



# Australian Adam Smith Club (Melbourne)

President: Timothy Warner, Editor: Mannie Gross, P.O. Box 950, Hawthorn, 3122

The vast majority of persons of our race have a natural tendency to shrink from the responsibility of standing and acting alone.  
*Francis Galton (Inquiries Into Human Faculty, 1883)*

# Tanveer Ahmed

on

# Fragile Nation

## Vulnerability, Resilience & Victimhood

**The Adam Smith Club will host a meeting on Wednesday the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, 2017  
at Bohème Restaurant Bar, 368 Bridge Road, Richmond.**

Dr Tanveer Ahmed is a consultant psychiatrist. He received his medical degree at the University of Sydney and trained as a psychiatrist throughout New South Wales. He is also an author who has involvement in the media and politics. He is an elected councillor at the City of Canada Bay. He appears in various media, most commonly regular contributions to Channel 7's Weekend Sunrise and columns in the Spectator Australia. He has previously had regular columns in national newspapers, undertaken international news stories and co-hosted a prime-time gameshow. His migration memoir is titled *The Exotic Rissole*. His latest publication, *Fragile Nation*, will be the subject of his address to the AASC.

Attendance is open to both members and non-members. Those desiring to attend should complete the attached slip and return it to the Club no later than the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, 2017. Tickets will not be sent. Those attending should arrive at 6:30pm for dinner at 7:00pm. The cost is \$45.00 per head for members and \$50.00 per head for non-members (see next page for explanation of arrangements and for electronic booking details).

**Enquiries to Hon. Secretary, mob. 0403 933 786  
or email: [asmith@adamsmithclub.org](mailto:asmith@adamsmithclub.org)**



*detach and return*

The Secretary,  
Australian Adam Smith Club (Melbourne),  
PO Box 950, Hawthorn, Victoria 3122.

Please reserve ..... place(s) at \$45.00 dollars per member and .....place(s) at \$50.00 per non-member for the March 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Australian Adam Smith Club. I enclose the amount of \$..... in payment for the same.

NAME (please print): .....

ADDRESS: .....

.....

SIGNATURE: ..... TEL: .....

## LAISSEZ FAIRE ON THE WEB

This newsletter has an address on the web: <http://www.adamsmithclub.org/laissez.htm>. The Club's web site can be found at <http://www.adamsmithclub.org/>.

### ELECTRONIC PAYMENTS

By popular demand, the AASC now offers electronic booking and payment to dinner meetings. Bookings can be made by emailing the number of members and non-members attending to [twarner@adamsmithclub.org](mailto:twarner@adamsmithclub.org); a reply email from the club will then be sent with a link to PayPal where the payment can be made by Mastercard, Visa, AMEX, Diners or PayPal Account. Bookings made after Friday 10<sup>th</sup> of March will not be accepted online. FEES - a \$2 card fee will apply for the transaction.

## DINNER REPORT

The November Dinner had Peter Fenwick speaking on freedom of speech and Bill Leak's famous (infamous!) cartoon. The improvements in the venue continue, with Bohème Restaurant Bar now running a jazz club in the same space. Mr Fenwick's speech was entertaining and the Q & A engaged more than the usual interlocutors.

Fingers crossed the venue continues to improve with no increase in cost! TW

### VENUE ARRANGEMENTS

For the March 15<sup>th</sup> dinner at Bohème Restaurant Bar, there will be a two-course dinner (main & dessert, followed by tea or coffee). The restaurant is fully licensed (no BYO). A separate (upstairs) room has been reserved for the dinner meeting. We hope these arrangements do not cause inconvenience and we welcome your feedback. Please note that because the Club must provide final numbers of attendees to the restaurant on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, **we are unable to admit anyone to the dinner who has not notified the Club of their attendance by Monday 13<sup>th</sup> of March.**

# Laissez Faire

Newsletter of the Australian Adam Smith Club (Melbourne), No 118, February 2017



## DEMOCRACY'S FATAL FLAW

Democracy is widely regarded as the epitome of good government. Its virtues are lauded by politicians and prelates, journalists and judges, academics and scholars of many and varied backgrounds. As Winston Churchill, with typical wit, observed, “Democracy is the worst form of government, save for all the others”. Not everyone however would agree.

Democracy and the critics thereof have existed since earliest times. Plato wrote unfavourably of democracy and foresaw the eventual fate of all democracies as tyranny or mob rule. Hans Herman Hoppe, whilst not advocating monarchy, suggests in his book, “Democracy the God that Failed”, that it was superior to democracy, against which he directs much criticism.

The definition of democracy as two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for dinner, is sometimes attributed to Benjamin Franklin, clearly suggesting that he did not favour it. Perhaps Franklin had in mind the threat of democracy when, on leaving the American Constitutional Convention he was asked what form of government the new USA was to have, he responded, “a republic, if you can keep it”.

In his preference for a republic and his opposition to democracy, Franklin was not alone amongst the American Founding Fathers. The second President, John Adams, asserted “Democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes exhausts and murders itself. There never was a democracy that did not commit suicide”. James Madison, the fourth President wrote in similar vein, “Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths...”.

