

**Report of March Meeting  
Royal Society  
Southern Highlands Branch**

**Speaker: Dr Michael McKinley**  
**Political Science and International Relations**  
**School of Political Sciences**  
**The Australian National University**

**Topic: Tridentine America:  
Decline, Corruption, Moral Ambiguity, Folly,  
Stupidity and the Refusal to Reform**

The Southern Highlands Branch meeting of 18 March was held at 6.30pm in the Drama Theatre, Frensham School, Mittagong, immediately following the AGM. The lecture attracted an audience of 64, including RSNSW President, John Hardie.

The speaker, Dr Michael McKinley presented a thought-provoking and wide-ranging lecture, which clearly interested the audience. In contrast with previous lecturers, he used no computer assistance in his presentation, instead prompting himself from time to time with a stack of pages comprising an early print of his soon-to-be released book. The data he presented to the audience included many surprising statistics, information that obviously supported the title of his lecture.

The statistics showed that one child in fifty in the USA is homeless, that 7.3 million USA citizens are either in goal, or are somewhere in the incarceration process, and that 600000 seniors are soon to have their homes taken from them because of financial difficulties. As for the health care system in USA, 44000 people die each year because of lack of the simplest medicine; 50 million people have no healthcare, leading to the now common practice of “granny-dumping”; in addition, the greatest cause of bankruptcy is due to medical bills. McKinley stated that in his view, President Barack Obama had inherited a situation where economic reform is impossible.

It is McKinley’s view that the United States is in a time of peril, and he is supported by many analysts, commentators and scholars who claim that nothing short of radical reform is required. He posed the question of whether the United States - the sole remaining superpower and traditional leader of the West since 1945 - is capable of reforming itself and leading the corresponding project. He argued that although the sources of peril are to be found in many categories, there are four interrelated areas within the US that need

special consideration: economics, strategic guidance, politics and higher education. His belief is that failing reform in these key areas, the USA will slip further into decline. He likened the current times in the USA to the 60 year period leading up to the Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent.

At the conclusion of the lecture, the audience responded with many questions. RSNSW President John Hardie complimented the Southern Highlands Branch of the Royal Society for hosting such a diverse range of speakers. The vote of thanks was given by Anne Wood.

Anne Wood