Ebony Bennett [00:10:24] Yeah, no, I definitely was reading it, thinking nearly everything that you covered was pretty, pretty applicable to the Australian context. When did you find the same thing?

Wayne Swan [00:10:34] I did. I did. And I think climate is a classic example because you can't win big reforms and you can't sustain big reforms without constantly being out there generating a movement for them. Now, when we managed to get the clean energy package and carbon pricing through the Senate, I think it's fair to say that the people that were most fervent about it thought it had been won. And as I moved around the community and we started to experience the backlash, I was out there and particularly when I was interacting with the environmental movement, they'd be saying, well, why haven't you done this on offshore conservation or whatever? And if you don't do it, we've got to give you a kick in the bottom up the bum, when in fact, we all we have to be we should have been continuing to fight for the gain we just made. So we put it in our pocket and assume that because it's been enacted in the parliament, that the

forces of reaction aren't going to turn around and come. Well, I do always turn around and come of turn around a number of occasions in Australia and for Medicare and unfortunately for the country, they came for carbon pricing and and clean energy. So there is a real lesson because you can't actually get the big reform and sustain it unless you're constantly out there in communities talking to people about the rationale for it. And that's become much more important in an age of disinformation. It is much easier to tear down something like carbon pricing in an age of Facebook and large media companies where we're scare campaigns and this information is so much easier to get out of it. So the progressive learning that I've had is that not only is the task of maintaining support become more complex in a campaign, and it's also we have to understand that this goes back to a point it makes in the book that there are two ways of getting big changes or big policies through. One is like we experience post war where the need for it was demonstrated and it came in a wash. But if I were to use carbon pricing again as an example of what you might do in a stage, why they get a big reform, I often think that perhaps if we'd had the price on carbon a little lower in our carbon pricing, we might have actually avoided the worst of the backlash at. The most important thing was to get the scheme in place in the first place and settle it down.

Ed Miliband [00:13:06] I think I think that's right. I think you're completely right about that way. It's important to say some of the incremental change can take you to a larger change can out of half way into a larger change. If just if it's if it's incremental, change doesn't really going anywhere that it's no good. But if it if it is envisioning a different future, I think the other point I would make and I think this might be different than the Australian experience, but I do make this point in the book is I think progressives need to also focus on the fact that the opponent has changed. Our approach has changed. You see, I think the I represent a constituency in Doncaster at the north that voted more than 70 percent for Brexit. That wasn't obviously my position. But the the, um, the Brexit campaign was an argument which which took quite a lot of the causes that the left had espoused, stagnant wages, need for industrial investment, all of those things, and said this is what Brexit will deliver. Now, we can certainly argue about whether that's true or not, but it's so striking to me that my constituents were saying to me, I'm voting for Brexit. I want a new beginning. I want something better. In other words, I don't feel this economy is working for me. And if you think about Trump, too, it was of course, Trump relied on a Republican base vote Republican in every election. But he also crucially won because he converted people who who felt the site and felt felt a similar sentiment and said, you know, if I think about the next election, the UK, we're not going to be facing a Tory party that says we just want to conserve Johnson's argument. If it is, John, that the election will be Boris Johnson will be of, look, I'm for change. I'm for less equal that levelling up on for tackling inequality. And so in a way, it makes all the more important that we we fight on this ground. We show we have more plausible but also actual real solutions rather than full solutions.

Ebony Bennett [00:15:11] Yeah, it reminds me, Wayne, kind of touching there on the importance of regulating big tech, which I know is another big subject that you touch on there. But actually, his points remind me of one of the stories from the book, particularly around climate change, where you talked about meeting activists who never saw climate change as an issue for their community until they began to see it as a social justice issue. That, for example, a lot of African-American communities live right beside coal fired power stations and have high rates of asthma as a consequence and things like that, and finding different ways for community organisers and activists to bring people into the movement and understand that it's sometimes much bigger than that one particular issue. I wonder if you could just talk to us about that.

