



TASA The Australian
Sociological Association

Contact Email for March 2017

Earlier in the month, Melanie drew our attention to the New York Times article: "What if Sociologists Had as Much Influence as Economists?" So if we had as much influence, what would we do with it? Economics basically says that an interaction only has any merit when it has a monetary component. This means that the voluntary jobs that I work at have no real value. Yet the organisations are State, and Local government run, and the services that the volunteers run could not be run without them at great expence. Dr Lisel O'Dwyer, a Senior Research Associate in the University of Adelaide's School of Social Sciences, has pointed out that there are more than 6.4 million people who volunteer their time in Australia, and in doing so contribute more than \$200 billion a year to the national economy. This is more than the mining industry. However, not one dollar of this contribution is recorded on any balance sheet. Important as this study is, I have not seen or heard any discussion about its findings.

But do economists really have much to contribute, even though they have the ear of governments? I would draw your attention to the book by Richard Denniss, "Econobabble, How to decode political spin and economic nonsense." (Published by Redbach Quarterly 223 Drummond Street, Carlton, Victoria.) One reviewer writes: *The best guide you'll find to the literal non-sense that usually passes for economic debate in this country.*

A second complementary book worth a read, is "The News" by Alain De Botton, Published by Penguin Books. The London Times reviewer writes: *De Botton's gift is to prompt us to think about how we live and how we might change things.*

There are people out there doing sociology and making an impression, but they are not members of the Association, they don't call themselves Sociologists, because in some quarters Sociologists have a bad name. What we have to do is to find people who are sociologists, who are of the same calibre, who can get out there with books with wide appeal, with articles that speak to ordinary people and politicians and be in a position to influence what happens in the community. It can be done, I know, because I have done it. I have done studies that have made Australia a better place. I have been called to Canberra by a cabinet minister, whose greeting was "I can't trust anyone round here, tell me what I should do about this."

We need to believe in Sociology. We need to believe it is strong enough to get the attention of the whole community, including politicians. Neither Economics nor Psychology have all the answers and a lot of their answers can make things worse. As I said at the Conference we have got to challenge dominant theories that chain people to one view of life which then is used to control them. We also need to get out of the universities with their restrictions and become a real source betterment for everybody and not like those who simply want to control us. Have a think about what we could be.

Alan Scott, Continuing Education Officer