

The disenfranchised find their voices, led by Trump

By Merv Bendle, Quadrant Online, 19 February 2016

The mogul's rise has shocked the new and arrogantly elitist ruling class, of which Australia's PM is very much a member. If the frustrations being tapped on the other side of the Pacific are a guide -- and there is no reason to imagine they are not -- we may well soon see our own pitchfork posses

There's a world-shaking political showdown approaching, and Donald Trump's presidential bid is the vanguard. Moreover, the political forces providing momentum for his populist insurgency — the disintegration of America's national identity driven by a new internationalist ruling class allied with a state-dependent underclass (or *lumpenproletariat*) — have become so obvious that both the left and the right are in basic agreement about them.

Addressing the question: what makes a person vote for Donald Trump, we find commentary like the following by [Ezekiel Kweku on the Gen-X left](#):

[Trump's supporters] believe that the United States is decaying from within, its strength sapped by a culture unmoored from the ideals that made America great, and that the source of this rot is immigrants who don't understand American values, depress the country's wages, drain government coffers, and increase crime. They believe that in this weakened state, America isn't strong enough to fight off terrorists abroad or infiltrators within. They are haunted by the amorphous fear that the America they knew is vanishing. And they believe establishment politicians and the press are too cowed, calculated, or corrupted to either voice these truths publicly or act upon them.

Meanwhile, on the libertarian right, we find a [similar analysis offered by redoubtable Charles Murray](#):

Trumpism is an expression of the legitimate anger that many Americans feel about the course that the country has taken, and its appearance was predictable. It is the endgame of a process that has been going on for a half-century: America's divestment of its historic national identity.

That national identity is based, above all, on American exceptionalism and a commitment to egalitarianism, liberty and individualism, specifically to the values of self-reliance, limited government, free-market economics and decentralized political power, all buttressed by freedom of speech and association, equality before the law and equality of opportunity. In an epochal shift that has lasted now for 50 years that foundational commitment is being fatally undermined:

The creed has lost its authority and its substance

Today, the creed has lost its authority and its substance. What happened? Many of the dynamics of the reversal can be found in developments across the whole of American society: in the emergence of a new upper class and a new lower class, and in the plight of the working class caught in between. The class structure of American society is coming apart at the top and the bottom, leaving the working and middle classes exposed. **As Murray pointed out several years ago:**

The new upper class consists of the people who shape the country's economy, politics and culture. The new lower class consists of people who have dropped out of some of the most basic institutions of American civic culture, especially work and marriage. Both of these new classes have repudiated the American creed in practice, whatever lip service they may still pay to it.

Faced with this disintegration, “Trumpism is the voice of a beleaguered working class telling us that it too is falling away”.

American egalitarianism is on its last legs

America is shifting swiftly away from the subdued class consciousness that characterised its first 175 years as a nation and, consequently, “American egalitarianism is on its last legs”.

During the past half-century of economic growth, virtually none of the rewards have gone to the working class. The economists can supply caveats and refinements to that statement, but the bottom line is stark: The real family income of people in the bottom half of the income distribution hasn't increased since the late 1960s.

Instead, since the Sixties a new upper class has evolved. Not only has it substantially increased its income share, it is aggressively progressivist in its ideology and internationalist in political allegiances – stances which are alien to traditionalist mainstream Americans. Moreover, its power is based on its stranglehold on the principal knowledge-based economic sectors of a post-industrial society. As Kweku points out:

This basic fact has been one of the primary political preoccupations of our time ... Those who shape America's politics, culture, and economy — the upper echelons of the political establishment, the most widely read political commentators, the executive class of industry, law, and entertainment — have incomes that place them at or very close to the top 5 percent of Americans.

These people have become an exclusivist elite

These people have become an exclusivist elite, a caste perpetuating itself through the highly selective private school system and the Ivy League universities, as Murray observes:

For a half-century, America's elite universities have drawn the most talented people from all over the country, socialized them and often married them off to each other. Brains have become radically more valuable in the marketplace.