Ed Miliband [00:16:05] I think that's such an important point, Ebony. You know, if we just talk about climate change as a future as a future threat, which, of course, is we have to be truth-telling about that, I don't think we will do enough to take people with us. We have to we can't say to people who are worried about the end of the week, well, you have to leave your worries to one side because it's only the end of the world that matters. Of course, it's right that the climate crisis, we're in the decisive decade and we have to tackle it. But at the same time, we have to tackle these social justice issues. And in a sense of what the put is, we can't just put a green coat of paint on their economy. Now, I actually think we can do this because actually, if you think about the ways in which we can tackle climate change, it can create the jobs of the future. Decent, well-paid, unionised jobs, a. Insulate homes and cut or hopefully eliminate fuel poverty, it can create green spaces for people, a different transport system. As we go through this transformation of our economy, I think it's progressives. We owe it to the to the values that we hold dear. To also tackle these these deep, deep economic and social injustices are putting them at the centre of the climate argument. I look I know from the debates in Australia that there are really difficult issues here and that they're not easy. But but it seems to me unless you put workers and and citizens and particularly those who are potentially vulnerable at the centre of this, you're not going to succeed. But if you do that, I think that is your best hope of succeeding. And that is the genius of the Greens, the idea of the Green New Deal, because it takes the climate argument and puts it together with the economic and social justice argument. And the other thing I would say is and maybe I would say this, but but but I think it's it's Labor parties that are going to do this because we can put green and red together, if you like. And and certainly that's the way I am arguing the case here, not just the government, our government, which is which says it's committed to climate change, but is really failing on delivering not just its failure to deliver, but its failing to deliver in a fair way.

Ebony Bennett [00:18:25] When talking about fairness, that reminds me that Australia's response, your response is Treasurer, during the global financial crisis. Part of that package was of stimulus, was one of social housing and things aimed at reducing inequality. That's something it touches on. How important was that for you as Treasurer when looking at a kind of a larger problem but solving other problems along the way in your response?

Wayne Swan [00:18:52] Absolutely massive. But don't forget that we gave the single biggest increase in the age pension in history, which was the single biggest reduction in poverty in our history as a consequence of that. So very much so. So our response to the GFC was was large and it was ongoing. Unfortunately, a number of other countries, particularly the United States, the initial response was too small and it was pulled out too early. And I love that you can probably say the same about Britain after the change of government there as well. The consequence for both those countries was a stagnant economy and growing inequality. As the asset bubble popped up of loose monetary policy in this country, we avoided a lot of that because we had a huge social spend as well. It wasn't just in social housing, wasn't just in pensions. And what recall we also did in paid parental leave in the middle of all that as well, a huge a huge reform and of course, went on to the NDIS in a number of other very big reforms. What the pandemic shows is, is the utility of that or the importance of that social spending and how you can have immediate impacts as well as long term structural impacts on opportunity in your economy. The thing I love about about the book and I like about the current policy debate we're having is that we are seeing in operation whether they're perfect policies or not, the power of public policy to transform people's lives. And of course, that is a concept that lay behind what they did in Britain, post-World War two concept that lay behind not just what happened with Roosevelt in the US, but Lyndon Johnson's Great War

Against Poverty. What we've seen in the deployment of resources here is something that we can easily do and transform into what you can call a green new deal, or we can call any number of things, but we can certainly manage the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy and reasonably quick time through the deployment of smart industry policy, good budget policy and good labour market policy. We've got to bring them together. The problem is avoiding the deep scepticism amongst people that these will actually hit the ground.

Ed Miliband [00:21:15] Yeah, so I think it's a really good start. And I think it's a really interesting point, which is worth exploring. And what Wayne says, which which is about, if you like, the transferability of the response to the pandemic. Because I'm so struck here, we've had this furlough scheme, which essentially paid a very significant proportion of people's wages because the businesses are shut down and significant grants to businesses. We don't think government's done everything right. But but it has been a very significant response. And I mean, it is so interesting that I'm right. The government acted in relation to the pandemic. And then if you take the climate crisis, I mean, all of the. All of the evidence is that there's a very interesting report from a former independent Office of Budget Responsibility that came out in July on this. All of the evidence is that the costs of acting are less than the cost of not acting because of the costs we will store up for future generations. But also what's so interesting about their analysis is the cost of acting slowly are much greater than the cost of acting quick, because actually, if you have to slowly, you lock in the high target, which will then eventually have to do something about high carbon buildings, high carbon infrastructure and so on. So I just I'd be interested to know from you and indeed from you Ebony Bennett you think about this as to how transferable is the response to the pandemic?

Wayne Swan [00:22:47] Well, I think it's transferable at a number of levels, but the fastest way to fire is to go small when you're in the middle of a catastrophic economic event for some of the reasons that you've just said, because the costs build up very quickly. And then, of course, there's little you can do if you wait too long when people have been unemployed with no income for 12 months to 18 months and so on. So we've had a real lesson about size and proportionate response here in this country. And our response to the GFC was or argued by conservatives has been far too large, when in fact it was it was certainly very large, the largest in the world by China, but it gave us ongoing strength. But the deployment of fiscal policy to bring about what we all require for the sort of social harmony and equity, the decency of society to bring about full employment is within our grasp.

