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Thanks Martin for that serious and important introduction. I thought in the best ministerial manner to look for a couple of texts to begin one from. One is from the Reverend Martin Luther King, and his famous remarks on population shortly before his death : "Unlike the plagues of the Dark Ages the Modern plague of overpopulation is solvable with means we have discovered and with resources that we possess." The other is from the Anglican Public Affairs Committee which you may have seen recently at the Press, saying suggesting that the faithful should question and work against the assumption that there has to be population growth in order to maintain economic growth as a prerequisite for human wellbeing . And following from the line that Martin made up by putting out that how much better off many people are if they are allowed to immigrate. The Anglican Committee also remarked "the desire to welcome people from other lands has one implication for Australia's population policy, but the impact on the Australian landmass has the opposite implication : the conflict between these cannot be ignored. During the delay in addressing it the size of our population and the damage it causes are growing." So no simple messages tonight.

A famous British satirist once noted that every boy and every girl that's born into the world alive is either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative, and a parallel observation might be that the world divides into those who've always seen population growth as what the Australian Conservation Foundation recently called "a threatening Process", and those who cannot and will not see any such thing. Anyone who presses politicians, economists, media presenters or ordinary citizens as to why they ignore warnings against population growth will often uncover strong prejudices. The desire to believe that growth of every sort can go on forever and for politicians to believe that any end to growth need not be on their own watch is potent. And yet there are also deeper forces. I think there is a natural human disinclination to believe that our own species or that our own drive to have children could ever be to blame. Other people simply feel that they can't see any decent way of thinking about this. It reminds them of lifeboat ethics - its one thing to agree there's too many people on the lifeboat, but how do you talk about that without proposing to throw someone off. And hence many people turn out to have thought briefly about the population problem then invented some argument that exempts them from thinking further about it. Bob Hawke was a Prime Minister who notably did not think about the population problem but relentlessly pushed population and immigration higher. Yet recently we discovered him on his 80th birthday saying that the thing that most terrifies him in the world today is population growth. It took quite some enquiry to discover how he got out of that in the Australian context. It turns out he's one of those who believes that overpopulation is always "over there".

Let's return to that divide in attitudes to population. I found out what side of that divide I stood one day in 1977 when I visited the Australian Embassy in Athens. I was appalled to find plastered on its outside wall a giant map of Australia. Upon this they'd cleverly superimposed the outline of Western Europe so you could see that the two regions were of roughly equal size, and the populations of both were printed below, and of course the message was clear ; "Come to empty Australia". And the colours used on the map disguised the fact that most of Australia's area is desert and the dry salt lakes of the centre for instance were represented in a vibrant blue, as if this was some well-watered region of Europe. My own instant response, I was interested to note, was anger. Anger that someone in authority had authorized and spent money on this lie, and that the ownership of my precious country, or at least a few hundreds of thousands of places in it, was being given away in pursuit of this myth. And also that Europeans, instead of being told to take responsibility for the grotesque way in which they'd overpopulated their own continent, famously described by the zoologist Desmond Morris as "a swirling mass of naked apes", were being fed the myth that there was nothing to worry about, because there was still an empty country crying out for more people to fill its loneliness. "Land without people, for people without land", as one Australian Catholic Bishops conference put it. Incidentally I was never able afterwards to trace this map or discover its author, or find out to how many countries this lie was distributed. I think it belongs in the history books, along with the propaganda of the earlier boosters and boomers of the 1890s. I mention this in case there are any historians here tonight who might trace it.

