

Member for Cowan Luke Simpkins speaks regularly in the Federal Parliament on a range of issues of both national and local importance. Below is a speech he made on the 25th of November on Classical Education. It is worth a read.



Mr Simpkin's speech on Classical Education

I rise to speak of the importance of the academic discipline known as the classics, and its importance in this modern age.

Having studied ancient history at high school, I developed a love of antiquity and a profound respect for what the ancient Greek and Roman civilisations achieved. Whether it is the roots of our language or the development of our democratic principles, or perhaps our approaches to thinking, the influence of the classics remains strong in the modern age. It is my view that the classics are not rightly credited with the depth of their influence upon us. Certainly the influence of the ancient civilisations is felt but not recognised by most of us.

The classics include ancient history and the study of ancient languages such as Latin and Ancient Greek. I am something of a fan of ancient history myself, studying the Peloponnesian Wars and Roman history whilst at school. Indeed, the military history of the Punic Wars continues to have modern application. One of the great ambushes of all time was the Carthaginian ambush of the Romans at Lake Trasimene. That battle has tactical application for modern military tactics and my interest in military history spurred on my interest in ancient history. The

Carthaginians attacked out of the mist, pinning the unprepared Romans against the lake.

It is, however, true that the Second Punic War was ultimately a demonstration of the strategic failure of the Carthaginian supply lines, and their eventual destruction — again, a modern application.

Although I have a personal interest in such history, from a national perspective, many Australians would be surprised to know that other nations have in the past recognised the strategic importance of Gallipoli before 1915. In fact, the strategic significance of the area has been known for some 3,000 years. The Turkish guns that overlooked the strait in 1915 would have, some 2,400 years earlier, seen a bridge of Persian boats that

Xerxes used to take his army to Europe and attack the

Greeks. Indeed, it was from the classical world that the greatest influences on our modern lives were developed.

We would be little more than barbarians if the Greeks had not invented democracy. Certainly we owe the classical civilisations for Christianity, our rule of law and scientific method. The English language has relied upon these developments to give it substance.

Some call Ancient Greek and Latin dead languages.

It may be true that they are not spoken by any group or nation, but those civilisations achieved great strides forward over a long period. Rome survived independently for some 1,100 years. Will people in another millennium look back on the Western European or British influenced civilisations as a golden age, or will we pale into insignificance in the shadow of the ancient civilisations?

What concerns me is that there is a lack of regard for the classics in Australia with the deep value and foundations of our own society not appreciated. I have now had some contact with the classics departments at ANU and the University of Western Australia. Sadly, these two departments consist of just four staff members each. I thank Dr Elizabeth Minchin and Dr Peter Londey for showing me around the ANU department and I congratulate Elizabeth for her promotion to professor for next year. I also congratulate her, Peter and the ANU for creating a specific new degree of Bachelor of Classical Studies, rather than being a major in the Bachelor of Arts. As part of my visit to ANU I saw their displays, including a Roman coin collection. In that coin display I observed ancient politics at work in the form of a coin from the time of Julius Caesar. As it was explained to me, on that coin it suggested that Caesar had claimed his lineage originally from Troy and claimed that his ancestors had actually founded Rome. Perhaps modern campaigning owes its roots to the use of coins, perhaps as part of Caesar's campaign for emperor.

In asking the Chair of UWA's Classics and Ancient History Department, Neil O'Sullivan, for his perspectives, he informed me with great pride of the work of his team, mentioning Professor Haskell for her work on Latin in the Renaissance, Professor

Kennedy for his work on aerial archaeology in Jordan, and Professor Melville Jones for his expertise in ancient coinage and Byzantine history. He also told me of recent retiree Emeritus Professor Bosworth, who during 40 years at UWA built a reputation as the world's foremost authority on Alexander the Great.

What the visit to ANU and my contact with the department at UWA suggest to me is that Australia has a strong capability and a history of success in the classics.

I know that we must never lose that, in fact we must defend it, because the study of the classical world remains fundamentally relevant. Whether it is the fact that our language is derived from Latin and Greek, the benefits in the development of powers of expression, or the profound influence which the events and ideas of the classical world have had on ours, the value of the classics becomes more relevant. As Neil O'Sullivan says, 'The classics form a vital and shared inheritance, transcending the parochialism of particular time and place.'

I myself strongly endorse the classics as a discipline of study and it is my view that the study of such subjects should be expanded with subjects being of relevance to other disciplines such as political science, law, philosophy, medicine and others. I wish Elizabeth Minchin and Neil O'Sullivan, as well as their teams, all the best for the future in studying a very relevant past.

