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Late 2015 and September 2016 postscript

Some hopes and dreams can last for centuries due to their seductively powerful, ‘common sense’ appeal. The economically minded, democratic and philanthropically inclined British colonists from 1860s South Australia would be very comfortable—if disappointed in the glacial progress—with the ongoing intentions to develop the northern half of the ‘great central state’ functioning as an advanced market democracy, producing wealth and trading with Asia (Cross 2011). The Northern Territory Government’s strategic planning document *Framing the future* repeats the century and a half old mantra citing the desire to ‘strengthen the Territory’s role as the gateway between Australia and Asia’ by creating ‘an economy that unlocks the potential of our regions’ supported by the ‘ongoing training and skills development of Territorians’ (Northern Territory Government 2013, p. 5).

The predominant metaphors of settlement and improvement, indeed the extension of British civilisation itself, into new environments provided the basis for an irresistible desire on the part of European settlers to make the traditional owners of the Northern Territory into objects that needed to be developed into productive citizens. Vocational training was first imported into the Territory as part of the philanthropically inspired project of social and economic advancement as an extension of the settlement and development undertaken by the early South Australian colonists. As described by Elsey (1986, p. 12), adult education is one of the most common sense and widely accepted ways to bring about

social change because it has traditionally adopted a social problem focus. It provides a simplistic commitment to welfare through learning. This social change conception of vocational education and training has its roots in traditional British 'philanthropic concerns of the intellectual middle class' (Elsy 1986, p. 17).

This benign philanthropy is built upon notions of:

- service to the community;
- rational administration;
- legislation and social planning;
- universal voting; and
- development of public health and education services.

This sympathetic desire on the part of the wealthy to improve the lot of others is deeply intertwined with the operations of market capitalism as first described by the father of modern economics, Adam Smith, in the mid-eighteenth century:

The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species (Smith 1759, pp. 508–509).

The late nineteenth-century views of the wealthy Scottish-American industrialist, Andrew Carnegie, demonstrate the application of Smith's theory—of the necessary linkage between capitalism and philanthropic behaviour—in support of the argument used in this analysis of the behaviour of the Northern Territory Government ministers since self-government. Carnegie (1889) proposed that surplus wealth could be disposed of either by leaving it to family members, bequeathing it for public purposes or administering it during the lifetime of those who

garnered the fortune. According to Carnegie, the rich would best benefit the nation's people and society by attending to the distribution of their wealth during their own lifetime thus dignifying their own lives:

The man of wealth thus becoming the mere agent and trustee for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves. Those who, would administer wisely must, indeed be wise, for one of the serious obstacles to the improvement of our race is indiscriminate charity. In bestowing charity, the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves. Individualism will continue, but the millionaire will be but a trustee for the poor; intrusted for a season with a great part of the increased wealth of the community, but administering it for the community for better than it could or would have done for itself (Carnegie 1889, pp. 15 and 18).

Education and training were particularly important areas targeted by Andrew Carnegie and other philanthropists, such as the Rockefellers, for the administration and distribution of their wealth in ways they believed would most improve society. 'Through conditional grant making, and by emphasising efficiency, sustainability and governance, these American philanthropic organisations [foundations] sought to modernise the practices and proclivities of universities and academics in the English-speaking world' (Harvey et al. 2011, p. 175).

In the Northern Territory, vocational education and training has been assigned an almost identical role to that described by Carnegie's interpretation of philanthropy. Training is conceived of as a mechanism to solve economic and social problems and needs to be wisely administered by high-minded ministers who depend upon public sector expertise to give effect to their visions and plans for improvement.

Personal services such as training can be provided for by both public and private means. At the heart of advanced democratic economies lie two competing principles—individualism and collectivism. The first deals with the civic right to public goods while the second refers to the right of the state and its ministers 'to plan, control and ration resources in the interests of all' (Elsy 1986, p. 24). The Northern Territory's modern quasi-market for vocational education and training is still premised upon the harmonisation of mild socialism and an open marketplace, using mechanisms that had originally been aimed at the Indigenous population,

later extended to unruly European elements of society and finally made available to everyone in the form of an ‘entitlement’ to training (Council of Australian Governments 2012):

Government in playing a leading part in social welfare provision bases its policies on democratic consultation with a variety of political, economic and social interests and works in partnerships with other providing bodies (Else 1986, p. 30).