But I think my personal views were fixed much earlier. I grew up in a Melbourne that was not yet de-countrified, in that most streets still had vacant blocks. What a magic word that is to children, where children could play, in which the natural world was not yet destroyed. The day the brick trucks came to our street in 1958, and bulldozed and fenced off the last vacant block in our street, I registered a huge loss in the environment and in the social world. After that we children had to kick the football on the road, in constant conflict with cars. But later I was old enough to roam further, into the rich world of Gardiners Creek, a small river running half wound through southern Melbourne. Its tendency to flood still protected from houses, a strip of natural land beside it. But nothing survives human population pressure. Eventually the river was concreted and literally covered over by Melbourne's Southeastern Freeway extension. There had been literally nowhere else to put the road. I wrote a poem later, celebrating what had been. It begins:

"Today I watched the last trace of country
Going forever out of the suburb
Not Australian, true,
These last acres of the farm John Gardiner built
But mine, and buried
Its blackberries, fennel and elder
Erase memory of Old England and Older Ireland
This was my first, almost migrant, childhood
Truant in an English park before the coming of the natives
The valley was our gloss on the verse of that other continent"

And ending:

“In the tightening streets plowered vacant blocks
Where the valley’s surrender was accepted not yet ratified
Thinned willow thickets
A refuge for sex and blue wrens
Recalling the warm pudginess of a breast released from nylon
To breathe under mohair on a winters day
Absorbing the fumes it marks the curve of a plastic pipe
That I knew as a minnow string of ponds
Among the un-swaying houses, the root bound traffic
The valley made sense of Melbourne’s seasons
But now that ancient shape of the land
The way its watershed tilts and rolls
Is altered as if forever
Someday, the Amazon too will be a drain
Drawing its waters from peccary crossing and python estates
We have lived to a world so dense
One person’s road beats down their neighbour’s river”

Later at the Australian National University, I met some of those who can’t and won’t see that population growth causes environmental damage, or runs us into resource limits. These were above all the believers in growth economics. One of the legendary Economics professors of the ANU once took me aside and pityingly explained that I was naïve to think that the world’s or Australia’s population growth might ever lead to famine. If food became short, he instructed me, in his German accent, this would increase its price, and this would cause farmers to clear more land, thus growing more food and reducing the price again. Market Forces. The notion that there would not always be more land to clear, or that it might be environmentally destructive to clear land did not occur to him. To the true growthist, the growth of people or the people’s economic activity, can and must go on forever. There are no critical resource shortages, because if there are then prices rise, causing people to grow or dig up more of whatever is required, or else they will find a substitute, which will often turn out to be better. Science will solve all problems. Indeed there is no faith in science like the faith of a growth economist who knows no science.

The director of the Australia Institute, Richard Dennis, himself an economist, remarks “the way Australia’s national accounts are constructed, and the way politicians define progress, means that the value of peace and quiet, space, lack of congestion, biodiversity and air quality are all ignored when claims about the economic benefits of rapid population growth are made”, and perhaps moving into the territory of a survey we of heard tonight, he remarks “we should invest in the infrastructure we will need before we invite new citizens, not after they arrive.” So after coming across such extremists, I could think of Greg Sheridan of the Australian, or Bernard Dean of Crikey, or Professor Peter McDonald of the ANU, I realized in time that I was dealing with a kind of religious belief, that is impervious to rational debate. Like all religions, growthist economics taps into our deep human need to believe that we humans, or at least our particular tribe of them, know a story. A story that explains the secret workings of The Universe, and hence we can hope to control The Universe or the Gods, through prayers,

mandalas, or economic mantras. And this faith can lead to such bizarre ideas as the Fitzgerald Reports claim that more people in Australia would improve the natural environment, since there would then be more taxpayers to pay for, and I quote “the same or higher environmental standards”. It would be easier to argue with Osama Bin Laden who are such true believers in growth.

Recently one Dr Kirchner, a research fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies ...Foundation published an article in which he pointed out that “human ingenuity in solving resource constraints is limitless, and population growth adds to that ingenuity, therefore to constrain population policy, based on existing capacity constraints, is to deny Australia’s enormous potential.” You can get that sort of rhetoric by the bucket load from those sources.