Ebony Bennett [00:23:50] Yeah, I guess my answer would be, Ed, that particularly with a conservative government here, that was really its main economic policy, was aiming for a budget surplus with really not much else behind it. And then I think none of us would have expected we also had a wage subsidy scheme could jump it here. They doubled the unemployment benefit, which has been below the poverty line for many years. But a lot of that was quite huge in the moment, not just in terms of the size of the response, but the political party that it was coming from. They really had to be dragged in particular by the union movement to the wage subsidy scheme. But as Wayne was talking about, I think it did show people that, you know, politics can change really quickly if the impetus is there. And and it showed that some of our political parties can be flexible when they're kind of forced to be. But I think we've already touched on this idea of the importance of government in people's lives and the good changes that it can make. But unfortunately for us, a lot of those measures were quite temporary, just sticking, I guess, with the idea of reducing inequality. Mentioned at the top of this webinar, the Vienna Social Housing. That

struck me as a really amazing story in terms of the go big ideas that you covered. Can you tell us a little bit more about what Vienna does? Because Australia certainly has a massive housing affordability problem as well.

Ed Miliband [00:25:27] Yeah, I mean, look, it's a really interesting story. It's just basically that ever since the interwar period, Vienna, the capital city of Australia, has been building social housing at scale. I think it's something like two thirds of their housing is either social housing or subsidised housing in some form. And it means that it's a capital city where people can afford to live rich and poor is significantly low rents to get elsewhere. And it just it makes a huge difference to mixed communities and and tackling the housing, preventing a housing crisis. Whereas, you know, this has particular meaning in the UK because ever since Mrs Thatcher came in, she basically said, look, let's stop building social housing. We had a massive social housing boom after World War Two under both Labour and Conservative governments. But she basically said, let's stop building social housing so we have a massive housing crisis, a massive and ongoing housing crisis. We have actually rates of home ownership about Phoolan. We have a very, very insecure, private rented sector, massive waiting list for social housing, homelessness, but not just homelessness, deep insecurity, people renting in the private sector. And, you know, I was part as a backbencher, obviously back on the front line, but as a backbencher, I was part of the Social Housing Commission, which was cross-party and cross-sector. Experts tell us residents who followed the terrible Grenfell Tower fire here that the people may have heard about. And I think what's so interesting about that is it it it united people from across the political spectrum in thinking we've got to invest it at scale in social housing. But I also think so interesting about this is it's partly because it will help families and people to to live. But but it also it's the backbone of a functioning housing market. It's not just up that does it. Singapore, other European, European countries. There's lots of other countries that are doing this in different ways. But but. From our point of view, we've had four decades of an experiment in not building social housing and it hasn't worked, and governments, I'm afraid governments of both parties have tried everything to solve this housing crisis, apart from building at large scale.

Ebony Bennett [00:28:02] Yeah, we might go to questions from the audience in just a minute. I can see we've got about eight hundred and twenty people on the webinar with us tonight. So thank you again so much for joining us. I know you're coming to us from all around Australia. I think I spotted in the comments someone from New Zealand and other places across the world. Thank you. We'll get to questions in just a second. And before we go to those additional questions from the audience, the other thing I wanted to touch on, because we do find ourselves in a moment of crisis in a global pandemic and things have really changed there. I was really struck again by the story that you told about. I think it was a volunteer or a council person called Pat Heads and kind of his ability to be very responsive in an emergency situation to the needs of his constituents and the fact that he just kind of bent the rules to make things happen and didn't really stick to a rigid bureaucratic kind of response. And your observation was, well, can we work more like that outside of emergency situations? Can you just tell us a little bit more about Pat and what struck you from his response?

Ed Miliband [00:29:22] Well, I'm glad you I'm glad you asked me about the that, actually, because, well, the Pat Hagan is a guy who's a council worker in my constituency. And we've unfortunately had two sets of terrible floods in my constituency in Doncaster in two thousand seven, two thousand ninety with some of the same people flooded out. This is supposed to be places where they were where flooding was one in 100 year event. It's happened twice in barely a decade. And

