

WHY WE MUST FIGHT BACK AGAINST THE FORCES OF WOKENESS

By John Anderson, former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia from 1999 to 2005.

We have an almost infinite capacity to convince ourselves that our actions are harmless, when in fact they are not. A 2019 Australian National University study showed that trust in our institutions and satisfaction with our democracy has hit an all-time low. In 2007 there was a record high level of satisfaction in how well Australia's democracy was working, 86 per cent. But in 2019 it had nosedived to 59 per cent. Most worryingly, in another ANU survey, trust in our parliamentary system itself has halved from 56 per cent in 1981 to 28 per cent in 2018. No modern society, certainly not one as multicultural as Australia, is going to have uniformity of thinking on the big questions of life and justice, but it is an existential imperative that we do agree on the procedure with which we work through our disagreements. Our procedure is parliamentary democracy. What is its alternative other than tyranny or civil violence?

In his most recent book *The Magna Carta of Liberty*, author Os Guinness runs through a list of steps that have led us to our present situation. First, there was a shift in our moral centre of gravity after World War II. Because we defeated tyranny and began to enjoy a historically unprecedented economic boom, the meaning of life became liberty and prosperity, and increasingly less our duties to family, country, and God. Citizenship in the West became less about what we could do for our country, and more about what our country could do for us. I think it is fair to read Menzies' immortal *Forgotten People* speech, 80 years old this year, as largely a rallying cry to not let this spirit of duty die. Second, is a lack of emphasis in our educational system not just on civic understanding, how our political society works, but on civic appreciation, why we should love our political system, notwithstanding its flaws.

If the thought of our teachers teaching children to love our political system strikes us as quaint, this demonstrates how powerful the forces of ideological cynicism have been in our education system. Third, our historical amnesia. Australians have a deep appreciation of the Anzac heritage, but beyond that, things get vague. We do have an education system that is obsessed with our history, but only the worst aspects of it. Google-search what education officials and policymakers have said about historical ignorance among Australians and you'll find that they're solely concerned with Indigenous history and massacres. The ruthless focus on the darker moments of our history, with no attempt to explain the positive achievements, has the effect of encouraging our children to believe that they are the inheritors of a nightmarish culture that is not worth defending, in the view of sociologist Frank Furedi.

Fourth, the growing generational and economic divide. Sound economic management is a highly moral imperative if we are to avoid intergenerational injustice. In March 1996, John Howard told the incoming cabinet that we were going to pay down the national debt and end the intergenerational theft. I well recall the moment of dread when I realised that in addition to Peter Costello, John Fahey, Jim Short and Michael Wooldridge, I was to be a member of that razor gang. The work was grinding beyond belief, but Australia continues to live off the balance sheet that we bequeathed the nation. I believe that Western governments, cowering before our culturally polarised societies empowered by social media, have responded poorly to the GFC and Covid. We are now in danger of doing the same in response to climate change, in that those policies have rewarded asset-holders and the wealthy over the young and more vulnerable members in our societies.

In the Australian context, for example, a serious housing affordability crisis has developed, increasingly turning the Australian dream into a fantasy. This crisis has profound knock-on effects on family formation and the quality of care that children receive in their early years. In an essay entitled *Welcome to the End of Democracy*, American demographer Joel Kotkin singles out Australia in particular for once being uniquely egalitarian in terms of home and land ownership.

But now Kotkin reports a sharp decline in home ownership for 24 to 35-year-olds from 60 per cent to 45 per cent between 1981 and 2016. And we know what direction things have gone in since 2016. These same young Australians were also forced to make tremendous sacrifices for the older generation during the Covid pandemic. They will be left with the economic cost of the lockdowns.

What effect will this have on young citizens' esteem for the institutions under which they live? Just like the cynicism generated by the Vietnam War was easily exploited by neo-Marxists, so today's downward social mobility will be an opportunity to sell statist fantasies like Universal Basic Incomes and the raft of policies that roughly make up what many call the Great Reset. On top of all this, surveys suggest that around half of all young people think the planet is doomed by climate change. Fifth, the rise of neo-Marxist and postmodern ideology, often called "wokeness". Wokeness is a direct attack on what Churchill called "variety", that is, different ways of thinking and living. Guinness catalogues the development of this ideology which came to dominate our universities and then shape culture more broadly.