So when I wrote “This Tired Brown Land” in 1998, and later when William Lyons and I combined to write “Overloading Australia: How Governments and Media dither and deny on Population”, it seemed like we were tilting against windmills. It’s not just this religious faith we were up against, but also vested interest and the power of money. Our opponents had scores of hired mouths, spruiking against us night and day. Even today, when the population debate has finally got away and got out of the control of the spin doctors, still half the comments on population that you’ll see in the media are from vested interests like the Business Council or Eron Gadiell’s so-called Urban Taskforce or the so-called Committee for Melbourne or the Committee for Sydney or the so-called Australian Population Institute, another front for the Growth Lobby, or the more honestly named Housing industry Association or the various state property councils, which frankly admit they want more people to keep housing prices high. My local branch of the Property Council shamelessly informed us in the paper recently that it is “working with the ACT Government, to make sure that none of the government’s measures might inadvertently lower house prices,” which as you know have gone up by 20% in one year, and you probably know the banker’s rule of thumb to work out doubling times you divide the annual rate of growth into 70. If you’re growing at 20% a year, you could expect to grow at 20 into 70, you could double every three and a half years. No one in the property Council seemed to think that odd or awkward. A Ross Garnot has remarked that nothing fleeces ordinary people better or moves money more effectively from the poor to the rich or even from the lower middle class to the upper middle class than high house prices. Another Australian economist John Quigan recently remarked “land speculators and property developers openly gloat, that is when they think others aren’t paying attention, that how high immigration allows them to gouge the rest of us for a basic necessity called housing.” In short I found that I was fighting, those who felt like me were fighting, endless arms of an octopus, whose head could be hard to identify. It’s hard to identify the many tie-ups for instance, between those who run the high house price scams, and others crucial sections like the media and the politicians. All Australia’s main media proprietors are believers in sky high immigration and probably in baby bonuses as well. And why wouldn’t they be? They all have virtual monopolies, being usually for instance the only broadsheet or the only tabloid in town, so for them doubling the size of their town is like a farmer doubling the area under crop, same journalistic cost of gathering the news, double the customers and the advertisers. What’s not to like in that? And for the newspapers of course real estate advertising is crucial to their survival. Are they bullied by the real estate

industry, which threatens to boycott any newspaper which is not pro-growth, but the more surreally high the house prices go, the more the vendors will spend on advertising. And as a result blatant lies go unchallenged. Peter Costello brought in a baby bonus, making the claim that births in Australia were not keeping up with deaths. Now we have a thing called the Australian Bureau of Statistics which logs every birth and every death in Australia. Rarely misses any and you can easily find from its website that births in Australia are twice deaths. They have been so for twenty years. It was an absolute lie, but it was not challenged, 'cos it didn't suit the media I think.

Politicians too are often locked in a corrupting embrace with the growth lobby. We might think we have a fairly uncorrupt society in Australia, in the sense that bureaucrats are usually honest, engineers don't pilfer materials from buildings etc, but we allow our political parties to be funded by donations from vested interests, and the interesting thing about donations; a company making donations to a political party, is that it is of course illegal for a group of directors to put their shareholders money to a political enthusiasm of their own, that is misuse of your shareholders funds. Unless of course you're getting something back for it. If it's an effective bribe than it's not a misuse of your shareholders funds is it, so the whole system has only the flimsiest legality to it. The people who give the donations, which they usually give to both sides of parliament; have to pretend that they are giving them because they are in affect effective bribes. The politicians have to receive them arguing they are not of course in any way affected by this money. Both claims cannot be true, and they aren't. This has of course put our politicians in a dilemma that we perhaps should be understanding about. If 80% of the people in southeastern Queensland think population growth is damaging their lifestyle, and 70% want it be capped, that puts very powerful pressure on politicians hoping to be re-elected. But of course to fight elections they need the campaign contributions that developers provide. The case for electoral reform, if I may diverge into a precise political issue has never been clearer. It's said that just \$3 per head per year would fund all our political parties decently, and allow us to outlaw the donations jerk that corrupts our democracy into plutocracy. It's noteworthy that both Wright and Bligh have half promised such reforms, similar to those Canada all ready has. They know that in the long run it may be their only way out.