part is that is the sort of thing if he got a an award from her Majesty the Queen for his efforts in the 2007 floods and when they hit in, two thousand ninety of the council knew to call part of. And I think what's so interesting about him and what I learnt from him during this crisis in twenty nineteen as I observed him and worked with him, was this sense of the rules and the bureaucracy just get in the way? And I think and the reason I tell this story, the reason I have a chapter in the book devoted to it, is I think that the left and I include myself in this is kind of good at talking about the failings of the market and less good about talking about the failings of the state. And we believe in the power of the state and the power of the state to do good. But I think we have to be thinking, how can the state be more responsive? And as a conservative for contracting out privatisation model, that doesn't work. There was a model that we did when we were in government between 1997 and 2010, which was setting lots of targets that had its role. But it could be quite constraining of the front line. And really where I come out and say, you've got to find ways to empower the frontline and also involve communities like somebody who's been talking about this in the chat, actually involved communities in solving that problem of participatory budgeting, getting communities to input into what they want to see. And I think but I don't think the left, at least as far as Britain is concerned, takes this seriously about this question of how do we make the state work better? How do we have a more responsive state, a state where people can really own the solutions? They're all good experiments being done around the country, local authorities and all those. But but I think it is a really, really important idea for us. The I think it's the Finns have this idea. A humble government government experiment learns from its mistakes and pretend everything will be right the first time. I think there's a kind of strong case for government to be to be humble in its ambitions, but in its in its innate sense of learning.

Ebony Bennett [00:31:52] I love that idea. We've got a Nordic policy centre at the Australia Institute. We might have a look into that humble government idea that strikes me as quite appropriate. Wayne, do you have a response to that?

Wayne Swan [00:32:04] I don't think we can underestimate the enduring impact of this housing crisis that we're currently in here. It will have a dramatic impact on the quality over time and generate generational inequality with large numbers of people just locked out of the housing market. So from my perspective, I think it's not just a generational income inequality that we're dealing with. It's a generational housing with a quality that is going to have quite an impact. And I don't think we know all the solutions. But the one thing I do know is that the government is going to have to think over time more directly to be in supply. And sort of measures that we took back in the first stimulus package would certainly be a significant part of any response. It's not the be all and end all, but the. The capacity of someone on average wages to buy a home over time has been dramatically eroded here over over recent years.

Ebony Bennett [00:33:12] Yeah, that's certainly the case. I'll go now to questions from the audience. But Ed, I ordered your book and it's arrived, but it's currently at our office and Cambra is in lockdown and I'm from home. So can you just hold it up for us and run? That's Ed's book, Go Back, and it is available in bookstores and the red hot copy sitting in the Australia Institute office. Unfortunately, I've just been reading it on my Kindle and I really do recommend it. We all need reasons to be cheerful at the moment. Pretty much most of the east coast of Australia, excepting where Wayne is in the beautiful state of Queensland, is in lockdown. So, yeah, if you need a good pick me up, I'd recommend to both the book and The Reasons to be cheerful podcast. I just listen to a great episode on line. Am I saying that correctly?

Ed Miliband [00:34:03] Yes, you are. Outdoor swimming pools. Sounds like it sounds like more of a thing for Australia than doesn't. But there's a there's a growing wider movement here.

Ebony Bennett [00:34:14] It's a wonderful episode. Australia does have a lot of beautiful ocean pools, I think being built around the same time as the holidays. And they look phenomenal. And it's a really lovely episode, a good entry, I would think, to the podcast overall. I'm going to go right now to questions. As I said, we've got more than eight hundred people on with us tonight, so we've already got quite a few here. We'll try and get to as many as we can. The first question is from and Howie, he says, can you please comment on the loss of ministerial responsibility? There's evidence, no evidence that no one is accountable for anything nowadays. He's got a couple of Australian specific examples. He Electroboy Debt and the West Sydney Airport SAYO cowpox or cowpokes, as some have called them here. Why not get you in a second? But what's the state of ministerial responsibility like in Westminster?

Ed Miliband [00:35:05] And lo, I would say, um, look, I think there is a sort of I think I think this is a right wing, at least in the UK. It's a right wing phenomenon, which is that I think Donaldson learns from the Trump model, which is never, never say you're sorry, never admit wrong, and sort of, you know, just go beyond shake the, you know, be shameless. And and I sort of think that is his M.O. And I think it is it's a sort of a massive problem in the the sort of very notorious example here that we've had recently with Dominic Cummings and his comings and goings, so to speak, during the his chief adviser during when there was locked out and he wasn't observing it and so on. And he tried to somehow explain he's now left. The government is very critical of Johnson, but now try to explain away. But but it's not it's not just that. It's a whole range of ministerial actions, wrongdoing. There's no accountability for one. Look, I mean, it all it does is it increases cynicism in politics. And in a way, look, part of the don't just go about jobs, but part of Johnson's approach to this. There's a very good long read written about it in The Guardian, which people should look at for a few months ago about the cloud. The idea of the cloud is that he wants to almost nothing is serious and that it's all you know, he he feeds on a sense of cynicism about politics. And then a lot of it's quite a joke, not serious and so on. And I think that's very dangerous for democracy. And I think it's dangerous for politics. And we've got to be the people who uphold standards and accountability.

