

Reverend the Hon Professor Brian Howe AO - Citation for Honorary Doctor of Letters

Brian Howe was born (in 1936) and educated in Melbourne, graduating with a BA from the University of Melbourne in 1961. He completed an MA in theology and sociology at the McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago in 1967. He was ordained in the Methodist Church and served parishes in Eltham, Morwell and Fitzroy. While the Methodist Minister in Fitzroy he established the Centre for Urban Research and Action. (CURA)

He was elected to the House of Representatives as the Member for Batman in 1977. After Labor won the March 1983 election, he was elected to the front bench and the Prime Minister Bob Hawke ironically appointed him Minister for Defence Support. However even in that position he sought to improve the efficiency with which materiel was purchased and the effectiveness with which the Australian Defence Forces were equipped. Fortunately another election was held after only 20 months, and Mr Howe was this time appointed to the entirely suitable Ministry of Social Security which he held for over five years, after which he continued in social policy as Minister for Health, Housing and Community Services. His administration of these portfolios was distinguished by a number of major policy initiatives: in Social Security, reform of family payments and the introduction of child support; in Health, with the National Mental Health Strategy and the Commonwealth Dental Scheme. He was also responsible for important Commonwealth-State initiatives such as the Commonwealth-State Disability Agreement and the Building Better Cities program. When Paul Keating resigned from Cabinet in 1991 Brian Howe was elected by Caucus to succeed him as Deputy Leader, and after Keating won the leadership Howe continued as Deputy Leader and as Minister for Health, Housing and Community Services. After the 1993 election he gave up the Health component of the ministry. In 1995 Mr Howe advanced proposals for housing reforms. These involved paying rental subsidies directly to eligible social security recipients in public and private accommodation. The benefits would have increased assistance to those most in need, reduced long queues for public housing and increased choice. The proposals were agreed in principle by the Keating Government and by COAG but were not implemented after the election of the Howard Government. He resigned the Deputy Leadership in June 1995, and did not contest the 1996 election. Throughout his 13 years as a Minister he was a vigorous advocate for an effective, equitable national welfare system and a leading participant in public debate. He also led the publication of many research and policy reports and was the personal author of many articles and published addresses. An example of the effectiveness of his policies was the decline in the proportion of Australian children in poverty from 15.5 per cent in 1985 to just under 11 per cent in 1995.

After retiring from parliament he was appointed by Melbourne University as a Professorial Fellow in the Centre for Public Policy. He taught postgraduate students and worked on several ARC funded research projects on such issues as A New Social Settlement-: Rethinking Social Policy Across the Life Course and 'Transitional Labour Markets: A Social Investment and Risk Mitigation Strategy for Australian Social Policy. He organized two major international conferences in Melbourne on changing labour markets and their implications for Australian social policy. He also authored *Weighing Up Australian Values*, Sydney, UNSW Press, 2007; edited two other books – *Spirit of Australia: Religion in Citizenship and National Life I and II*, ATF Press, Adelaide, 2000 and 2003; and published many articles. He received a visiting fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University in 1997 and 1998. In 2001 he was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia and promoted to be an Officer of the Order in 2008.

In October 2011 the ACTU commissioned Professor Howe to chair an independent inquiry into the consequences of the growth in the proportion of insecure employment, such as casual and contract work and labour hire. In 2013 he chaired an enquiry into the strategic planning of Australia's capital cities for the Gillard Government Throughout his career Professor Howe has been a perceptive analyst of social change, and an authoritative intellectual and political innovator in the processes of strengthening social protection and community services in Australia. He has been and continues to be a national advocate of the values which contribute to

a socially just, inclusive and kindly society. It would be a fine affirmation of the discernment of the University of Melbourne if this modest prophet is recognised with an honorary doctorate in his own country.