
People centred and way forward

The decision is now in our hands

Byline: Vesh Arumugam

An outcome of a political forum isn't always a satisfactory one given disparate ideologies surface in the room amongst the audience; each to their own. But, the Federal Pre Election Public Forum by The Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia (ECCWA) on the 8th of May was an exception. It almost felt like a bunch of frenzies chatting along over a cuppa (in this case spring rolls and good old pizzas). It could fairly be a reason that out of three invited Parties, only two turned out on the night - Australian Labor Party (ALP) and Australian Greens. Dr Anne Aly MP, Member for Cowan represented ALP and Hon. Senator Jordan Steele-John for the Greens. That leaves us with no show from the Libs. In a genuine outcry during his speech, President of ECCWA Mr Ramdas Sankaran said that despite multiple invitations, the *Big Blue* still didn't turn out at the forum. He said, "This was the third time that the Liberal Party has chosen not to participate."

On the other hand, I [the author] consider myself as apolitical and one that sneaks out during impromptu political yarns to avoid melee or disparities. But, little did I know that this forum would change me well on this issue. I felt comfortable talking about Australian politics in an open and safe space. The theme of the forum, "We are Ethnic, We are Taxpayers and We Vote", was a great place to start the liberating journey within. Yes, I identify myself from an ethnic background and I am a potential voter. This grants me a right to choose the party that I believe correlates with my set of values and I urge all voters to exercise their right to vote.

In an initiative to informed voting, both the reps did a great job. They deserve a holler of bien joué. Anne started her speech with a bit of humour that portrayed a sense of calmness and relatability with the audience; she sounded like an ordinary person fighting for extraordinary policies. The most significant part of her speech was when she addressed the flaw in multicultural representation in the parliament. Anne said that out of 24 percent population of the non-Anglo Indians in Australia only 4 per cent are active representatives. In reply to this she said, "A lot of work to do." Anne further added that the change has to start from reforming the parliament in terms of representation. "I think Australian parliament is one of the most homogenous and mono-cultural institutions," she said. Anne also believes that more women and people with disabilities should be represented in the parliament. I, personally think that Anne is a living proof that one fine day Australia will get there and that day is not in a million light years away.

The ALP has prominent principal policies to implement should they be fortunate enough to take over the office in the coming election. Mainly, they are set to carve a niche in the Australian politics with inventing a body for Offices of Multicultural Affairs to deal with all things multicultural. Besides, Anne spoke out against the Liberal's attempt to repeal Section 18C. Thirdly, language requirement for citizenship such as IELTS will be reformed with less curfews, and lastly, retention of community languages. As a multilingual person, this was a huge appeal for me. There are some notable initiatives happening in WA especially Tamil classes are widely operating after school hours vastly

run by volunteers. But, it's safe to say that more eloquent work need to be done to preserve mother tongues in Australia. Anne articulated the importance of studying one's mother tongue after her despairing experience with one of the closest family members who reversed to first language while suffering dementia. The sisters were unable to converse as they were taught to speak in English while missing out on Arabic.

Some of the other policies are data correction of all sects under long stay parent visas, encouraging migrant women to learn English language, and producing an impact statement on culturally and linguistically diverse background.

Australian Green's Senator Hon. Jordan Steele-John was also more pressing on the IELTS reformation just as much as Anne. An article on SBS today read that Greens Senate candidate for Queensland, Navdeep Singh has demanded an urgent review of the current testing system in place to measure the English language standards for migrants. This was coherent to Jordan's appeal at the forum. The Greens have also promised that they will work on immigration policy, abolishment of Nauru and Manus detention centres, reformation and review of border policies, migration and family reunion system, and Human Rights Commission.

The Greens are also very vocal in terms of renewable energy and climate change policies. They want to phase out coal and move to 100 per cent renewable energy by 2030, and implement a super profits tax on oil, gas and mining giants. They also want to increase Newstart and Youth Allowance payments, and provide free TAFE and university education.

Jordon further articulated the vitality of recognising the important role the Indigenous Australians play in our community. He was quite emotional when he said "they deserve all our apologies for the suffering they endured since Captain Cook stepped on this land." He propagated that detention centres in Australia must be abolished and all asylum seekers must be treated humanely even if they are by the boats. Finally, Jordon expressed his disappointment that handover of NDIS was not done appropriately and more work need to be done to ensure its efficiency.

The Greens have pledged to safeguard arts and culture especially of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in WA. They want arts and culture in Western Australia to maintain their unique character and diverse nature through support and promotion of local content and the development of local projects for all forms of art and culture. The Greens will do this by initiating and supporting legislation and actions that support and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' art forms through appropriate funding and as part of school-based curricula.

On the other hand, the Liberal Party is concerned about traffic congestion with billions of dollars being allocated to transport infrastructure across the country. They are also spruiking tax relief for workers and small businesses, and talking up their handling of the economy during their time in office - forecasting a budget surplus in 2019-20. The party will also revamp the emissions reductions fund by way of a \$2 billion climate solutions fund, which supports businesses, farmers and land managers to reduce emissions.

The decision is now in the hands of each Australian citizens who will be voting this weekend.

Disclaimer

Please note this article is written by Vesh Arumugam a freelance journalist who attended the ECCWA Pre Election Forum on 8th May. **His views do not represent the stance of ECCWA's staff or management.**