Ebony Bennett [00:36:53] Hmm. Yeah. That idea of the clown and not taking things seriously and feeding on cynicism certainly reminds me of Australian politicians. But when what are your observations on ministerial responsibility, given the series of reports that we've seen lately

Wayne Swan [00:37:10] about the fact that on Robard, which was so damaging, such a significant impact on some of these people that no ministers paid a price for, that is extraordinary. And, you know, it's it appears that no price now or no circumstances under the current government justify the one being to the sort. It's extraordinary and it's probably a bit like Britain. And I think there's a lot in the approach that this frontier as well.

Ebony Bennett [00:37:42] Hmm. The next question is from Kit Regan. He says or she sorry, I don't want to miss Genndy that kit. While many of us are excited for a change, some people are experiencing change, fatigue and covered. Many may want to go back to the pre COVA days. How do we bring people who are tired or scared along with us?

Ed Miliband [00:38:03] He's a really good question. The kids asks, and I talked quite a lot about this over the last few months because we mentioned earlier when Britney came out in Second World War and there was this big appetite for change. And I think that is a really important sort of analogy in terms of what our ambitions should be. And I need someone that we've used here. I think the the difference is that there is a sort of debt people it's paradoxical this people desperately keen to go back to normality, see friends and family live normal lives and so on. And I think it's completely understandable. We feel ourselves. And at the same time, we can't let the lessons of what happened during the pandemic, the deep inequalities which mean that Britain has been so badly affected that what's happened to our public services, the pay of key workers, which has been a massive issue here, the most valued workers, the most insecure, the lowest paid. We can't let those lessons be swept under the carpet. So I think this is quite tricky, really. I think it's about I think it's about embracing that desire for people to go back to normalcy, but also normality, but also saying, look, as a country, we owe it to those who have suffered, which I believe we do, and we owe it to ourselves to learn the lessons of the crisis. And I think know it's interesting when you say the climate issue as doing some polling on this, there is a real sense that, you know, just like we we're right to follow the science when it comes to covid. So we've got to follow the science on the science on climate. I think there is an understanding of people that this has got to we've got to learn lessons from this crisis.

Ebony Bennett [00:39:41] Wayne change.

Wayne Swan [00:39:43] I've got a much more optimistic point of view, which might be completely out of sync with many people on the broadcast. I've been really excited, if you like, and pleased with what I've seen. It has been a strong community response to basically a common purpose in defeating this pandemic. We've seen people engaging in public health measures, whether it's mask wearing and all of the associated requirements that have been put on and done it. I wouldn't say a cheerful way, but with the acknowledgement that in fact, we are all in it together. So where we've seen protest movements, whether it's about the public health measures, mask wearing mandates, they have been minuscule. I have been absolutely minuscule, so I've actually take great faith that there has been at a grassroots level with Australia, a lot of community solidarity. And understanding that if we we need to take collective measures, but for the collective good and I didn't think in my lifetime I would have necessarily seen such a strong response amongst all ages, all groups that had a rally about the border control down on the Queensland, New South Wales border, Koongarra. And that's terrible for the people that are on the border. But it was relatively small. Because I think essentially people understand even there where it is difficult that these difficult measures have to be taken. So I would say that there is a degree of solidarity for it's a word we use. And, you know, in the labour movement a lot, a degree of solidarity in support for the public responses which have been opposed by significant sections of the business community and sold at various stages. And they've got behind their political leaders that were asking for some form of collective sacrifice. So what I would say is that, you know, collective sacrifice for a better world is still in people's heads and is waiting to be harnessed by some inspiring policies in different directions.

Ebony Bennett [00:42:04] Now, it's a good observation. And it reminds me, you know, in Australia, within the faith community, for example, step up and cook and provide meals both after the bushfire crisis and also, for example, the public housing towers when they were under strict lockdowns during the pandemic. And, you know, people looking after elderly relatives and make sure that the food delivered to them and all of that kind of stuff. I think that's a really good point.

