

Sir John Monash Education Bursary

“How a 21st century Sir John would address our nation’s current challenges, and the personal attributes and skill set he would employ to lead our country out of this crisis”.

The vast and perplexing challenges currently imposed on Australia require a highly dynamic and extremely well-planned response. Such pivotal skills required in order to enact such a response must emulate the personal attributes of Sir John Monash, employing his leadership and guidance derived from the battles of WWI over a 100 years later. Facing various challenges ranging from recession to the threat of further infection, a 21st century Sir John Monash would directly address such issues, formulating a structured response capable of minimising and overcoming such an array of challenges. Thus, by employing his cohesive leadership and planning skills in conjunction with sharp intellect a 21st century Sir John could ‘equip’ the nation for life, ‘for the benefit of the community.’ (Monash Uni)

Currently, Australia, along with the rest of the world is seeking to contain and eventually eradicate the highly contagious and threatening COVID-19 pandemic. Such a virus has had a profound impact on the nation, influencing a range of social, economic and physical factors, particularly those induced by lockdown measures. Similarly, Sir John lived through a similar period in history some 100 years earlier, facing the brutal Spanish Flu after a period of widespread casualties and destruction following WWI. Both viruses pose similar threats, compromising health and potentially life of the vulnerable whilst further sacrificing the livelihood of others through lockdown measures. However, during the time of Sir John, our nation was able to overcome such challenges, adhering to quarantine measures followed by a widespread recovery facilitated by increased infrastructure and migration flows. As a result, a 21st century Sir John could emulate a similar strategy adapted to contemporary society, a vastly different Australia in comparison to the 20th century. In doing so, the physical and mental impacts associated with lockdown and infection are able to be minimised and counteracted, guiding the nation out of this crisis.

Furthermore, the economic impacts that continue to arise from the current challenge of COVID-19 may potentially affect the nation for generations, reflecting the necessity for guidance out of such crisis from a leader like Sir John. Following lockdown measures and reduced activity within Australia, economic growth and unemployment levels have significantly deteriorated with values of -6.3% (Mar, 2020) and 7.5% (August, 2020) respectively. Such recessionary conditions coupled with low inflation (-0.3%) have triggered significant policy responses from government, including the provision of wage subsidies through the Job Keeper, Job Seeker and Job Maker programs in order to minimise such fluctuation in the business cycle. Additionally, a record deficit of -\$213b announced by Josh Frydenberg coupled with expected public debt levels of \$1.1T reflect concerning

trends for future tax payers and residents. Comparatively, Sir John lived through a similar global downturn during the Great Depression, a time of widespread poverty and famine throughout the world. However, the response to such a pressing issue was addressed through facilitating projects throughout the nation such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge. By emulating a similar styled response through careful planning and consideration of a variety of geopolitical factors, a 21st Century Sir John would lead at the forefront of such economic response. Through rigorous discretionary measures, an individual would employ their own intellect coupled with a vast understanding of society and economic structure to effectively stimulate Australia and counteract such impacts whilst maintaining stable debt levels due to such considerate qualities. Thus, a 21st century Sir John would lead our country out of this crisis through advocating and implementing a range of policy measures.

Comparatively, increasing pressure on climate action following a rise in global emissions as well as alleged global warming and degradation of natural resources has fuelled an environmental crisis within Australia. As witnessed during the recent drought followed by widespread bushfires, Australia has experienced increasingly prevalent natural disasters due to a range of factors, including management decisions. Following such scenarios, increased pressure from global and domestic influences has been applied to enhance Australia's environmental sustainability, exemplified through being a signatory to the Paris Agreement. However, a shift toward more renewable sources of energy must be conducted in a timely and conservative manner due to a heavy reliance on commodities such as Coal (over 30% of export revenue) and Natural Gas. As a result, a 21st Century Sir John would need to balance both economic objectives whilst achieving ecologically sustainable development. In doing so, they would need to intertwine a range of Sir John's admirable attributes, particularly from his education and engineering skill set. By implementing a range of policies and driving innovation for technologies to assist with such transition, a present-day Sir John could promote and complete projects such as large-scale dam construction. This would utilise his civil and water engineering skills, improving water security, effectively 'drought proofing' regions whilst also generating renewable electricity to ease the transition toward more renewable energy sources. Thus, a 21st century Sir John could employ such innovative, productive and constructive qualities to effectively guide the nation out of the recent environmental crisis, increasing sustainability and overall utility for future generations.

Furthermore, for such objectives to be fulfilled in order for the nation to be guided out of such crisis and challenges, a 21st century Sir John would have to advance attributes of his predecessor, applying his skills from his soldier, engineer and scholar qualities. Firstly, a modern Sir John would have to exhibit similar scholar qualities, harnessing a high intellect and ability to reason through higher order thinking and decision making. This would allow the individual to transfer Sir John's planning and reasoning from the battlefield of WWI and engineering projects to a

political context, facilitating an effective response to complex challenges faced by our nation. In addition, present day Sir John would need to emulate qualities of the soldier and ANZAC legend, displaying qualities of resilience, stoicism and adaptability during a time of adversity and widespread challenge. This would further enable the individual to act as a leader despite the turbulent times in which we live, guiding fellow Australians and demonstrating to the wider world how to overcome such crisis. Comparatively, such individual would employ the characteristics of an engineer in a similar way to Sir John, enabling a range of practical solutions to be derived for current challenges faced due to COVID-19 and environmentally, regardless of complexity. Most importantly, a suitable leader would need to possess a sense of optimism and positivity. This attribute is pivotal in providing other Australians with confidence that there is indeed ‘light at the end of the tunnel’ and stability is near, encouraging a smooth resurgence from the current crisis. This likely reflects Sir John’s own attitude in life, particularly during WWI, encouraging ANZACs to remain hopeful of a bright future, despite the short-term pain, a quality that most likely led to his recognition as ‘the foremost Allied military commander of the First World War.’ (Monash Uni) as well as a knighthood. Thus, emulating such qualities described would be crucial in leading the country from crisis in a similar way to Sir John during WWI.

Ultimately, various perplexing and significant challenges await addressing within Australia following the COVID-19 pandemic and environmental disasters. The current economic and social crisis we live in can be effectively overcome through sensible and rigorous policy decisions implemented and lobbied by a 21st century Sir John. In doing so, they would need to seek, ‘above all, to use his education and abilities for the benefit of the community.’ (Monash Uni), emulating key qualities and skills of the general, scholar and engineer such as optimism; adaptability, intellect and most crucially... leadership. Thus, as entailed, an individual would address our nation’s current challenges in a similar way in order to lead our country out of this crisis into a vastly improved and unified Australia.

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