So, where might we move from there? In a recent new edition of "Overloading Australia", which Dick Smith is about to send to every politician in Australia, I talked about how abnormal Australia's population growth rate is. A demographer on the Inside Program last night made the same point. That it is bizarrely high for a first world country... 2.1% according to the Bureau of Statistics annual growth. Indonesias's rate....1.2%... world average....1.1. the demographer remarked that it was twice as high as Canada, the next craziest country. Four times as high as the USA, that's in per capita immigration rates. And indeed when you see these very high predictions for the future, far higher than the ones that the intergeneration report is making, that if we kept on at 2.1% of course you'd double every 33 years, and we'd be way up towards 150 million by the end of this century, which is beyond what even the greatest optimist believes that you could feed in Australia. It's clearly heading for an impasse or a disaster. And almost all of this growth incidentally would come by immigration. Australian couples, or more exactly Australian women, are

averaging just below 2 children each....1.97 is the latest figure from the Bureau of Statistics. Hence natural increase the surplus of births over deaths should soon fall away, giving us even-sided generations. About the same number of grandparents as grandchildren. And thus natural increase may have no more than a million people by 2050. On this scenario the remaining 27 million additional people....more than all the existing population of 22 million...would all come through immigration. Now I'm going to move into an area that involves morality, but not the easiest of moral issues to argue. To justify this vast giveaway of stakes in the nation, growth economists have tried to present Australia as a sort of infinite cut-in come-again pudding. Like the Magic Pudding, the more who dine off it, the bigger the pudding gets. Can this be true? Although at present we grow food for some 60 million people, we do so with vast machines, few labourers and millions of tonnes of fertilizers. These include imported superphosphate, plus nitrate fertilizers, which as you may know, are made from oil and natural gas. Well every terrorist knows that. They incorporate the same energy as the oil and the natural gas they're made from, and they're actually made out of the molecules of it too. Do we have much oil? No! According to the intergenerational report Australia will run out of its own oil before 2020, just as world oil prices are expected to peak, and many world oil exporters are expected to restrict the exports of oil in the interests of their own people. At the same time we're foolishly selling off our natural gas for short term Political comfort. That's why Tim Flannery suggested that Australia's long term carrying capacity might be as low as 8 to 12 million people. About half what we have at present. So there's little doubt that existing Australian citizens, including immigrants, have every right to disapprove of population boosting. Not only does it strike at their, and their children's, future security, but at the nation's wealth. I received an absolute spray about this the other day from a Punjabi taxi driver. He was appalled at the rate at which the city was growing. I asked him how long he'd been in Australia and he said 3 months. I think he'd all ready realized it was not in his interests.

Our semi-desert continent will earn less and less from the food it exports. This is partly because of the cost of importing fertilizers, partly because we're eroding our soils and acidifying and salinising what is left of them, all described in my book in more detail, partly because our population by 2050 may be eating most of the produce, and probably also because of climate change. What could keep us, and our children, safely in the first world, cruising down supermarket aisles to buy imported widgets, produced in the sweatshops of other nations, is our billion year heritage of minerals to export. And for a short time if we're foolish, oil and gas too. In effect, every new person invited or born into Australia, becomes a sharer in this bonanza. It's as if they were issued with a few million dollars worth of iron, uranium, nickel, aluminium, copper, coal and so on, to be sold off over the next 200 years or so. Did I say sold off. Well not really. We'll give them away for a small royalty per tonne, plus a bit of trickle down prosperity with other jobs created until the resource is gone, and a foolish system of national accounts, as Richard Dennis points out, represents this sell off of assets as growth. But will it sustain us for the next 200 years? Not really. Most of these resources will be gone in decades. There is amazingly little curiosity about how long they will last. The third intergenerational report, it's true, gives a graph of how long some of them will last at current rates of extraction, but these rates are doubling every two or three decades.