And it brings me to my next question, which is from Janani Jonathan. I hope I'm pronouncing that correctly in the book. And you talk about how you went to a community organising training and saw huge value in it and said that all employees should go to one which they couldn't agree with more as an organiser and maybe Labour Party member themselves. And you also then provided an example about how your local Doncaster branch engaged in their own community organising around local issues. The question is, how do you think local branches and party structures can really embed a community organising strategy as bread and butter and other anymore UK or Doncaster examples that could inspire Australian Labour Party spaces?

Ed Miliband [00:43:16] Well, I'm really glad the question to ask. So when I lost the election in 2015, I went to I grew a beard, which is I think sometimes of politicians, of politicians do when they lose elections. Anyway, I kept Australia up and had a fantastic holiday with my family in Australia. Then I came back and I went on this community organising course. And I look at the beginning, I felt a bit of a fish out of water. It was a five day training of the different community. Groups were engaged in it, run by a great organisation called Citizens UK. And I had tried when I was leader to get the community organising ethic into the way the party did its work with a guy called Arby Graff, a US community organiser. And it sort of worked and sort of happened because it was very hard running up against the sort of kind of electoral necessities that the electoral necessities of doorknocking and so on. And I found this very inspirational course to do and then led to me doing a local community campaign against a a kind of company in my constituency that also actually extends across the country, which is now since Gruchy gone into liquidation and basically sells white goods like cookies and so on, to to be able to pull people at vastly inflated prices, huge interest rates and so on. It's like a small payday lender, but for white goods. And it led to this community campaign. And I think it's so interesting to see it does actually go back to something that Wayne said earlier, which is you need the policy, but you also need the infrastructure in place to spread your message, make your arguments. And the thing that really struck me about the Brighthouse campaign that we did this campaign was it was the Labour Party not saying to people, please vote for us, but saying to people, this is something that we care about in our community, that we're campaigning was all about whether you vote for us at all. And I think there is a way in which we even in these times that we're in, we need to learn the lessons of our past, which is how did Labor parties grow by being embedded in communities and showing that that we were part of them and we could we could affect change. And I think that's something very inspiring about the community organising movement, because it says that anyone, however powerless they might appear, has got the capacity to join with others to bring about change. In a way, you need that bottom up and top down change. So I would like to see the Labour Party in Britain. This is actually being being done in different ways, doing more of how do we mobilise our members not to talk to each other, but to go out, talk to the public, but also to organising communities to show that we can that change. And I think that a lot of principals from the community organising movement that we could apply.

Ebony Bennett [00:46:03] When did you respond to that?

Wayne Swan [00:46:05] Well, it's a model I always followed as an MP, and I hope all of our employees do some, do some some days, I guess. But it's absolutely critical. A local area that the community that you are at in the community doing what they're doing and whether it's being involved in local movements or protest movements about particular events that are happening or whether it's being out there supporting junior sport or whether it's, you know, supporting activities on Australia Day, whatever they may be. Significant community events require activists

to be at them, not talking at people about policy, but being with them in celebrating once again, to use that word, their solidarity around their issue or their activity. So you can deeply involve yourself in conservation. You can involve yourself in disability issues. You can involve yourself in housing issues. And that's the basis of politics. And we live in a community. And as a as a political party, we need to make sure we've got those grassroots party members are actually members of local organisations and get feedback about what's going on. And it becomes a virtuous loop and that is the way to win and hold communities.

Ebony Bennett [00:47:24] The next question is from the man who is should Labor, and I think by that she means maybe Australian Labor should Labor go big as an opposition election strategy or should we only go big after winning government or in a second term? The question is, is go big a style of government or is a campaigning style and.

Ed Miliband [00:47:46] I might leave the Australian Labor tonight really are

Ebony Bennett [00:47:52] Labor as well.

Ed Miliband [00:47:53] I'll let me let me say something about about our own situation because we're formulating policy for the next election. Look, in a way, I think that ultimately lost three elections in in Britain and that sort of offer lessons in a way, 20, 50 I, I lost. I feel like in retrospect, I should have been bolder, had good analysis of the problems the country faced, but I don't think it was the solutions were quite big enough. And therefore part of the reason was hard to get a message across in twenty seventeen. Jeremy Corbyn was that the leader had a, if you like, a turbo charged version of my 2015 manifesto. He didn't win. The election became much closer to the very unexpected circumstances. And then in twenty nineteen we crashed down to a terrible defeat of any kind of in a way what is bigger the twenty seventeen I think as a sort of lesson in this, which is look for us, it's a test of morality. The incentives tinkering around the edges is not the answer. We do need big solutions to the problems we face, but you have to have a sense of priorities. If you say you can do everything all at once, people are going to believe it. So it's going to pass a credibility test. But in my view, at least for the UK context, I can't speak to the Australian context. It's got to pass a sense of is this equal to the scale of the crisis we face? And I actually think that's our best chance of of convincing the public and winning a win in the election. So so that's the kind of position. But we're at the moment formulating policies for the next election where the we're in some relatively early stages of the parliament, but that's how it looks from. Yeah.