The problems of poverty and deprivation that become amenable to philanthropic interventions on the part of ministers are framed in ways that assume poverty and disadvantage to be a result of personally acquired deficiencies. The solution to these problems is an emphasis ‘on acquiring new skills and changing attitudes’ (Else 1986, p. 71).

When asked during interviews, senior policy makers and politicians from the Northern Territory provided the following examples of why they deployed the problem-solving capacity of vocational education and training during their time in office:

- The former Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Education and Training Syd Stirling believed, ‘Training changes behaviours to a desirable state of affairs. It helps those being trained to understand why things need to be done in a certain way’.
- Additionally, Col Fuller—the last Secretary of the Department of Chief Minister in the initial 26 year-long run of Country Liberal Party governments—was characteristically brash in his description of the importance of training to governments: ‘Training can rehabilitate those who break the rules or do not conform to social norms’. However, he also linked the need for control with economic development by stating ‘the main problem being addressed by training is one of skill shortages. Particularly in the early days of the Northern Territory, there was a need to build a critical mass of businesses and population’.
- Supporting this view, the former Commissioner for Public Employment and Secretary of the Department of Labour and Administrative Services, David Hawkes, repeated his view that training is ‘the only answer if people are not behaving as they ought to—you have to train them’ and ‘training is necessary to ensure longer term workforce needs are satisfied. Training needs to respond to satisfy skill needs across the economy otherwise major gaps will occur’.

- Furthermore, the Chair of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority at the time of its demise in 2001, Andrew Bruyn, opened his interview by stating his belief that training ‘fixes problems that are deemed as someone’s fault’ and ‘fixes issues for those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder’.

Vocational education and training is a form of philanthropy that started as a tool of Northern Territory missionaries in their efforts to ‘improve’ the life of Aborigines but has become a mainstream political mechanism with broad application to the entire population to structure social behaviour and support an advanced market democracy. The minister with responsibility for training is given the temporary control over the training system and its resources by the community with the expectation that the public’s largesse will be used efficiently and effectively to support the continued economic and social development of the Northern Territory.

As described throughout this book, some ministers are better at this task than others, if only because they have a superior understanding of both the potential benefits and the electoral obligations of behaving like a wealthy philanthropist. It is doubtful that any of these ministers of the Crown would describe themselves as sharing the traits of Andrew Carnegie or John D Rockefeller, however, this examination of their behaviour and motivations suggests that they have much in common. There is a shared desire to use time-limited access to financial resources to improve society in ways that they recognise and have experienced—ensuring the continued survival of a capitalist economy by assisting all responsible citizens to participate in work, either through direct employment or entrepreneurial endeavours. ‘Even the poorest can be made to see this, and agree that great sums gathered by some of their fellow-citizens and spent for public purposes, from which the masses reap the principal benefit, are more valuable to them than if scattered among them through the course of many years in trifling amounts’ (Carnegie 1889, p. 12).

In 2015, Minister Robyn Lambley joined the group of more than two dozen ministerial philanthropists since self-government who have successfully mastered the intensely personal political hothouse and been given responsibility for training. It is instructive to examine the motives for entering politics that she provided in her maiden speech to the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly delivered on 19 October 2010:

The people of Araluen have spoken, and it is with enormous pride that I stand before the Northern Territory parliament as the new member for Araluen. Humbly, I confess I am not a polished politician as many of my esteemed new colleagues. I am an average person who has had the great fortune to benefit from the unbelievable opportunities the Northern Territory has had to offer.

Like many of us, I arrived in Alice Springs with little more than a suitcase, a yearning sense of adventure, and a bucket full of enthusiasm. Almost 17 years later, I am proud to say the Northern Territory is my home, where I met my husband, where my two children were born, where we have established our family business, and where I have lived the greater part of my life. It is an intensely proud and humble Territorian who speaks to you today with her hand on her heart.