Centrally, he notes the evolution of Marxist theory from primarily economic to cultural; going from calling for an economic revolution to overthrow capitalism, to a cultural Marxist-postmodern revolution to overthrow Western civilisation via universities and other culture-shaping institutions. The buzzwords of this Great Awakening, "inclusivity" and "diversity", turn out in reality mean their exact opposite. Let's take the recent Manly Sea Eagles controversy. The Manly management wanted the team to be inclusive. Well, the way to be inclusive is to simply not exclude. It's not rocket science. Notice how in all of this there was not one person who said they had been excluded from the team on the grounds of his sexuality. Not one. By the normal meaning of inclusive the Manly Sea Eagles were, in fact, already inclusive.

But the actions of the team's management showed that woke inclusivity is actually to exclude and to impose uniformity over genuine diversity, thereby destroying what Churchill called variety. Remember, Manly were already a team of genuine racial, religious, and intellectual diversity: some players agreed with LGBT ideology, and some did not. What was the result of this initiative of "diversity" and "inclusivity"? Seven players who were never ever accused of excluding or discriminating against anyone were excluded from playing because they did not want to celebrate this particular ideology. In other words, the team that ended up playing was not diverse at all, it was made up only of those who submitted to mandatory ideological uniformity. Woke diversity and inclusivity is not about rights, or freedom, or diversity or inclusivity: in true Marxist-postmodern fashion, it's about power. It's about forcing a uniformity of thinking and acting on a whole culture through schools, corporations, universities, and increasingly sports: the so-called "long march through the institutions".

Where will this all go? One plausible scenario is that social polarisation will die down as people's basic needs are met and can perpetually indulge in sufficiently stimulating or numbing, distractions. Leaning on Aldous Huxley a bit, Kotkin wonders whether the future will be people working part-time in a gig economy while being subsidised by some form of Universal Basic Income, spending their lives for the most part consuming videos, drugs, or whatever keeps the dopamine levels high. We become pigs satisfied rather than Socrates dissatisfied, to borrow a phrase from John Stuart Mill. Technology, not religion, becomes the opiate of the masses. This is not that far fetched. Rod Dreher, in his latest work *Live Not By Lies*, drawing on Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, contends that the most subversive act against the emerging soft totalitarianism is simply to tell the truth. Jordan Peterson has the same message. And famously, Jesus Christ said "the truth will set you free".

When we are told that there is a climate catastrophe, we say 'climate challenge, yes, climate catastrophe, no'. To say that there is a climate catastrophe such that we must rapidly revolutionise our economy and energy at great pain to those who can least bear it is, plainly and simply, dangerous. Bad policy, as Sri Lanka should demonstrate, may lead to nothing less than starvation. When we are told that there is no objective distinction between men and women, or that someone who simply identifies as one or the other is by virtue of that fact one or the other, we say no. We don't say no because we feel differently, we say no because science and brute reality deems it not true.

When we are told that Western civilisation is little more than a series of crimes against all who are not white, heterosexual males, we say no. Again, we say no not because of how we feel, but because history tells a much more interesting story of a civilisation like any individual of any race, deeply flawed yet capable of tremendous good.

When we are told that Indigenous Australians currently have no real voice and no real agency without some constitutionally enshrined voice to parliament – as the Uluru Statement from the Heart irresponsibly and demoralisingly states – we say no. Telling the truth requires moral courage, and courage culture is the only effective weapon against woke cancel culture. Cancel culture thrives when those who have the power to stop bullies don't speak out. To speak out, of course, we have to turn up. It will not just be a matter of telling the truth that forms part of the resistance. We live in an age of astonishing disengagement by far too many good citizens in the life of our nation. I suspect that without compulsory voting we'd have up to half the electorate not bothering to vote at all. I constantly meet disillusioned citizens who have belonged to political parties in the past that now say they do not want to be involved.

If we are to have our say, we will only be credible when we remember that freedom also demands from us responsibility: the responsibility – the duty – to live in such a way that our actions don't result in the social problems that become a pretext for the state to expand into all areas of our lives to "save" us from ourselves. In other words, freedom cannot simply be doing what we want. It cannot even merely be defined as doing whatever we like as long as we don't harm others, because we have an almost infinite capacity to convince ourselves that our actions are harmless, when in fact they are not.

Source: *This is an edited extract of the inaugural memorial Tim Fischer Oration given by John Anderson.*