Ebony Bennett [00:49:35] Yeah. When there's a couple of questions in here. And I think in the comments as well as kind of saying people are really behind this idea of going big, but it appears like Labour's got more of a small target strategy this time around. What are your kind of comments on that?

Wayne Swan [00:49:50] Well, it's a matter of public record that we the electoral review found correctly, in my view, that we offered too many big policies all at once and we would have been far better off sequencing. A very good example here is Biden. Barton had a very big policy. Sanders and others wanted an even bigger one. Well, Barden's was still pretty big and he won. And in that both they lost in the House of Reps, they actually went backwards. So I think you've just got to be careful. I'm in favour of big changes, but you can't do too many at once. So I think you can indicate direction, but in terms of of of an electoral cycle, there's only so many big changes you can

communicate. Cell got a public support for at the same time. And if you're trying to work with too many at once, you set yourself up for what happened to Bill Shorten and Labour in the last federal election, which was like they ran a multitude of scare campaigns, admittedly with 80 million dollars of Clive Palmer's money across a range of policy areas. And it became almost impossible to the. So there's a sweet spot. I'm in favour of big and significant changes over time. Medicare was big, but we should never forget. We can just put it in that pocket. We've got to go back and defend it so you can't fight on everything at once.

Ebony Bennett [00:51:24] Thanks, Wayne. The next question is from building whole town. Where do Ed and Wayne stand on the concept of a universal basic income, sitting within a strategy to address inequality and.

Ed Miliband [00:51:38] That's a great question. So in my sort of slightly paradoxical position on universal basic income, which is if somebody said to me, what's the one idea in your book that could be most transformative? I would say the universal basic income for those who don't know the universal basic income, is this idea that you pay a flat rate foundation to everybody in your society has a basic right of citizenship in a way that would replace some parts of the means tested Social Security system. Why would it be transformative? Because it basically gives everyone a floor as a basic right to live on unconditionally and universally. I don't think that the people who say, well, everyone will give up work are right, because I think it's actually it would be set at such a high level. People say, well, it's not worth bothering to work, but it would give people the kind of security that so often middle or upper class people can take for granted. It gives them the right to say no to certain jobs they don't want to do. It would be transformative. That's part of it. This is the paradox. I also think it's the policy that is kind of furthest away in terms of being able to happen soon. When you look at the numbers, Hillary Clinton said this in her campaign. She said she looked at doing what she called Alaska for America. So this base in Alaska, they have this two thousand dollar a person payment from the from the oil revenues of annual payment. And she didn't just the numbers didn't add up. I think that I think the numbers are very difficult. When you face all the other problems in your society, you think, is this really the priority for now? But I think it's the idea that deserves to be kept alive, not least because automation, the way technology is going to change jobs, people do insecurity. There's a whole range of things that could mean I think it could kind of gather momentum as an idea is being piloted and tested in different parts of the world, which I think is a good thing. I think we'll see some some results of that. And there are some principles you can apply. Some of the furloughed, the universal basic needs of the fellow we had here, which is we're paying 80 per cent of the wages, is not a million miles away from that idea. And we have seen some pretty transformative effects in terms of people then thinking what job, what job are going to do in the future and so on. So so I think I think it's I think it's got a lot of resonance. Laughing I'd say that is that there is something that you could do in the shorter term. And I say this in the book, which is a kind of universal social inheritance. We have this thing in Britain called the Child Trust Fund, which paid every 18 year old for a certain set of skills. So we got kicked out of government a few thousand pounds on reaching 18 as a foundation. And that's a much that's a like a lump sum. It's a much cheaper alternative. And it gives people that asset base, that, again, middle class people can maybe more take for granted.

Ebony Bennett [00:54:32] Yeah. Wayne, talking about that Alaska payment there. Correct me if I'm wrong, but that's derived from their royalties or taxes from their resources in Alaska, is that right? Did you feel when you've had a run in with fossil fuel companies in Australia, presumably if we tax them more effectively, we might want to do something similar to the Alaska payment here.