The Northern Territory has been good to my family and me, and for this reason I am before you today. I believe we all have a responsibility to try to put back into our community what we get out of it, to reciprocate, to give, and to enable. We have a responsibility to serve our community, and particularly those less fortunate than ourselves. This principle is intrinsic to why I have decided to embark on a path in politics. My vision for the Northern Territory is to enable all Territorians, to provide others with the opportunities I have been afforded, and to serve people as they have served me.

Not all problems require an intervention by government. Not all problems require public resources and public servants to fix them. The community can be enabled and empowered to respond to needs. Governments do not have to be instrumental in providing everything and finding the solution for everything. Neighbourhood Watch is an example of community action. A free-market democracy means, theoretically, government does not need to be big or intrusive in most areas.

The converse side to my lifelong interest in social justice is my business acumen. My parents, grandparents and great-grandparents were all successful, to varying degrees, as business owners. I was raised valuing the importance of financial independence, and the freedom and strength of being self-employed. I was also raised understanding the worry, endless headaches and demands of business.

Business is key to the future of the Northern Territory. Private enterprise is by far our biggest employer. In the electorate of Araluen, 70% of residents are employed and supported by private enterprise. We need to do everything we can to promote and create all manner of business in the Territory. A robust, open economy is far preferable to one which is

propped up by government and managed by public servants who have no experience of business, who have never had the experience of risking everything they have to make a quid. We need to listen to the business sector and work with them.

This extended excerpt is not intended to suggest that Minister Lambley is unique in her motivations or intentions. The purpose is, in fact, the complete opposite: her words serve as an exemplar of the characteristics of those vocational training ministers that have gone before and highlight their philanthropic disposition. It also returns us to the main thesis that has been developed in this history of vocational education and training in the Northern Territory. If one seeks to influence training policy and resource allocation, an understanding of the drivers of ministerial decision-making is required. Put simply, these ministers act like wealthy philanthropists and their decisions are driven by the most important factor that influences giving behaviour—self-identification with the intended recipient of the public’s munificence.



Figure 47. Robyn Lambley, Member of the Legislative Assembly, with the Mayor of Alice Springs, Damien Ryan, joining in the celebrations at the Alice Springs campus of Charles Darwin University recognising 25 years of university-level education in the Northern Territory, June 2014.

Source: Creator Patrick Nelson. Office of Media, Advancement and Community Engagement, Charles Darwin University.

The new Minister for Employment and Training clearly described the type of society and economy that she believed would be the best for the future of the Northern Territory and its residents and it was remarkably similar to that held by virtually all of her predecessors. Once the ministers gained access to the resources, they have each wanted to change society and the world to more closely conform to their views of how life should be lived by the population. Some have seen a larger role for government, others less so, but the difference between them is slight. This world-changing desire is a trait they have in common with the super-rich philanthropists. In their analysis of Andrew Carnegie's philanthropic behaviour, Harvey et al. (2011) describe how dominant economic actors have abundant power (defined as command of resources) and their governing position is gained not through passivity, but inevitably requires victory in a succession of contests for control. The action of the wealthy philanthropist is:

a world-making process through which already successful entrepreneurs use their power to accumulate more power, extend their social and political influence and increase their capacity to shape society according to their will (Harvey et al. 2011, p. 5).

What did the new minister, with her self-described philanthropic pedigree, find in the vocational education and training portfolio in 2015? Perhaps controversially, this account would suggest that not much has changed over the years since the Kangan Report in 1974 except that there are considerably more people in training—with more than 2500 students commencing apprenticeships or traineeships in the Northern Territory in 2013 in over 500 declared occupations (Department of Business 2015). At the national level, the Commonwealth Government was conducting a number of reviews into vocational education and training in the name of consistency and the most efficient use of public funds—the responsibility for vocational education and training had been removed from the industry portfolio and returned to a Department of Education and Training and the endless debate over state versus federal government responsibility for training had been dusted off yet again (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014).