The American Founding Fathers did not make the mistake of equating freedom with democracy. In creating the USA they established what they considered to be a Republic, where the voting power of the majority was constrained by a superior law, the Constitution, and where the Rule of Law prevailed. By such means they hoped to avoid what they saw as the shortcomings of unlimited democracy. Such concept is sometimes referred to as Constitutionalism. Similar sentiments applied in the setting up the Commonwealth of Australia.

With the passage of time it has become clear to many that those who put their faith in Constitutionalism as a safeguard against the shortcomings of democracy were wrong, and that the critics of democracy have been proven right. Constitutionalism has shown itself to be a feeble shield both in America and Australia. In Australia such limited successes as the Bank Nationalisation Case and the Communist Party Case of the 1940s and 50s are long gone, and have not looked likely to recur. In both countries, the Constitutions, as protectors of liberty and constraints on the power of government, are effectively dead.

The critics of democracy have suggested a variety of possible causes as to its likely demise. Perhaps the most convincing is the determination of the 18th century Scottish lawyer and theorist Alexander Tyler, who wrote that “A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the majority discovers it can vote itself largess out of the public treasury”. It would appear that such stage has well and truly now been reached. *DBS*

# CREATING A NATION OF CRIPPLES

Tanveer Ahmed: *Fragile Nation: Vulnerability, Resilience and Victimhood*. Connor Court Publishing, Redland Bay, 2016.

Today people often see themselves as cripples who have subordinated their lives to some "higher authority." That is the primary social and political challenge of the early twenty-first century. They are no longer individuals who have 'agency,' that is, control over their own destiny. The "higher authority" is not usually these days an omnipotent transcendental deity, though for young Muslims it often is, but some form of governmental instrumentality, or some set of circumstances which have impinged on their lives, often to do with their occupation. Dr Tanveer Ahmed is a Sydney-based psychiatrist working in private practice at a private psychiatric hospital in Western Sydney. He is married with two daughters. He is, by ethnic background, Bangladeshi. Dr Ahmed's book is informed by, and illustrated by, the many patients that he has treated in his practice, which, like Western Sydney itself, draws people from many varying ethnic communities. Some of his patients are Muslim, most are not.

Dr Ahmed's main thesis is that society and policy making have been fundamentally transformed, both at the individual level and the national level, by the ideas we have about human frailty; the notion that we are all victims.

"Arguably, Western conceptions of the 'self' have changed from viewing the human being as fundamentally resilient to formulations that view people as innately fragile" (Ahmed, 62). We no longer talk about 'character' for example, where we see individuals as morally autonomous beings. Now we talk about 'personality,' seeing people as a collection of traits, and as such, psychological analysis can excuse any act, even the most heinous.

If we treat "Fragile Nation" as a work of literature, for indeed it is a fine, arresting piece of writing that is well worth reading, we would say that it deals with the problem of 'agency.' 'Agency' is the individual's ability to make choices and to take control of his own life. Or, as the case may be, her life. For example, Jane Austen's heroines have agency, and within their restricted *milieu* of upper middle class and minor landed gentry – the social environment within which she lived – they show an intensity of feeling rarely seen in previous literature. The late Georgian era in which Jane Austen lived saw the shift from social and economic stasis – where you took what life handed out and were expected to live happily in your social station – to an era when people grasped life's

opportunities. Merchants, sailors, soldiers and entrepreneurs slowly gained respectability. Thus, social status changed from glorifying passive and slothful landed gentry to who benefitted from primogeniture and entail to an active upper middle class who took control of their own destiny. We move, as a social ideal – gradually, admittedly – from the passive landed gentry to those merchants and entrepreneurs who show agency.

The retreat from passivity to the deification of the man of action – the millionaire, the sportsman and the soldier -- from the early nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth saw the adoration of those who demonstrated agency. Concurrently, evangelical Christianity saw the reinvigoration of religious practice throughout the Western world led by men and women such as John Wesley and Cardinal John Henry Newman. Most people felt a connection with the transcendental. 'There's a divinity that shakes our ends, rough hew them how we will' (Hamlet Act 5, Scene 2), Shakespeare wrote. Human beings lived in a world that both rewarded agency and acknowledged a divine presence; this provided moral and psychological certainty.

'The idea was that we each have a moral sense and a feeling for what might be right. The moral sense was not considered merely as a matter of calculation but was anchored in our feelings. Our inner feelings were considered a link with God and what was innately good' (Ahmed, 71).

What changed? We were once a people who accepted individual responsibility. Now, any deviation from the norm becomes a 'problem' to be fixed. In one mainstream Sydney school, one out of three students are said to be 'handicapped.' Minor depression, once considered to be a natural reaction to the evolution of one's character, usually a learning experience, is now treated with antidepressants. Post-traumatic stress claims against the military authorities and the police command have skyrocketed. More and more, society is regarded as a dystopia resembling Aldous Huxley's 'Brave New World' with its tranquilizing medication 'soma.'

If one program sums up the impending psychological and social catastrophe of mass dependence, it is the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS is supplanting State governments and voluntary agencies, and families. It is in no sense an insurance scheme. An insurance scheme implies someone is paying premiums. Who are they? Even so, the public is unlikely to react until the scale of this social and financial disaster becomes apparent. In the meantime, the electorate is so numbed by other media-generated political and personal worries that they are simply not taking notice --- yet. *JRB*