This new ruling class is intensely status conscious

Disdaining even lip-service to traditional egalitarianism, this new ruling class is intensely status conscious and enthusiastically embraces elitism and exclusivism:

The members of the new upper class are seldom attracted to the films, TV shows and music that are most popular in mainstream America. They have a distinctive culture in the food they eat, the way they take care of their health, their child-rearing practices, the vacations they take, the books they read, the websites they visit and their taste in beer. You name it; the new upper class has its own way of doing it.

Kweku agrees. The new ruling class has become so wealthy that

they can support whole markets that cater only to them. The result is that the elite have lives that are culturally, geographically, and experientially segregated from those of average Americans. This renders them largely unable to relate to those average Americans, much less act or speak in a way that recognizably addresses their concerns.

Dismissive of the working class

Above all, they are condescending and dismissive of the working class and what used to be mainstream American values. Ordinary folk are ridiculed as 'rednecks', while the places that they inhabit are derided as merely inconvenient 'flyover country', inhabited by the *hoi polloi*.

Most galling of all, is the ruthless use of state power by the elite to stifle any murmur of dissent from the politically correct agenda

Our vaunted liberty is now constrained by thousands of petty restrictions that touch almost anything we want to do, individualism is routinely ignored in favour of group rights, and we have acquired an arrogant upper class.

Characteristically, the new ruling class makes no secret of its contempt and consequently,

For its part, mainstream America is fully aware of this condescension and contempt and is understandably irritated by it.

The massive, unheralded support for Trump is an expression of the growing working-class outrage at the way in which they are being contemptuously dismissed, disregarded, and marginalized.

According to Kweku:

The alienation of the people

The alienation of the people who have turned to Trump points to a deeper, broader problem in American society. And if we ignore it, we will regret it.

He agrees with Murray that the dominant economic trend of post-war America has been the sharp increase in income inequality and the emergence of a new upper class:

Since the 1960s, after-tax real income for households at or below the median has barely increased, if at all. Instead, the benefits of economic growth have gone to those households in the top half of the income distribution. In fact, most of the growth has been concentrated at the very top: Household income for those at the cut-off of the top 5 percent of Americans has doubled, and for those at the cut-off of the top 1 percent, it has more than doubled.

As he observes, “this basic fact has been one of the primary political preoccupations of our time.”

Enthusiasm for government benefits

This anger and alienation is being compounded by changes at the other end of the class structure. While the new upper class is separating itself from the previous mainstream at the top, a new parasitic *lumpenproletariat* has emerged at the bottom, characterized by a disinclination to work and marry and an enthusiasm for government benefits. Once again this is a product of the coming of post-industrial society, as the types of skills required by the economy changed radically:

Work and marriage have been central to American civic culture since the founding, and this held true for the white working class into the 1960s. Almost all of the adult men were working or looking for work, and almost all of them were married. Then things started to change.

Workforce participation fell from nearly 100% to 80%, while the proportion of married male workers **declined from 86% to 52%**. Consequently,

In today's average white working-class neighbourhood, about one out of five men in the prime of life isn't even looking for work; they are living off girlfriends, siblings or parents, on disability, or else subsisting on off-the-books or criminal income.

Not only are nearly half of these men not married in these communities, about half the children are born to unmarried women, while drugs and crime are increasingly rampant. As Murray observes:

Consider how these trends have affected life in working-class communities for everyone, including those who are still playing by the old rules. They find themselves working and raising their families in neighbourhoods where the old civic culture is gone—neighbourhoods that are no longer friendly or pleasant or even safe.

Meanwhile,

white working-class men are looked down upon by the elites and get little validation in their own communities for being good providers, fathers and spouses [while] life in their communities is falling apart.

In this fashion an entire new constituency has emerged, made up not only of the economically and politically disenfranchised working class but also the conservative middle class. These people are turning to Trump because no established political party cares enough properly to attend to their concerns.

The political arm of the new ruling class

The implications for Australia of this phenomenon are obvious, as many of these economic, political, and cultural processes are underway here, and the potential for widespread and terminal alienation from the political system is manifest. This is especially the case as Malcolm Turnbull and his progressivist gang continue to transform the Liberal Party into the political arm of the new ruling class. Whether it is at this election or the next, the increasingly disenfranchised conservative constituency in Australia will find its voice. Hopefully it will be someone with genuine vision and integrity; but if it's someone like Trump, Turnbull and his supporters and apologists will have only themselves to blame.