Closer to home in the Northern Territory, the merits of boards/commissions/authorities, as opposed to departmental structures under direct ministerial control, were being reconsidered. The related, sometimes heated, debate of which department's experts should be framing vocational education and training policy and allocating public funding

on behalf of the minister continued to thrive. The minister also inherited a quasi-market for the provision of training and assessment services that has become well-established since 1992. Her government was the major 'customer' in this market financing a variety of about 50 private providers as well as the two public providers which operate at arm's-length from government to train Territorians. This arrangement fuels another seemingly irreconcilable contest over the appropriate balance of public funding between the two sectors. Feeding this discussion is the interrelated issue of how can the minister best interact with and obtain advice from business and industry in a manner that recognises the unique, intensely personal nature of the Northern Territory's political landscape. Finally, the minister noted her concerns about the limits of government intervention and seeks assurance that the largesse she distributed would produce the type of society, economy and democracy with which she self-identified.

Unfortunately for Minister Lambley, and in a demonstration of the battles one must wage to remain a public philanthropist, she lost her Cabinet position as a result of her part in the February 2015 botched attempt to remove Adam Giles as the Country Liberals' Parliamentary Leader and Chief Minister. This type of instability has been a feature of the Country Liberals since they returned to the Treasury benches in August 2012. Lambley actually had two brief stints as Minister for Education and Training, while Dave Tollner served for the longest period of time from March 2013 until August 2014. Four other ministers occupied the position for short periods of time culminating in the current occupant, Peter Styles, being set to achieve a new record if he remains minister up until the scheduled August 2016 Legislative Assembly general election. In total, there were 15 Country Liberal ministries in the period August 2012 to August 2016.

Regardless of the particular, rather circular, responses to these questions that remain permanently on the agenda, the ministers have always had two mechanisms upon which they rely to give effect to their ambitions. The Northern Territory Government has shifted vocational education and training between departments or statutory authorities in accordance with the minister's preferences, sense of electoral advantage and political skills. Regardless of which bureaucratic structural arrangement is in use, the operational role has remained the same. The department or authority fulfils the same function as does a wealthy philanthropist's foundation. The technical expertise required to implement the minister/philanthropist's objectives is provided through these organisations.

In addition, these bodies can serve as buffers between givers and receivers, protect the reputation of the philanthropist, identify potential recipients displaying those desirable characteristics required in a market democracy and take steps to ensure the financial resources are not squandered or mishandled.

The leaders of these departments/foundations/authorities are generally eager to provide their minister/philanthropist with the 'best' outcome and will fight over the capacity to influence giving behaviour. The middle managers are frequently ambitious and will seek to promote their organisation as being best-positioned to meet ministerial wishes. Having multiple agencies that are competing with each other—as well as arm's-length training providers from which to choose—gives Northern Territory Government ministers increased policy flexibility and access to a wider variety of data and information with which to both plan their interventions into the behaviour of the population but also monitor the outcomes.

A new minister would have soon found out that she or he had access to the second, and most useful, tool in the vocational education and training policy repertoire—the review—which has frequently been used by those who have gone before. A number of Northern Territory specific reviews impacting upon vocational education and training have been described in the preceding chapters. Australia-wide, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research lists over 100 relevant 'landmark reviews' into vocational education and training since the mid-1960s. Well-constructed reviews provide the minister with considerable electoral and organisational advantages. The first step involves the appointment of the person to lead the review. This individual must not only have the confidence of the minister, but also understand the views and motivations that have prompted the commissioning of the review. The review must have access to expert advice, large amounts of data and a schedule of interviews and consultations that meet the political imperatives that characterise the electorates of the Northern Territory. As a general rule, involving greater numbers of people and organisations in the review better serves the political and personal ambitions of the minister. The results of the review are most useful when presented as a series of recommendations that can be separately implemented and carefully worded in ways that leave room for interpretation by ministerial minds. Reviews also serve

another important purpose in that they also ‘buy time’ as they provide the appearance of action, yet protect the minister from having to make either an immediate or firm decision resulting in unintended consequences.

