

# Powerhouse Museum move: Labor's backflip is a sellout to inner-city's privileged interests

ANNA CALDWELL, The Daily Telegraph

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WRESTING a prized museum from the inner-city elite for the battlers of Western Sydney was never going to be easy.

But it's the type of task that will define precisely what kind of city we want to be. Is it the kind of city that holds its cultural prizes hostage in the domain of the privileged?

Surely we're better than that.

This is, unequivocally, a state that knows the value of the suburbs and the regions. We talk about spreading the benefits of the boom in health, education and infrastructure.

And — newsflash — culture and art should be no different.

Yet, here we are again, in the battle over the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum, at the crossroads of a tale as old as time — the inner-city elite versus the westies.

There has been a series of conversations in recent weeks that suggest the Berejiklian government's plans to relocate the Powerhouse to Western Sydney could be rattled by opponents. As one Parramatta supporter put it to me privately, "You can tell which direction the tide is moving and it's not with us."



The Powerhouse Museum building at Ultimo in Sydney.

**POWERHOUSE MUSEUM: Secret 2014 report warned NSW Liberal Government**

Labor's Luke Foley has backflipped on his support for the move after sustained pressure from the likes of Tanya Plibersek and other inner-city interests.

He thinks a “better plan” is a “performance space” for Parramatta, leaving the Powerhouse untouched.



Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta executive director Greg Whitby.

Meanwhile, some of Berejiklian's own ministers have admitted to me privately that they are gun-shy about the cost of the move.

Bruised and battered after a painful fight about stadiums, they know they need to get this one right.

I spoke this week to Greg Whitby, the executive director of Catholic Education in Parramatta.

“Our children in the west are without doubt suffering deprivation when it comes to culture,” he told me.

“Not having appropriate cultural presence in the west is an equity issue. It's not about school excursions, it's about how these children live.

“How they spend their weekends. There is a clear cultural divide.”

This is confronting stuff and other world cities are way ahead of us.

Look to New York City, which has some of the world's greatest museums.

To give Western Sydney anything less than what's been promised is an insult, and plays into historic class divides about who should and shouldn't have access to the arts.

Most of us know of The Met and MoMA in Manhattan. But New York City also founded major museums in the outer boroughs of the Bronx and Queens back in the 1970s.

These are internationally recognised cultural destinations featuring permanent collections that have, over decades, given diverse communities access to the arts they might never have had.

The city of New York rightly decided its outer boroughs were worthy of more than just some “performance space” that would have to scrap year in, year out to attract exhibitions.

To give Western Sydney anything less than what's been promised is an insult, and plays into historic class divides about who should and shouldn't have access to the arts.

One of the more average suggestions has been to instead give Western Sydney a "migration museum".



NSW

Opposition Leader Luke Foley wants the Powerhouse Museum to stay in Ultimo. Picture: AAP

Talk about regional stereotyping at its finest. The chairman of the Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue, Christopher Brown, described the migration museum proposal as patronising.

"I wonder if the good citizens and art heavies of the eastern suburbs realise how patronising they sound when they say things like 'the westies don't need high art, just give them a migration museum'," he said.

"The good taxpayers of Western Sydney have been paying for the galleries and museums of the east for many years. It's about time some of that money was spent on cultural facilities in the west, to help raise the aspirations, participation and artistic output of the wider community."



Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue chairman Christopher Brown. Picture: Adam Taylor

There's no doubt that as a world city, we should aspire to allow all our communities access to culture.

I revealed on Saturday in this paper precisely how the government's favoured plan for the relocation looks.

It wants [to keep a 30,000 piece fashion and design collection at Ultimo](#) and create a massive science and technology facility at Parramatta.

One source said the whole move would be driven by a "west gets the best" ethos.

There is also some talk that the Ultimo facility will also retain a theatre.

This plan, which is yet to go to Cabinet and still needs to traverse the spectre of naysayers, strikes the right balance.

Labor's backflip to instead say a "performance space" is a "better plan" for Western Sydney is bizarre, given Foley's backing for the region he represents in his own electorate.

He'll need to be careful not to overreach in his opposition to a permanent Powerhouse collection for the west because voters can smell a disingenuous policy a mile off.

And that's precisely the territory Foley steamrolled into on Friday when he declared "not one person" in his electorate has ever told him "they want a bit of the Powerhouse in Parramatta."

The battle of the elites against the working class is one that transcends states and even nations.

Every inner-city elite always has its outer-other. Having grown up in Ipswich — Brisbane's Parramatta, except without a Westfield — it's a battle I'm intimately familiar with.

I have a searing memory of the day as a young child I was taken to a travelling art exhibition that had been put on in a shoddy fashion in a church hall in Ipswich's main drag.

An exciting day at the time, but in hindsight — seriously? Sydney, we can do better.

Let's look to cities including New York with its world class galleries in the Bronx and Queens as the arts culture to which we should be aspiring.

Let's drive tourism to the west and give our children in the region the access to the arts they deserve.



State Political Editor Anna Caldwell. Picture: Christian Gilles

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2

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Release the business cases. Release the study into alternatives that is the first requirement in preparing the business cases. Get the Parramatta land deal ratified by an ELECTED council. Conduct a proper survey of what the Parramatta people want. Then we can have a proper debate.

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Paul5 hours ago

The only interests that benefit from moving the museum are the lib crony property developers that want the inner city site. Keep the existing site and build a new one out west. Easy but then Gladys' mates miss out!