So let me move on to some of the issues where the debate I think now swirls and ought to swirl. First of all let's dispose of the refugee issue. Refugees are not the same as immigrants. We take in about 14000 people in the humanitarian category each year, about half of who would qualify as refugees. Nett migration, nett not gross, is 280000. So you can see that it's about 1 in 20 at most is a refugee or even in the humanitarian category. Um, clearly we could double refugees if we chose, if we had the generosity to, while still pulling our immigration back towards nett zero if we wish to do that, or towards Kelvin Thompson's much more moderate figure of nett plus 70000 a year, meaning 70000 a year more people coming in than out, which would still enable our population, if we keep the birth rate reasonably low, to eventually level off. The great issue we're coming up against of course is peak oil. As you know there was a time when oil just flowed out of the ground and you got it basically for the cost of collecting it, distilling it, and moving it to where you wish to use it. Oil used to go for \$5 a barrel and ten years ago when it hit \$10 a barrel, the Economist editorialized that this was totally unsustainable and it would soon drop back to 5. Instead it reached 100, at which point food riots broke out around the world, because even the third world now grows its food with oil based fertilizers. That was what was called the Green Revolution. It takes about 1kilogram of oil to produce kilogram of food. So about 400 gallons a year to feed each of us, \$5 a barrel growing to \$88 is the current price. And without oil and gas there'll be no nitrate fertilizers. Phosphate is similar. It takes huge amounts of those energy compounds to move phosphate around the world. There's also the problem that it's running out. As any farmer will tell you a bag of super now costs three times what it did ten years ago, and the quality is going right down. Most super now comes from Florida, with a warning that it should not be used on food to be consumed by humans directly. And if you're a wheat farmer and it's the only superphosphate you can get, I'll allow you to guess what you would do.

We could of course move to alternative energies, and you can make nitrate fertilizers from, but we've failed to do so. There will be at least a couple of decades of severe energy shortage ahead, in which there will probably be famine. And I gave a talk to ex-parliamentarians the other day, talking about how world population is hoped to taper off at 9 billion. First question came from the former Cabinet Minister John Kerrin. He said "what makes you think world population could reach 9 billion before collapsing?", and he was talking mainly about peak oil and peak phosphorous. In Australia, the CSIRO says that each dollar needs to be backed by about a third of a litre of petrol, or presumably an equivalent energy source.

What other issues do we have to look at. There is of course the great cop out that I sometimes think of as the gormless green argument. "Oh it's not the number of people, it's the way they behave." And it's true in a sense. It's the number of people multiplied by the demand each person makes. But you can't say that one thing is the only one to concentrate on. Number of people is a basic multiplier of over consumption, and granted that we're not reeling in over consumption; it's pointless to argue that the number of people, particularly in the First World countries, doesn't matter.

So let's look at the...what my book was doing. We found that a lot of people were getting very upset about the effects of population growth. They were seeing them so tangibly. Whether the thing that upset them was gridlock on the roads or a mob of kangaroos being blocked in by developers and left to starve or to be killed on the roads, or a whole range of other things. And they would then go and see their local member and they would raise this point, and they would be fobbed off with answers like "oh but what about the terrible ageing population problem we suffer. Who's going to look after us all when we get old?" or "Isn't there an awful lack of labour in Australia?" And because ordinary people aren't spending all their time thinking about these things, they wouldn't know how to answer these cop outs. The value of this book is that it sets out all these arguments, and shows how dishonest most of them are. Recently I gave a brief summary of what these cop outs are, and the answers to them. It's very brief obviously but it'll give you a quick gallop through them. First, "it's inevitable that we'll grow to a vast population. Population growth is inevitable." This is a line coming now from the new population Minister Tony Burke. Well, no it's not. Demographers say we could, if we chose, stop even now at 23 million. The figure that the Australian Academy of Sciences said should be our safe limit. "Well, won't our future suburbs come with you beaut transport systems and every imaginable public facility and be glorious places to live." Well, when was the last time we managed to build the train line and the train station before we put the suburb there. Another claim you'll very often get.. "There is no necessary connection between having more people and more environmental damage." It's a good point. Quite right, there is no necessary connection. And there is also no necessary connection between speeding and having an accident. But there is a very likely and probable connection. There's another argument that more people means higher house prices and makes us all richer. Peter Costello at one stage claimed that in one year he made Australians each ten thousand dollars richer, 'cos their houses were worth more. I'd say no, high house prices make a few of us absurdly rich, and turn the rest of us into mortgage slaves. It now takes both spouses working fulltime, and often overtime, to take out a competitive loan for a house in a nice suburb. If one of the pair gets retrenched it's a disaster. Marriages crack under that strain. People grow tired and angry, as they feel their youth slipping away in endless work. Children are neglected, turn to drugs or whatever. The only people who profit reliably by Australia's bizarrely high house prices are those speculators who own additional houses or house blocks that neither they nor their children need. By contrast in a society with stable population, most people don't even need to buy a house - they inherit one. And I know what I speak of, because I very nearly became an Italian citizen, married an Italian and settled in Tuscany. And the parts of Tuscany around Sienna where I lived, have had a stable population for 300 years. None of the young couples I knew there were worried about mortgages. I mean there was always a house in the family, or a flat or an apartment somewhere. You might do it up a bit to your own tastes, but you didn't have to buy it. And if you did have to buy it, it would be quite cheap.