Reviews have frequently been used to focus the public policy debate upon the public sector bureaucratic structures, on the potential threat to vested interests that might result from changes in the status quo and the personalities of those individuals who are implementing government programs. This has allowed the real drivers of vocational education and training—ministers acting as wealthy philanthropists—to remain comfortably masked by the actions of senior bureaucrats, affording the ministers even greater latitude to create the sort of world they hold dear.

This contemporary account of the development of vocational education and training in the Northern Territory has found that the motivations of those who wish to improve the circumstances of their fellow citizens have remained remarkably consistent over time, as have the organisational and policy options available to philanthropically-minded ministers. Knowing that Northern Territory Government ministers are motivated and behave in ways that are nearly identical to those demonstrated by wealthy philanthropists helps one to understand what has happened in the Northern Territory’s training arena since self-government and, consequently, the best means of influencing the future direction of vocational education and training. This creates a new space for novel methods of presenting information and future policy options to decision-makers.

This account of the philanthropic use of vocational education and training invites us to avoid the fallacy of considering the present as a point of arrival but rather to acknowledge that we are at a point of departure (Burawoy 2013).

Postscript

During the final sitting day of the Northern Territory’s 12th Legislative Assembly in July 2016, the first major overhaul to the legislation governing vocational education and training since the early 1990s was passed. The *Training and Skills Development Act* (Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory 2016) maintained the focus upon nationally recognised training used to support employment and economic growth. The role of

the minister is clearly defined as well: ‘The Minister is responsible for the administration and management of VET in the Territory’ (Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory 2016, p. 6).

In a ‘back-to-the-future’ scenario, the new Act provides for the establishment of a nine member Northern Territory Training Commission ‘to provide high level strategic advice to the Minister, prepare a VET investment framework and an annual VET investment plan’ (Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory 2016, pp. 6–7). Mr Andy Bruyn, the former chair of the Northern Territory Training and Employment Authority, was appointed by Minister Styles as the inaugural chairperson of the Commission which is ‘subject to Ministerial direction’ and ‘must give effect to a direction’ (Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory 2016, p. 8). This statutory authority does not have a mandate to operate at the national level nor the capacity to employ its own staff; it will be supported by the Department of Business whose Chief Executive Officer is a member of the Commission. The activities of the Training Commission are further constrained by legislated provisions that insist ‘the CEO or a delegate must attend all meetings of the Commission’ and:

an act or decision of the Commission at a meeting of the Commission is not valid if the CEO or the CEO’s delegate is not in attendance when the act is done or the decision is made (Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory 2016, p. 9).

In his media release announcing the changes to the administration of vocational education and training in the Northern Territory, Minister Styles (2016) also announced that Northern Territory Government resources that had been allocated to the six remaining Training Advisory Councils would be ‘redirected’ to a new incorporated body, the Industry Skills Advisory Council Northern Territory. This arm’s-length organisation will engage directly and intimately with industry to provide contemporary advice to the Department of Business on the skills needs of employers and businesses in relation to the economic growth of the jurisdiction, as well as liaising with a number of federal bodies to ensure the formal qualifications being delivered in the Northern Territory are nationally recognised and up-to-date. All employees of the advisory councils were employed by the new council. In addition, the membership of the board of directors of the Industry Skills Advisory Council was drawn from the

directors of the former training advisory councils and an independent chairperson, Don Zoellner. The Industry Skills Advisory Council commenced operations on 1 July 2016.

On 27 August 2016, a Northern Territory general election was held at the end of the four-year fixed-term of parliament. While the final results are yet to be determined at the time of writing, there is the distinct possibility that the Country Liberal Party will only hold two seats in the 25-member assembly. Minister Styles was not re-elected, while the former training minister, Robyn Lambley, was re-elected as an independent member as was former Chief Minister, Terry Mills. The Labor Party was overwhelmingly elected along with at least four independents. On the final day of August 2016, Labor leader Michael Gunner was sworn in as Chief Minister, the first one to have been born in the Northern Territory. With the exception of two ministries, Gunner temporarily assumed all other ministerial portfolios and will make final appointments as the results of the election are finalised. The one certainty is that the Northern Territory is destined to have a spanking new person in the role of public philanthropist with responsibility for the distribution of the public's vocational education and training funds.

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