Wayne Swan [00:54:56] Well, we wouldn't do that like that. I mean, I'm in favour of a strongly progressive tax system for both corporates and for individuals, and I'm absolutely against paying a stated payment to people who don't need it. That is people on high incomes, the very wealthy. And I think what we need to do is to go back to the architecture, which says that we have that we have a fiscal policy that delivers full employment, that we have a decent and generous minimum wage, and that we have a decent and generous Social Security system for those people that are not temporarily in work. Because I'll tell you, I've done the numbers on a universal pie, but it doesn't add up and it doesn't work. It doesn't add up at all. And what we really want to do is get back to a very generous Social Security system or social welfare system, the likes of which was constructed after the Second World War in both Australia and Great Britain and put in place to to be beat off of fascism and communism. On the other, that's all been eroded by 30 or 40 years of attacks on that Social Security safety net to tax on on minimum wages as a tax on workers rights. It's going to go back to the basic architecture. The basic architecture is well paid, good, decent jobs and a good, strong social safety net backed up by a policy of full employment.

Ebony Bennett [00:56:23] Yeah, we've touched on a whole bunch of topics that related to inequality. And people on the line might be interested in a recent Australia Institute report, which looked at the explosion of wealth in Australia, not income, but wealth in Australia. People's assets are worth twelve point seven trillion and they grew by wealth, grew by one point seven trillion to the year March twenty twenty one this year. That's almost as much as Australia's total GDP. And we've certainly made the argument that that's not taxed effectively in Australia at the moment. People can find that on Australia Institute dot org, don't you? And we've only got a couple of minutes to go knowing that this was loosely inspired by reasons to be cheerful. When you're at a low point in your life, can you leave us with some reasons to be cheerful before we sign off tonight?

Ed Miliband [00:57:18] Yeah, definitely the I'll tell you what, I think this inspires me more than the world of anything and thinking about this book. And it does go back about something that Wayne said about what happened during the lockdown and. Actually, I think that is a spirit amongst people and I think a spirit of solidarity. And I think it's matching that spirit of solidarity with the way we run our institutions. And I think what's happened is over the last 30 or 40 years, our institutions have got further and further away from the spirit of of of actually people solidarities like we need to match our institutions with the best of us. And I think we have seen the best of us during this period. And then the other thing that I'd say inspires me. I think this is a lesson for all of us, actually, is the young people who are campaigning on climate change. And in a way, I think we all need to think like the young, just like the youngest generation to a campaign on the climate crisis because, you know, they are going to have to live with this for longer than any of us and just talk about being weighed here. Ebony Bennett the new and and and they speak for future generations who are going to be impacted by this. And so I think, you know, what other thing about young people is they're not cynical. Many of them are not cynical about what politics can achieve. And I think we've got to think like them. And that is a sense of idealism and a sense of urgency when it comes to the problems that our world faces. And if we do that, if we have idealism and urgency and imagination and in a sense, we trust the public a bit. But because the public know that there's lots of problems with our society and they need solving, then I actually think we can't go far.

Ebony Bennett [00:59:12] Thank you so much. We'll have to wrap it up there. Thank you to Ed Miliband all the way coming to us all the way from the UK and Wayne Swan for joining us this evening. We really appreciate it. Thanks, everyone, for coming along tonight and for all your great questions. Don't forget, grab a copy of Ed's book if you can. And if you can't, I highly recommend the reasons to be cheerful podcast. Also, don't forget to check out the Australia Institute podcast. Follow the money. The last couple of episodes tackle that wealth explosion that we talked about. We talked to Richard Denniss chief economist and we've also done one recently looking at some of the assumptions in the Doherty Institute modelling for the national plan and really looking at the importance not just of vaccinations, but of the test tries isolate and quarantine public health measures. And there's some concerning assumptions in there that people might be interested in as well. We've got more exciting webinars coming up. We can find all of that and our fabulous research on climate change, on inequality, as well as the work from our centres, the Nordic Policy Centre, the Centre for Work and the Centre for Responsible Tech. All of those covered issues covered in Ed's book. You can head on over to Australia Institute dot org you to find all of those. And don't forget to sign up for future webinars. Next week, we'll be looking at ending of the incarceration of children and raising the age of criminal responsibility. And again, we'll be talking to the head of the Burnet Institute about what other public health measures beyond vaccinations we can use to keep it under control. Thanks so much for joining us tonight. We really appreciate your time. Stay safe out there. Get vaccinated as soon as you can. And hopefully we'll see you at a future webinar. Thanks for joining us.

Ed Miliband [01:00:58] And thanks very much. Thanks for having me on.