Another of the great cop outs is "We can't do anything about Australia's population problem till we've solved the World's." A very common argument. I think it's simply wrong. We don't have to solve the World's population problem. The World has to solve the World's population problem. We have to solve our own, while providing reasonable help to other countries. But every country, even

Java, started from a very small human population. You know the population of Java in 1800, the most over populated island in the World probably. It was under 5 million. It's not as if intergalactic aliens have come down and scattered humans very unevenly and unfairly across the world. Those countries that are overpopulated made a choice to do so. Each country, I would argue, has both the right and the responsibility to keep its population in balance with it's environment and it's resources. Those that don't, do not I believe, have the right to claim Liebens Raum from others. Another great cop out that we heard a lot of on Insight yesterday was "Australia is a vast continent with a very small population" although in terms of resources for humans it's better described by the geographer George Sedden as "a small country with big distances". I talked once to Phillip Ruddock about how important it was to educate incoming immigrants about what kind of country they were coming to. So many would fly directly into Sydney or Brisbane, see a fairly lush environment, see a big size on the map, and assume that the rest of the country was like that. He seemed very willing, in fact, to put out a kind of education pack, but something in the bureaucracy created an inertia and I believe it has never happened.

Another belief, "We're going to be terribly short of labour." You hear this all the time from employer groups. But I don't think that's true. Employer groups don't like to train their own workers, or pay the going price for labour, if it's easier to beg the government to import more skilled and willing workers, which often means pre-trained and docile workers. They often offer bizarre estimates of future business growth to justify this. The reality is that over a hundred thousand young Australians dropped out of the workforce last year, unable to compete with imported workers. That's just the way capitalism works. If you're an employer, and you can get Australian teenagers who you would have to train for say 13 weeks before you could turn them loose on your minesite, or you can get the government to bring in pre-trained workers from overseas, which would you do? If you made the choice that's better for Australia, you might go broke by competition with people making the other choice. That's just how it works. But such people do need to be reminded about market forces. They apply to labour too. And you do need to pay the going rates. If you don't do this and simply allow them to import the cheapest labour available, teenagers never get a job ,cos immigrants often are in direct competition with teenagers starting off on their work career. In the USA, it was found that in just 13 years the percentage of teenagers finding a job had halved as the immigration became easier.

Finally we have this terrible ageing population disaster coming up. So let me talk about this. Are you frightened by all this talk of ageing? I am. Ageing is what's going to kill me. It's what's going to kill each one of us, unless something else gets in first. And political spin doctors know that people are worried about their personal ageing, and they believe they can get them to transfer this worry to our ageing decrepit society. Our stagnant population. Only there's no connection. Having a lot of people survive and stay healthy into their 60s and beyond is a sign of a successful, prosperous, advanced society. There are countries, unhealthy countries, where life is short, birth control seems unknown, and half the population is under 30, or even under 20. But you might not want to live there. Pamela Kinnear of the Australia Institute remarks "Alarm over the ageing crisis is not justified by the evidence. Population ageing is not a threat to Australia's future." Similarly in the UK, where the same line is being tried in

defence of high immigration, the Select Committee on Economic Affairs of the House of Lords concluded that arguments in favour of high immigration to, quote "diffuse the Pension's time bomb", do not stand up to scrutiny. It's also not true that we're heading for a bizarrely aged society. We're simply heading for an even-aged society where there are roughly equal numbers of people in each generation. Up to that age at which death starts to prune a generation away.

Our population in fact is heading for stability, or would be without this large imbalance of immigrants. It is because the government wants to keep the high immigration going that it tries to frighten us with the ageing population argument. But it's not working. A poll released on Wednesday by the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes found 69% of Australians don't agree that Australia needs more people. Meanwhile the government and the treasurer, plus a chorus of voices from the big end of town, rely increasingly on the ageing population scare. "Do you know" they cry "that by 2050 without high immigration, every Australian of working age will be supporting 2 to 3 times as many retirees as now. And they're right. There are just four little problems with this argument. First the ratio won't be much different even with high immigration. Secondly, most Australians over retirement age are not supported. They support themselves and often their children or their grandchildren as well. Detailed economic studies show that up to the age of 75, the flow of money is from the retirees towards the younger generation. Not the other way. Thirdly the real issue is the dependency ratio, which means the number of people too young or too old to work versus the number in their working years. And it's quite true, there will in future be more people like myself, too old to work. I haven't noticed myself working any less. But there will be far fewer who will be too young to work. On balance our dependency ratio in 2050 will be little worse than in 1970 and much better than in 1947 when I and my sisters were crawling around the floor, totally unproductive. Besides, today far more of those inside their working years are able to work especially women, and this is partly because of our litter smaller, and also because there are more retired grandparents around to help look after the kids. Fourthly, this is the point I'm ending on which is why I'm doing it to death just to make clear how much of a lie it is. It doesn't matter how many people we have in 50 years if there's no jobs, jobs, jobs for them. The government most of the time pretends that there's a shortage of jobs only occasionally switching the rhetoric to claim that there's a shortage of workers. But a young family on unemployment benefits is just as expensive as a couple who draw the old age pension. In fact much more so. Currently there are many more job applicants in our cities than available jobs. A 5:1 ratio in Melbourne for instance. Besides the increased cost of housing caused by population growth impoverishes ordinary taxpayers far more than paying for the old age pension.

Much the same goes for claims about the high medical costs of the aged. In fact, apart from people who go into hospital to die, and dying is something I hope each of us does only once, the health costs of the old don't seem to be as great as those of the young. It's true that Wayne Swan pulls a long face and talks about aged and health care as if they were the same thing, and talks about needing more people to pay for the projected blowout in health costs by 2050, but the economist Tim Colbatch who checked his figures was scandalized to find that the mean cause of the blowout in health costs the treasury had calculated was the 60% increase in the population it was assuming. In other words the

supposed remedy was the cause. Remember that it is the young not the old who are the most economically dependent. They require many more years of looking after. In a word, they cost society far more than the old.

But the most telling point of all is one only recently made by the University of Queensland's Jane O'Sullivan who put it out that it's the extra infrastructure costs that seem to be killing our society at present. Everywhere when we look at the parts that are not coping with population growth: Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, people's complaint is it would be all right if the infrastructure kept up, but it doesn't keep up. Why doesn't it keep up? Well she made a very simple calculation that explained why it doesn't keep up. Infrastructure means all those things: sewers, broadband, telephone lines, roads, signs..all those things we need to lead a modern civilized life. And on average the usual economist's rule of thumb is that infrastructure lasts 50 years. In other words you replace about 2% of it each year and it's very very expensive to do so. It requires about one eighth of GDP..each year's annual GDP..goes into replacing infrastructure. Now she asked a very simple question. That's what would happen in a state with steady population. What happens if your population is growing by 2%? What does that do to your infrastructure costs? You see how this debate has turned a poet into an economist. What does it do to infrastructure costs if population is growing at 2% a year? Does it put them up by 2%...20%...or 100%? I asked this question a few days ago when I was talking to a group of ex-parliamentarians, and one of them confidently answered 100% of course, and gave the obvious reason that it's 2% infrastructure to replace the old infrastructure as it wears out, plus another 2% just to keep up with the additional people being added. I was later told who he was. He was John Stone. This I think is the very simple economic reason why we don't get ahead. Now, you can see I range very widely, economics, morals, I think it's up to you in question time to push me into some of the areas that I haven't got into. I'll leave it there.